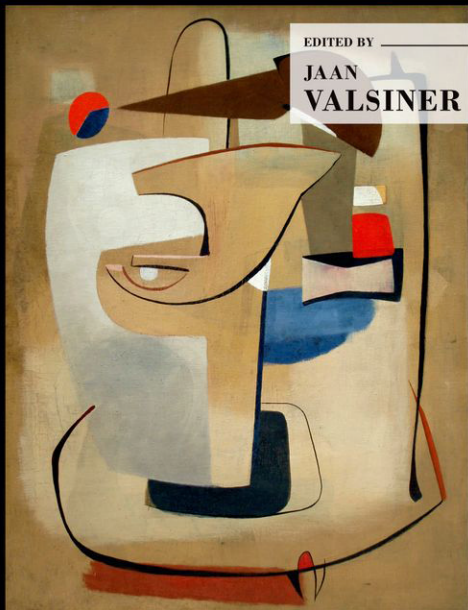


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# The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016  
www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
The Oxford handbook of culture and psychology / edited by Jaan Valsiner.  
p. cm. — (Oxford library of psychology)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-539643-0

1. Ethnopsychology. 2. Culture—Psychological aspects. 3. Social psychology. I. Valsiner, Jaan.

GN270.O94 2012

155.8'2—dc22

2011010264

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper

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Jaan Valsiner is a developmental cultural psychologist. He is the founding editor (1995) of the major international journal *Culture & Psychology* (Sage) and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Sciences* (Springer, from 2007). He is also the recipient of *Alexander von Humboldt Prize* (1995) for his interdisciplinary work on human development.

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PART

1

Historical Linkages of  
Culture and Psychology

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# Introduction: Culture in Psychology: A Renewed Encounter of Inquisitive Minds

Jaan Valsiner

## Abstract

This introductory chapter outlines the historical picture of the recent interest in the linking of culture and psychology, as well as the conceptual obstacles that have stood on the way of re-introducing complexity of human psychological functions—higher cultural forms—to psychological research practices. The avoidance of complex and dynamic phenomena (affective processes in feeling, religious sentiments that take the form of values, and of the high varieties of cultural forms displayed all over the World) has limited psychology's knowledge creation. In the past two decades, with the emergence of cultural psychology at the intersection of developmental, educational, and social psychologies and their linking with cultural anthropology, sociology, and history, we have observed a renewed effort to build an interdisciplinary synthesis of ideas. This takes place in the wider social context of the globalizing world. Psychology needs culture to make sense of the human lives.

**Keywords:** cultural psychology, causality, quantity, quality, affect, globalization

This Handbook is a milestone in the effort to re-unite two large domains of knowledge—one covered by the generic term *psychology*, and the other by the equally general term *culture*. When two giants meet, one never knows what might happen—it can become a battle or the two can amiably join their forces and live happily ever after. The latter “happy end” of a fairy tale is far from the realities of the history of the social sciences.

In the case of this Handbook, we have evidence of a multisided effort to develop the connections between culture and psychology. The time may be ripe—discourse about that unity has re-emerged since the 1980s, and cultural psychology has become consolidated since the mid-1990s around its core journal *Culture & Psychology* (published by Sage/London). The present Handbook reflects that tradition, while extending it toward new interdisciplinary horizons. The contributors— from all over the World—enthusiastically take on the task to

bring culture into psychology. Such enthusiasm is needed—as revolutions, both in science and in societies, need it. Innovation in any science is impossible without the efforts of the scientists to explore the not yet known lands of the ideas that may seem nonsensical from the point of view of accepted knowledge yet tease the mind.

The complexity of the task of bringing culture into psychology as a science has been considerable. It has been historically blocked by a number of social agents (representing rivaling ideologies) who saw in this a damage to psychology as natural science (*see* Valsiner, 2012, Chapters 5–9). As a result, psychology has suffered from its self-generated image of being an “objective science”—of deeply subjective and culturally organized phenomena. Such historical myopia can be understood as a need for the discipline to compete in the representational beauty contest of the sciences. Yet it cannot win that contest—remaining such a frivolous competitor whose claims

to “objectivity” are easily falsified by yet another innovation in the social or psychological domain.

### ***Psychology’s “Blind Spot”: Personal Will As a Cultural Phenomenon***

Historical myopia of a discipline has dire consequences. Psychology of the last century turned out to be mute when basic human life phenomena—famines, wars, epidemics, religious piety and prejudice, political negotiations, and migration—have been concerned. It has refrained from the study of higher—volitional—psychological functions, while concentrating on the lower, simpler ones. Thus, psychology of affect has many ways to deal with basic emotion categories that are expressed similarly all around the world—yet has not made new breakthroughs in understanding the generalized feelings that lead to desirous actions and generalized values. The intentional affective actions were actively investigated until the beginning of the twentieth century in psychology but rarely later. It is the semiotic and narrative focus of our contemporary cultural psychology that restores our focus onto these humanly important phenomena. The most important cultural invention of the human psyche is the simple claim, “I want <X>!”—and it is precisely the least studied and understood theme in contemporary psychology. Although there is increasing interest, in cultural psychology, on the “I” part (e.g., Dialogical Self Theories), the “want” part of this simple meaning construction is rarely analyzed. The notable exception—Heider, (1958, 1983)—is an example of a synthesis of different European philosophical and psychological traditions. Psychology has been fearful of the willful human being and has instead presented the human psyche as an object influenced by a myriad of “factors” from all directions—biological, social, economic, even unconscious—rather than by the volition that could break out from all these confines and develop in new directions.

### ***Why Another Effort to Link Psychology With Culture?***

Given this complex history, bringing culture back into psychology is also a very multifaceted effort in today’s intellectual environment. Yet the realities of social life guide us toward it—in a world where people travel voraciously and their messages travel instantly, the know-how of how “the others” function is both necessary for life and profitable for businesses.

There can be very many different vantage points from where culture could enter into psychology in the twenty-first century. First, of course, there are the realistic connections with neighboring disciplines—cultural anthropology (Holland, 2010; Obeyesekere, 2005, 2010; Skinner, Pach, & Holland, 1998; Rasmussen, 2011), and sociology (Kharlamov, 2012)—from where such efforts could find their start. Yet in the last decade we also can observe the move inside of the vast field of psychology. Psychology itself is a heterogeneous discipline—within which we can observe a number of moves toward embracing the notion of culture. Although it began from the educational and developmental concerns of the 1980s that mostly used the ideas of Vygotsky as the center of their new efforts, by 2010s the effort also includes social psychology—both in Europe and the United States—where the generic label “social” becomes frequently taken over by “cultural.”

Second, it is the rapid movement—of messages and people—that renders the former images of homogeneous classes that dominated cross-cultural psychology either moot or problematic. The tradition of comparing societies (i.e., countries, re-labeled as “cultures”—e.g., of “the Mexicans” or “the Germans”)—which has been accepted practice in cross-cultural psychology—loses its epistemological value. Empirical comparisons of the averages of samples “from different cultures” (i.e., countries) can bring out interesting starting data for further analysis by cultural psychology.

All this is supported by real-life social changes. It is as if the globalizing movement of people across country boundaries brings “cultural foreigners” to be next-door neighbors. The issue of making sense of their ways of living becomes of interest for the already established colonists of the given place. It is hard to remain content with the prototypical notions of “being American” when one sees a collective Islamic prayer unfolding in the middle of a major U.S. airport. The world is now different from the last century—we are in close contact with “cultural others,” and all our social-psychological adaptations to this innovation acquire a cultural accent. Contemporary social psychology picks up the need to study such social events that carry complex cultural accents. It is supported by the demand of both the lay publics in different countries and their socio-political organizations to understand and administer the “cultural others” yet retain their own dominant centrality.

## The Third Effort for Psychology in its History: How Can it Succeed?

This effort—uniting culture and psychology—that has been taking place from the 1990s to the present time is actually the third one<sup>1</sup> in the history of psychology. We can observe, in the recent two decades, multiple efforts to bring culture into the science in general. Likewise, psychology begins to enter into cultural arenas in many new ways that Little Albert,<sup>2</sup> Ioni,<sup>3</sup> or Sultan,<sup>4</sup> or even the dogs of Professor Pavlov could never have thought about. A number of our contributions to this Handbook—those of Christophe Boesch (2012), Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal (2012) and Zachary Beckstead (2012)—give the readers a glimpse of new pathways for future development of cultural psychology.

Of course, psychology's historical inroads can be seen to have delayed such return to culture. The issue has been ideological in the history of the science of psychology—how to treat complex, meaningful, intentional, and dynamic psychological phenomena? These phenomena were actively addressed in the context of emerging psychology in Germany by philosophers in the first seven decades of the nineteenth century—yet all these contributions were lost as they were guided out of the history of psychology as it was re-written after the 1870s. According to most of the history textbook views, psychology as science was born in 1879. That origin myth dates back to Boring's work on re-writing the history of psychology (Boring, 1929) that selected *as science* only some part of the wide intellectual enterprise of psychology of the nineteenth century.

Psychology as a science was born in the German language environment—first in the 1730s (Christian Wolff's *Psicologia empirica* in 1732 and *Psicologia rationalis* in 1734), followed by the anti-Wolff denial of psychology's place among other sciences by Immanuel Kant. The birth of psychology as part of educational curriculae dates to years 1806 and later—when Johann Friedrich Herbart started his first university course in psychology (Jahoda, 2008; Teo, 2007). Yet in the early nineteenth-century psychology was the realm for discourse by philosophers and theologians, with natural scientists playing a secondary role. This power relation reversed in the 1860s in favor of the natural sciences—particularly physiology. This led to the “elementaristic revolution” in psychology that started from Wilhelm Wundt's establishing his laboratory of Experimental Psychology in

Leipzig in 1879. It was followed in North America by the avalanche of the “behaviorist” ideology (Watson, 1913), which has been slow to end. The intermediate birth of “cognitive science” in the 1950s from the behaviorist roots was a half-restoration of the focus on higher psychological functions. Hence, the cultural psychology movement that started in the 1980s constitutes another effort in that direction.

### *The Obstacles to Innovation*

As psychology is non-neutral in its context of social existence, it is not surprising that its progress is constantly organized by different promoting fashions (e.g., the need to look “socially relevant”) in unison with a multitude of conceptual obstacles. The latter are often the targets of discourse in cultural psychology that cannot avoid addressing them. Their relevance, of course, transcends the work in the realms of cultural psychology and would illuminate other fields of psychology.

### DECISION ABOUT WHERE NOT TO LOOK: AXIOMATIC DISMISSAL OF COMPLEXITY

Many of the habits of psychology, in their insistence on the study of elementary phenomena (Toomela & Valsiner, 2010), have led to avoiding the complexities of the human psychological functioning. This happens in a number of ways: by **imperative to quantify** those phenomena that are of “scientific interest” and by **developing theories inductively**—moving toward generalization from the thus selectively quantified evidence. This all happens with the belief in the work of **elementaristic causality** (factor X causes Y; e.g., “intelligence” *causes* success in problem solving; or “culture” *causes* “girls being shy”; see Toomela, 2012, in this Handbook). In contrast, cultural psychology leaves such causal attributions behind. Culture here emerges as a generic term to capture the complexity of human lives—rather than narrowly concentrating on their behavior. We are back to the study of psychological dynamics in all of its complexity (Valsiner, 2009a), yet we are still at a loss about how to do that. The lead from the “second cybernetics” of the 1960s (Maruyama, 1963) and the use of qualitative mathematical models (Rudolph, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Rudolph & Valsiner, 2008; Tsuda, 2001) instead of statistical inference can be a way to overcome the obstacles of unwarranted assumptions.



**THE TERMINOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY—*CULTURE* IS POLYSEMIC**

*Culture* is in some sense a magic word—positive in connotations but hard to pinpoint in any science that attempts to use it as its core term. Its importance is accentuated by our contemporary fashionable common language terms (multiculturalism, cultural roots, cultural practices, etc.)—hence the perceived value of the term. Yet much of “normal science” of psychology continues to produce hyperempirical work using methods that do not consider substantive innovation, even after having learned to insert the word *culture* into politically correct locations in its various texts. In this sense, the fate of culture in contemporary psychology continues to be that of up-and-coming novice who tries to get its powerful parents to accommodate to its needs.

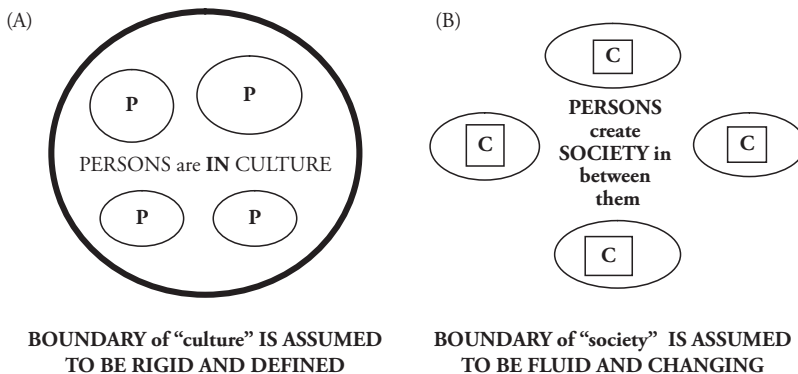
Cultural psychology is being sculpted in a variety of versions—all unified by the use of the word *culture* (Boesch, 1991; Cole, 1996, Shweder, 1990). That may be where its unity ends, giving rise to a varied set of perspectives that only partially link with one another. This may be confusing for those who try to present cultural psychology as a monolithic discipline—but it is certainly good for the development of new perspectives. Heterogeneity of a discipline breeds innovation—whereas homogenization kills it. History of psychology gives us many examples of originally innovative perspectives turning into established “theories or systems”—and becoming followed through sets

of imperatives rather than creating innovations. Psychology has suffered from too many consensual fixations of the “right” methods in the last half-century (Toomela, 2007a), rendering its innovative potentials mute. Cultural psychology as a new direction entails an effort to un-mute the discipline. It is helped by the appeal—and uncertainty—of the label *culture*.

*Culture As a “Container” as Opposed to a “Tool”*

The readers in this Handbook will encounter two opposite directions in handling of the notion of culture—that of a container of a homogeneous class (Fig. I.1A), and that of a unique organizer of person–environment relations (Fig. I.1B). These two uses have little or nothing in common, once more indicating the vagueness of the use of culture in our present-day social sciences.

Of course the proliferation of the notion of culture in the social sciences is no issue of science only. Reasons for that increasing popularity of a vague label are to be found beyond the boundaries of science—in the “culture stress” experienced by local communities resulting from in-migration of “others” and temporary (or not so temporary) outmigration of “our own” (Appadurai, 2006). Our globalizing world is also open to various projections of oneself to the (far-away) others. Politicians start to pretend they can say something in a foreign language in public, whereas production capacities move from their “First World” locations to the so-called “developing countries.”



**Figure I.1** Two meanings of *culture* in psychology. (A) *Culture* as a container (P = person). (B) *Culture* (C) as a tool within person.

## THE HERO MYTHOLOGY—REPLACING INNOVATION BY FINISHED IDEAS

Psychologists like to tell stories—beautiful stories—about famous people of their kind who had clever ideas that are still guiding our contemporary thinking. Of course, it is in the communication process between a science and the society that the making of such “hero myths” operates in creating *cultural connectors* (Aubin, 1997, p. 300). The popularity of “being X-ian” is a token in the public legitimization of a particular perspective (e.g., “Vygotskian” is “promising,” “behavioral” is “past its prime”)—independently of the particular ideas used within these perspectives to make sense of some phenomenon. Freud, Skinner, Piaget, and Vygotsky are often put on the pedestal for having revealed the great secrets of the psyche. Telling such stories is dangerous for the ideas of precisely those persons who are being honored. On the theoretical side, glory stories of various “giants” such as Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Gadamer, Levinas, and others are likely to promote the mentality of following previously expressed ideas, rather than developing new ones. Rather than innovate historically solid intellectual perspectives—the makers of which tried, but still did not solve their problems—we seem to enjoy turning these “classic thinkers” into some gurus and follow them ardently. Taking a theoretical perspective becomes transformed into a membership of a fan club of one or another of such guru figures—leading to a variety of intra- and intergroup relationship issues of such groups of followers. The main function of theories—being intellectual general tools for understanding—easily gets lost. Social scientists seem to enjoy the game of social positioning. We can still observe recurrent claims of “being X-ian” (“Vygotskian,” “Bakhtinian,” “Freudian,” “Habermasian,” “Levinasian,” etc.). I consider such claims misleading, because the best way to follow a thinker is to develop the ideas further—rather than declare one’s membership in a virtual community. But mere membership in a community is no solution to problems that the members of the community try to solve. The scientific community is a resource for providing new solutions—rather than a club, the membership of which is determined by loyalty to old ones.

### Vagueness in Science and its Functions

We know that culture’s journey into psychology has already been in the making for more than two

centuries (Jahoda, 1993, 2011). Such slow movement results from projection of social values into the term—*culture is not a neutral term*. It is suspect—and appealing—at the same time. Its appealing label feeds into the advancement of various streams of thought in the social sciences (Rohner, 1984; Sinha, 1996), and the constructive openness in using it as an intellectual catalyst in psychology continues.

Although it is well-known (Valsiner, 2001, 2004a) that the term *culture* is vague, as it has been proven indefinable, yet its functional role in public discourse has been growing steadily. Vagueness of a concept need not be an obstacle in scientific knowledge-building (many terms in many sciences are) and are kept vague, so as to enhance their generative potential (Löwy, 1992). As Löwy has explained:

The long-term survival of imprecise terms points to an important heuristic role. Adopting an over-precise definition may jeopardize a promising study, while maintaining a poorly defined concept may propel fruitful research. Imprecise terms may also facilitate the study of phenomena that share some, yet poorly defined, characteristics, and that may help link distinct disciplinary approaches. The fluidity of terms at times of conceptual change makes retrospective discovery accounts especially problematic. Discoverers tend to attribute a later, fixed meaning and imprecise, fluid terms current at the time of the discovery. (Löwy, 1990, p. 89)

The fate of *culture* in psychology and anthropology fits Löwy’s point well. Since the 1990s, we have seen the acceptance of the term by psychologists, who pride themselves in its vagueness and make it useful in various ways. In contrast, cultural anthropologists can be seen refusing to use it at all! *Culture* as a term becomes useless in anthropology, whereas it is becoming useful in psychology!

### Psychology Is Becoming Global

Globalization in a science—like in economics and society—is an ambiguous process. It brings with it emergence of new opportunities together with the demise of old (and “safe”) practices. The immediate result of globalization is the increase of “sudden contacts” between varied persons of different backgrounds—with all that such contact implies (Moghaddam, 2006). If “culture” is viewed in terms of a “container” (Fig. 1.1A) that implies selective “border controls,” segregation of immigrants into “we <>they” categories, and emphasis

on acculturation (Rudmin, 2010). If, in contrast, “culture” under globalization is seen as a tool (Fig. I.1B) it is the issue of relating to one’s next-door neighbor—with both positive (mutual learning and support from one another) and negative (frictions and open conflicts over trivial local issues) that come into our focus of observation.

Science also has to learn to tolerate its often less affluent but better educated neighbor. Any casual reading of leading science journals, which may be published in North America or Europe, reveals the enormous mixture of the home countries of the scientists. People from all continents collaborate in the solving of crucial scientific problems. Not surprisingly, together with the move toward international economic interdependence comes internationalization of sciences. Like other sciences psychology is no longer dominated by few (North American or European) models of “doing science” in that area. Instead, creative solutions to complex problems emerge from the “developing world,” where the whole range of the variety of cultural phenomena guarantees the potential richness of psychology.

### ***Cultural Psychology: Its Indigenous Roots***

Of course different areas of psychology are differentially open to such internationalization—cultural psychology in its recent new upsurge is thus a “developing science.” Looking back, much has changed since mid-1990s (Valsiner, 1995, 2001, 2004, 2009a, 2009b), mostly in the context within which the discourses of re-entering talk about culture into psychology have been framed. Cultural psychology has been the witness—an active one—of the transformations that go on in all of psychology as it is globalizing (Valsiner, 2009a, 2009b). Nevertheless, within psychology, cultural psychology remains “indigenous”—emphasizing the phenomena, rather than data, as these are central for science.

*Indigenous* is not a pejorative word. We are all indigenous as unique human beings, social units, and societies—coming to sudden contact with others of the same kind, and discovering that it is “the other” who is indigenous, not ourselves. Different ways of actions follow: changing the other (by missionary or military conquests) or using the other for production (by importing slaves, or allowing “guest workers” temporarily into “our country” to alleviate labor shortages), or for consumption (creating consumer demands for our products—arms or

hamburgers—in their places). In all of these adaptations to such contacts, the diversity of both human cultural and biological forms is being negotiated (Kashima, 2007; Moghaddam, 2006).

### **The Gains—and Their Pains—in Cultural Psychology**

The last two decades of the twentieth century were productive for cultural psychology. Following the lead of the originators of the rebirth of the cultural direction (Richard Shweder, Michael Cole, James Wertsch and Barbara Rogoff in North America, and Ernest Boesch, Lutz Eckensberger, Serge Moscovici, Ivana Markova and Ivan Ivic in Europe), a number of younger-generation researchers started to look at human phenomena intertwined with their everyday contexts. By the twenty-first century, many new research directions have become emphasized—ruptures as central for new developments (Hale, 2008; Zittoun, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010), actuations as a new way to unite actions and meanings (Rosa, 2007), generalized significant symbols (Gillespie, 2006) as well as search for the self through looking at the other (Bastos & Rabinovich, 2009; Simão & Valsiner, 2007) and finding that other in the contexts of social interdependence (Chaudhary, 2004, 2007; Menon, 2002; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). At the same time, we see continuous interest in the cultural nature of subjectivity (Boesch, 2005, 2008; Cornejo, 2007; Sullivan, 2007) and the unpredictability of environments (Abbey, 2007; Golden & Maysseless, 2008). The topic of multivoicedness of the self as it relates with the world has emerged as a productive theme (Bertau, 2008; Joerchel, 2007; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007; Sullivan, 2007), including the move to consider the opposites of polyphony (“intensified nothingness,” Mladenov, 1997). This is embedded in the multiplicity of discourse strategies (Castro & Batel, 2008) in institutional contexts (Phillips, 2007). Affective lives are situated in social contexts but by persons themselves as they relate to social institutions.

### ***Old Disputes in New Form: Immediacy and Mediation***

It never ceases to amaze me how old disputes re-emerge in terminologically new ways. When in the 1950s psychologists were disputing the immediacy of perception (à la James Gibson) in contrast to the constructive nature of the perceptual act (à la Jerome Bruner and Leo Postman, 1950—not to forget

Ansbacher, 1937 for the origins), then 50 years later, we find a similar dispute in cultural psychology around the issues of *enactivism*, focusing on the immediate nature of cultural actions—and *mediation*—that centers on the distancing from (yet with) the immediate action (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999, 2012; Kreppner, 1999; Christopher & Bickhard, 2007; Crisswell, 2009; Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2007). Furthermore, the immediacy dispute is built around the John Dewey-inspired look at human development as seamless linking of person and context (Rogoff, 1982, 1993, 2003). The question of boundaries between person and environment has been actively disputed in the last two decades. Of course, human beings live within the boundary—circumscribed by their skin. Futuristic film-makers, such as David Kroonenberg, have recently experimented with images that make the skin transferrable and let objects enter and exit through the skin in surprising—and horrifying—ways.

The roots of this new focus on immediacy are in the resurgence of the centrality of the body in theorizing about human beings and its abstracted corollary in terms of the processes of *embodiment* of the mental processes (Varela, Thompson, & Ross, 1991). Refocusing on the body—under the philosophy of fighting against “mind-body dualisms”—leads to the elimination of the mind. And with the elimination of the mind goes the focus on mediation.

#### IMMEDIACY IN ITS ENACTIVIST FORM

The enactivist position has been put forth succinctly:

Enactivism avoids the notion of “mediation” and problematizes the representational or semiotic status of social and cultural objects in general. Representation is a sophisticated social act and in that sense it is tautological to add the adjective “social.” Moreover, this specification becomes misleading when “social” is understood in terms of sharedness, even when the notion of sharedness is systemic rather than aggregate one. (Verheggen and Baerveldt, 2007, p. 22)

Of course, the enactivist move against ideas of mediation triggers a counteroffensive (Chryssides et al., 2009) defending the role of social representation processes precisely as acts of social construction. The focus on social representation can be dialectical (Marková, 2003, 2012), and the act of representing can itself be embodied. It seems that

it is the latter to which the enactivist viewpoint adheres.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF SIGNS AND THEIR USE— ALTERNATIVE TO IMMEDIACY

In contrast to the enactivist orientation, the semiotic meditational direction (Boesch, 2005, 2008, 2012; Lonner & Hayes, 2007; Valsiner, 2007) accepts the notion of mediation as an axiomatic given and concentrates on the construction of *what kind of mediating systems* can be discovered in human everyday activities and in the domains of feeling and thinking. The focus on cultural tools—or symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006, 2007, 2012)—necessarily prioritizes the meditational view in cultural psychology. This is further supported by the work to bring Charles S. Peirce’s semiotics to cultural psychology (Innis, 2005, 2012; Rosa, 2007; Sonesson, 2010). Yet bringing in the philosophy of Peirce is a kind of “Trojan horse” for cultural psychology—if on the manifest level such importation allows for new look at the multitude of signs that organize human lives. Such appealing closeness to reality is supported by Peirce’s abstractions as a mathematician.

#### THE UNRESOLVED PROBLEM: UNITS OF ANALYSIS

The difficulty of returning to the psychological complexity in the context of cultural psychology is in the rest of psychology accepting the notion of analysis units as the atomistic concept of divisibility of the complexity to simplicity. Yet that tradition cannot work if complexity *as it exists*—rather than as it could be eliminated—is on the agenda for researchers (Matusov, 2007).

The root metaphor of the question of units in psychology has been the contrast between water (H<sub>2</sub>O) and its components (oxygen and hydrogen), used in making the point of the primacy of the Gestalt over its constituents widely in the late nineteenth- through early twentieth-century thought. The properties of water are not reducible to those of either hydrogen or oxygen—water may put out a fire, whereas the constituents of it burn or enhance burning. Hence the whole, a water molecule, is more than a mere “sum” of its parts. Furthermore, it is universal—the chemical structure of water remains the same, independent of whatever biological system (e.g., human body, cellular structure of a plant) or geological formation (e.g., an ocean, or in a water bottle) in which it exists. Vygotsky expressed

the general idea of what a unit of analysis needs to be like in psychology:

Psychology, as it desires to study complex wholes ... needs to change the methods of analysis into elements by the analytic method that reveals the parts of the unit [literally: breaks the whole into linked units—*metod ... analiza, ... razchleniyushhego na edinitsy*]. It has to find the further undividable, surviving features that are characteristic of the given whole as a unity—*units within which in mutually opposing ways these features are represented* [Russian: *edinitsy, v kotorykh v protivopolozhnom vide predstavleny eti svoistva*].<sup>5</sup>

(Vygotsky, 1999, p. 13)

Vygotsky's notion of units fits into the general structure, emphasizing the unity of parts and focusing on their relationship.

However, it is easy to see how Vygotsky's dialectical units—into opposing parts of the whole—go beyond the water analogy. The whole (water)—parts (oxygen, hydrogen) and relations—are fixed as long as water remains water. In reality of human development, the wholes are open to transformation. Together with charting out the pathways to synthesis, inherent in that unit is the constraining of options—the structure of the unit rules out some possible courses for emergence.

Vygotsky found that holistic unit in word meaning, as that meaning includes a variety of mutually opposite and contradicting versions of “personal sense” (*smysl*). Through the dynamic oppositions (contradictions) between subunits (of “personal sense”) of the meaning (*znachenie*), the latter develops. Thus, we have a hierarchical unit where the transformation of the *znachenie* at the higher level of organization depends on the dialectical syntheses emerging in the contradictory relationships between varied *smysls* at the lower level. And conversely, the emerged new form of *znachenie* establishes constraints on the interplay of *smysls* at the lower level. The *loci* of developmental transformations are in the relations between different levels of the hierarchical order, not at any one level.

#### TENSION BETWEEN MACRO-SOCIAL AND MICRO-SOCIAL LEVELS: HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ratner's (2008, 2012) call for a macrocultural psychology fills the void at the boundary of psychology and sociology. Although doing that it faces a new challenge—that of the political nature

of all social discourses about the phenomena, as well as about the social sciences that study these phenomena. This challenge is most visible in the field—in the deeply politically embedded activities of NGOs in their relations with local government agencies, community structures, and personal goals (Bourdier, 2008). Culture in the field is a politically contested, non-neutral complex used by all disputing sides for their objectives (Wikan, 2002). Possibly precisely because of such multiplicity of vested interests, the process of “Westernization” can be replaced by a notion of parallel development of societies in contact. As Kagitçibasi (2005, p. 267) has commented:

... as societies modernize (with increased urbanization, education, affluence etc.), they do not necessarily demonstrate a shift toward western individualism. A more complex transformation is seen in family patterns of modernizing societies with cultures of relatedness. The emerging pattern shares important characteristics with both individualism and collectivism while, as the synthesis of the two, it is significantly different from each.

Thus the crucial issue in cultural psychology is to handle phenomena of synthesis. So far the field is as far from a productive solution for that problem as Wundt, Krueger, and Vygotsky were about a century ago. Psychology lacks the formal language that made chemistry back in the nineteenth century capable of solving the synthesis problem theoretically.

#### VARIED PERSPECTIVES: CONTESTED BY “INDIGENOUS” PSYCHOLOGIES

The meta-theoretical decision to build hierarchical models of relationships means a new return to the question of parts-whole relationships. The parts belonging to a whole are necessarily operating at a level subservient to that of a whole, and we have a minimal hierarchical system. That system is guaranteed by the central role of the agent—the acting, feeling, and thinking human being who is *always within* a context *while moving beyond the very same context* by one's goal-oriented actions. As Tania Zittoun has explained it:

... there is no such thing as a context-free competence or skill. However, the setting is not everything; every activity is also undertaken by a person, actively making sense of the situation, of its whereabouts, its goals and resemblances with other

situations met by her—these processes are in large part not conscious.  
(Zittoun, 2008, p. 439)

Thus, by the very act of modifying the setting, the person (actor) creates a hierarchical relationship that sets oneself above the setting, yet in ways that remain bounded with the setting (“bounded indeterminacy,” Valsiner, 1997). This hierarchy can be hidden from self-reflexivity and can occur at the intuitive level of *Umwelts*. From a generic idea, “either X or Y” (person OR context), we move to “X into Y into X into Y . . .”—a mutually recursive feed-forward process.

There is much to learn from the indigenous movement in contemporary psychology (Chakkarath, 2005, 2012; Choi, Han, & Kim, 2007; Li, 2007; Krishnan & Manoj, 2008). The productive use of the indigenous psychology movement for the conceptual texture of cultural psychology becomes available after the “colonizing” (treating “the other” society as a data source) and “independence” (the “other society” claiming the value of their indigenous concepts) is overcome. Instead of mere equality claims of the “others” concepts, the science of psychology can overcome its Euro-centric historical orientation by making some of these concepts the core terms (and treating their Euro-centric analogues as their derivatives). As Durghanand Sinha has noted:

Long before WHO defined health in positive terms as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, the Indian conceptualization was completely holistic as reflected in Susrut’s definition: *prasannamendriyamanah swastha* (or health is state of delight or a feeling of spiritual, physical and mental well-being). The aspect of *sama* or avoidance of extremes and having various bodily processes and elements in the *right quantity* (neither too little nor too much), that is, of maintaining proper balance, has been constantly emphasized . . . well-being is not equated with fulfillment of needs and production of material wealth through the control and exploitation of nature. The capacity to develop and maintain harmonious relationship with the environment is considered vital.  
(Sinha, 1996, p. 95)

Of course no governmental organization (WHO, UN, or any other) has a privilege in defining scientific terms. A science cannot start from a local definition of a socio-political kind—it would reduce its generalizability and would let a social institution

direct the knowledge construction along its political orientations.

### ***Self-Reflexivity of Psychology: Advantages of the “Cultural Look”***

Psychology’s theory construction site is itself culturally organized. It includes sensitizing concepts (social representations)—meanings that give direction to empirical efforts of researchers (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007, p. 413). A sensitizing concept may block the advancement of a direction of research for long time—as the history around developmental logics (Valsiner, 2008b) shows. Although the core notion of “taking” may guide Western psychological theories to accept the rationality of benefit maximization axiom that leads to the “independent self” notion as normative, the Indian focus on “giving” (Krishnan & Manoj, 2008) sets the stage for different versions of “interdependent self” theories. The generic social representation accepted in the occidental worlds—such as Aristotelian two-valent logic—makes the emergence of multitrajectory holistic (yet structured) concepts much more complicated than in many cases of indigenous meaning systems. Existing meta-level social representations guide the directions of theory construction in the sciences.

For example, Western psychologies have had difficulty accepting the notion of development as it entails synthetic emergence of generalized, abstracted phenomena. The focus has been on “what was” (memory, history) or on “what we now think that was” (Galasinska, 2003; Goldberg, Borat and Schwartz, 2006; Mori, 2008; Wagoner, 2008, 2011) and rarely has considered “what is not yet—but is about to become.” What is “being measured” is assumed to be “out there” in its essentialist form (fixed quality) and in different amounts (quantities). Once the quality is immutably fixed, it cannot transform into new forms—hence, the difficulty of developmental thinking in occidental psychologies. It is only at present that questions of processes by which the movement toward the future occurs begin to be analyzed (Järvinen, 2004; Sato et al., 2007). Cultural psychology cannot deal with behavior as something “out there” that can be observed. Instead, we can observe *meaningful conduct* of goal-oriented organisms (not only humans—Sokol-Chang, 2009) who are in the process of creating one’s actual life trajectories out of a diversity of possibilities (Sato et al., 2007, 2012). That process may be poorly captured by the use of real numbers (Valsiner & Rudolph, 2008), and hence careful qualitative

analyses of particular versions of human conduct are the empirical core of cultural psychologies.

### The Range of the Handbook—And Its “Missing Pages”

Obviously a handbook of 51 chapters is a huge corpus of ideas and seems to be fully comprehensive. Unfortunately we did not succeed in including all the expected and desired relevant authors in the Handbook, for various reasons—mostly linked with workloads and travel. Thus, the voices of traditional experimental social psychology (of Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Markus), and its adamant critiques (Richard Shweder), psychoanalytic cultural anthropology (Gananath Obeyesekere, Sudhir Kakar), sociology of complex societies (Veena Das, Rama Chan Tripathi), socio-cultural semiotic perspectives (Alberto Rosa), and the cultural psychology of work processes (Yrjö Engeström) did not materialize by the time the Handbook project was to be finished. The following entails a brief synopsis of some of these.

### Social Psychology of Cultural Self—The Stanford Tradition

The “Stanford tradition” emanating from the work of Hazel Markus since 1980s and proliferating in North American social psychology is an outgrowth from the contextualist orientation in personality psychology of the 1970s. Markus’ work starts from an empirical emphasis on the schematic self-descriptions. She gives new theoretical life to William James’ notion of *possible future selves* that is conceptualized in terms of subjective approach/withdrawal tendencies of a person who is facing possible futures (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Furthermore, the emphasis on “possible selves” constitutes a return to Gordon Allport’s idea of hierarchical organization of personality and tentatively explains the role of the personally constructed “possible selves” in the regulation of personality development (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987). Although proceeding from self-personological roots, Markus creates a contrast between different collective cultures in terms of the opposition of independence versus interdependence notions that organize the selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In years since, Kitayama has developed the notion of interdependent self into a major research program in experimental social psychology. The normal state of the self is interdependent—interdependence is merely a special condition of interdependence.

### Gananath Obeyesekere’s Cultural World of Person in Context

*Culture* for Obeyesekere consists of internalized ideas in the minds of persons, mediated by consciousness. Because consciousness is primarily personally constructed, the “sharing” of culture between persons can only be episodic and partial (see Obeyesekere, 1977—demon possession is a personal-psychological phenomenon that is not shared with others, yet can be exorcised by cultural rules). Furthermore, specific sophisticated readings of cultural texts by constructive persons can bring into being forms of conduct that seemingly deviate from cultural meanings yet are incorporated into those by special conditions (e.g., the making of “Buddhist eggs”; see Obeyesekere, 1968, p. 30). He has shown how constructed discourses—such as the stories of Maori cannibalism—proliferate (Obeyesekere, 2005).

### CULTURALLY REFORMED PSYCHOANALYSIS

Obeyesekere has been working within a psychoanalytic paradigm, enriching it with his hermeneutic stance, and diligently trying to reformulate its conceptual structure on the basis of empirical evidence from the Sinhalese cultural contexts (Obeyesekere, 1963, 1968, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1990). He has also taken a look at encounters between societies (Obeyesekere, 1993) that reveal the “work of culture,” as it

... is the process whereby symbolic forms existing on the cultural level get created and recreated through the minds of people. It deals with the formation and transformation of symbolic forms, but is not a transformation without a subject as in conventional structural analysis ...

(Obeyesekere, 1990, p. xix)

The work of culture is a developmentally progressive process in its main scope (even if it may include moments of temporary “regressions” in its course—e.g., a person’s dissociation of the existing personality organization and being in turmoil for long periods of time (Obeyesekere, 1987, p. 104). The key idea is **cultural constraints set up conditions under which personal symbolic action takes place**—be this the construction of women’s pregnancy cravings in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere, 1963, 1985) or sorcery for retribution (Obeyesekere, 1975). On the other hand, each person acts in one’s unique ways, has unique personal history, and hence any “standard ritual” (e.g., that of exorcism

of “demon dominance,” Obeyesekere, 1977, or in Christian traditions, Obeyesekere, 2010) needs to accommodate a variety of specific conditions that may be characteristic of a particular person.

#### OVERDETERMINATION BY MEANING

Perhaps the most central innovation of the psychoanalytic thought that Obeyesekere introduces (and that moves him irreversibly away from psychoanalytic explanations of the occidental orthodox kind) is the move from overdetermination of motive (as emphasized by Freud and reflected in dream analysis) to overdetermination of meaning (Obeyesekere, 1990, p. 56). All events in human life occur in polysemic contexts, being framed by a variety of cultural meanings, operating simultaneously at different levels of symbolic remove from deep motivations. Some of the cultural meanings are closer to the motivations (events) that originally triggered the personal symbolization process, which utilized culturally available means. However, in human development, some levels of symbolization may lose all of their connection with the initial “triggering event” and acquire symbolic life of their own in the personality of an individual. Furthermore, Obeyesekere’s theoretical transposition of the notion of overdetermination to the symbolic level is an important idea:

... “[S]ymbolic remove” is based on the psychoanalytic idea that symbols in principle, if not always in practice, show infinite substitutionability. Related to this idea is another principle of the work of culture that psychoanalysis has not, and could not, consider seriously since it would threaten the isomorphism between symbol and symptom. And that is the principle of disconnection of the symbol from the sources of motivation. Substitution implies that symbol X related to motive Y can be replaced by symbols A, B, or C ... n. A, B, C are all “isomorphic replacements” of X, related to motive Y in identical or similar manner. “Disconnection” questions the postulated isomorphism and suggests that A,B,C, ... n might exhibit degrees of symbolic remove from Y and might eventually lose its connection with Y ... Admittedly, total disconnection is rare, but one can make a reasonable case that the more the symbol is removed from the sources of motivation the more it gets the attribute of arbitrariness, thus approximating the Saussurean idea of the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified.

(Obeyesekere, 1990, p. 58)

Obeyesekere adds this constructive-disjunctive (of the symbol from the motive) dimension to the culture-work idea, thus liberating the psychoanalytic perspective from its expression-interpreting fate.

#### *Richard Shweder—The Voice of Culture for Psychology*

Starting from an anthropological background, Richard Shweder’s voice in psychology over the recent two decades has undoubtedly pointed to the need to consider culture in psychology as a primary constituting factor of the self (Shweder, 1984, 1991; Shweder & Much, 1987; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990, 1993). The cultural richness of India has certainly fascinated Europeans in very many ways, but it is rarely that occidental science has attempted to provide in-depth analyses of the cultural constructions in the Hindu world. Shweder’s approach recognizes the heterogeneity and culture-inclusiveness of moral reasoning of human beings (Shweder, 1995; Shweder & Much, 1987; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). Shweder returns to the emphasis of culturally constituted person as an agent in both subjective and collective domains:

... to imaginatively conceive of subject-dependent objects (intentional worlds) and object-dependent subjects (intentional persons) interpenetrating each other’s identities or setting the conditions for each other’s existence and development, while jointly undergoing change through social interaction ... (Shweder, 1990, p. 25)

The personal minds (object-dependent persons) construct mental and affective order out of chaos of everyday events—hence, an illusory view of reality is constructed by persons but on the basis of the culture. Shweder has been a consistent critic of psychology’s “culture myopia” (taking the role of “the grand confusionist” by his own designation), pointing out that psychology—even its cross-cultural version—has ignored culture as the central player in the domain of human *psyche*.

#### **A SINGLE EXAMPLE MATTERS: HOW MR. BABAJI IS IMPORTANT FOR PSYCHOLOGY**

Shweder’s specific work on the organization of the self in Hindu collective-cultural contexts takes the form of elaboration of specific personal-cultural transformations of socially shared knowledge. Everyday conversations surrounding the developing person are filled with cultural suggestions for how



to interpret the nature of experience in accordance with social representations (Markova, 2003, 2011).

Shweder encountered specific collective-cultural organization of moral discourse in his efforts to apply Kohlbergian moral dilemmas in Hindu contexts in Orissa. His elaborate dispute with the informant Babaji (Shweder & Much, 1987, pp. 235–244) revealed how a Western collective-culturally shared “moral dilemma” (stealing/not stealing a drug under life-threatening illness of one’s wife and drug-owner’s refusal to provide it by special arrangements) can be translated into a completely different personal-cultural issue (i.e., sinning vs. not sinning via stealing for one’s wife, even if the latter’s life is in jeopardy). By way of specific combination of collective-cultural meanings of “sin,” “wife” (as “belonging to” the husband), “multiple lives,” and “inevitability of death,” a set of alternative personal-culturally allowable scenarios for the action of the person in a dilemma situation is being constructed (*see also* Menon, 2003, on Hindu moral discourses). Cultural-psychological investigations are necessarily of unique events—yet of those that happen within a hierarchy of social contexts. Instead of situating cultural psychology on the socio-political landscape (Ratner, 2008, 2012), it is the macro-social organization of society that becomes analyzed in micro-social activity contexts. Here the traditions of micro-sociology of culture give cultural psychology a lead—generalization from a carefully studied single specimen can be sufficient.

### ***Qualitative Methodology As the Root for All Methods in Psychology***

A liberation movement is happening in psychology—an effort to topple the socially normative fixed role of the quantitative methods as having the monopoly of being “scientific.” Yet making the qualitative and quantitative methods look like they oppose each other as two rivals is an unproductive stance—which is even not overcome by the “cocktail” metaphor of giving preference to “mixed methods.”

In reality, quantity is a derivate of quality. As Ho et al. (2007) have demonstrated, contemporary social sciences that treat qualitative and quantitative methods as if these were opposing methodologies are introducing a false dichotomy. Research questions in psychology—as long as psychology is not hyperformalized by mathematical ideas—are asked in philosophical terms, hence qualitatively. Echoing

the concerns by many scholars over the twentieth century (e.g., Baldwin, 1930; Michell, 1999, 2003, 2005; Rudolph, 2006a, 2006b), they point out:

Quantification is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for science. No-one questions the scientific status of biology without quantification . . . . The price of quantification is a ‘loss’ of information, as when rich qualitative data are reduced to sets of numbers, such as frequency counts, means, and variances. Quantitative data have to be translated into qualitative statements if their meanings and implications are to be spelled out, communicated to and received by the researcher’s audience.

(Ho et al., 2007, p. 380)

Qualitative perspectives are clearly on the ascent in contemporary psychology at large (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2006, 2008; Gelo, Braakman, & Benetka, 2008; Mey & Mruck, 2005, 2007; Michell, 2004). This is more easily fitted to cultural psychology—where the molar level units of analysis resist quantification anyway (e.g., Toomela, 2008b, pp. 64–65, on psychology’s production of meaningless numbers). To ask the question “how much of [X= “love”, “hatred” . . . .]?” presumes the *unitary quality* of that X and its nature together with *homogeneity* of the presumed substance (X), which makes it possible to apply quantitative measurement units to it. Hence the assumption of quantifiability rules out from the outset the possibility of transformation of quality by separating the latter from whatever numbers are attached to the phenomena in the act of “being measured.”

### **UNITY OF QUALITY AND QUANTITY**

All quantitative approaches constitute a subclass of qualitative ones but not vice versa. Psychology treats numbers as if they are objective in contrast to mathematics. For example, the difference of 0 (zero) and 1 (one) and 2 (two) in case of psychology’s assumption of interval or ratio scale treats each of these numbers as equally meaningful. Yet they are not; the concept of 0 (zero) is in its quality different from 1 or 2. Zero indicates a dialogue:

Zero means both all (excessive) or none (void). The dialogical process includes the middle, which gets excluded in the dichotomies.

(Tripathi & Leviatan, 2003, p. 85)>

Thus, psychology’s—not only cultural psychologies’—core conceptual problem is not merely “dualisms” of all kinds but of the understanding of the

dualities (or multiplicities) inherent in what seems to be a unitary point to which a number can be easily assigned (Wagoner & Valsiner, 2005).

The issue—treating *science* of psychology as an *act of assigning numbers* to qualitative phenomena (to get data) has been discussed critically by Rudolph (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2009) as well as Toomela (2007b, 2008a). The social consensus of number assignment guarantees no science—hence much of psychology’s data analytic practices are of the kind of cultural artifacts that may belong to a museum rather than contribute to advancement of knowledge. The cultural nature of the meaning of “statistical significance” has been shown to be one of such widespread artifacts (Ziliak & McCloskey, 2008).

More importantly, the crucial conceptual mishap in psychology is the reduction of the notion of abstract formal models of mathematics to the use of only one kind of numbers—real numbers. At the same time, many cultural-psychological phenomena are better fitted with models using imaginary numbers (Valsiner & Rudolph, 2008) and topological models (Rudolph, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Such number systems may be better fitted for dealing with the phenomena of uncertainty of living (Abbey, 2004, 2007, 2011; Golden & Mayseless, 2008) and with dynamic boundaries-making (and unmaking) in human social lives (Madureira, 2007a, 2007b, 2011; Tsoulakas, 2007). Tsoukalas (2007) has brought the issue of religiosities—differentiating doctrinal and imagistic types—back to our focus of attention. Specific cultural practices of communication—turned into institutionalized framework through activities like *prayer* (del Rio & Alvarez, 2007), asking for forgiveness (Brinkmann, 2010; Phillips, 2007), apologizing, and many others may lead the way toward cultural psychology of religious sentiments.

### *From Oppositional Terms to Unity of Opposites*

Psychology has usually adhered to exclusive separation of opposites along the lines of Aristotelian-Boolean two-valued logic. Consider the basic opposition of “individualist” versus “collectivist” cultures—a staple organizer of knowledge in cross-cultural psychology. Societies on the Globe are divided into either “individualist” or “collectivist” and contrasted with each other.

Matsumoto (2003) has specified the location where tension can be located in human cultural

functioning—between the consensual reflection about one’s group membership (e.g., “as an X [i.e., “an American”] I am Y [“individualistic”], not Z [“collectivistic”]) and the circumstances for action (“while an X in general—in situation S, I am Z”). Because each person is context-bound, no statement about one’s cultural label (“individualist” vs. “collectivist”) can characterize the negotiation between the opposites and the situation demands. The tension is thus granted by the social community (*see* Mead, 2001/1931, on the role of community in U.S. society). By the regular cross-cultural psychology nomenclature, the United States is considered to be “individualistic,” yet if one looks at the level of person–community relations, it looks very “collectivistic.” That person is therefore necessarily analyzable as a dynamic structure of multiple parts—such as Autonomous-Related Self (Kagitçibasi, 1996, 2005; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010) or in terms of dialogical self (Hermans, 2001, 2002; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007).

It is here—at the unity of various parts within the whole—that cultural-psychological processes make stability out of instability; parents operate at the intersection of various cultural models (Keller, Demuth, & Yovsi, 2008), and kindergarten teachers evoke danger scenarios for children in the middle of mundane everyday activities (Golden & Mayseless, 2008). The *cultural-psychological worlds are relational worlds*, yet that recognition leads us to inquire into what *relational* could mean.

### RELATIONSHIPS AS BOUNDARIES

Cultural tools both set up boundaries—by way of classification—and set the stage for transforming them (Boesch, 2008). As Boesch sets up these two functions of culture—classification and transformation—we can expand these from two different functions into one. Although classification (“this belongs to A”) creates the distinction with the rest (non-A), it also sets up the boundary {A || non-A}. The act of classifying is simultaneously boundary-setting, and boundary is the trigger for its overcoming, by way of transformation {A |is becoming| non-A}. As such, classification and transformation are two mutually linked processes. Boundaries of gender (Madureira, 2007a, 2007b, 2011) and body (Ingold, 2004) turn out to be both solidly protected and quasi-permeable. Human social life entails constant boundary construction (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007) and transformation—social classes create their boundaries in urban globalizing worlds (Tevik, 2006) together

with opening up the possibility of transcending these boundaries. By creating boundaries, we create objects, which are simultaneously physical and cultural entities.

### CULTURAL OBJECTS

Objects are not just material “things” that exist in and of themselves but distinguished contrasts between a figure and the ground. Thus, a black point on a white surface is an object, based on a relationship of the figure and the ground. Human cultural histories are filled with hyper-rich construction of such objects through abundant use of signs. We create our lives through ornaments, which seem to us to carry decorative purposes, yet these decorations abound and can be found in unexpected locations (Valsiner, 2008). By our constructive actions we turn things into objects.

We live among objects—and relate to them:

The words “object,” *objectus*, *objet*, *Gegenstand*, *ogetto*, *voorwerp* all share the root meaning of a throwing before, a putting against or opposite, an opposing. In the English verb “to object” the oppositional, even accusatory sense of the word is still vivid. In an extended sense, objects throw themselves in front of us, smite the senses, thrust themselves into our consciousness. They are neither subtle nor evanescent nor hidden. Neither effort nor ingenuity nor instruments are required to detect them. They do not need to be discovered or investigated; they possess self-evidence of a slap in the face.

(Daston, 2000, p. 2)

It is not surprising that cultural psychology becomes increasingly interested in the study of meaningful objects. Cultural objects are everywhere—in our private domains of homes (including the homes themselves) and in public (in the streets, town squares, etc.). They are both stationary (temples, monuments, etc.) and moving (buses, trains, airplanes, etc.). As Bastos (2008) pointed out, these objects can be seen as “tattoos on the collective soul,” and they bring into cultural psychology the methodological credo of visual anthropology. The kind of meaning-making in the creation of such (moving or stationary) wholes is of hybrid nature, including indexical, iconic, and symbolic signs (to follow C. S. Peirce’s basic typology). Cultural psychologists of the semiotic orientation have usually detected varied versions of encoded versions in their descriptions of objects, whereas the jeepney example forces us to look for principles by which different sign

types become coordinated in the making of a holistic cultural order (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008).

Last—but not least—the increasing interest in objects in cultural psychology leads to its new relationship with another discipline—that of archeology. Empirical evidence from the structure of objects used by human beings in the past in various social contexts becomes functional for understanding the present and the future (González-Ruibal, 2005, 2006, 2011). It is in this historical focus—of objects-in-their context (in case of archaeology) and meanings-in-their context (in case of cultural psychology)—that a new interdisciplinary synthesis of knowledge is likely to emerge in the future.

### Preview of the Handbook

The 12 sections of the Handbook are merely an orientation device for the reader to orient oneself in the large heterogeneous field of cultural psychology. The chapters in the historical section (I) situate both the previous efforts to unite culture and psychology (Diriwächter, 2012; Jahoda, 2012) as well as provide an insight into the role of Vygotsky (van der Veer, 2011). Different other chapters in other parts of the Handbook (Magnus & Kull, 2012 on the role of von Uexküll; Tarasti, 2012, on various philosophical tendencies that underlie the semiotic perspectives in cultural psychology) show how the scientific minds of various backgrounds have been looking for solutions to similar problems. History of the social sciences is a rich ground for finding out how different theoretical efforts emerged—yet failed to reach solutions to the problems.

The key message from our turn to history is the need to rejuvenate the theoretical schemes of psychology by touching on similar solutions attempted in other sciences. Semiotics (Innis, 2010, 2012; Magnus & Kull, 2012; Tarasti, 2012) stands out as a new and very promising peer for psychology. This is complemented by bringing the science of archeology into contact with psychology (Gonzalez-Ruibal, 2012).

Cultural psychology benefits from conceptualizing the notion of positioning—a geographic metaphor that allows for elaboration of the multiplicity of psychological phenomena (Harré, 2012; Bento et al., 2012). When the notion of positioning is linked with that of social representations (Aveling et al., 2010) we gain a multifaceted dynamic view into the human lives as these move through various social settings. Obviously such positions are themselves embedded in the macro-social settings, as Ratner

(2008, 2012) reminds us. Through the synthesis of positioning theory, social representation theory (Marková, 2003, 2012), and the macro-cultural look, cultural psychology can arrive at a hierarchy of “niches” of socially embedded and personally constructed phenomena. All these are united through the use of semiotic tools at all levels of that social hierarchy (Innis, 2012; Salvatore, 2012; Sonesson, 2010; Tarasti, 2012).

Yet at the beginning of all efforts to unite culture and psychology is the act—a purposeful, meaningful, future-oriented movement by a willful person (Boesch, 2011; Eckensberger, 2011). Action theory is unabashedly focused on the symbolic (*see also* Bruner, 1986; Salvatore, 2011). Although the semiotically organized ACTING PERSON–SOCIAL POSITIONING–SOCIAL REPRESENTATION–MACRO-CULTURAL ORDER hierarchy could be considered the vertical axis of cultural psychology, it is important to pay attention to its horizontal counterpart. The latter entails the transitions between different culturally structured contexts within which human beings act, position themselves, and become involved in macro-social activities. The home leads, through an entrance, to the street, the city square, to the road that leaves the city for the rural countryside. Airplanes take us 10 kilometers above the ground, where our positioning ourselves is surrounded by white clouds and thinking of the past that we left behind while taking off and the future that awaits us in the airport where we are about to land. Kharlamov (2012) brings to cultural psychology the notion of moving between different spaces—and the role of constant meaning construction “on line” as such movement takes place. This resonates well with the focus on migration as human main *modus operandi*—from micro-migration (movement between home and workplace, home and school), temporary work-related migration (sailors at sea, guest workers in foreign lands), immigration, and establishment of oneself in a far away place. By the twenty-first century, the latter includes extra-terrestrial spaces—as long as the ideas of “colonizing the Moon” (or Mars) are entertained as potential future projects. In all these migrations—real or imaginary, temporary or permanent—we can observe the unity of the self and the other (Bento et al., 2012; Simão, 2012). The human being needs to relate to the other to be oneself and develop further while being oneself. An important part in that is creating stories—both about oneself and about the other. In this respect, the developing qualitative research practice

using narratives (Brockmeier, 2011) or focusing on the micro-level discourse phenomena (Murakami, 2011) is a notable direction for future development of culture within psychological research. Into the human propensity of narrating—all over the life-course—enter different semiotic resources (Eco, 2009; Zittoun, 2007, 2012) and we consolidate our selves around the images of fictional characters from novels, movies, or revered historical figures. The connections of psychological data and different literary constructions are being explored in contemporary cultural psychology (Brinkmann, 2006, 2007, 2009; Johansen, 2010; Moghaddam, 2004). The creative writers may have had better insights into the complexities of the human psyche than North American college undergraduates diligently putting pencil marks onto the myriads of Likert scales.

It is for the reason of providing resources that culture in psychology needs to consider the history of human beings (Carretero & Bermudez, 2012; Winston & Winston, 201=2). That history entails the construction of meaning about one’s social and economic status as well as that of the others. “Being poor” may look different from various definitions of social positioning, as can objective state of economic status (Bastos & Rabinovich, 2009, 2012). So does the construction of the notion of race (Winston & Winston, 2012). Behind all these socially constructed human phenomena are very real biological bodies of *Homo sapiens*. Historically oriented cultural psychology needs to look at the phylogensis of cultural means. The Handbook provides a glimpse into our thinking about the newest developments in the studies of primate cultures (C. Boesch, 2012) and gives the readers a glimpse into the biosemiotic look at the animal world (Magnus & Kull, 2012). Theoretically, contemporary cultural psychology shares the ground with epigenetic thinking in biology (Tavory et al., 2012).

Human beings move around—as tourists, pilgrims, traders, warriors, or vagabonds. In such movements, they enhance their horizons of “the Other”—persons, customs, habits, and economic opportunities. Understanding people-in-movement is a crucial task for cultural psychology (Gillespie et al., 2012; Kharlamov, 2012). The hybrid trajectory of self-willed movement—the pilgrimage—is a cultural phenomenon that dynamically unites the otherwise static rural–urban, religious–secular, and nomadic–sedentary oppositions. The pilgrim’s path is not geographic but psychological (Beckstead, 2012).

Complex psychological functions of social kind are covered in Part X of the Handbook. Perhaps the most crucial issue is the way in which duties and rights (Moghaddam et al., 2012) are linked with the construction of values (Branco, 2012). In a counterweight to the Euro-American discourse on such higher processes, Nsamenang (2012) has provided a contextualized perspective from the vantage point of African societies.

The basic tenet of cultural psychology—in contrast to cross-cultural psychology—is the inclusion of the social institutions in which people participate in the study of the cultural ways of living (*see* Valsiner, 2007, on two ways of knowledge creation). Our Handbook looks at a number of social practices—those in the macro-structure of a school (Daniels, 2012; Marsico & Iannaccone, 2012, Marsico, Komatsu & Iannaccone, 2012) The educational contexts can—and do—change; our Handbook covers the ways in which interventions have been observed (Downing-Wilson et al., 2012; Lopez et al., 2012).

All human beings who participate in the activities of social institutions are acting on the basis of their affective relations with the immediate social worlds. Chaudhary (2012) demonstrates how the normative stance for such relations is the strategic coalition-making in family networks—filled with affective construction of dramas. The centrality of play (van Oers, 2012) in human lives guarantees that within any social group there is constant differentiation of forms of new action. The peer group sets the range of social constraints that enable further innovative collective action (Li, 2012).

The crucial area for re-integration of culture and psychology is the creation of new methodology (Part XII). It needs to transcend the elementaristic logic of the General Linear Model by allowing for recognition of cyclical nature of causal processes, focus on constant construction of variability (which leads to idiographic science; Molenaar, 2004), and accepting the multilinearity and multifinality of the psychological processes (Sato et al., 2012). Ambivalence—rather than its absence—is the normal state of affairs in psychological phenomena (Abbey, 2012). That ambivalence is being temporarily overcome through the use of cultural tools by persons (Boesch, 2011; Eckensberger, 2011; Innis, 2011). New methods are emerging from this general line of thinking—collective techniques of looking at reconstructive memory (Wagoner, 2012) and the look at life trajectories in-the-making (Sato et al., 2012).

Encountering the rich material in this Handbook is a multilinear experience for the reader—a worthwhile effort, so as to make sense of where psychology so far has failed and to get some ideas of better future for the human sciences of the future. It is our hope that this Handbook becomes a rich resource for future generations of thinkers who want to see culture in the psyche and let psychology as a science enter the social realities of cultural organization.

## Notes

1. The first two having been the times of *Völkerspsychologie*, 1860–1920, and the efforts of the “culture and personality” school in cultural anthropology in the 1950s.
2. The boy who was trained by John B. Watson, one of the originators of behaviorism
3. The infant chimpanzee who was raised by Ladygina-Kohts (2002, original in 1935 ) in the classic study of chimpanzee development in human environments
4. Wolfgang Köhler’s best known research participant on the Tenerife.
5. It is important to note that the intricate link with the dialectical dynamicity of the units—which is present in the Russian original— is lost in English translation, which briefly stated only the main point in a summarizing fashion: “*Psychology, which aims at a study of complex holistic systems, must replace the method of analysis into elements with the method of analysis into units*” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 5). Yet it remains unclear in the English translation what kinds of units are to be constructed—those that entail oppositional relationships between parts—while in the Russian original it is made evident.

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# Culture and Psychology: Words and Ideas in History

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## Abstract

This chapter provides an historical overview of the links of culture and psychology from antiquity to the present time. The roots of interest in culture are traced to the social practices of travel—exploration, trade, conquest, and administration—that lead to experiencing other human beings as living by very different practices. Psychology emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European thought that carried various cultural prejudices into its mainstream. This took place in the context of basic philosophical tension between *nature* and *nurture* as causal streams resulting in cultural differences. Over most of the period nurture predominated, with a sharp reversal during the nineteenth century when *race* came to the fore. Yet it was after the middle of that century that the terminology began to change and *culture*—the name, not the concept—entered the vocabulary. Cultural psychology of today is in a position to see mind and culture as mutually constituted.

**Keywords:** history, culture, *Völkerpsychologie*, mind, exploration, customs

Like some Freudian terms, *culture* has now become part of our everyday vocabulary. As such, it is usually coupled with a range of adjectives to indicate some undefined properties of a category, such as “adolescent culture,” “consumer culture,” “literary culture,” “tabloid culture,” “visual culture,” and so on. Such ordinary usage is regarded as unproblematic, whereas the social sciences have agonized over the meaning of *culture* for more than half a century and continue to do so. In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn published their well-known monograph that listed some 160 proposed definitions. For reasons that will be explained later, no definition will be offered here, but the history of the word will be outlined.

The original source of the term was *cultivation*<sup>1</sup>, as in “agriculture,” although already in Roman times Cicero used the expressions *cultura animi* for the training of the mind and *cultura mentis* in a figurative sense to refer to philosophy. But for centuries

it meant producing or developing something, such as “the culture of barley” or “the culture of the arts,” and it is still applied in this sense, as in the phrase “the culture of bacteria.” In English, the first use of “Culture” in the figurative sense of improvement or refinement by education and training dates back to the early sixteenth century. More than three further centuries had to elapse before it was employed in more or less its current quasi-technical sense by Tylor ([1871]1958), whose approach will be more fully discussed later. Initially *culture* was mainly used in the singular to denote a property of humankind in general, and it was not until the 1930s that a clear distinction came to be drawn between “culture-in-general” and “a culture” as one of many different cultures.

So far this may seem rather straightforward, but in fact matters are more complicated. Tylor’s definition began with the phrase “Culture or Civilization . . .,” indicating his view, then widely held, that these

terms were synonyms<sup>2</sup>. There are further complications because, as shown by Elias (1982), there are national differences in the meanings of these terms. In France, *civilisation* was seen as a universal feature of the (superior) West, encompassing a cluster of features including economic, political, technological, social, and moral ones. In Germany, for historical reasons, civilization that transcends national boundaries was conceived as something external and even threatening to their *Kultur*, which embodied their particular national values. In more recent times, these distinctions have become somewhat blurred without being altogether eliminated.<sup>3</sup> It will be clear, therefore, that the term *culture* is of relatively recent origin and that there are variations over time and place in the manner it is understood.

### Psychology: Its Historical Roots

Let me now turn briefly to *psychology*, a term that goes back to the end of the seventeenth century. There was and remains a general consensus that it refers to the study of the (mainly human) mind. In the present—historical—context, it will be interpreted more broadly as psychological features attributed to (usually other) peoples.

At this point the reader might well begin to doubt whether the implicit promise of the title of this chapter is really capable of being fulfilled, as it entails a retrospective application of the concepts of “psychology” and “culture.” There seems to be no fundamental difficulty with regard to psychology, as long as one thinks of it as concerned with the mind, which in turn is a key aspect of human nature. Ideas about human nature not only go back to the beginning of recorded history but exist in some form in all known human societies, and they are being studied now under the heading of “indigenous psychologies.”<sup>4</sup> For earlier periods, long before the advent of specializations, one can draw freely on the writings of a wide range of thinkers, including philosophers, physicians, naturalists, travelers and, later, anthropologists and sociologists. Such usage is sanctioned by the practice of most conventional histories of psychology. For despite of the fact that the term *psychology* dates back only to the sixteenth century, authors usually have no compunction in tracing origins back to antiquity.

By contrast, there appear at first sight to be strong objections to the retrospective use of the elusive term *culture*, which has undergone radical changes over time. Let me try to show that, quite

apart from the cumbersomeness of a constantly changing vocabulary, there is a case for using the term *culture* as a kind of rough-and-ready shorthand for past ideas. The argument rests on the fact that the absence of a term does not preclude the presence of concepts, otherwise articulated, which at least broadly correspond to, or overlap with, what we understand today by *culture*. These include expressions like “customs” or “the genius of a people.” Such notions again go back to antiquity and gradually came to be more clearly formulated, so that by the eighteenth century prominent thinkers put forward ideas dealing with the relationship between salient features of peoples or societies and their psychological characteristics.

An example of past usage will help to illustrate this, and I have chosen for this purpose Michel de Montaigne’s famous essay “On cannibals” written in the sixteenth century:

... il n’y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation ... sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n’est pas de son usage; comme de vray il semble que nous n’avons autre mire de la verité et de la raison que l’exemple et idée des opinions et usances du pais ou nous sommes.

(Montaigne [1580] 1954, p. 33)

In the above, reproduced in the original archaic French, Montaigne is saying that everyone calls “barbarism” whatever does not correspond to their own customs; and he states that we have no other criterion of truth and reason than the example of the opinions and customs of the country in which we find ourselves. Now these “opinions and customs” are important aspects of what we mean by *culture*. The view that Montaigne can be regarded as having been concerned with culture is widely shared, and a number of commentators have described him as one of the first “cultural relativists”—that is, taking the view that each culture should be judged only in terms of its own standards. Corresponding notions, such as Voltaire’s “*moeurs et esprit*” or Hume’s “moral causes” of differences between peoples, were widespread in the eighteenth century. This, of course, should not occasion any surprise. A term like *culture* is a kind of construct that groups together a set of phenomena and what makes up the set will largely be a function of implicit or explicit theoretical assumptions. Past thinkers made different assumptions and applied different labels, yet they were concerned with similar phenomena. Even today the boundaries between what is and what is not to be

treated as *culture* remain fuzzy, with considerable divergences of views. Thus I would submit that it is defensible to employ the term *culture* diachronically to designate a certain commonality of—admittedly somewhat vague—meanings.

### Antiquity and Middle Ages<sup>5</sup> *The Greeks*

The origins of most aspects of western thought can be traced back to figures from ancient Greece, and the present theme is no exception. Among them, one of the most prominent was of course Aristotle (384–322 BC), whose teachings retained their authority for more than one-and-a-half millennia. Mainly in *de Anima* (but also in other works), he laid the foundations of a theoretical psychology. Here only a few relevant comments can be singled out. Aristotle often disagreed with his teacher Plato (c.428–c.348), but when it came to the external factors (chiefly climatic and geographical) influencing peoples' psychologies, they followed much the same lines:

Some regions are unsuitable or unfavourable, probably owing to the prevailing winds and the heat of the sun; others because of the water or even the food that comes from the soil and which not only provides better or poorer nourishment, but also can have no lesser consequences on the souls.

(*Plato*, *Politeia* II)

This is not to say that Plato placed major emphasis on such influences, because he took the view that willingness to learn, strength of memory, and a keen mind can be produced by education and appropriate laws.

Aristotle went into rather more details:

Namely the peoples of the cold regions and those in Europe have a courageous character, but are behind in intelligence and skill; they also prefer to be free but lack an organized state and are incapable of dominating their neighbours. Asian peoples, by contrast, are intelligent and artistically gifted but inactive, and therefore they live in subjection and as servants. The Greek people lives so to speak in the middle between them and therefore partakes of both these characters. For it is courageous and intelligent. Hence it is free, has the best state, and is able to dominate everything . . . .

(*Aristotle*, *Politeia* VII)

The views of these philosophers were entirely speculative, no doubt drawing on ideas that were

prevalent in their time. On the other hand, Thucydides (c. 460–c. 400 BC) and Herodotus (c. 485–c. 425 BC) were historians whose work was at least partly based on observations. The former's *History of the Peloponnesian war* was a masterly account of Greek history but not only that. Thucydides wanted to explain that history in terms of what he regarded as fundamental human nature and sought to analyze the motivations of the actors and as such was described by Collingwood ([1946] 1961, p. 142) as the founder of psychohistory. In undertaking this analysis, he did not ignore the effect of external circumstances as these interacted with the common human nature. The same principle was applied by his contemporary Hippocrates (c. 460–c. 377 B.C.) the "father of medicine." According to him, one has to consider a series of factors to arrive at a correct judgment about illnesses: general human nature, the particular constitution of the individual, the climate in general and its specific manifestation, and regional influences.

Although Thucydides was able to personally observe aspects of the war, he did not have much to say about other peoples. Herodotus, on the other hand, traveled widely and collected extensive ethnographic data in Egypt, Babylonia, India, Persia, and Scythia (the region north of the Black Sea). The list of topics he covered is a long one, including: race, looks, intelligence, virtues and vices, language, occupations and skills, food, sexuality, various rites (e.g., naming and funerals), sciences, arts, religion, history, notable personalities, geography, and climate. In addition to direct observation, he also questioned local people. Well aware of the dangers of what we now call "ethnocentrism," he was rarely judgmental. His view is epitomized in the following passage:

... if someone were to assign to every person in the world the task of selecting the best of all customs, each one, after thorough consideration, would choose those of this own people, so strongly do humans believe that their own customs are the best ones. Therefore only a madman would treat such things as a laughing matter. There are many weighty proofs which confirm that all people have these strong attachments to their own customs, but let me describe this particularly interesting one: during his reign, Darius summoned the Hellenes at his court and ask them how much money they would accept for eating the bodies of their dead fathers. They answered that they would not do this for any amount of money. Later, Darius summoned some Indians called Kallatai, who do eat their dead parents. In the

presence of the Hellenes . . . he asked the Indians how much money they would accept to burn the bodies of their dead fathers. They responded with an outcry, ordering him to shut his mouth lest he offend the gods. Well then, that is how people think, and so it seems to me that Pindar was right when he said in his poetry that custom is king of all.

(*Herodotus* [c. 440 BC], 2008, Book III, p. 38)

Herodotus also related the story of the Egyptian king Psymmetichos (seventh century BC), who wanted to find out experimentally who the first people were. For this purpose he obtained two newborn children and handed them to shepherds, with strict instructions that not a single word must be spoken in their presence. One day, after 2 years, the children called “bekos.” They repeated this when brought before the king, who instituted enquiries from which he learned that “bekos” was the Phrygian word for “bread.” Hence, he concluded that they were the most ancient people.<sup>6</sup>

This brief sketch has concentrated on a just a few outstanding figures, and many more contributed. Even so, it will be clear that the outlook of some of the intellectual elite was wide-ranging and, in some respects, remarkably modern.

### **The Romans**

A great deal of their learning was transmitted to the Romans from the Greeks, and their brilliant innovations were mainly in technology. A huge compendium of all then existing knowledge, from Astronomy to Zoology, was assembled by Pliny the Elder (pp. 24–79). It includes sections on humans and quasi-humans, the latter becoming important later. In Julius Caesar’s account of the Gallic war, he discussed not merely the characters of different tribes but described how cultural change can come about:

Among them the most courageous are the Belgers, because they live most remote from the civilization (*cultu atque humanitate*) of the Roman province; and also because traders bringing luxury goods, which could weaken their character, seldom reach them.

(*De bello Gallico*, I,1,3)

Other writers, like Tacitus, made similar comments. Generally, however, much of their thought on the topic was derived from the Greeks.

### **The Middle Ages**

These lasted from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance, roughly the millennium from

500 to 1500. It has rightly been called the “Age of Faith”—gone were the bold speculations of the Greeks, and horizons narrowed. A great deal was written on what might be called “Christian psychology” by St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, but not without merit it was essentially the study of the soul.<sup>7</sup> Contact with the world outside Europe was limited, except for Muslim countries, which were seen as the enemy. The world beyond was perceived as being peopled by Pliny’s “monstrous races” (cf. Friedman, J.B. (1981). The typical description cited below is from the fabled Sir John Mandeville’s travel reports:

And in those isles there are many manner of folk of divers conditions. In one of them is a manner of folk of great stature, as they were giants, horrible and foul to the sight; and they have but one eye, and that is in the midst of their forehead. They eat raw flesh and raw fish. In another isle are foul men of figure without heads, and they have eyes in either shoulder one, and their mouths are shaped round like a horseshoe, y-midst their breasts. In another isle are men without heads; and their eyes and their mouths are behind their shoulders.

(*Letts* ([1346?] 1953, Vol.1, pp. 141, 142)

The existence of the “monstrous races,” including creatures that were half-human and half-goat, was believed by Albertus Magnus (1200–1280), one of the great scholars of the Middle Ages. For him a marginal case on the boundary between animal and human was the pygmy, of whom he probably heard from Greek sources. His main criteria were psychological ones: pygmies have memory and are able to compare memory images, but they lack abstract concepts. Albertus likened them to feeble-minded humans possessing only the shadow of reason. Hence, he concluded, they are incapable of *civitas*—what we would call culture.

An earlier saint and scholar, Isidore of Seville (c. 560–c. 636) had put forward a climatic theory of psychological characteristics:

In accordance with diversity of climate, the appearance of men and their colour and bodily size vary and diversities of mind appear. Thence we see that the Romans are dignified, the Greeks unstable, the Africans crafty, the Gauls fierce by nature . . .

(cited in *Slotkin*, 1965, p. 5)

Climatic theories of various kinds persisted until the nineteenth century and were not confined to Christian Europe. Regarding Europeans, the

Muslim writer Masudi (?1–956) noted, “The farther they are to the north the more stupid, gross, and brutish they are” (cited in Lewis, 1994, p. 139). In the year 1068, Said Ibn Ahmad, from Toledo in Spain, wrote a treatise on the types of cultures. He divided them into two groups: those who contribute to science and learning, including Arabs, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Jews and those he considered to be progressively more stupid and ignorant with increasing distance from the sun, including people living in the north; Chinese and Turks were treated as marginal.

The most remarkable of the Muslim Arab scholars was Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) who wrote a treatise on the history and theory of social and political change, which he regarded as cyclical. Many of his ideas have an astonishingly modern ring, such as his view that stability depends on “group feeling”; again, here are his comments on culture:

Culture is not an independent substance, but a property . . . of another substance which is man. Hence the natural character of culture must have reference to what is natural to man, i.e. to his nature and is what differentiates him from the rest of the animal world.

(Mahdi, 1971, p. 173)

Significantly, the subtitle of his opus is *A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*. Although it is not clear what Arabic word was glossed as *culture*, there can be little doubt that it must be close to our concept, probably more so than any of the notions discussed so far.

## From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment *Renaissance*

In Christian Europe the fantastic image of the outside world was slow to change even after the dawn of the voyages of exploration. These began with Marco Polo who visited India and the Far East at the end of the thirteenth century. During the fifteenth century, the Portuguese explored the West Coast of Africa, later getting to the Cape of Good Hope shortly before Columbus reached America. The following century saw the conquest of Mexico and Peru by the Spaniards, who also found New Guinea.

It was a new breed of men, created by the Renaissance cult of the individual, who embarked on these hazardous voyages of exploration. The all-embracing theological shell had cracked, opening

the way for a renewed interest in the cultures of Greece and Rome, which in turn liberated minds. Renaissance travelers eagerly sought personal fame as well as proclaiming the goal of converting the pagans. One can clearly discern the ethnocentric anchoring of the concern with exotic peoples. At the same time there was a search for a perspective whereby one might locate “the Others” in time and space for the purpose of systematic comparison, and with a view to gaining a better understanding of one’s own individuality and society (Rowe, 1965).

The period was also characterized by an immense—albeit somewhat diffuse—curiosity, manifesting itself in a passion for collecting a wide range of natural objects and artifacts, as well as by receptivity to new ideas. The travel literature resulting from these voyages therefore found an avid public. Although the first-hand accounts by travelers were often sober and factual, it did not follow that belief in the fabulous had disappeared. Popular travel books embroidered the tales—describing, for example, the inhabitants of the New World as “blue in colour and with square heads.” One of the most successful of these collections, the *Cosmographia* by Sebastian Muenster (1544), presented an indiscriminate mixture of the old “monstrous races” and the newly discovered “savages.” Yet despite the persistence of fables, the Renaissance saw an unprecedented expansion of the European intellectual horizon in terms of both the physical and human worlds.

With a vast expansion of travel, exploration, and colonization, the material available for comparative studies grew proportionately. From the beginning of that period, advice to travelers came to be published. The advice included general admonitions of a vague kind (e.g., to mark down things observed) and moral warnings about dallying with women. Other works listed various kinds of customs and institutions that should be recorded and also mentioned the need to note the psychological dispositions of the people as well as their moral character, qualities, and abilities. Varen’s (1650) *Geographica generalis* achieved a wide circulation among travelers. The topics it covered, reproduced below (from Malefijt, 1974, p. 45), are by no means outdated:

1. Stature, shape, skin color, food habits
2. Occupations and arts
3. Virtues, vices, learning, wit [in the sense of intelligence]
4. Marriage, birth, burial, name giving



5. Speech and language
6. State and government
7. Religion
8. Cities and renowned places
9. History
10. Famous men, inventions, and innovations

It would, of course, be anachronistic to suppose that the authors of such guides were thinking in terms of anything like culture and psychology, as these categories were then nonexistent. All they show is an interest in a range of topics we include under these rubrics.

Among the travel literature, one of the most remarkable works, dealing with Japan, will be briefly outlined. The first substantive contact with Europe began with Portuguese missionary activity in the sixteenth century, and from this stemmed the first coherent account of Japanese culture. The Jesuit Father Louis Frois (1532–1597) wrote a slender volume entitled *Treatise on the Contradictions and Differences in Customs* (Frois, [1585] 1998). In the preface, he wrote: “Many of their customs are so strange and distant from ours that seems almost unbelievable that there could be so many oppositions [between us and] people who are so civilized [*une grande police*], have such a lively spirit and natural wisdom” (p. 13). Evidently the good Father was favorably disposed toward the Japanese, although he could hardly have approved of some of the customs he described. A few examples of oppositions from several of his categories are cited below.

#### PERSONS AND THEIR CLOTHES

With us, there are many men and women with brownish spots on the skin; this is very rare with Japanese, *even though they are White*. (Author’s emphasis added)

With us, wearing painted clothes would be regarded as mad or ridiculous; the Japanese do it customarily.

#### OF WOMEN, THEIR PERSONS AND THEIR MANNERS

In Europe, the honor and the supreme good of young women are the modesty and the inviolate cloister of their purity; the women of Japan set little store by virginal purity, and losing it neither dishonors them nor prevents them from marrying.

With us it is rare that women know how to write; an honorable woman in Japan would be held in low esteem if she did not know how to do it.

#### OF CHILDREN AND THEIR MANNERS

With us, a child of 4 years does not yet know how to eat properly; those in Japan eat by themselves with chopsticks from the age of 3 years.

With us it is customary to whip and chastise boys; in Japan it is very rare to act in this manner, and this applies even to reprimands.

#### THE JAPANESE MANNER OF EATING AND DRINKING

We drink with only one hand; the Japanese always do with two.

We like dishes cooked with milk, cheese, butter, or bone marrow; the Japanese abominate all that, which smells very bad to their nose.

Altogether Frois listed more than 400 binary oppositions, throughout his tone remains neutral and objective. Differences capture attention and interest, as already shown by Herodotus when writing about the “peculiar customs” of the Egyptians. For example, he noted that Egyptian priests have shaven heads, whereas in other nations they have long hair.

#### THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

The existence of a wide diversity of peoples having been established, the general question arose as to the nature of the differences. The most commonly postulated cause remained the climate, viewed in broad sense,<sup>8</sup> although there were some dissenters. Jean Bodin (1530–1596) tried to classify peoples in terms of north and south but was troubled by the fact that people in the same latitudes can differ. Nevertheless, as already noted, such ideas persisted. About the same time, a *social* interpretation of differences gained ground—namely, in the variety of *customs*. It was Montaigne, already cited, who most eloquently described the power of custom:

... the principal effect of the force of custom is to seize and grip us so firmly, that we are scarcely able to escape from its grasp, and to gain possession of ourselves sufficiently to discuss and reason out its commands. In truth, since we imbibe them with our mother’s milk, and the world shows the same face to our infant eyes, we seem to be born to follow the same path; and the common ideas that we find around us, and infused into our souls with the seed of our fathers, appear to be general and natural.

(Cited in *Slotkin*, 1965, pp. 56–57)<sup>9</sup>

In his famous essay “On Cannibals” and elsewhere, Montaigne applied this to what we would call “cultural differences”

The different customs I find in one nation after another please me by their very diversity ... I am ashamed when I see my countrymen steeped in that silly prejudice which makes them fight shy of any customs that differ from their own ...  
(p. 55)

This insight was repeatedly voiced throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here are some examples:

It is good to know something of the customs of different people in order to judge more sanely of our own.  
(Descartes, p. 104)

But there is another force, that ravishes away the minds of men, and makes them addicted to certain affections. Namely, that spirit which being appropriate to every region, infuseth into men, as soon as they are borne, the habits and affections of their owne country.  
(Barclay, p. 106)

Custom is our nature. ... What are our natural principles but principles of custom? In children they are those which they have received from the habits of their fathers ... A different custom will cause different natural principles. This is seen in experience; and if there are some natural principles ineradicable by custom, there are also some customs opposed to nature, ineradicable by nature, or by a second custom.  
(Pascal, p. 120)

It is interesting that Pascal struggled with the problem of the relationship between, in our terms, “nature versus culture,” an issue that has not gone away. This is because culture is now often seen as an evolutionary product (e.g., Auger, 2000). The general tendency to refer to *custom* in the sense of our *culture* long continued. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, Bagehot (1872) employed the phrase “the cake of custom” to refer to cultural traditions. Apart from *custom*, there is one other kind of expression, rare at that time but becoming more frequent subsequently: Harrington explained national differences in terms of “The *Genius of the Nations*” (Slotkin 1965, p. 130).

So far nearly all the ideas that have been reviewed have been impressionistic and speculative, but during the second half of the seventeenth century, that

began to change. It was the age of the scientific revolution and John Locke (1632–1704), friend of Isaac Newton, was an empiricist who stressed the need for observation. His views on the environmental determination of people’s characteristics were much the same as those of Descartes. Other developments at that time contributed to the formation of a fresh perspective. Ludwig Seckendorf (1626–1692) and William Petty (1623–1687) elaborated a system of social statistics dealing with births and deaths, showing that human life is subject to order and regularity and could be studied quantitatively.

### *The Enlightenment*

In the eighteenth century, the authority of the churches became undermined by Newton’s demonstration that the physical universe is lawful. This prompted the question whether one might not envisage causal laws of mind and society. Montesquieu was one of the first to attempt the formulation of such laws that would account for differences between societies (1689–1755):

I have first of all considered mankind, and concluded that its infinite variety of laws and customs did not uniquely arise from arbitrary fancy. I have postulated the principles, and have seen how particular cases fit them neatly.  
(Montesquieu, [1748] 1964, p. 529)

In the same work (p. 641), he also proposed that various influences, including “the examples of things past,” create “a general spirit [*esprit général*]” that corresponds fairly closely to what we mean by *culture*. The underlying assumption, then widely shared, was that human nature remains constant and that differences result from varying historical circumstances. It was an optimistic age, based on the belief in inevitable progress driven by reason. Its effects were regarded as cumulative. A typical statement is that by Adam Ferguson (1723–1816). He begins by listing the commonalities between animals and humans, and then goes on:

Yet one property by which man is distinguished has been sometimes overlooked ... In other classes of animals, the individual advances from infancy to age or maturity; and he attains, in the compass of a single life, to all the perfection his nature can reach; but in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual; they build in every age on the foundations formerly laid; and, in a succession of years, tend to perfection in the application of their faculties, to which the aid of long experience is

required, and to which many generations must have combined their endeavours.

(Ferguson, [1767] 1966, pp. 4–5)

Apart from the vocabulary used, this seems a fair description of what is now referred to as “cultural transmission.”

In France Louis-Francois Jauffret (1770–1850) founded the *Société des Observateurs de l'Homme* in 1799. Its object was to study human nature, including ethnic differences and their causes, the history of various peoples, and their customs and migrations, as well as child development from infancy onward. The membership consisted of a galaxy of illustrious names in France, and a number of empirical studies were performed. One of the most ambitious ones took advantage of an opportunity to study “savages” at first hand. Napoleon approved the project of an expedition to Australasia, and the *Société* commissioned Joseph-Marie Degérando (1772–1842) to prepare a kind of handbook of methods for this purpose,<sup>10</sup> entitled “Considerations on the Methods to Follow in the Observation of Savage Peoples” (Degerando, [1800] 1969). This is one of the most remarkable documents in the history of social science, which reflects and advances the knowledge then available. After two centuries, many of its recommendations are still valid. They will be briefly summarized, employing modern terminology.

At the outset, Degerando warns against a number of possible pitfalls in research, such as inadequate sampling and communication errors. One should not judge people in other cultures by ethnocentric standards. It is best to become a participant observer and learn the indigenous language. One should consider the effects of the presence of an observer.

The psychological topics he suggests reflect the then prevailing “sensationist” theory of Condillac. The first illustrative category will be described in some detail, whereas for the others, just headings will be listed.

### SENSATIONS

The first thing to be observed is the sensations of savage people, examining in detail their varieties and focusing on the following four questions:

1. What are the senses among them that are most exercised, active, and finely discriminating?
2. What are the conditions that might have led to the more marked development of a particular sense modality?

3. What is the extent of development of each of their senses compared with what one encounters normally among ourselves?

4. What is the type of sensation in which they find most pleasure?

There follow some comments on ways to estimate the degree of development of a particular sense modality, including the threshold as well as speed and accuracy of sensory judgment responses. An example given is the skill in estimating distances. Observers should seek to establish whether innate factors as well as practice contribute to the frequently noted perfection of savage senses.<sup>11</sup> They will also find out if blindness and deafness are more or less common than among Europeans, the effects of such handicaps, and the modes of adaptation.

Other topics include abstract concepts; association of ideas; opinions and judgments; attention; memory; imbecility; education; and child development. It will be noted that nearly all these topics have subsequently become topics of cross-cultural research.

### AGAINST ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT

The idea of a social science based on the model of physics was strongly opposed by Giambattista Vico (1668–1744). In *The New Science* ([1725] 1948), he wrote:

... the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, he alone knows; and that they should have neglected the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know ...  
(p. 331)

The philosophers of the Enlightenment saw human history as progressive pan-human stages based on modes of subsistence: from hunting to pastoral to agricultural and finally to commercial. Vico's stages were essentially psychological in character and referred to “a world of nations,” and his concept of a nation appears to have been very much the same as what we mean by *culture*. For him the language, morals, customs, myths, and rituals of a “nation” constituted a complex unity of interdependent parts.

Unlike Vico, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was in his youth an ardent disciple of the

Enlightenment but later came to question most of its ideas and values and moved much closer to the position of Vico (although without knowing Vico's work). In opposition to the then prevalent view of the immutability of human nature, Herder stressed its variability, conditioned by historical and environmental factors.

In one of his main works on *The Origin of Language* (1772), he discusses its broader functions. Language, according to him, serves not merely as a means of communication but also as a mode of transmitting the ideas and feelings of past generations. Thus what Herder calls "tradition" is not just a static bundle of beliefs and customs but a *process* in which past and present are fused and that gives a group of people their sense of identity. This clearly anticipates later ideas of the transmission of culture through the generations.

The key term Herder applies to such a group—or better, organic community—is *Volk*. A *Volk* is characterized by a shared language and historical tradition that shape the mentality [*Volksgeist*] of its members, not into any permanent mold but in constant movement of growth and development—or decay. A *Volk* may or may not coincide with a nation-state—it certainly need not do so. This concept is in fact very close to what we mean nowadays by a *culture*, and Herder's somewhat flowery description of the way in which, from infancy onward, not merely collective ideas but also feelings and images are conveyed is essentially an account of socialization into a particular culture.

The diversity of human languages and cultures was, for Herder, a positive value, something "good" and "natural." In contrast to most philosophers of the Enlightenment' who established scales of "progress" whereby to evaluate different societies as "high" or "low," "barbaric," or "polished," Herder was a relativist who considered that each culture must be approached, and valued, on its own terms:

Thus nations change according to place, time and their inner character; each carries within itself the measure of its perfection, incommensurable with others.

(Herder [1785] 1969, vol.4, p. 362)

Herder was also unusual in that he did not share the then quasi-universal assumption of a *general* European superiority and disapproved of the European practices to "subjugate, cheat, and plunder." Thereby he went directly against the spirit of nationalism and colonization that was dawning toward the end of his life.

## *The Nineteenth Century*

### THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

This was a period of transition. With the rise of biology, human differences came to be increasingly attributed to "race," and environmental factors tended to recede into the background. Yet most of the figures to be discussed here bucked this trend. One was Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), who was influenced by some of Herder's ideas but did not believe in cultural relativity, being convinced of "the governing principle of universal humanity." Humboldt's dominant interest is epitomized in the title of his most important work, *On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species* ([1836] 1999). He held that language is the main glue that holds human cultures together, and he had a great deal to say on the relationship between language and thought.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he maintained that social processes are an essential prerequisite for adequate cognitive functioning.

The nature of mental processes was the main focus of the work of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), best known for his writings on educational and mathematical psychology. Of course, it is not possible here to go into details of his complex theories, but some basic features have to be briefly indicated. He envisaged an intra-individual system whereby different *Vorstellungen* (ideas and/or feelings, or presentations) interact, either combining or opposing each other. They can rise above and/or push each other below the threshold of consciousness. Subsequently he put forward the proposal that the forces in society analogously reflect the individual system, which is similar to Benedict's (1932) contention that culture is individual psychology writ large.<sup>13</sup> Herbart also recommended that psychologists should study people from outside Europe:

... how many of us concerned with psychology have been to New Zealand? How many of us have occasion to observe the savages in their home setting? (1825/1890, vol.6, p. 16)

Herbart could therefore be regarded as one of the ancestors of cross-cultural psychology, and he furnished the theoretical underpinning for Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie* (Diriwächter, 2011). One of their main aims was to clarify the concept of the *Volksgeist* (spirit of the people), a concept whose meaning is at least loosely related to that of *culture*.

Theodor Waitz (1821–1864), prominent follower of Herbart, devoted himself to the cause of “psychic unity” (a phrase he coined) as against the biological race scientists. Like James Pritchard (1786–1848) in Britain, he was faced with the problem that given the (then) stark contrasts between human groups, the claim that they all had one common mind appeared counterintuitive. Hence they accumulated a mass of ethnographic material in an effort to make their case, and Waitz wrote:

However great the difference between their mental *culture* and ours, we may, if time and opportunity are favourable, learn to understand all their actions, and we are thus justified in assuming in the human species, only difference in *culture*.

(Waitz [1859] 1863, p. 274, emphases added)

It might be tempting to conclude from the ending of this passage that Waitz used the term *culture* in its modern sense, but that would be a mistake, as the earlier mention of “mental culture” indicates. The sense is that of “cultivation,” and some peoples are said to be insufficiently “cultivated.”

Yet around mid-century, a monumental work was published by Gustav Klemm (1802–1867) under the title “General Culture-History of Humanity” (Klemm 1843–1852),<sup>2</sup> which at times does appear to employ the term *Cultur* in something like its modern sense.<sup>14</sup> The work is historical and does not deal with psychology, but it is mentioned here because it inspired what is widely regarded as the classical definition of culture by Tylor, usually cited as follows:

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.

(Tylor [1871] 1958, p. 1)

From this, one might infer that his definition was purely anthropological, but the next sentence shows that he did not ignore psychological aspects: “The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind . . . is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action” (emphasis added). It will be noted that he treated *culture* and *civilization* as synonyms, an issue to be pursued below.

#### ADOLF BASTIAN

Another German figure of that period, very much concerned with psychology, was Adolf Bastian

(1826–1905). In his student days he attended lectures by Lazarus, one of the founders of *Völkerpsychologie*, for whom he had a high regard. Among the aforementioned eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers, he was the first to have personally collected ethnographic material in various parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, North and South America, China, and India. Unlike other travelers who mainly reported about the geography of the places they visited and the physical characteristics of the peoples and their artifacts, Bastian was mainly interested in their psychological features. He obtained information on religious beliefs and practices, myths, legal and political forms, customs, and so on.

In his travels, he found that peoples all over the world had a great deal in common as well as differing in many ways. He therefore postulated the existence of what he called “elementary ideas” that are universally shared. He sometimes wrote in a manner suggesting that by “ideas” he also meant “thought processes.” The differences between peoples are said to result partly from the development of their particular languages which, according to Bastian, afford valuable insights into national characters and partly from environmental and historical factors. The ultimate objective was to arrive at a comparative psychology:

A comparative psychology can only be established on the basis of ethnology, which traces in the various ethnic groups [*Volkskreisen*] the genetic development of mental products [*Gedankenschöpfungen*] and explains their local colouring in terms of geographical or historical contexts.

(Bastian, 1868, p. XI)

How far does Bastian’s notion of “elementary” or “folk ideas” correspond to a modern concept of culture? Here we have to remind ourselves that far from there being a generally agreed definition of culture, there are numerous varied ones. Among them is that of “a symbolic meaning system,” and this to some extent resembled what Bastian had in mind. It should also be said that Bastian’s was essentially a *collective* psychology, located midway between psychology and anthropology and as such had a good deal in common with Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie*.

#### CULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CIRCLE OF WUNDT

*Völkerpsychologie* was located outside the mainstream of experimental psychology pioneered by

Fechner and Ebbinghaus. Not everybody was happy with experimental psychology, which to some seemed rather dry and mechanical, failing to do justice to the subtleties and complexities of human life. The most articulate critic was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911). Like Bastian, he had met Lazarus and had even worked with him for a time. But his initial enthusiasm for *Völkerpsychologie* was later tempered by reservations related to the speculative nature and diffuseness of the enterprise. He turned toward the scientific side, became a pupil of Helmholtz, and attended lectures on physiology.

After obtaining a chair in philosophy, he became increasingly preoccupied with problems of psychology, philosophy, and history, which he came to see as connected. Regarding psychology, he proposed that there are two distinct approaches to the subject: one is empiricist, concerned with hypothesis-testing and aiming at *causal explanations*, the other rests on lived experience and aims at *understanding*—a contrast analogous to that drawn by Vico. While accepting the legitimacy of the former, Dilthey described it as formal and atomistic, ignoring the fact that the self has a functional unity that eludes any approach that concentrates exclusively on its constituent parts.

Dilthey himself focused on *Erlebnis* or “lived experience,” and his two key concepts are *Verstehen* (a kind of understanding<sup>15</sup>) and *Bedeutung* (or “meaning”).

Both of these operate within particular culture-historical contexts. In this connection he took over from Hegel the notion of “objective spirit,”<sup>16</sup> employing it in a manner that corresponds closely to what we refer to as *culture*:

I understand objective spirit to be the various forms in which the common ground that exists is objectified in the world of the senses. In this objective spirit, the past is a continuing presence for us. Its domain extends from the style of life and the forms of economic interaction to the system of ends which society has formed: to morality, law, the state, religion, art, science, and philosophy.

(Dilthey, [1894] 1977, p. 126)

One could also gloss this as a reference to intersubjectively shared meaning systems. At any rate, the broad congruence between “objective spirit” and what we know as culture is supported by the way in which Dilthey characterizes what we would call the acquisition of culture:

From earliest childhood our self receives its nourishment from this world of objective spirit. It is also the medium in which the *Verstehen* of other

persons and their expressions of life comes about. . . . Before he learns to speak, the child is already completely immersed in the medium of common contexts. . . . In this way, the individual becomes oriented in the world of objective spirit.  
(Dilthey, [1894] 1977, pp. 126–127)

It may be noted that Dilthey’s ideas were one of the sources from which almost a century later the so-called “cultural studies” movement emerged.

Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915) was an unorthodox historian who thought that history was not bound to remain merely descriptive but could become scientific and thereby attain objective truth. Like many of his contemporaries, he adopted an evolutionary framework, taking the view that humanity went through a set of distinct stages that were lawful. It should therefore be possible to arrive at universal historical laws. For Lamprecht, historical phases and events are essentially of a psychic nature, so that any stage is characterized by a *collective* psychic state. This he regarded as a kind of diapason, pervading all mental states, and thereby also all activities, in any given period.

The auxiliary science that would enable historians to arrive at these sequences was the then emerging social psychology. Furthermore, he devised and sought to apply an empirical method for identifying the sequence of distinct evolutionary stages.<sup>17</sup> Lamprecht proposed a schema detailing the social-psychological factors operative in the course of history, which will be summarized. He divided them first into natural and cultural ones. The natural comprised such influences as climate, soil, flora, and fauna. The cultural is further subdivided into material (e.g., economy, nutrition, population, and, oddly, custom) and ideal (e.g., opinion, language, myth and religion, and art). Altogether it is a rather strange mixture, yet nonetheless somewhat distantly reminiscent of Berry’s (1976) scheme. One could also mention the French *Annales* school of historians that began during the interwar period. At the outset, one of their principal tenets was that each historical period features a particular kind of mentality. So not only was Lamprecht directly focusing on culture but his ideas had certain resonances in the twentieth century.

### Some Debates in Germany

To grasp the issues at stake, it is necessary to explain first that in German, a distinction had long been drawn between scholarly or humane and scientific disciplines. The former were known as *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally “disciplines of

the spirit”) and the latter as *Naturwissenschaften* (what we would call “natural sciences”).<sup>18</sup> This dichotomy became the subject of a great debate. Its ostensible aim was the purely scholarly one of conceptual clarification, but the fact that it was conducted mainly by exponents of the *Geisteswissenschaften* indicates that it was the status of the *Geisteswissenschaften* that was chiefly at stake. Although the debate as such was not about psychology, psychology was nevertheless to be found at the heart of the controversy. The reason, no doubt, is the hybrid character of psychology that spans the divide separating the sciences from the humanities and social studies.

In 1880, philologist Hermann Paul published a book in which he argued that the opposite of *Natur* is not *Geist* (mind or spirit) but *Kultur* and proposed the expression *Kulturwissenschaften*. The characteristic mark of *Kultur*, he maintained, lies in the involvement of psychic factors.<sup>19</sup> The new label was adopted by the philosopher Heinrich Rickert (1848–1936), who defined *Kultur* as “the totality of objects to which generally recognized values are attached” (Rickert, 1910, p. 27). Thus the basic difference between *Natur* and *Kultur* is that the former, unlike the latter, is value-free. This broad issue also concerned Wundt, whose rather variable positions will be outlined next.

### **Wundt on Kultur**

It is difficult to examine Wundt’s ideas regarding *culture* without the context of his *Völkerpsychologie*, to which they are closely related. Because *Völkerpsychologie* is dealt with in detail by Diriwächter (2011), all that can be done here is to provide a sketch of his usages.

In his earliest relevant publication, Wundt (1863) employed the term in the then most prevalent sense—namely, the higher forms of human intellect and creativity. In his later work, he generally takes it that the essence of *Kultur* consists of three elements—namely, language, myth, and *Sitte*, a term denoting both “custom” and “morals.” In the *Methodenlehre* (1883), he refers to *Kulturvölker* as meaning “civilized peoples.” In a later edition of his *Logik*, Wundt (1908) makes a passing comment anticipating the view that culture is not merely a random assembly of features but possesses some unity and coherence:

Cuvier<sup>20</sup> maintained that one can reconstruct from a single bone the typical form of the whole vertebrate to whom it belongs; similarly, each single part of a

culture provides an approximate mirror image of all the remaining parts.

(Wundt, 1908, vol.3, p. 434)>

A more detailed treatment is to be found in Volume 7 of the *Völkerpsychologie* dealing with Society (Wundt, 1917). This contains a critical discussion of the dichotomy of *Natur-* versus *Kulturvölker* (the term *Naturvolk* is roughly equivalent to our “savages”). This distinction had usually been drawn on the basis of the absence of history and an organized state, but Wundt points out that these criteria are too vague for any clear division to be possible. There is no *Naturvolk* without elements of *Kultur*, consisting of the above-mentioned language, myth, and *Sitte*, and there are different levels of culture among these peoples. Hence the dichotomy is becoming redundant:

[It is for this reason] that the concept of *Kultur* in its actual extension to the peoples of the earth has become ever broader, while the concept of *Naturvolk* is gradually disappearing.

(Wundt, 1917, p. 121)

From this passage one might suppose that Wundt had begun to think of *culture* in much the same way as we do today. But one is rapidly disabused of this by an immediately subsequent—and rather confused—discussion of the concept of “culture-minimum.” In this he reverted to a usage of *Kultur* as more or less synonymous with *Zivilisation*.

The same theme is taken up in the tenth and final volume of his *Völkerpsychologie*, entitled “Culture and History” (Wundt, 1920). There he states that the absolute lower limit of *Kultur* is set by the possession of language, which presupposes at least a modicum of mental life. The question of origins is a futile one, and it is more profitable to ask what cultural products and events have been critical for cultural development. Wundt reviews various turning points, like the invention of the plough or the printing press, but raises various objections to such simple schemes—particularly that they leave out qualitative aspects of cultural values. These are implicit in the concept of *Zivilisation*, which is felt to be something that has been actively achieved, whereas culture is merely the outcome of historical processes—a rather curious distinction. This means that civilization leads to a sense of superiority and of a mission both to civilize and dominate more backward peoples.

Wundt regarded this as a valuable feature of civilization, because it contained a purposive element that is absent from *culture*.

Shortly afterward, there occurred a radical shift in the meaning attributed to *Kultur*:

*Kultur* is national. It is confined to a particular national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] which constitutes a coherent unity in terms of language, custom, and intellectual cultivation [*geistige Bildung*]; but it lacks the tendency to go beyond these limits by spreading the acquired cultural achievements more widely . . .

(Wundt, 1920, pp. 20–21)

Here Wundt suddenly identifies *culture* with something very much like Herder's *Volksgeist*, seemingly unaware of the change. He concludes that the notions of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* are complementary: *Kultur* is bound to nationality, whereas *Zivilisation* embodies an ideal of humanity as a unity under the leadership of the advanced nations (*Kulturvölker*).

The next section, entitled "Animal antecedents of cultural man," reverts again to a wider concept of *Kultur*, applying to humans in general. However far one goes, he maintains, what one finds universally among all those who have the physical characteristics of humans are language, myth, and *Sitte*:

As these three labels designate only the major directions in which human life is distinguished from that of other organic beings, and although each of these directions comprises very different forms, so all these factors and their influences on men may be subsumed under the collective name of *Kultur*, so that in view of this *Völkerpsychologie* and *Kulturpsychologie* are equivalent concepts.

(Wundt, 1920, p. 57)

In the end, therefore, Wundt overcame his misgivings and accepted that what he had been doing could be described as "cultural psychology," because he seemed to have arrived at a conception of culture-in-general that is close to our own. The path that led him to this position was not a straight one. For a long time, Wundt swiveled between several different and mutually exclusive notions of *Kultur*, varying according to context, as well as between an objective stance and one that uncritically accepted the then prevailing ethos.

Wundt rarely drew a sufficiently explicit distinction between "human-culture-in-general" and the varied cultures of different peoples; nor did he seek to

relate these, respectively, to general *Völkerpsychologie* and to what he regarded as its applied aspect, which he called "ethnic characterology"—that is, dealing with the psychological characteristics of particular peoples. There is no indication that any echoes of the radical rethinking of the category *culture* by Franz Boas (discussed below) ever reached Wundt.

Before going on to Boas, it is necessary to return briefly to Tylor, whose classical definition of culture was cited on p. 34. As already mentioned, in his time the favored explanation of human differences was simply in terms of "race." This opinion was not shared by Tylor, who was an inheritor of the Enlightenment tradition of a basically unchanging universal human nature.<sup>21</sup> Under the influence of environmental factors, its manifestations underwent progressive changes, occurring at varying rates among different peoples. Thus he was a social (rather than Darwinian) evolutionist, and the approach to the study of evolutionary stages was the "comparative method." For example, ancient Swiss lake habitations were very similar to those of nineteenth-century Maoris, and this was taken to show that the same evolutionary trajectory was being followed, although the Maoris were well behind.

### *Franz Boas*

Both racial and social-evolutionary theories came to be rejected by Franz Boas (1858–1942). He was the main creator of a fresh concept of culture and came to dominate American anthropology during the 1920s. He was born and educated in Germany, where he began by studying chemistry and physics but later turned to biology and geography. He also became interested in psychophysics and attended lectures by Wundt. In 1882 he went to Berlin in preparation for a geographical expedition to Baffin Island, and in Berlin he came to know Bastian. A year later he departed on the expedition, intending originally to compare the objectively studied environment with the knowledge of it held by the Inuit inhabitants. As a result of his close acquaintance with the Inuit (e.g., he hunted with them) Boas came to understand that their knowledge was not just a reflection of the environment but discovered that there was a *tertium quid* that intervened—namely, their culture. This was a turning point in his career, and back in Germany he applied for his *Habilitation*,<sup>22</sup> and the members of the commission included Dilthey and Helmholz. Subsequently Boas emigrated to the United States, where he embarked on fieldwork with the Indians



of the Northwest Pacific Coast and in 1899 became the first professor of anthropology at Columbia University in New York.

In his theorizing about culture, Boas was greatly influenced by his German background, from Herder onward. Although he initially shared Tylor's social evolutionism, he later abandoned it. He pointed out that similarity does not necessarily imply an identical cause, showing how the same outcome could result from combinations of quite diverse historical, environmental, and psychological factors. He also objected to specific traits or complexes being torn out of their particular cultural context and lumped together indiscriminately. He showed that biological traits (i.e., "race"), language, and culture were not intrinsically linked to each other and had to be studied using different methods.

Generally, Boas was instrumental in changing the intellectual climate toward thinking about *cultures* in the plural as entities that had a certain unity based on history, environment, and psychology. His enduring concern with psychology is clear from the title of one of his major works—namely, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (Boas, 1911); it is also implicit in an early definition of *culture* he proposed:

Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individuals as affected by the habits of the groups in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by these habits.

(Boas, 1930, p. 79)

Boas and his students, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, shaped the character of American anthropology for many years and led to its being called "*Cultural anthropology*" as distinct from British "*Social anthropology*," but that came later.

### ***The Problem of "Convergence," Rivers, and Bartlett***

The issue of how disparate cultures came to display similarities, which were often striking, was extensively debated during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Tylor and other social evolutionists had attributed them to universal human nature; an alternative interpretation, putting the major emphasis on transmission through culture contact, was put forward in Germany. It is neither necessary nor possible to enter here into the details of the debate, except to say that the sharp opposition between the two sides gave way to a question

of relative emphasis. What is relevant here is the fact that these anthropological discussions usually involved psychological ideas and speculations. For example, Goldenweiser (1910) referred to "the mechanism and psychology of borrowing behavior" (p. 285) and proposed that "the phenomena of diffusion [are] replete with psychological problems" (p. 287). In a similar manner, Boas (1910, pp. 375–376) proclaimed, "the necessity of looking for the common psychological features, not in outward similarities of ethnic phenomena, but in the similarity of psychological processes in so far as these can be observed or inferred." Although these were American comments, in Britain, Rivers took part in the debate.

William Halse Rivers (1864–1922) was an experimental psychologist at Cambridge when his anthropological colleague Alfred Haddon invited him to take part in the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait in 1898. It was the first systematic cross-cultural research, although confined to sensory processes;<sup>23</sup> Rivers had little to say about culture at that time. He was then still a social evolutionist, but that changed when he became actively involved in anthropological fieldwork. In his very substantial book on Melanesia (Rivers, 1914), he discussed at length the impact of culture contact, especially through migrations, on cultural changes. In an essay on "The Contact of Peoples," Rivers wrote "... it becomes a matter of urgent necessity to understand the process of blending [of cultures]" (Rivers, [1913] 1926, p. 299). He always stressed the importance of including a psychological approach, and in an address on "The Ethnological Analysis of Culture" to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he argued:

Side by side with ethnological analysis, there must go the attempt to fathom the modes of thought of different peoples, to understand their ways of regarding and classifying the facts of the universe. It is only by the combination of ethnological and psychological analysis that we shall make any real advance.

(Rivers, [1911] 1926, p. 132)

Rivers returned to Cambridge in 1908, and a year later Frederic Bartlett (1886–1969) became his student, whom he inspired to pursue research concerned with the effects of culture contact. In his Fellowship Dissertation, Bartlett (1916) declared his intention of studying the process of *conventionalization*, whereby new elements are incorporated in

cultures as a consequence of contact; and he refers in this connection to a passage by Rivers on “the blending of cultures.” He stressed that the manner in which he used the term *conventionalization* implies the existence of social intercourse, the passing of representations between individuals within a community.

It is in this context that Bartlett carried out his experiments on “repeated” and “serial” reproductions, also reported later in his classic volume on *Remembering* (Bartlett, 1932). In 1923 he published his *Psychology and Primitive Culture* in which he sought to analyze the social-psychological processes of culture change resulting from contact and borrowing. When expounding the principles underlying cultural transmission, Bartlett made extensive use of anthropological illustrations, largely drawn from North America and Boas in particular. The psychological theory underlying his analysis was that of McDougall (1908). Although it is evident in hindsight that the work suffered from considerable flaws, it constituted the first systematic attempt to interpret anthropological data in psychological terms; he also recommended the method of serial reproduction as a promising tool for the experimental study of cultural transmission.<sup>24</sup> In his later writings, the theme of culture recurs frequently, but he made little further empirical or theoretical contributions.

### The Interwar Years: 1929s and 1930s

During the 1920s and 1930s, British psychologists generally displayed hardly any interest in culture, and British social anthropologists turned away from psychology. This was because their main inspiration had become Durkheim, who focused on “collective representations” and did not believe that what he understood by “psychology” was relevant for the study of societies. Yet, in fact, he and his followers deduced a kind of social psychology from social (we would say *cultural*) facts. For example, Marcel Mauss, in his classic essay on *The Gift*, used ethnographic material to deduce psychological principles involved in social exchanges that he regarded as universals. Similarly, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) attributed a “pre-logic” to “primitive peoples,” yet without describing them as childlike. Following Lévy-Bruhl, the early Piaget went even further when painting a picture of what he took “primitive society” to be:

In a society where generations place all their influence on each other, conditions necessary for the

elimination of childhood mentality cannot appear. There is no discussion, no exchange of points of view. . . . There are thus only personalities who do not know themselves and a group which is everything. In such a situation nothing is created by individuals, and nothing extends beyond the level of childhood thought.

(Piaget, [1928] 1995, p. 207)<sup>25</sup>

All such writings were about what we would now regard as culture, but in France this term was very seldom used until fairly recently. That was a matter of linguistic usage, but for quite different reasons some British anthropologists became somewhat disparaging about the notion of *culture* during the interwar years. Radcliffe-Brown dismissed it as “a vague abstraction” (Radcliffe-Brown, [1940] 1952, p. 190). Yet anthropologists could not really do without some kind of psychology, and so they made up their own. Radcliffe-Brown used the concept of “sentiments,” and Malinowski (who *did* use the concept of *culture*) elaborated a “theory of needs” whose aim was to provide a basis for analyzing human behavior in any culture (cf. Piddington, 1957). Generally, they had scant use for the then prevailing academic psychology.

Matters were very different in America, where for Boas culture had been a key issue, and he had always been keenly interested in psychology; and Boasians dominated the anthropological scene during that period. Two of his most prominent students were Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) and Margaret Mead (1901–1978), both very much concerned with the relationship between culture and psychology. Benedict’s famous *Patterns of Culture* ([1934] 1946) was partly inspired by Gestalt psychology, and the emphasis she placed on psychological features is clearly seen in the following passage:

Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of societies . . . Taken up by a well-integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses. The form that these acts take we can understand only by understanding first *the emotional and intellectual mainsprings of that society*.

([1934] 1946, p. 42; emphasis added)

Mead took courses in psychology before becoming a student of Boas at Columbia University. The task Boas set her was to research the way in which the personality reacts to culture and she did that in

several cultures in the South Pacific. As the titles of her famous trilogy (shown below) indicate, psychological aspects of culture were salient for her:

Mead, M (1928). *Coming of Age in Samoa; A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*

Mead, M (1930). *Growing Up in New Guinea; A Comparative Study of Primitive Education*

Mead, M (1935). *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*

All three books were aimed to persuade western readers that culture is more important than biology in shaping personality and behavior. An admittedly impressionistic scan indicates that Benedict and Mead were almost the only anthropologists occasionally mentioned in early post-war psychology texts. Yet in two interwar handbooks of social psychology (Murchison, 1935; Murphy et al., 1937) *culture* had figured prominently. Several noted anthropologists contributed to the former, and the latter included the following warning:

... the concept of culture ... has awakened us to an immensely important fact regarding the limits of social psychology. It must be recognized that nearly all the experimental work in social psychology ... has value and is definitely meaningful only in relation to the particular culture in which the investigation was carried on.

(Murphy et al., 1937, p. 7)

These wise words were later forgotten, or at least not acted upon, and that remains true even today for most of experimental social psychology.<sup>26</sup> Yet there was a period when *culture* was taken seriously,<sup>27</sup> and it is an intriguing question why that concept subsequently suffered an eclipse in psychology. Farr (1996) suggests that it resulted from the rise of behaviorism and that may well be part of the answer: both the handbooks mentioned above were in varying degrees inspired by Darwinian evolutionism rather than behaviorism. Yet that cannot be the whole answer since Floyd Allport ([1933] 1969), archpriest of behaviorist social psychology, did discuss the notion of *culture* in several passages. He argued against cultural determinism and regarded the culture-versus-nature dichotomy as misleading.<sup>28</sup> For Allport, culture consisted of *habits* that, although learned from the social environment, are “organically grounded” (p. 508). He did not specify against whom his arguments were directed, but it was probably the Boasian anthropologists.

The year of the outbreak of World War II saw the beginning of what came to be known as the culture-and-personality school. Its main exponent was Abram Kardiner (1939), an unorthodox psychoanalyst, who collaborated with several anthropologists. This school sought to link subsistence type, child training mode, and belief systems. It was later described by Bruner as “a magnificent failure.” Yet it generated during the post-war years the field of “psychological anthropology,” which continues to flourish.

Later still, more than half a century after the pioneering work of Rivers, “cross-cultural” psychology emerged, to be followed by “cultural psychology.” But that is another story.

## Concluding Overview and Future Directions

The broad overview that has been presented here is unavoidably rather sketchy. Nonetheless, it should be sufficient to support the claim made in the introduction that despite varying terminology, there shines through an ever-present interest in other people’s “customs”—to use the most common term of the past. Differences held a fascination, and there was a good deal of speculation about their causes, climate being the prime candidate; it was not until the Enlightenment that such causes as ecology and modes of subsistence were proposed, in a manner not unlike that still prevailing.

A related issue sometimes raised was that of nature-versus-nurture as the cause of differences. Over most of the period, nurture predominated, with a sharp reversal during the nineteenth century when “race” came to the fore. Yet it was after the middle of that century that the terminology began to change and *culture*—the name, not the concept—entered the vocabulary. For quite some time confusion prevailed, even in so acute a mind as that of Wundt: no clear distinction was made between culture as a universal and the multitude of cultures over the globe.

From earliest times, the notion of custom was indissolubly linked with psychological aspects. For differences in customs entailed differences in beliefs and behaviors, and these features were often noted and even emphasized as early as Herodotus more than two millennia ago. As some writers on culture such as Cole (1983) and Shweder (1990) have it, culture and mind are really different facets of the same phenomenon.

## Notes

1. In modern French/English dictionaries, the first translation given for *culture* is generally still “cultivation.”
2. For example, the German title of Freud’s book first published in 1930 was *Das Unbehagen der Kultur* (The uneasiness of culture); the English translation was “Civilization and its discontents.”
3. For a discussion of current usages in the context of culture and psychology, see cf. Krewer & Jahoda (1993).
4. In anthropology, they are called “ethnopsychologists.”
5. For some of the material in this section, I am indebted to Chakkarath (2003).
6. Much the same proposal, although more sophisticated, was put forward by the *Société des Observateurs de l’Homme* in late eighteenth century.
7. For a detailed account, see cf. Peters (1962).
8. The north–south divide continued to be regarded as a key factor, but the values attributed to them varied according to the writers own geographic position. For Europeans, north was good, for Muslims, it was bad.
9. All the following quotations, where only page numbers are indicated, are derived from Slotkin.
10. The expedition, which included a majority of natural scientists, was dogged by ill fortune from the start. Although it produced some interesting findings, this was at a heavy cost: one-third of the personnel (including the leader) died on the voyage.
11. Until the cross-cultural work of Rivers (1901), it was widely believed that “savages” had more acute senses.
12. Humboldt’s views greatly influenced the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal.
13. “Cultures from this point of view are individual psychology thrown large upon the screen, given gigantic proportions and a long time span.” (Benedict, 1932, p. 24).
14. For a detailed analysis, see cf. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952).
15. It is a particular kind of comprehension specifically related to human behavior.
16. In his rather indigestible *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel assumed the existence of spiritual facts that cannot be described as subjective states of individual persons but that have an independent, objective existence.
17. For an account of this method, see cf. Jahoda (1991).
18. There is no exact equivalent to *Wissenschaft* in English; the word is usually, and misleadingly, translated as “science.”
19. Because “psychic factors” are also present in animals, Paul argued that one has to recognize the category of animal culture and therefore include the study of animal behavior among the *Kulturwissenschaften*. At the time that was regarded as absurd, but the existence of “animal culture” is now accepted.
20. Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) was a distinguished French naturalist.
21. This is not strictly true: In his later years, Tylor became persuaded that race differences in the complexity of the convolutions of the brain set limits to the progress of some races.
22. *Habilitation* is an examination by thesis that entitles the candidate to consideration for a chair.
23. Some years later, the German anthropologist Richard Thurnwald (1913) carried out some psychological studies in the Solomon Islands. He explicitly referred to cultural factors in cognition (p. 4).

24. This claim has more recently been renewed by Kashima (2000).

25. For a more detailed discussion, see cf. Jahoda (2000).

26. For a complaint about the neglect of culture, see cf. Jahoda (1988).

27. It must be said, however, that during the 1930s the topic of “culture” was greatly outweighed by that of “race differences.” This literature has been surveyed by Richards (1997).

28. “It seems almost as though the individual becomes a product of the ‘group’ or of ‘society,’ rather than of his own biological ancestry. Viewing human development in this light, certain social scientists have proposed that all this range of modifications of the original tendencies should be set apart from these tendencies themselves as a separate category, to which the name ‘culture’ or ‘civilization’ should be applied. Thus arises the notion of *culture* as something entirely distinct from, and even antithetical to, *human nature*.” ([Allport [1933] 1969, pp. 507–508).

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Rainer Diriwächter

**Abstract**

*Völkerpsychologie* is, so to speak, the grandfather of cultural psychology who has been left sitting in the corner, full of nostalgia, while yearning for and dreaming of the old days when ambitions and spirits surrounding his existence ran high and dedicated disciples tried to use his knowledge to explain complex mental phenomena. However, it is not the case, as many would like us to believe, that *Völkerpsychologie* needs to remain an outdated model that has no connection with the present. Many of its problems stem from language barriers, lack of cultural-historical understanding, and the absence of any considerable synthesis that would present it as a unified theoretical model ready to be applied in today's research. *Völkerpsychologie*, like cultural psychology, is still a work in progress, albeit one that has been left to fend for itself without anyone seriously considering its continuation or integration.

**Keywords:** Völkerpsychologie, culture, history of psychology, Wundt, folk psychology

“*Die Personen vergehen, aber die Völker bestehen*”  
—Wilhelm Wundt, 1914, p. 4

It is almost hard to believe that less than 100 years ago, the name *Völkerpsychologie* was once widely used, becoming a part of the vocabulary of the educated German public, psychoanalysts, and ethnographers alike (see Jahoda, 1993). But since then, much has changed. Nowadays, *Völkerpsychologie* has sunk into the abyss of time, and through this chapter I hope to spark some readers' interest in the rich theoretical literature, certainly beneficial to the study of culture and psychology, that is gathering dust in the archives of libraries throughout the world.

Giving an adequate translation of the term *Völkerpsychologie* is virtually impossible. Its broad use and distinct “German-ness” makes it especially difficult for non-Germans to grasp. At its core, *Völkerpsychologie* relies heavily on ethnology and

focuses on the psychological aspects of ethnicity. However, in the strictest sense, *Völkerpsychologie* is to be translated into “peoples' psychology” or *folk psychology*, and it was to present an alternative to “person psychology” or “individual psychology.” It is clear that readers who are familiar with *Völkerpsychologie* would be quick to raise objections with the aforementioned translation. For example, Danziger (1980, p. 303) called folk psychology an “absurd mistranslation” of the discipline. To be sure, folk psychology is not ideal, as it brings with it a lot of connotations. However, as *Webster's Dictionary* (1987) defines folk as either “a group of kindred tribes forming a nation” or “the great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its

characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions, and superstitions from generation to generation,” it may well be the closest translation to the original word.<sup>1</sup> Further, the term *folk psychology* was used as the translation of *Völkerpsychologie* by E.L. Schaub, who translated (with the cooperation of the author) Wundt's *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*. Thus, in an effort to remain true to the original intentions, the German term will be applied throughout this chapter.

### Language, *Weltanschauung*, and the Origins of *Völkerpsychologie*

There may be little doubt that *Völkerpsychologie* finds its roots in German idealism and can be especially said to have been influenced to some degree by the philosophies of Hegel,<sup>2</sup> Herder, and, notably, Herbart (Jahoda, 1993; see also Danziger, 1983; Eckardt, 1997; Krueger, 1915; Schneider & Müller, 1993; Volkelt, 1922; Wundt, 1877). Nonetheless, it is Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) who is generally credited to have laid the immediate groundwork for *Völkerpsychologie*<sup>3</sup> (Krueger, 1915; Volkelt, 1922). Humboldt, a philologist, philosopher, statesman, and one of the founding fathers of the University of Berlin (1810), has also been described as one of the founding fathers of neo-humanism (Knoll & Siebert, 1967). This is largely because of his idea that education (*Bildung*) operates on two levels: first, that the goal of humans is education on the individual level and second, that education serves the purpose of broader humanity—namely, to reach an ideal.

It is important to recognize that *Bildung* does not necessarily mean education in the scholarly sense but includes the education we gain from all aspects of life. According to Humboldt, the education of the individual occurs through historical experience. Here the need for synthesis occurs when the broader masses pass down ideas to the individual. The connection between individuals occurs through understanding, which in turn occurs through language. Hence, language assumes a central position when we try to understand and analyze humans. It may not be surprising, then, to learn that language was to become one of the main themes in *Völkerpsychologie*.

However, language is not a complete product; rather it is a process that contains a historical character (Steinthal, 1860). This character is “shaped” through the individual, the *I*, who speaks it. But the individual is also limited to that understanding for which language allows. The *geistige* (spiritual/mental) attachment to language occurs through the respective

language community. Through this language community, a self-awareness begins to emerge, one in which we come to realize that we are not isolated individuals, rather we are *I*s who are located in a language community relative to a *YOU*.

Language is one of the primal strengths of humans. According to Humboldt, every language contains its unique form, based on a particular *Weltanschauung*. That is, our outlook on the world is built in language because those who share a language develop a similar subjectivity. By being born into a language community, humans are immediately exposed to a particular relationship with their world. Because of language, this relationship is to a large extent mental (Volkelt, 1922). In other words, language can be seen as the creating force as well as the tools of higher mental processes.

For Humboldt, language was a lively process, one that never rests and thus cannot be truly captured by any signs. Hence, for him the true definition of language could only be a developmental (*genetische*) one (Krueger, 1915, p. 7). Through vocalisms, the internal language form could be discovered; it develops through the interaction of objectivity and fantasy with momentary moods. It is precisely the feeling-factor (*Gefühlsfaktor*) that enhances the subjective occurrences in the listener. Although language receives its final definitions within the individual, the continuity of language forms is only guaranteed through life within society, and thus the entire objectivity of human thought rests therein. This would be precisely the point on which the pioneers of *Völkerpsychologie* would touch base.

### *The Zeitgeist: A New Psychology Discipline in the Making*

Somewhat comparable to the Greek city-states of antiquity, Germany had developed a national culture in the late eighteenth century but was split into numerous independent states. Since the days of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) at the latest, German philosophers had come into contact with the idea that social relations are not only grounded in power, but also involve cultural communities (i.e., *das Volk*). The notion of nationalism, albeit certainly a preoccupation of the upper classes, found increasing (although nowhere near overwhelming) support. This was well-reflected in the political arena prior to 1866, when there was a general political struggle for and against nationalism between liberals and conservatives (see Eckardt,

1997). It is precisely through this political climate that we see *Völkerpsychologie* emerge.

In 1860, Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903), a professor of psychology in Bern, and his brother-in-law, Hajim Steinthal (1823–1899), a philologist from the University of Berlin (for a biographical review, see Eckardt, 1997), began the task of developing the new academic discipline of *Völkerpsychologie*. As with any fresh start, getting an ambitious program underway was no easy undertaking. The term *Völkerpsychologie* was, of course, not chosen for the purposes of attracting fame or to announce that something new had been discovered; rather, it was to draw attention to an area that had only recently been approached and still needed further development (Steinthal, 1891, p. 11).

The central aims of *Völkerpsychologie* were to investigate the psychological aspects of groups of people living in communities bound by common language, myths, and customs. In the midst of international unrests and conflicts between neighboring countries, it seemed that the time was right for a psychological discipline that would account for the national character of people to better understand their ways of thinking. After all, the German-oriented states and the young republic of France had not been the best of neighbors, and their frequent disputes had led to much bloodshed.

The trend for a nationalistic-oriented psychology is nicely captured in a letter that Lazarus wrote to his friend Paul Heyse on November 29, 1870 (during the Franco-Prussian War):

*France is a beacon in the midst of chaos. I personally do not yet have the courage to dissect this issue with my folk-psychological (völkerpsychologisches) scalpel . . . , but my thoughts of course are all around that topic, and I can already say today: the big, though futile, displays of strength of the French, which will cost us and them much bloody work, will only serve to make us stronger, and them for the future more cautious, hopefully also better, and will uphold, foremost, the dignity which seemed to have come to an end with Sedan and the pitiful republic.*  
(as quoted in Schneider & Müller, 1993, p. 94)

It certainly seems that the national feeling was a driving force in Lazarus's approach to *Völkerpsychologie*. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, under the leadership of Wilhelm I and Otto von Bismarck, the German people saw unification come true, as Germany was finally united and declared an Empire in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles on January 18, 1871 (see Noble et al., 1994), thereby reigning

in what became known as the "Second Reich" of Germany. Although the unification was marked by authoritarian aristocracy, the German identification as separate peoples, *das Deutsche Volk*, caught on. German preoccupation was to lay with honor and dedication to their community<sup>4</sup> or folk (*Volk*), and with that general notion of distinctness among different "tribes," the focus of psychology needed to expand to include the study of that *uniqueness* of different *Völker*, social classes, or ethnic groups. That is, the study of psychology was also to include the products of collective mental processes of peoples identified as a unified body (e.g., the Germans), distinctly separate from others (e.g., the French). Individual psychology was limited to the focus of the capabilities of one person. However, the person was always part of relationships with the masses (e.g., family, community, society, etc.). Hence, the need arose to expand the investigation to include collective capabilities of peoples living together and how a person "evolved" within that "togetherness."

### ***Völkerpsychologie: The Individual As Part of the Volk***

Much debate of early *Völkerpsychologie* surrounded the notion of individual versus collective spirit (*Geist*) and soul (*Seele*). The underlying question was whether it was possible to study collective mental phenomena. Such a study was indeed seen as possible as society dominates over its individual members. Lazarus and Steinthal (1860) defined the *Volksgeist* (or collective spirit) as "the inner activity, according to content as well as form, which each individual has in common with the *Volk*; or: that which each individual has in common in terms of inner activity" (p. 29). The *Volksgeist* was to be governed by the same principles as the individual spirit; however, the collective was much more complex and extended (see Jahoda, 1993). In any case, the *Volksgeist* could be objectively studied by examining intrapsychic events: thoughts, sentiments, and dispositions that were objectified through books, art, and other products of cognitive processes (Eckardt, 1997; Jahoda, 1993).

For Lazarus and Steinthal (1860), psychology represented a third science, placed between natural science and history (p. 16). Psychology differs from natural science because it makes the human spirit the object of investigation, something materialists would undoubtedly see as a mere appendix to physiology. However, psychology does look for underlying laws that govern psychical processes. Because humans are ever-changing, their mental capacity



needs to be seen as being in a constant, never-ending, dynamic state of “becoming.” With the experiences we gain, we grow, and as a result our *Volk* becomes different over time. Therefore, psychology needs to account for the dynamics of society, the historical forces, and the complex web of social structures in which individuals find themselves.

Both Lazarus and Steinthal repeatedly warned their readers of the incomplete picture given when examining humans only from an individualistic perspective, without regard to their place within human society (e.g., Lazarus, 1862, 1865; Lazarus & Steinthal, 1860; Steinthal, 1887). They proposed that one should study the spirit of people as part of a community or society. Similarly to Humboldt and Herbart, Lazarus and Steinthal reasoned that no man has become what he is because of himself; rather, man has become what he is through being part of a larger community. It was Lazarus and Steinthal’s (1860) belief that humans cannot be raised in solitude, and that those few who have been raised in the forest, absent from civilization and other companions, resembled humans merely through their physical similarities (p. 3). Humans are social beings, and to understand them, we must examine them from a *Volk* perspective; we must understand the influences society has on them and how humans develop within the social structures and through the social tools (e.g., language) that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Hence, of primary importance for *Völkerpsychologie* was determining the relationship between the whole and the individual (p. 31).

Moreover, Lazarus and Steinthal (1860, p. 5) warned their readers not to separate society and the individual so that one looks at the individual, then society, and then puts one into the context of the other. Instead of retroactively attributing certain social influences to the individual, the object of investigation was to be the dynamic processes of the two that intermingle in complex ways. *Gesellschaft* (society) cannot be broken down into smaller circles, such as families, without realizing that they are constantly connected to a *Gemeinschaft* (community). Psychology would always be one-sided if it were merely to examine the person without context. Or as Lazarus (1862) put it:

We cannot emphasize the following enough, society does not consist of individuals as such, rather it is within and from society that individuals exist.  
(p. 419)

For Lazarus, the individual receives his/her properties through being linked within society, through

being parts of the whole, through being a participant and representative of societal values. Only the collective idea or spirit of the *Volk* brings meaning to the individual. After all, ideas do not emerge from nowhere; rather, they transform from previous ideas that have been passed down through communal efforts. Thus, our “individuality” is integrated in our community.

In fact, identification with the *Gemeinschaft* is what gives *Volk* its meaning. We, as a *Volk*, share similar dangers, faith, happiness, and identities. According to Lazarus and Steinthal (1860, p. 35), membership in a race is based on objective criteria (e.g., skin color, but also bone structure, etc.); however, membership in a *Volk* is based on inherently subjective standards. We identify and choose to be a member of a *Volk*, and the *Volk* recognizes us as a part of them. This notion of belonging is a bidirectional, dynamic process (*Wechselseitigkeit*). In this sense, *Völkerpsychologie* positioned itself alongside individualistic psychology so that it became its necessary extension. The myriad of questions posed by psychology can only be answered by the combined efforts of both *Völkerpsychologie* and individual psychology.

### Lazarus and Steinthal’s Program for *Völkerpsychologie*

For Steinthal (1887, p. 248), the myriad of questions psychology poses could be addressed by a research program sorted into the following three categories:

I. General Psychology: The study of mechanisms of thoughts/imagination (*Vorstellungen*), feelings (*Gefühle*), and drives (*Triebe*).

II. *Völkerpsychologie*: The study of the collective “mental” (*geistige*) life. [This implies the coexistence of members of society living together. *Völkerpsychologie* can be divided into] (a) synthetic *Völkerpsychologie* [see Lazarus, 1865], which deals with the general requirements of collective mental life, and (b) the use of these requirements within ethnology, pre-history, and history. It needs to be added that whereas (a) results in a self-standing theoretical construct, (b) only exists implicitly.

III. Individual Psychology [the reader may want to note that Steinthal lists this at the end]: The study of the individual, which can only be examined within the historical context of a given culture. Individual psychology, in a synthetic form,

is incorporated within the previous two categories, but its application appears in biographies.

The task for *Völkerpsychologie* was to objectify collective mental life to be able to study it. That is, wherever people are living together, the result of their “togetherness” is that subjective processes manifest in objective content, which in turn becomes the norm and organ of the former. Lazarus (1865, p. 41) takes language to exemplify this idea. When several individuals operate under similar motives and conditions, thereby sharing a common understanding, the subjective activity of talking results in an objective language. This language then represents objective content for the subsequent speech acts of the individuals. It provides laws for thoughts and further represents the organ that is open for further development through ensuing speech acts by all members of society. What has been born through the actions of individuals in relation to others (or the self) becomes a mental content that rises beyond the individual. It becomes generality vis-à-vis the actions of the individual. In short, we are molded by the “organ,” which in turn is molded by us.

For Lazarus and Steinthal (1860), the objectification of collective mental life—that is, the core program of *Völkerpsychologie*—was broad and could be found in language, myths, religion, customs, art, science, law, culture, and, most notably, history. It was especially the historical aspect that was important for the emerging discipline of *Völkerpsychologie* because it attempted to understand the history of humanity and its peoples (*Völker*) through which psychical laws were revealed (Lazarus, 1865, p. 2). We needed to understand the historical forces that underlie collective life; hence, analysis of history combined with the synthesis of *Völkerpsychologie* would result in the discovery of the very nature of collective mental life (*Volksgeist*). Only through such a program would we be able to understand such constructs as individual personality because only in and through the community does the person become a “mental/spirited” being (*geistiges Wesen*). As Steinthal (1891) would later say, “The spirit (*Geist*), before it becomes individual and personal, is in reality a collective spirit, a spirit of the entirety (*Gesamtheit*), an objective spirit, and it is that which forms the object of *Völkerpsychologie*” (p. 12). It should be made clear that none of the advocates of *Völkerpsychologie* saw the spirit (*Geist*) as a mystical substance; rather, it should be understood similarly to how we interpret the concept of mind. It goes without saying that such concepts remain,

then and now, inherently controversial and difficult to define.

#### THE SPIRIT OF EARLY VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE AND THE JOURNALS THAT MADE IT FAMOUS

Lazarus and Steinthal’s central aim was to achieve a synthesis of the humanities and social sciences in regards to the study of the *Volksgeist*—to study the collective mind through the combined forces and the strengths that each academic discipline could bring to the table. This spirit is nicely captured through Lazarus and Steinthal’s (1860, p. 1) opening statement in the first volume of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (*Journal of Völkerpsychologie and Speech Science*), where they invited all researchers to participate:

*We are not only asking those men who are working in the field of psychology, rather we are asking anyone who is investigating the historical appearances of language, religion, art, literature, science (Wissenschaft), customs, law, the societal-, home-, and state- constitutions; in short, we are asking everyone who is researching the historical life of ‘civilizations/cultures’ (Völker) in any of its manifold aspects, so that the discovered facts out of the most inner workings of the ‘mind’ (Geist) can be explained, hence, revealing their psychological causes.*

What ensued over the next 30 years of the journal’s existence was an accumulation of 200 original works that, perhaps not surprisingly, had little to do with its contemporary psychology that was building up along the lines of natural sciences. However, Eckardt’s (1997, p. 72) claim that under the numerous reviews published in the first 20 volumes of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, not a single one addressed the pioneering breakthroughs of Fechner, Helmholtz, Wundt, Ebbinghaus, and other experimental psychologists may be somewhat misleading.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the great majority of the journal’s articles (67 of 200) focused on issues surrounding linguistics (*Sprachwissenschaft*), followed by religion and mythology (26 articles).

Many of the controversies surrounding early *Völkerpsychologie* (see Eckardt, 1997; Jahoda, 1993) are comparable to what Valsiner describes as “ideological taboos” (2001) or “theories as identity markers” (2004). Indeed, the topic of culture has again become very fashionable, and today’s institutional taboos may well be much more rigid in regard to methodology than in the heydays of *Völkerpsychologie* when the spirit of the great pioneers ran high while

they embarked on their quest to discover the collective manifestations of the inner workings of the human mind. This is not to say that German academia was not riddled by politics (which has been discussed in detail by Ash, 1995); rather, it is to point out that at the very least not much has changed in regard to trying to enforce proper etiquette for psychology research methodology along with the political maneuvers that would help establish ideological supremacy for one's own approach at the expense of others.

Volume 20<sup>6</sup> of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* brought the first epoch to a close. The grand synthesis had not yet occurred, and *Völkerpsychologie* was far from being guided by a unified systemic approach, free of controversy (thus, no different than the general state of psychology today). The predominantly philological approach of the journal had not helped much to shed light on the *Volksgeist*, and a fresh start was needed. This new start was announced on the first five pages of Volume 20, when Weinhold (1890) announced a new scientific (*Wissenschaft*) discipline—namely, that of *Volkskunde*. The literal translation of *Volkskunde* is folklore; however, in his opening as well as closing statements, Weinhold was careful to distinguish between those folklorists who merely collected folk-traditions as if it were a fashionable sport<sup>7</sup> and those who took the matter seriously—that is, from a scientific (*wissenschaftlichen*) perspective. To the latter belonged those people who were familiar with “history and linguistics, with anthropology and psychology, with the history of jurisprudence, with history of national economics, of natural history, literature, and art” (pp. 1–2). When done correctly, *Volkskunde* was to become a national and historical science with the aim of examining a *Volk* in all its life expressions (*Lebensäusserungen*). First, the new discipline would have to research a particular *Volk*, and only then could one make comparisons and conclusions, which should eventually merge with anthropology. After all, anthropology and *Volkskunde* had the same scientific end-goals.

Weinhold (pp. 2–4) went on to say that body and mind, or material and spirit, would present the two main halves of the new field. The first half would explore the physical appearances of a *Volk*. It would need to penetrate the historical conditions of a *Volk*, the gradual development, its relationships, and its geographical distributions. In short, the terrain upon which the *Volk* lived needed to be historically explored. The next step required that the lives

of members of a *Volk* were to be made the object of investigation; in terms of how morals and customs left their mark. In this regard, birth, the selection of names (baptism), childhood, education, love, marriage, aging, and dying would all represent points of interest. Weinhold believed that these morals and customs had developed over a long period of time and could be traceable through people's folklore. A related section would be the material that provides the basis for physical life. To this area belong the different methods and conditions through which we take our nutrition, including living conditions, clothing, and technical material (*see also* Weinhold, 1891).

The second area of *Volkskunde*, the mental/spiritual one, would first need to address religious conceptions and customs. To this area belonged all belief systems, and especially the beliefs in those *Gestalts* that are anchored in the fantasy and feelings of a *Volk*, developed over time, that have been brought forward to consciousness from the days when demonic forces ruled over man and earth. Certainly fairy tales and sagas would prove to be a rich source of those “dark” ages but also poetry (especially those poesies that could no longer be traced to a particular person and that have not been taken over by other *Völker*), songs (especially children's songs), melodies, dances, legends, riddles, and, from all this, most importantly language would provide an immense treasure chest for gaining access to the historical mental roots of a *Volk*. In this respect it needs to be mentioned that language was important from the psychical perspective—that is, not in terms of grammar (which was to be left to linguists) but rather in terms of how sentences, sounds, and words found their origins (Weinhold, 1891, p. 7). Of particular interest would be the study of words<sup>8</sup> and how their meanings emerged over time—how certain semiotic mediations were conveyed through statues, and later through live talk (i.e., speeches).

Similarly to Lazarus and Steinthal's opening remarks in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* back in 1860, we again find a remarkable enthusiastic spirit in Weinhold's (1891) call for participation in this transformed program when he writes, “[W]e wish that the cultural researchers in the Netherlands, in the Scandinavian lands, in England and America will join us in our brotherly ranks” (p. 10). With the new aims in mind, the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* got transformed into the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* (*Journal of the Volkskunde Association*),

with Weinhold replacing the aging Steinthal as editor in 1891. It is an often overlooked fact that the former journal did not end after 20 volumes *per se*; rather, it merely took on a new title to capture its new approach but retained the earlier title as a sub-heading for several more years.<sup>9</sup>

The 26 volumes of *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* are filled with in-depth analysis of topics from around the world, such as fairy tales (e.g., by the Grimm brothers), *Volk* riddles (e.g., “The Riddle of the Fish in the Water” by Robert Petsch), *Volk* customs (e.g., “The Use of the Death-Crown in Germany” by Otto Lauffer), rhymes, songs, sagas, poetry, mysticism, biographies, religious practices (e.g., “The Journey of the Soul into the Afterlife” by Julius von Negelein), gender studies (e.g., “The Woman in Islam” by Martin Hartmann) ... in short, the diversity in contents by far surpasses those volumes edited by Lazarus and Steinthal from 1860 to 1890. The choice to refocus the attention of the discipline away from linguistics and instead toward the study from the *Volk* about the *Volk* in a manner that includes folklore, but is not itself folklore, provided a means to broaden the perspective from which to investigate collective mental processes.

To alleviate the confusion about the differences between *Völkerpsychologie* and scientific *Volkskunde*, Steinthal (1891, p. 17) captured the fundamental difference by emphasizing that it is not that each of them takes a different slice from mental occurrences; rather it's in the *way* the two disciplines look at them. If it is done in a more synthetic way, then it is called *Völkerpsychologie*; if it is done more analytically, then we count it as *Volkskunde*, or history. In any case, *Volkskunde* would always be a psychological discipline, as the spirit (*Geist*) of any person, no matter how distinguished he/she is, always rests within the *Volk*. However, despite its ambitions, no systematic synthesis of materials can be found within the editions of *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*. It seems that this was left to be done by a later generation of researchers.

### **Wilhelm Wundt's Völkerpsychologie**

Wilhelm Wundt<sup>10</sup> (e.g., 1888, 1911, 1917) had been an avid reader of Lazarus and Steinthal's publications on *Völkerpsychologie*, and he agreed that the discipline was a necessary extension of the individualistic approach.

Just like it's the objective of psychology to describe the actuality of individual consciousness, thereby

putting its elements and developmental stages in an explicatory relationship, so too is there a need to make as the object of psychological investigation the analogous genetical and causal investigations of those actualities which pertain to the products of higher developmental relationships of human society, namely the folk-communities (*Völkergemeinschaft*). (Wundt, 1888, p. 2)

The simple, elementary mental processes could be studied via internal perception (*innere Wahrnehmung*). This should not be mistaken for introspection, however. In fact, Wundt was opposed to the form of introspection (*Selbstbeobachtung*) that J.S. Mill or Edward Titchener would much later advocate (Danziger, 1980). For Wundt, as for many other psychologists of those days, introspection was closer to retrospection, or the observation of an unreliable memory image. Instead, Wundt proposed that the processes we want to observe can be produced via experimental presentation of respective stimuli (Diriwächter, 2009). These experimental situations, however, were limited in their scope and did not allow for the examination of the higher processes of thought. Experimental internal perception was usually limited to examine simple relationships as they occurred but not higher mental processes.

To understand higher psychological processes, only historical comparisons, the observation of our mind's creations (*Beobachtung der Geisteserzeugnisse*), could be looked at. It was these products that Wundt saw as central to *Völkerpsychologie*. The simple psychological experiences were to be studied experimentally, whereas the products of the higher processes (which could be seen as having properties of “objects of nature”) preceded the folk-psychological analysis. With Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie* was to fill the voids of the limited applicable experimental analyses by examining under a historical-genetic approach complex mental functions, thereby determining both the social dimensions of the mind and the psychic processes.

However, for Wundt (1888), the broad conception of what academic fields should belong to *Völkerpsychologie* made it vulnerable to attacks. Wundt was especially opposed to integrating history *per se* (a core component of *Völkerpsychologie* for Lazarus and Steinthal) on the grounds that (1) history is already integrated in the subdisciplines (e.g., language, myth, art, etc.) of *Völkerpsychologie*, and (2) there is a great risk of making causal inference

on historical grounds without accounting for natural and cultural factors (Wundt, 1888, pp. 3–7). In other words, there is the risk of psychologizing history, something that was certainly not the objective of *Völkerpsychologie*. Instead, Wundt proposed that *Völkerpsychologie* should be divided into the following main areas: language, myth, customs, and morals.

What these areas have in common is that they originate in communal life. They are further related because they have an historical context. The roots of this assumption can be found already in the works of Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who tried to supplement Immanuel Kant's philosophy of pure reason with a philosophy of language, culture, and history (Nerlich & Clarke, 1998, p. 181). Aside from language, it was especially historical development (not to be confused with history as a discipline) that was central to Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* in that it gave direct insight into the products of creative synthesis of many individuals.

#### WUNDT'S VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE AS A SOCIAL-DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

For Wundt (1888, 1911, 1912, 1917), *Völkerpsychologie* was, in essence, a social-developmental discipline: social because it predominantly moves within societal dimensions; and developmental because it also needs to examine the different steps of mental development in humans (true psychogenesis), from underdeveloped to higher cultures (it goes without saying that the supremacy of one culture over another is in the eye of the beholder).

Examining the products of higher mental processes brings with it a myriad of methodological problems, most notably that products of mental processes are subject to interpretations. It is important to note that this applies not only to *Völkerpsychologie* but also to any division of psychology. However, it is especially the broad perspective of *Völkerpsychologie* that has raised the eyebrows of the critical investigator. For example, unlike his predecessors (i.e., Lazarus and Steinthal), Wundt (1912) attempted a form of *völkerpsychologische* synthesis in his *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, where he traced the roots of modern man by emphasizing a seemingly universal primitive man (*Urmensch*). The connection can be traced through various developmental stages: (1) primitive man, (2) the totemic era, (3) the ages of heroes and gods, and (4) the development of

humanity. Examining the different levels of mental development in which humans continuously find themselves is the way of true psychogenesis (Wundt, 1912, p. 4).

In this sense, the continuous progression from one level to the next, including the in-between stages that connect the stages to more complex, higher cultures, makes *Völkerpsychologie* in its true nature a developmental discipline. Each stage has its own unique characteristics that mark the achievements of the group under examination. For example, whereas primitive man is said to be closest to nature, comparable to wild animals, the man of the totemic era is already distinguished by a realization of the possession of a soul. In fact, the totem itself is the manifestation of a soul, either the soul of an ancestor or the soul of a protective being, often in the shape of an animal. In this regard, Wundt (1912, pp. 114–115) carefully noted that the difference between primitive and totem is not necessarily indicative of a lesser and greater development, as humans in both stages are best adapted for their level of development.

Each stage is marked by distinctive characteristics, directly relating to the products of higher level mental processing. More specifically, the products relate to the elements of our psyche, not in an atomistic sense, but rather in an elementaristic sense as pertaining to the units of *processes*. These elementaristic processes, however, make sense only when looked at in relation to the whole. Thus, taking context into account also becomes an absolute necessity.

Nonetheless, Wundt's general claim that he was investigating the historicity of the psyche was somewhat problematic. In his *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, it was not always clear whether he was indeed adhering to that claim. That is, what is investigated is not the historicity of the psyche in and of itself but the development of the mental objectifications of psychical activity during the course of history. As Eckardt (1997) points out:

Although the reconstruction of cultural development implies an aspect of historicity in the psyche, it still has to be distinguished if the historical changes of the psyche or the psychological parameters of historical development are the objects of investigation. In other words, the historicity of the psyche is not to be mistaken for psychologizing the historical.  
(p. 104)

The problem of psychologizing history may well be rooted in Wundt's determination to separate

psychology into a lower and higher discipline—an obstacle that Wundt's successors would later overcome (see Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008). To find general laws about the fundamental psychical functions based on the objectification of complex psychic processes seemed to be a methodological impossibility. The main problem was the jump from one level to the other (i.e., from higher to lower). That is, Wundt was forced to leap constantly from the products of interaction to intra-individual processes, whereby the crucial mediating process never really went beyond general theoretical postulates (Danziger, 1983).

#### CREATIVE SYNTHESIS: FROM ELEMENTARY PROCESSES TO WHOLENESS

*Under the principle of creative synthesis I understand the fact that psychical elements, through their causally related bi-directional processes (Wechselwirkungen) as well as the resulting consequences thereof, create connections which may be psychologically explained through their components, but at the same time those connections contain new characteristics which are not contained in the elements.*

—Wundt, 1894, p. 112

Wundt felt that creative synthesis was the necessary link between the lower mental processes (i.e., sensory perceptions) and the higher processes that give our life meaning. The higher ones were the foundation of *Völkerpsychologie*. However, it needed to be understood that *Völkerpsychologie* was not really a self-standing discipline; rather, it was intimately connected to the lower processes—that is, those connected to physiology (Wundt, 1917), albeit this connection was never truly shown.

Sensations, according to Wundt, are the product of isolated abstractions. They become the end result of psychological analysis when components of a totality can no longer be reduced—that is, they are the elements that precede consciousness/awareness. Nevertheless, although such elementary processes can be temporarily examined in isolation, it needs to be reiterated that they too are constantly connected with other components that lead up to the wholeness of experiences. Although it may well be possible to further abstractly differentiate aspects of the elements (sensations), it comes at a cost: the destruction of the experiential totality. A psychology that takes these elements as the starting point of analysis, from which they build up to create the immediate experience, will always find it impossible

to show the complex state of affairs (*Tatbestände*) from these elements alone (Sander, 1922, p. 57).

It may be helpful to use one of Wundt's (1894, p. 113) own examples on how this worked. When looking at our sensations, every conscious perception (*Wahrnehmung*) can be divided (*zerlegt*) into elementary sensations (the reader may want to note the deductive approach). However, our experience is never just the sum of these sensations (in the additive sense). Instead, through the connections of these sensations something new is created, with unique characteristics that were not contained in the sensations alone. Therefore, although we can abstract elements from a phenomenon, attempting to put these elements together again will not result in the original phenomenon. For example, through numerous light-shades/impressions (*Lichteindrücke*) we create spatial forms (*räumliche Gestalt*). No matter how nativistic our philosophical orientation is, this conscious perception is something creative as opposed to the sum of all the light-shades/impressions, which is the substratum (*Substrat*) of the perceptive act. Wundt saw this principle as valid for all psychical relationships; it guides mental development from the first to the last step.

#### TRANSFORMATION IN CREATIVE SYNTHESIS: ELEVATION TO THE CULTURAL LEVEL?

Volkelt (1922, p. 88) points out that for Wundt, synthesis had a double meaning. First, synthesis is the inverse of psychological analysis—that is, it is a task in which psychologists take the abstracted products of their analysis and place them together again. It must be noted that the object of synthesis (the totality) is the starting point of analysis, and abstracted components need to be reintegrated into the original totality. In other words, synthesis is the inversibility of psychological analysis, a task in which psychologists are capable of reproducing the abstract elements in a synthesized whole. This is where Wundt's primary concern about grasping the person in his/her entirety becomes clear.

The second meaning of synthesis, according to Wundt, is that it is a real genetic process of melding originally unrelated elements. As mentioned above, when we are looking at an object, we may say that it consists of certain elements (i.e., the light-shades/impressions reflected on our retina). However, we do not perceive this object in terms of its elements; rather, it is the object in its totality on which we reflect. The genetic process of melding unrelated elements goes unnoticed, and

our psychological processes thus begin at the level of synthesis. Nevertheless, although unnoticed, the finalized synthesis has undergone a genetic process.

The finalized synthesis is precisely the point that some of Wundt's closest students (e.g., Krueger, 1915, 1922; Sander, 1922; Volkelt, 1922) picked up on when they transformed the Leipzig School into one that took *Ganzheitspsychologie* (or holistic psychology) as its guiding principle (see Diriwächter, 2008 for a discussion on the doctrine and main tenets of *Ganzheitspsychologie*). For them, Wundt's notion of creative synthesis was not a true synthesis but rather only another form of aggregation based on the researcher's manipulations of elements. Hence, it did not tell us much about the true experience of the psyche's totality. Instead, there is a necessity to incorporate qualitative elements that circumscribe the psyche in its entirety by leaving the realm of the synthesized aggregates to the sphere of holistic measurement. Any attempt to incorporate the products of elementary processes into a totality (*Ganzheit*) requires the person to leave the method of summation of properties and acquire the process of qualitative description of the experienced phenomenon from the perspective of the totality. When all is said and done, we are interested in explaining the entirety of experience and not merely its isolated products. In that sense, analysis of the psyche should be a top-down process and not vice versa.

If we give up the genetic elemental synthesis (the melding of unrelated elements) and replace it with the genetic totality (*Ganzheits*) transformation, then the creative character of development is no longer hindered: each higher totality is in relationship to the totalities out of which it emerged—a creative novelty. The person's development does not progress from scattered elements to a synthesized whole; rather, it progresses from one totality/whole to another (Volkelt, 1962, p. 27). For Wundt's successors at Leipzig, creative synthesis did not mean that scattered elements connected to form a new whole but, rather, that an old synthesis was restructured. Synthesis does not replace the aggregate structure; rather, a different synthesis replaces previous ones. Elements were not of much use because in isolation they had no meaning, and thus for Wundt's students the notion of cumulating elementary processes needed to be dropped and replaced with the principle of psychical totality.

#### THE CASE OF SYNTHESIS TRANSFORMATION, THOUGHTS, AND LANGUAGE: AN EXAMPLE

That Wundt unknowingly anticipated and stood at the threshold of *Ganzheitspsychologie* (see Diriwächter, 2009) becomes especially evident in his dealings with the higher totalities within a self-contained discipline: *Völkerpsychologie*. Of these higher totalities, language was given particular attention to be able to trace mental development (or synthesis transformation), and Wundt devoted two volumes of his *Völkerpsychologie* (volumes I & II) for this task. For example, Wundt (1912, pp. 436–458) divided language into two domains:

1. Outer phenomena: this domain consisted of a person's actual produced or perceived utterances. The outer phenomena can be described as the organized system of sounds of language. However, this aspect is just the expression of much deeper cognitive processes:

2. Inner phenomena: this domain entailed the cognitive processes that underlie the outer phenomena. These processes organize the person's thoughts. They allow for analysis of the phenomena encountered and to put mental images into words that are then presented in the form of organized utterances. Or, in the case of a listener, to comprehend a speaker's utterances by extracting meaning from the perceived sound units (see below). In short: The cognitive processes constitute the inner mental domain of speech.

Sentence production, according to Wundt (1912, pp. 436–458), begins with a *Gesamtvorstellung* (a unified idea that entails the whole mental configuration) that one wishes to express. The analytic function of apperception prepares us to express our *Gesamtvorstellung* by analyzing it into components and structure that retains the relationship between the components and the whole. Let's say that I marvel at how green the grass is today and wish to share this perception. What I first need to do is to dissect this unified idea (the grass is green) into component parts, which at the most basic level consist of a subject (grass) and predicate (green). Thus, the basic structural division consists of two fundamental ideas that can be represented through a simple tree diagram (see Figure 2.1 below).

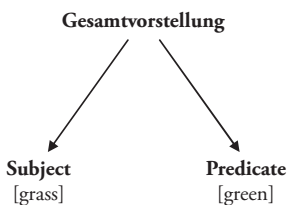
These basic ideas receive their corresponding symbols (i.e., words) with the addition of function words such as “the” and “is,” which are required in a particular language for full sentence creation. The result is that through an analytic process, I was

able to describe the transformation of an inexpressible, organized whole (the *Gesamtvorstellung*) into an expressible sequential structure of symbols (the words) that manifested themselves by means of a sentence (the media of language), whereby in the present case above I have shared verbally two fundamental ideas (grass and green). Naturally, the more complex our *Gesamtvorstellung* is, the more expanded our analysis must become, which in turn results in more complex tree diagrams. In each case, we are examining the results of a creative synthesis—the meanings that have become united as a *Gesamtvorstellung* and are now deconstructed via the tools (e.g., words) that our system of language has provided.

In the case of comprehending a person's *Gesamtvorstellung*, the above process now needs to be reversed. That is, a listener (the receiver of a communicative event of meaning exchange) is confronted with a transmission of sequential components (such as “green” or “grass”) that now need to be synthesized into a whole (a creative act). In principle, this proceeds via a reversed tree diagram (see Fig. 2.1 below) by which particular components (e.g., words and grammar) are linked and melded (one after the other) as they arrive in the listener's mind. The words and grammatical structure of the transmitted sentence are merely the tools through which the listener can try to reconstruct the speaker's *Gesamtvorstellung*. Beyond that, the words (the parts) are of no particular relevance. Thus, as Wundt pointed out, we usually retain the meaning (inner phenomena) long after we have forgotten the specific words (outer phenomena) that the person spoke to convey that meaning.

### ***Völkerpsychologie* and Culture**

The investigation of language (as well as myth and customs) comprised the core of *Völkerpsychologie*, as these were seen as universal phenomena across all human civilizations and thus made humans distinguishable from other organic beings. Although



**Figure 2.1** Tree diagram depicting the dissection of a unified idea into its most basic components.

Wundt would not have phrased it so, one could say that these labels rest on the foundation of creative synthesis transformations.

That such ideas are not far removed from a discipline called cultural psychology should not be surprising. In his tenth (and final) volume of *Völkerpsychologie*, titled *Kultur und Geschichte* (culture and history), Wundt (1920), to the best of my knowledge, brings *Völkerpsychologie* for the first time close to cultural psychology:

As these three labels [language, myth, customs] only describe three main directions, according to which human “mental” life (*Seelenleben*) differs from all organic beings, and while each of these directions encompasses various appearances, we can say that these factors and their development in relation to humans are joined under the general term of culture, so that in this regard *Völkerpsychologie* and the psychology of culture (*Psychologie der Kultur*) are equivalent terms/concepts (*Begriffe*).

(p. 57)

However, as Jahoda (1993) emphasizes, culture (in the German sense of *Kultur*) did not always have the same meaning for Wundt. According to Jahoda, culture was sometimes “the expression of the higher forms of human intellect and creativity; it meant art science, knowledge and high-level skills, sophistication and *savoir-faire*” (p. 185). At other times, the label *culture* was more or less used synonymously with the term *civilization* or *nationality* (the later especially after World War I). Hence, a clear definition of culture was not always apparent in Wundt's writings (a problem that also occurs in present-day studies on culture and psychology).

Nonetheless, what present-day readers of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* can benefit from is the wide breath of scope with which he approached the subject. Although many things he wrote are arguably outdated and in some cases flawed,<sup>11</sup> he nevertheless demonstrates a remarkable talent for inquisition, curiosity, and, above all, skills with which to relate and integrate information that was previously left nearly exclusively to the domain of anthropology or ethnology, thereby broadening the scope of psychology beyond the laboratory setting.

However, taking the notion of creative synthesis transformation as the basis to approach the discipline of *Völkerpsychologie*, one could arguably make the discipline more focused and proceed to study culture as Wundt's successor, Felix Krueger (1953,



pp. 321–323), suggested by applying the following principles:

1. The highest level of totality (e.g., culture) weighs most on its sub-totalities (e.g., the individual).

2. Just like life in general, communal (*Gemeinschaft*) and cultural life is hierarchically organized.

3. The emphasis is on experience, most notably the centrality of feeling and the structural orientation, as well as the complexity of whole, which is dynamic and all-encompassing.

These principles have finally been addressed in more recent cultural-psychological publications (e.g., Valsiner, 2000; Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000). Communal life has internal roots and borders that embed it within its environment. In this regard, the focus shifts from the products of peoples (as in Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*) to their experiences as a complex phenomenological whole. For Krueger (1953), social life was grounded in tension among the group, its environment, and the individual will. In fact, this tension (in the form of opposites) increases as a *Volk* progresses and develops. Reaching higher levels of totality (e.g., from primitive to civilized cultures) is tied to pain and must be gained by some sort of force (e.g., hard labor or battle). And naturally, true to the doctrine of any *Völkerpsychologie*, it is futile to study individuals independently from a group; rather, the group membership is the basis for the individual. Collective experiences are embedded not in the individual but in the totality of the group, of which the individual is but a mere subtotality.

### **Future Directions: The Place for *Völkerpsychologie* in Today's Cultural Psychology?**

Although rare, attempts have been made to conduct *völkerpsychologische* analysis from Krueger's (1953) perspective. For example, Dürckheim-Montmartin (1934) examined the structural forces of community life with Krueger's theory guiding his analysis. Consistent with the notion of no parts without the whole, Dürckheim-Montmartin reiterates that true membership of a group implies spontaneous action in accordance with the collective will, whereby the individual does not feel forced but, rather, pledges himself/herself to act. The phenomena experienced by the collective people (*Völk*) are most clearly distinguishable when the *Volk* remains rather homogeneous—that is, united in

times of stress—and rejects outsiders. Thus, despite the holistic emphasis on heterogeneity, it is best to start such studies on the *völkerpsychologische* level in peoples who exhibit a great degree of unique characteristics that are not found in other communities (similarly to the aims of *Völkskunde*).

Through the fusion of *Völkerpsychologie* with new ideas, the horizon may open to allow for investigations that were previously not methodologically possible on the level of *Völkerpsychologie* alone. The criticism of Eckardt (1997) that Wundt's proclaimed unified historical-genetic approach to investigating psychological phenomena was more a “psychologizing” of history than a historicizing of the psyche would have to be re-examined in light of the experiential factors that could be deduced from a new *Völkerpsychologie* that is grounded not in the past but in the present. This would be possible because we are now aware of other approaches that are grounded in the feelings and structures that are experienced in the totality of a phenomenon as it occurs.

John Greenwood (1999) once added to the criticism of Wundt by stating that although Wundt did recognize the possibility and potential of forms of social and/or cultural psychology (the investigation of psychological processes that are grounded in cultures or social groups) distinct from individual psychology (the investigation of psychological processes that operate independently of cultures and social groups), his own work lacked concrete details. That is, although he felt that there was a need for bringing individual psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* into organic relation theoretically as methodological procedures, he did not recognize that a similar need existed with regard to the concrete facts and processes with which these psychologies were supposed to deal. This criticism, of course, would also need to re-examine the new form of *Völkerpsychologie* because newer approaches do not necessarily make that dual distinction, as Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* and physiological psychology did.

Moreover, Greenwood (2003) even went so far as to make the controversial suggestion that perhaps there may be a space for experimental procedures in Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, something that has not previously been deemed possible. However, in this regard we should be very careful not to fall into the linear causality model (as is so often applied in mainstream social sciences today). I can only imagine that Wundt would be shaking his head in disbelief if social sciences came forth presenting research under

the heading of *Völkerpsychologie* in which claims are made that “A caused B.” Instead, alternative models of causality would need to be applied, such as catalyzed systemic causality models (Valsiner, 2000, pp. 74–76; see also 2004) that would not only be able to capture the essence of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* but would be closer to real-life events. It is clear that in such an approach, the catalyzed system necessarily needs to include the historical nature of the *Volksgeist*, something that completely removes the model from present-day mainstream linear approaches to ones that turn the causality issue into one of emergent or synthesis causality. After all, we must remember that theories are not supposed to take on the role of a *set mental* (and *socio-ideological*) position; rather, they are the tools that help us look at phenomena (see Valsiner, 2004).

Holzner (1961) proposed several specialized subdivisions of *Völkerpsychologie* that are abstracted from a general *Völkerpsychologie*. In that regard, *Völkerpsychologie* would consist of a *völkerpsychologische* description of cultural content, a sociological analysis of the totality of society, and disciplines that specifically focused on studying social stratifications, the totality of communal life, socialization, and personality. In the past, these studies would predominantly require a comparative analysis, but with the framework of modern cultural psychology, they could become experiential to include phenomenology of the higher levels of totality on topics like feelings and emotions, thereby utilizing the rich methodological knowledge that has been introduced by various cultural psychology researchers (for a general overview, see Valsiner, 2000).

Finally, Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* has done little to integrate the actual developmental processes, and such an approach would be a desirable addition to *Völkerpsychologie* as a part of today’s cultural psychology. After all, development implies processes that engulf the entire person or persons, and this form of totality needs to be accounted for. One can now only hope that the present-day generation of cultural psychologists will dare to step into the footsteps left behind by the early giants of *Völkerpsychologie* and complete the ambitious project that, until now, has been left dormant but ready for a re-awakening.

## Notes

1. Other translations of the term *Völkerpsychologie*, such as cultural psychology, could be equally misleading as none really grasps the spectrum of this discipline. *Völkerpsychologie* was more

than cultural psychology, as culture (in the German sense of *Kultur*) was merely incorporated into the approach (see also Jahoda, 1993), although Wundt does compare *Völkerpsychologie* and the “psychology of culture” at one point (see below). Nevertheless, *Völkerpsychologie* was to focus on all aspects of people living together, not just culture *per se*.

2. Although not without criticism (see Schneider & Müller, 1993).

3. However, according to Thurnwald (1924, p. 32), it was Wilhelm Humboldt’s 2-year-younger brother, Alexander von Humboldt, who coined the term *Völkerpsychologie*. Thus, it remains unclear who was the first to have coined that term. Jahoda (1993, p. 145) followed up claims that Humboldt was the first and found that these claims rest on mere assertions.

4. This idea was nicely captured by Wundt (1915) as Germany’s Second Reich was soon to near its end when, shortly after the outbreak of World War I, he advocated German idealism and a social state in which the duty of citizens was to live for the community and not for themselves.

5. For example, Achelis (1889) published an article in honor of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887) and in it addresses several of Fechner’s important points in his system of psychology. Thus, the scholars of *Völkerpsychologie* were aware of the theories in experimental sciences but may have not necessarily been on the “cutting edge,” and certainly did little to incorporate it into *Völkerpsychologie* theory. The three articles that Eckardt (1997, p. 71) highlights as specifically psychology-related are to be classified as a form of philosophic-psychological essays. The authors were Lazarus (1868) and Meyer (1878, 1880). The reader may wish to note that the latter reference has been cited wrongly in Eckardt’s text (he provides the same year and issue number for both of Meyer’s publications) and is given in the corrected form in the references below.

6. This volume also contains a complete name and topic index, stretching over all 20 volumes of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*.

7. He made it a point to emphasize those people who belonged to the folklore guild, which held an international congress from July 29 to August 3, 1891 in Paris, France.

8. Weinhold (1891) believed that the lower a person’s education, the fewer words are needed for talk.

9. The title *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* continued to be displayed under the title *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* until the new editor, Karl Weinhold, passed away in 1901. In 1902, when Johannes Bolte became Weinhold’s successor, the old title of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* finally became history. The new journal would continue until the midst of World War I, by then under a new editor, Fritz Boehm, when the lack of personnel in the printing factory and money problems would force it out of existence.

10. A biographical account can be found in Rieber and Robinson (2001).

11. For example, in his approach, Wundt faced considerable difficulties in explaining the intermediate steps of cultural development. In his *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (1912), despite his emphasis on context, Wundt is often accused of reconstructing the cultural development of humans (e.g., Eckardt, 1997; Werner, 1953). First of all, the way Wundt breaks down the development of humans into elements leads to the assumption of an *Urmensch*, which by its nature is the same for all humans. The development is then similar for all of mankind, given the environmental conditions. Werner (1953), for example, opposes

this by noting that if two human cultures are superficially similar today, it does not guarantee that they are not of different origins and of different functional relevance. Further, the interpretations of the *völkpsychologische* elements are tainted by our own developmental stage (which is arguably operating out of a different world than the world it is analyzing).

This has proven to be a fundamental problem for *völkpsychologische* analysis: capturing and determining cultural units or cultural layers that are so formed that all the outer manifestations of these cultural layers are carried by the distinct mental uniqueness of a higher unit. (Werner, 1953, p. 11)

This issue, however, will always remain a problem for psychology. No matter how well we design an experiment, no matter how objective we try to be, the results are always subject to the interpretations of those who are investigating the matter.

\*This chapter is a revised and expanded version of the following publication:

Diriwächter, R. (2004). Völkerpsychologie: The Synthesis that never was. *Culture & Psychology*, 10(1), 85–109.

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## Cultural-Historical Psychology: Contributions of Lev Vygotsky

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### Abstract

A brief outline of Vygotsky's major ideas is presented with only cursory reference to their historical background. Drawing on psychological and linguistic research, Vygotsky developed a theory of the development of mind. Central is the idea that the child's naturally given mental processes become transformed by the acquisition of speech and meanings. Through speech the child acquires a worldview that reflects reality in a more adequate way. The driving force in creating new meanings for the child is education in school. Given that meanings and schools differ in different cultures, children and adults living in different cultures will think along different lines. Attention is paid to the argument that Vygotsky overemphasized the role of speech to the detriment of the child's concrete operations with reality.

**Keywords:** Cultural-historical psychology, history of psychology, speech, concept formation, lower and higher mental functions, social interaction, cross-cultural research

Cultural-historical psychology is connected with the name of Lev Vygotsky and originated in the 1920s in what was then the Soviet Union. The definitive account of Vygotsky's conception cannot yet be provided—given the inaccessibility of a substantial part of his writings (Van der Veer, 1997)—but enough is known to give a fairly accurate picture of what he was up to. However, the understanding of Vygotsky's ideas is made more difficult by the fact that they originated a long time ago and in a different culture. Theories often reflect the social context and historical period in which they were written, and Vygotsky's theories formed no exception. No social scientist in his time and country could permit himself to ignore the socio-political events taking place, nor could he fully escape the pressure of social demands. This makes it essential for an understanding of Vygotsky's theories and their social embeddedness to provide a brief account of that rather remote period in a country that no longer exists.

### Social History

Born in a Jewish family in Belarus in 1896, which then formed part of the Russian empire, Vygotsky<sup>1</sup> could not avoid participating in and witnessing the social turmoil his country went through in the early twentieth century (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). This included several pogroms against the Jews, the October Revolution in 1917, the Civil War from 1917 to 1923 (with foreign intervention), the collectivizing of farming in the late 1920s and early 1930s with resulting famines and millions of death, and widespread political terror during the reign of both Lenin and Stalin (Conquest, 1986). Practically from the beginning of the new state in 1917, the authorities began curtailing the freedom of speech and scientific research. Some unwelcome investigators were exiled or arrested, and others were fired or criticized in public (Chamberlain, 2006). Researchers reacted by complying or trying to avoid sensitive subjects; only a few openly

resisted the new official ideology to the extent that this remained possible (Van der Veer, 2000). As the new official doctrine was loosely based on Marx's ideas about class struggle and Engels' ideas about the origin and nature of man, the social sciences and humanities were most vulnerable for criticism from above. As a result, the researchers within these domains attempted to develop a Marxist psychology, a Marxist sociology, a Marxist anthropology, and so on. Vygotsky was one of the younger generation of psychologists who tried to develop this new Marxist psychology and one who, in the process, developed close ties with high officials, such as the minister of education Lunacharsky and Lenin's wife Krupskaya. One might think, then, that his writings would be full of obligatory terms and references as shibboleths of the right worldview and, more generally, that he did not sincerely believe in the ideas he advanced, like so many of his generation. This, however, does not seem to have been the case. Vygotsky's work is relatively free of the standard criticism of class enemies and bourgeois mentality, and one gets the impression, while reading his private notebooks and letters, that he truly believed in the possibility of a Marxist reform of psychology and society at large. Also, in his attempts to develop his own new version of a Marxist psychology, he steered his own course—for example, relying heavily on contemporary linguistic studies—which in the end made him suspicious for ideological hardliners. In the final years of his brief life, Vygotsky suffered criticism and harassment from the Soviet authorities, and no one knows what would have been his fate had he not died from tuberculosis at the age of 38 years (Van der Veer, 2000).

### **Basic Ideas**

Vygotsky developed his ideas over a period of about 10 years, and given this relatively short period, one would expect to find a reasonably consistent oeuvre without major revisions. In Vygotsky's case, this expectation is not vindicated, however. Characteristic of Vygotsky is that he was constantly lecturing and writing—he published several hundreds of books and articles in one decade—and revising his ideas in the process. That implies that while reading one of Vygotsky's publications, one always has to take into account when it was written or published. However, in what follows, I will avoid that problem by presenting mostly concepts and ideas that Vygotsky still adhered to by the end of his life.

### **Functions**

One of Vygotsky's principal claims is that human consciousness is a unique phenomenon in the animal world and develops in ontogeny. It is unique in that it is based on the use of cultural means, which become internalized by the individual (Vygotsky, 1997c; Vygotsky & Luria, 1994). Vygotsky was primarily thinking of the unusual power of words as cultural means to transform our mental activities. Drawing on the work of the linguists Jakobson (1923), Potebnya (1926), and, ultimately von Humboldt, he emphasized the capacity of words to influence both the other and the self (Bertau, 2009). Words can be used to urge another person to do something, but they can also be used to steer one's own behavior. Words can be used to make a plan for the day, to form an intention, and to memorize a list of objects. Because such use of words does not develop overnight, children and adults may differ substantially in their way of mental functioning, in their consciousness.

Take the phenomenon of memorization. It is obvious that animals have memory, just like it is clear that preverbal infants learn to recognize their mother, but Vygotsky argued that this is a type of memory that is qualitatively different from typically human, verbal memory. Using words, we humans may make a list of errands, we can think of categories of objects to be bought (vegetables, meat, dairy, etc.), we can describe pictures or music in words (which may help to recognize and remember pieces of music or art), and so on and so forth. Vygotsky preferred to call the first type of memory—that of infants and animals—“natural memory” and the second type “cultural memory,” and, more in general, he distinguished natural from cultural mental functions. Cultural functions always involve the use of cultural means such as words, and natural functions do not. Vygotsky posited that cultural functions are much more powerful than natural ones and, consequently, also spoke of higher and lower functions. In this conviction, he may have been strengthened by his own feats as a memory artist. Using various classic tricks, he showed his own students how one can memorize long lists of words or numbers and thus increase one's memory capacity immensely. Subsequent researchers (e.g., Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007) have tried to soften the natural-cultural dichotomy on several grounds, but there is no doubt that the distinction itself is a valid one.

## Origins

Inasmuch as words are first learned and used in social interaction, we can conclude with Vygotsky that higher mental functions have a social origin. Vygotsky accepted Janet's view that in human history, words were originally commands (i.e., *ego* instructs or urges *alter* to do something). However, it belongs to the peculiar nature of spoken words that we also hear them and that we may instruct ourselves. Speaking to ourselves, we wander through the day and, in a way, human "consciousness is, as it were, social contact with oneself" (Vygotsky, 1925/1997, p. 78). Vygotsky argued:

We are conscious of ourselves because we are conscious of others and by the same method as we are conscious of others, because we are the same vis-à-vis ourselves as others vis-à-vis us. I am conscious of myself only to the extent that I am another to myself . . . the social moment in consciousness is primary in time as well as in fact. The individual aspect is constructed as a derived and secondary aspect based on the social aspect and exactly according to its model.  
(1925/1997, p. 77)

It is not difficult to see this statement as a further elaboration of the *dualis* concept developed by von Humboldt, who emphasized the social nature of speech and its importance for the understanding of the self:

Language, however, develops only socially [*gesellschaftlich*] and man only understands himself because he tentatively tested the intelligibility of his words on others.  
(quoted in Bertau, 2009, p. 61)

So, in this view we know ourselves only through the medium of social speech, via the shared meanings of existing language and becoming conscious of oneself is formulating one's experiences in words acquired through others. That implies that our most intimate, private, and personal feelings—to the extent that they can be verbalized—are nevertheless very social and that becoming an individual or personality does not imply becoming less social. As Vygotsky put it in his book on the psychology of art, "We should not say that feeling becomes social but rather that it becomes personal . . . without ceasing to be social" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 314). In this way, Vygotsky also undermined facile individual–society dichotomies: society is within the individual and our uttermost individuality consists of

a combination of socially acquired features, ideas, skills, et cetera.

Incidentally, Vygotsky's emphasis on the social nature of mind may seem Marxist, and in Vygotsky's case, it was certainly also inspired by Marx's writings, but it should be said that the social emphasis was shared by several non-Marxist thinkers of the time as well. In 1939, for example, the sociologist Norbert Elias wrote in a remarkable essay on "the society of individuals":

[E]ven the nature and form of his solitude, even what he feels to be his 'inner life', is stamped by the history of his relationships . . . one must start from the structure of relations *between* individuals in order to understand the 'psyche' of the individual person.  
(Elias, 1935, pp. 33, 37)

Indeed, this is not far from a statement made by Vygotsky's collaborator Luria (1979, p. 43), who wrote that "we needed, as it were, to step outside the organism to discover the sources of the specifically human forms of psychological activity." Our most intimate core, our private ideas and feelings have their origin in human interaction and make use of (are molded by) the available cultural means in a specific society.

## Means

There are different usages of the word "social" in the above passages that should be distinguished. Of course, one can say that human babies are social in the sense that they depend on others and seek the presence of others. In this regard, human babies do not differ from the young of other primates. Or, one can say with Elias that to understand an individual one needs to look at the history of his or her relationships. But Vygotsky was aiming at something more specific. What Vygotsky had in mind was the slow change of learning, memory, vision, hearing, and so forth into *human* learning, *human* memory, and so on. This takes place by the acquisition of cultural means transmitted and/or acquired in a social context. In this sense, the mental faculties of a child of, say, 7 years may not have become fully socialized or *culturalized*.

According to Vygotsky, the understanding and acquisition of cultural means goes through several stages in ontogeny, and the first cultural means often have a concrete, material nature. At first, the young child will disregard cultural means even when they are made available; then the child will use the material means in a purely formal way, without

understanding them and without improvement of the performance. Subsequently, the child will make use of the material means and profit from them. And, finally, the child will internalize the cultural means and no longer need material support. One of Vygotsky's favorite examples was that of counting, which for children still depends on the concrete availability of body parts such as fingers and toes but which most adults can do without this dependence. Another of his examples was that of memorizing an intention such as the purchasing of some present. Children may need to rely on such material means as a knot tied in a handkerchief to remind them of their intention. Adults, however, may tie a mental knot by vividly connecting the image of some situation or person with the intention to buy the present. This switch from external to internal means is not always fully complete for a specific function—adults may still use the stratagem of tying knots in handkerchiefs—and neither can one say that it is always generally present in adults, perhaps, but Vygotsky argued that it is characteristic of human mental development. And one might add that the fact that we have gone through this development is what makes it so difficult for humans to fully grasp the bovine or porcine wordless worldview. In any case, the above examples give an idea of Vygotsky's concept of the gradual acquisition of cultural means in social interaction to steer one's own behavior.

### Words

Speech itself was the subject matter of Vygotsky's final chapter in his posthumous book *Thinking and Speech* (1934). His discussion of private or inner speech and its relation to social speech, on the one hand, and thinking, on the other, was partially inspired by the reading of his contemporary, Jean Piaget. Piaget (1923; 1924) first described the phenomenon of children who, during play, speak for themselves in a way that is often not intelligible to other children. Piaget hypothesized that such speech is unintelligible, because young children are unable to take the other's point of view—that is, children up to age 7 or 8 years do not realize that the other child does not have the same knowledge, tastes, or feelings as they themselves. In a word, they are egocentric. Only gradually will children learn to replace their egocentric speech with social speech. Piaget's background philosophy was that children are originally autistic, and their autistic thought and speech is gradually suppressed and replaced by more

open, social variants under the influence of peers and adults.

Vygotsky (1932) criticized Piaget's contention and performed several little experiments to refute his views. Vygotsky noted, for example, that egocentric speech was absent or greatly reduced when the child was alone or surrounded by deaf children. This suggests that egocentric speech is meant by the child as social communication. Vygotsky also observed that the incidence of egocentric speech rose when the child was confronted with unexpected problems. This suggests, in his view, that egocentric speech has some function in the solution of problems. Finally, Vygotsky noticed that egocentric speech becomes *less* intelligible as children grow older, which is not consistent with Piaget's idea that egocentrism gradually disappears. From these results, Vygotsky drew the conclusion that so-called "egocentric speech": (1) originates in normal, communicative speech and branches off at a later stage; (2) has as its function to steer the child's behavior when the need arises; and (3) becomes less and less intelligible for the outsider until it has become proper private or inner speech. According to Vygotsky, then, egocentric speech is an intermediary stage between normal, communicative speech and inner speech. Like communicative speech, it is audible, and like inner speech, it serves to guide the child's thinking (Van der Veer, 2007).

Of course, it is very difficult to describe and analyze the nature and function of inner speech given its intimate nature, and Vygotsky's reasoning here was necessarily largely hypothetical. He began (following Jakubinsky, 1923/1988, pp. 27–43) with positing that inner speech must be shorter because one need not spell out details that are known to the speaker but not to the listener. In inner speech, speaker and listener coincide, which means one can be much less explicit. With Paulhan (1928), Vygotsky added that inner speech is dominated by personal connotations—that is, in inner speech subjects may, on the basis of their private experiences, attach private meanings to words that do not coincide with their lexical meanings. The word "sun," for example, may acquire strongly negative connotations for a person with delicate skin, whereas for others it may be an entirely pleasant word. In sum, the chances are that inner speech made audible would not be entirely intelligible to other people given its abbreviated nature and its personal connotations and jargon. In itself that is a comforting thought, but more important is to see



how Vygotsky attempted to trace our inner voice from social dialogues. As stated above, in his view, verbal thinking begins with social speech (i.e., *ego* utters things meant to be heard by *alter*) but after a series of transformations becomes utterly private and presumably unintelligible to the social other. Again, then, thoroughly private mental processes originate in social interaction. In a recent investigation, Werani (2010) investigated whether Vygotsky was right in suggesting that inner speech may have a function in problem solving. Using thinking aloud protocols, she was able to show that overt speech was connected with the complexity of the task and the quality of the solution. It may be inferred that this holds for inner speech as well (cf. Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999; Zivin, 1979).

### **Systems**

If Vygotsky was right in his claim that mental faculties such as memory and perception gradually become dominated or transformed by the acquisition of verbal meanings and concepts, then it follows that mental processes are mutually connected in a system that in adults is dominated by verbal thinking. With several contemporaries (e.g., Charlotte Bühler), Vygotsky believed that in children mental functioning may be dominated temporarily by other functions such as perception or memory—that is, children behave led by what they perceive or remember, without thinking too much—but that in adults thinking has the dominating role. In one of his later writings, Vygotsky developed this notion of the systemic structure of mind. His basic claim was, in his own words:

It is not so much the functions that change ... what is changed and modified are rather the relationships, the links between the functions. New constellations emerge that were unknown in the preceding stage. That is why intra-functional change is often not essential in the transition from one stage to another. It is inter-functional changes, the changes of inter-functional connections and the inter-functional structure that matter. The development of such new flexible relationships between functions we will call a *psychological system*.  
(Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 92)

One of Vygotsky's examples was that of perception. In adults, perception is dominated by knowledge. We see what we expect to see, and it is almost impossible to find what Wundt called the "immediate experience" (i.e., the sensational experience that

supposedly precedes the verbal understanding and designation of the experience). In other words, as adults we live in a conceptual world and it is very hard or impossible to regress to the preverbal world of the newborn and once again experience a meaningless universe. With the acquisition of words, the child's phenomenal world begins to change; the child learns to classify things, animals, and persons in several more or less coherent groups. Vygotsky posited that the most fundamental changes in the child's understanding of the world take place in adolescence when children develop full-fledged scientific concepts. Younger children do interpret the world in intelligent ways, but their conceptual grasp is inadequate compared to that of trained adults. (It is here that Vygotsky's research into concept formation discussed below becomes relevant.) Conversely, in diseases such as schizophrenia, Vygotsky (1997b, p. 103) claimed, the subject loses his ability to use adequate concepts.

It is not just perception that becomes, so to speak, intellectualized. The same holds true for memory and feelings. Vygotsky believed that our feelings become trained to gradually fit into a historically determined cultural system. When and to what extent we feel jealous is determined by our culture, Vygotsky argued. And the appreciation of music and wine is framed in elaborate systems of technical terms that co-constitute the experience. Thus, what in children may be primary experiences become refined aesthetic feelings in the adult through the introduction of complex conceptual systems. In a sense, then, mental functions that originally operated in isolation become connected through language.

### **Brains**

It is, of course, tempting to speculate about the cerebral substrate of a system of mental functions. Vygotsky believed that brain systems are not pre-given but that connections between different zones of the brain develop in ontogeny. When the images of two different objects are evoked in tandem and become connected for the subject, then this presumably means that new connections are formed between the loci where these images and their names are stored. In other words, the neural network of meanings and images is constantly being revised as the person grows older. Also, the social other may stimulate the connection between different cortical centers of the subject through instruction and so on. To Vygotsky this once more showed that social

interaction is crucial for cognitive development: cortical centers that were originally unconnected now form a cortical network thanks to outside interference. The functional plasticity of the brain permits the dynamic systemic structure of mind.

The idea of a flexible systemic brain structure also allows us to understand cases of compensation in patients with brain lesions. Subjects may, for example, lose the ability to name an object they perceive—that is, the visual image of the object no longer triggers its name. However, when allowed to touch the object, they may regain its name. That finding seems to imply that in a complex system of cortical centers responsible for the storage of the sound, image, touch, and name of the object, some connections may be lost but may be compensated for by others. A better understanding of the exact nature of such interfunctional systems may allow us to devise means of compensation for brain patients. It was Luria, Vygotsky's former collaborator, who developed this approach into the new discipline of neuropsychology.

Ultimately, for Vygotsky the most important implication of the system notion was that of the possibility of deliberate control. The well-trained adult is capable of using his thinking to improve his memory feats, for example. As thinking is nothing other than the use of cultural means such as words to solve problems, this is equivalent to stating once more that we may use cultural means to enhance memory performance. That is to say, by making deliberate use of cultural signs, we can lift our perception, memory, and attention to new levels. Ultimately, we may even be capable of fully dominating our passions by framing them in culturally accepted meanings. As we reasoned before, the attention of children is dominated by factors outside their control. Similarly, children are the slaves of their passions. Adults, however, are ideally capable of steering their own behavior; they are less spontaneous, they can ignore external or internal stimuli, they can choose to conceal their feelings, and they can become capable of deception. Thus, with Spinoza, Vygotsky (1997b, p. 103) believed that man, through his intellect, has gained power over his affects and other mental processes.

### **Concepts**

Vygotsky's evidence for conceptual change in childhood and adolescence rested on several of his own investigations, which he described in *Thinking and Speech* (1934). Subjects of different age groups

were told the name of an object and asked to find another object of the same name in a group of objects differing on various dimensions (color, size, etc.). They found that younger children's approach to that task was qualitatively different from that of adults. The attempts at classification by children were inconsistent, based on concrete features, and often unsuccessful. The last preconceptual stage is reached in pre-adolescence when children classify the objects on the basis of what Vygotsky called "pseudo-concepts." Children might gather all objects of the same form but be unable to state their joint property in an adequate way. Thus, they might select all triangles because "they look the same" but be unable to state the abstract concept "triangle" and its defining properties. Superficially, they seemed to experience the world as adults do, and nothing prevented successful communication between children and adults, but deeper probing learned that children of that age conceptualize the world differently from adults.

A recent replication in South Africa, using Vygotsky's original material and experimental setup, has verified Vygotsky's assertion that true conceptual thinking only becomes possible in adolescence (Towsey, 2009; Towsey & Macdonald, 2009). In their meaning-making efforts, children are guided by the culturally determined meanings available in the words around them, but they reach the (adult) stage of full-fledged scientific concepts only after a lengthy process of development.

### **Teachers**

It is education that plays a fundamental role in children's growing ability to make use of scientific concepts. Inspired by Piaget, Vygotsky made a distinction between everyday concepts and scientific concepts. Everyday concepts are based on concrete and sometimes irrelevant features of phenomena and do not form part of a coherent conceptual system. Scientific concepts reflect essential, abstract properties of phenomena and are logically connected to other, related concepts. Such scientific economic concepts as supply, demand, scarcity, turnover, and profit, for example, form part of the interconnected system of concepts called economic theory. Characteristic of scientific concepts is that they are explicitly and systematically introduced in an educational setting and that students are trained to define them, to state their interrelationships, and so on. In other words, students make conscious and deliberate use of these concepts, realizing their

interconnectedness. Vygotsky posited that the mastering of such scientific concepts in school carries over to everyday life and that children's everyday concepts become transformed by them. Thus, the child's original concept of a worker as someone who goes to work (with concrete images of clothing, factories, etc.) will become enriched by the idea that a worker is someone who sells his labor to an employer in accordance with the system of economic concepts mentioned above. Everyday concepts, on the other hand, give bone and flesh to scientific concepts. They provide the rich concrete details that scientific concepts lack and are tied to the child's concrete reality. Vygotsky, thus, posited that everyday and scientific concepts mutually enrich each other but nevertheless emphasized the leading role of scientific concepts in creating new and deeper understanding of reality. As often, he discussed some empirical investigations that corroborated his view, but these left much to be desired in terms of research methodology (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

### Zones

The leading role of school or, more generally, instruction in stimulating children's mental development was emphasized by Vygotsky time and again. In the final years of his life, he lectured about education as supposedly creating a new zone of mental development. His basic idea was very simple. Some tasks children can solve themselves, independently. Others are only within their reach when they receive assistance or scaffolding from more capable peers or adults. Using the hints and prompts of parents or teachers, they then reach above their present abilities. The interesting thing to note is that children cannot utilize all the hints they receive; some assistance is so beyond their present abilities that they fail to profit from it. But there is a twilight zone between their present darkness of ignorance and their future brightness of understanding, and just as the daybreak announces a new day, that twilight zone announces the child's understanding in the near future. What the child can do today with support, she can do tomorrow independently. In other words, we may use the children's assisted performance to predict their future independent performance. Vygotsky clearly suggested that parents and teachers, by giving hints and prompts, were of paramount importance in calling into life (rather than laying bare) new levels of the child's understanding, but in this context he provided no empirical backing

for that suggestion. Also, he suggested that children differ in their ability to profit from assistance and that the difference between their independent and assisted performance has differential prognostic value. More than standard cognitive tests, assisted performance would give us an indication of the children's potential, their independent performance in the near future. This suggestion has long been ignored, but the recent dynamic assessment movement—also inspired by Feuerstein, who independently reached similar conclusions—is exploring its potential (cf. Van der Veer, 2007).

### Cultures

If higher cognitive processes are determined by the acquisition of cultural means, if instruction plays a fundamental role in creating new zones of cognitive development, then it follows that higher thought differs between cultures. The lower, natural mental functions will be shared because they belong to the human make-up, but the higher, cultural functions should differ because they depend on different cultural means from sometimes radically different cultures. This was a conclusion that was unusual for that time: contemporaries were inclined to attribute the different mentality of 'savages' to their different bodily constitution or animal-like nature (Jahoda, 1999). Vygotsky followed another line of reasoning:

We have no reason to assume that the human brain underwent an essential biological evolution in the course of human history. We have no reason to assume that the brain of primitive man differed from our brain, was an inferior brain, or had a biological structure different from ours. All biological investigations lead us to assume that biologically speaking the most primitive man we know deserves the full title of man.

(Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 97)

Thus, Vygotsky denied that there could be any relevant biological differences between contemporary persons of different races or cultures. However, if we cannot attribute the existing differences in mentality to nature, then they must be attributed to nurture, to the way human children are raised in various societies, and to the cultural means these children master. But do we find any deep differences in cognitive functioning between cultures? This is largely an empirical matter, and Vygotsky and his associates were among the first investigators who tried to answer this question through

scientific investigation. Alexander Luria, Vygotsky's closest collaborator, found important cognitive differences in the Islamic population of Kazakhstan in the early 1930s. Previous investigators had found various minorities in Central Asia to score low on intelligence tests, and in an effort to explain the differences medical anthropologists had measured the size of their skulls (cf. Van der Veer, 2007). Luria took another approach: after due preparation and with the help of interpreters, he offered Kazakh subjects intellectual riddles and carefully discussed the proposed solutions with the subjects—challenging them for better arguments, expressing dissent, and so forth—in a manner not unlike that used by Piaget in his clinical interviews with children. He found that his subjects failed to solve several cognitive tasks in the manner that he found to be superior and that was common in most adult Western subjects. Thus, asked to group together three of four objects, subjects failed to sort them according to their function or to abstract properties. For example, when asked which object did not belong in the series “glass, saucepan, spectacles, and bottle,” the subjects could not reach a solution. They did not say that three of the objects were vessels (function) nor that three others were made of glass (abstract property). Instead, they imagined concrete situations in which these objects would fit together despite Luria's suggestions that other solutions were possible. Luria concluded that “different psychological processes determined their manner of grouping which hinged on concrete, situational thinking rather than on abstract operations which entail the generalizing function of language” (Luria, 1976, p. 77). Similar results were reached with other cognitive tasks such as hypothetical reasoning: the subjects reacted to the tasks in ways that differed from those of Western subjects and relied on their concrete, everyday experience. Thus, when subjects were told that all bears on Nova Zembla were white and that Jaan was a bear on Nova Zembla, they refused to draw any conclusions about Jaan's skin color because they had never been on Nova Zembla.

On the basis of such results, Luria and Vygotsky were inclined to speak of different *levels* of cognitive functioning—that is, they reasoned that the non-Western subjects had not yet reached the Western level of abstract reasoning. In their view, the Islamic culture to which the subjects belonged did not offer the necessary cultural means to solve the tasks presented, and therefore, the subjects could not manifest the required hypothetical scientific thinking.

In Vygotsky and Luria's view, it takes the Western school instruction to develop truly scientific abstract reasoning in children, and Luria provided data to prove that the subjects' capacity for abstract thought was directly linked to the number of years of schooling received. Given the right education, they might make “a leap of centuries” (Luria, 1976, p. 164). Now, as then, these conclusions are viewed as debatable. It is contentious to compare cultures on a developmental scale. It is risky to draw general conclusions about subjects' general ability to reason abstractly on the basis of their failure or refusal to solve the presented tasks. It is doubtful whether Western school is essential in creating abstract abilities. Be that as it may, Vygotsky's and Luria's findings have been verified time and again, and now, as then, it is unlikely that the differences found are caused by genetic differences. The exact nature of the differences in higher reasoning is still subject of considerable debate, whether it be cognitive differences or moral reasoning à la Kohlberg.

## Conclusions

In the early 1930s, Vygotsky advanced a set of ideas that was quite unlike that of contemporaries such as Karl and Charlotte Bühler, Kurt Koffka, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Wilhelm Stern, and Heinz Werner. He posited a peculiar theory about the merging of *natural* and *cultural* lines in child development. The cultural line was based on the acquisition of cultural means that transformed the child's functioning. Applying the socially acquired cultural means to the self, the child becomes conscious of his or her mental functioning. The mastering of cultural means takes years and is only finished in adolescence. At first, higher mental functioning needs the support of concrete material actions and objects but gradually the child becomes able to operate on the purely mental level. The most important cultural means is speech, with its variants social, egocentric, and inner speech. The inclusion of speech into mental functioning implies that the inter-relationships between different mental functions become changed and form a dynamic system. On the level of the cortex, this probably means that different cortical centers become connected and disconnected depending on life experiences. A primary role in intellectual development is played by education, which teaches children a logically connected worldview. Children can profit from education when it falls in their zone of proximal development. To the extent that cultures offer different cultural

means inside or outside education, subjects from different cultures will display different modes of thinking. Children from different cultures may have the same intellectual potential, but they do end up thinking in fundamentally different ways.

### Future Directions

In the 1920s and 1930s, Vygotsky's ideas were virtually unknown in the West and thus met with no criticism there. In fact, it is very difficult to find any mention of his person or work (Van der Veer, 2007). In the Soviet Union this was different: in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his work first met with criticism, which was continued after his death in 1934. The first criticisms were largely ideological and can be left aside in this context (Van der Veer, 2000). However, shortly after his death several of his closest collaborators—notably Aleksey Leontiev (1935, 1937) and Pyotr Gal'perin (1935)—began to voice criticism that needs to be taken seriously. Gal'perin, among other things, argued that the distinction between natural and cultural mental processes as made by Vygotsky leads to the unfortunate consequence that children age, say, 7 years may be said to function naturally, outside culture. He pleaded to trace the origin of mediated actions to the “child's first cry”—that is, he believed that the role of cultural, semiotic means should be studied already in the child's proto-language. Second, Gal'perin argued that Vygotsky laid too much emphasis on verbal consciousness and ignored the child's concrete operations in the real world. Vygotsky's claim that education is the driving force of development, Gal'perin deemed “idealistic,” because it suggested that the child's ideas are changed by those of his teacher (the social other) without intervention of the real world. Leontiev elaborated this criticism and gradually developed it to create his so-called “activity theory.” In his view, the subject matter of psychology was “activity as a relationship to reality, to the objects of this reality” (Leontiev, 1935, p. 68). Acknowledging the central role of speech, Leontiev nevertheless claimed that speaking with others, or social interaction in general, could not be the driving force behind changes in ego's consciousness. In his view:

The social nature of the child's mind thus does not reside in the fact that he interacts with others but in the fact that his activity (his relationship to nature) is objectively and socially mediated.

(Leontiev, 1935, p. 74)

Thus, Leontiev shifted the emphasis from speech to concrete operations, with reality mediated by speech. Undoubtedly, this move was motivated by his wish to stay closer to orthodox Marxist thought with its emphasis on the role of concrete labor in the development of human consciousness. Whether Leontiev's view substantially differed from Vygotsky's stance and, if so, whether it constituted an improvement has since been the subject of considerable debate.

### *The Dialogue that Could Not Be*

It is very interesting to note that what Leontiev and Gal'perin wished Vygotsky to do—to shift the emphasis from speech to concrete actions—was to some extent realized in practice by Vygotsky's contemporary Jean Piaget, albeit in his own original way. Just like Vygotsky, the young Piaget attached fundamental importance to language and social interaction, but gradually he began put more emphasis on the importance of the child's concrete operations. It would have been highly interesting to see what happened had these two great scientists been able to communicate and criticize each other's ideas in this respect. What is more, I think it would still be beneficial to confront the two theories more substantially than has been the case to date. I offer just a few examples from an introductory book on Piaget to show what kind of topics might be worth discussing.

the child's ability to profit from training depends on his initial developmental level”... [only] those at a transitional level showed considerable progress ... the child can profit from external information ... only when his cognitive structure is sufficiently prepared ... / ... Interest and learning are best facilitated if the experience presented to the child bears some relevance to what he already knows, but is at the same time sufficiently novel to present incongruities and conflicts ... the child's interest is aroused when an experience is moderately novel.

(Ginsburg & Opper, 1979, pp. 217–219, 226)

This statement seems to deal exactly with the situation that Vygotsky described in discussing his concept of the zone of proximal development. The question to ask might be to what extent the “hints and prompts” discussed by Vygotsky differ from the Piagetian type of education that hoped to create incongruities and conflicts in the child's mind in a transitional stage.

Ginsburg and Opper also offer the following observation:

Adults often believe that once a child has learned the linguistic label for an object, he has available the underlying concept. But Piaget has shown that this is often not the case ... only after a period of cognitive development does the child use these words and understand them in the same way as the more mature person.

(Ginsburg & Opper, 1979, pp. 223)

Is this not the same conclusion that Vygotsky reached in his own research on concept formation? If not, what are the differences? Finally, Ginsburg and Opper formulated what can be called a law of internalization:

First the child physically sorts or otherwise manipulates objects ... later, he can sort the objects solely on a mental level.

(Ginsburg & Opper, 1979, p. 225)

Again, one might ask whether this is fundamentally different from what Vygotsky discussed when describing the internalization of cultural means.

I offer these examples for contemplation, not to argue that Vygotsky and Piaget basically thought along similar lines. But I do believe that many researchers who quote Vygotsky to make some point might just as well have quoted Piaget, who now for them seems outdated, perhaps. A thorough confrontation of both theories by impassionate researchers would be quite beneficial, I believe, for the progress of psychological science. It is high time that we make some fundamental steps in our understanding of the development of the human mind. The replication and criticism of Vygotsky's many research projects against the background of other fundamental theories may contribute to this cause.

## Notes

1. He was born as Lev Simkhovich Vygotsky but changed his patronymic and surname for reasons that have not been fully clarified.

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PART

2

Inter- and  
Intradisciplinary  
Perspectives



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# The Role of Indigenous Psychologies in the Building of Basic Cultural Psychology

Pradeep Chakkarath

## Abstract

In this chapter, the author traces some of the common historical roots and features of indigenous psychology and cultural psychology. He then considers the extent to which the mainstream historiography of psychology's encounter with culture conveys a misleading impression and why correcting this impression is of general importance for a science that deals with human development and functioning in varying socio-historical and cultural environments. Examples from Indian psychology are used to illustrate the potential of indigenous psychology to add to our scientific knowledge. Finally, conclusions are drawn about how and whether indigenous psychological knowledge and methodologies can help the cause of cultural psychology, what can be learned about the research skills that different research environments demand, and what kinds of inequalities hinder a more fruitful exchange of knowledge within the psychological community.

**Keywords:** indigenous psychology, cultural psychology, historiography, ethnocentrism, Indian theories about self-concepts, hybridity, third space

The current psychological literature on the relationship between culture and the human psyche differentiates between subdisciplines and/or approaches on the basis of their historical lines of development, their basic theoretical assumptions, and the research methods they consider appropriate for the investigation of the psychological role of culture. Although their historical lines of development can be traced back quite far into the history of thought, when it comes to the historical impact of the approaches and their scientific merits and the number of scholars representing these fields, the following subdisciplines and/or approaches may be named the most influential:

a. **psychological anthropology**, a research tradition that introduced psychological theories and methods into cross-cultural scientific field work and

had an impact on psychology's cultural turn in the twentieth century (Jahoda, 1982; 1992)

b. **cross-cultural psychology**, which emerged from psychological anthropology and has always been inclined toward mainstream psychology's nomothetic/quantitative approach and an experimental paradigm in which culture is treated like just another quasi-independent variable (Berry et al., 2011)

c. **Soviet Russian cultural historical psychology**, which helped uncover the role of the contextual dependence of human psychological development and the complex process of the cultural mediation of meaning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1930/1978; Wertsch, 1985)

d. **cultural psychology**, which (in its current form) owes much of its interdisciplinary character, its focus on the "meaning making process" in

human action and experience, to the Soviet school and is also characterized by its corresponding preference for qualitative and interpretative methods (e.g., Boesch, 1991, 1996; Bruner, 1987, 1991; Chakkarath & Straub, in press; Cole, 1996; Lonner & Hayes, 2007; Ratner, 2002; Shweder, 1990; Valsiner, 2009)

e. **indigenous psychology**, which shares many perspectives with cultural psychology, but (in its current form) resulted from the dissatisfaction with the historically and politically rooted dominance of certain other psychological disciplines (including cultural psychology) and the frequently insufficient expertise of their representatives when pursuing their goals in other cultural contexts than their own (e.g., Chakkarath, in press; Ho, 1998; Kim & Berry, 1993; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006).

Taken together, these fields are frequently and collectively referred to as “culture-sensitive,” “culture-inclusive,” or “culture-informed” psychology. Although they consider themselves culture-sensitive, they nonetheless vary as regards the extent to which they agree or disagree that (1) psychology should follow the nomothetic paradigm of the natural sciences and (2) the established methodological standards and procedures of natural scientific psychology will enable us to deal with the psychological role of cultural phenomena. It is also the extent of agreement or disagreement with these positions that determines whether the positions mentioned above consider themselves to be more a subdiscipline or an alternative, new conception of mainstream psychology—that is, a new paradigm for doing psychological research and analysis.

In the following, I will focus on the latest of the culture-inclusive approaches to psychology: indigenous psychology. I will try to characterize its self-understanding and to evaluate its potential to refine the approach of cultural psychology, the discipline it is most closely related to. In doing so, I will first sketch the historical development of indigenous psychology and its historical relationship to cultural and cross-cultural psychology. I am not beginning this chapter with a historical sketch merely to follow academic convention but, rather, to show that even the historiography of psychology, including culture-informed psychology, reveals shortcomings that are interesting for our understanding of the importance of perspectives from indigenous psychology. That will also help to show why the relationship between indigenous and cross-cultural psychology is so distant while

indigenous and cultural psychology bear a strong family resemblance. In the next step, I will present some of the main features and goals of indigenous psychology as they are portrayed by prominent representatives of the field. There, I will also take the opportunity to critically comment on that portrayal and to add to it. Drawing on examples from Indian psychology (and contrasting them with stereotypical views that are deeply embedded in Western accounts of the “Asian” and the “Indian psyche”), I will then try to illustrate the impact indigenous psychological theories can have on various aspects of human development and why this should have the attention of psychology in general. Finally, in the same line, I will summarize the potential of an indigenous approach to improve and refine the foundations and state of the art of cultural psychology.

### **Cross-Cultural, Cultural, and Indigenous Psychology: A Historical Sketch** *A Critical View of the Mainstream Historiography of Psychology*

The mainstream historiography of psychology, particularly as written by Western historiographers, portrays psychology as a comparatively young scientific discipline rooted in the scientific enthusiasm of eighteenth century’s European Enlightenment and institutionalized at Western universities in the late nineteenth century. This narrow, Eurocentric, and misleading but dominant historical view stems from a characterization of psychology not based on its broad range of research topics and questions but primarily on its quantitatively oriented research methods. These methods were devised by early scholars of the field in accordance with Descartes’, Newton’s, and Boyle’s models of rigorous science as exemplified by then modern astronomy, physics, and chemistry. Thus, observation, experiments, and the quantitative processing of data were regarded as the *via regia* to discover the universal natural, rationally understandable laws governing the human psyche. The year in which Wilhelm Wundt established the first “Institute for Experimental Psychology” at the University of Leipzig, 1879, is commonly marked as the founding year of psychology as a science. However, Wundt himself had a far less reductionist idea of psychology in mind. Rather, he proposed a culture-inclusive and multimethodological psychology that he called “dual psychology” and that was meant to do justice to the investigation of man as a natural as well as a cultural being. Thus, his conception represents the

variety of topics and approaches that were to be found even in the nineteenth-century beginnings of psychology far more appropriately than common historiography does (Wundt, 1900–1920). For the history of the more recent culture-sensitive subdisciplines and approaches to psychology, it is particularly significant that nineteenth-century psychology (along with philology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and others) was among the very first institutionalized disciplines to apply a culturalistic perspective to the social sciences (Jahoda, 2011). The same perspective showed up in Wundt's conception of a culture-integrative psychology to which he dedicated the 10 volumes of his *Folk Psychology (Völkerpsychologie)*. Within that framework, Wundt, one of the founders of physiological and experimental psychology, declared that in addition to investigating the elementary mental processes using natural scientific methods, psychology also needed to investigate the higher or more complex processes and products of the mind like language, religion, myths, art, and social practices. Because these higher mental processes are historically shaped, creative, and dynamic phenomena that cannot be brought under control in a laboratory, psychology, according to Wundt, needed to avail itself of knowledge and methods from the social sciences and the humanities as well (Diriwächter, 2011). Terminologically and intellectually, Wundt's conception of folk psychology reflected an influential tradition of social scientific thought that found its well-documented expression even earlier in the *Journal of Folk Psychology and Linguistics (Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft)* founded by Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal in 1860. The journal served as an interdisciplinary panel for psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, ethnologists, and historians, all with a common interest in the investigation of different languages, myths, institutions, diffusion processes, thinking and communication styles, differences in education and learning, personal and interpersonal perception as well as in the dynamic and reciprocal effects within all these domains. Thus, this early conception of a culture-inclusive psychology embraced topics and perspectives that could be traced back to scholars as different as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt. These scholars themselves can be seen in a line of thought that arose as a critical assessment of the adequacy of the Newtonian paradigm for the field of the social sciences.

One of the leading proponents of that criticism was Giambattista Vico. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Vico (1725/1968) laid the ground for a social scientific theory that did not conceive of human beings as simply mechanically functioning entities, as proposed within the mathematical framework of the natural sciences. Vico stressed that the human realm is not ruled exclusively by foreseeable regularities but much more by circumstance, coincidence, opportunity, chance, and a wide range of complex psychological phenomena like love, hatred, courage, fear, indecision, capriciousness, heedlessness, and fantasy. This complexity cannot be described and understood in terms of modern physics or any other kind of methodological monism, especially if one considers that nature, society, individual, and psyche are interdependent and in constant flux. Because humans are capable of giving meaning to things, events, themselves, and the historical dimensions of the world and their existence, they need to be understood in their own terms and by using methods that allow us to analyze the processes and structures of the individual as well as the collective production of meaning.

As this short recapitulation of an influential line of thought in the history of social science and psychology shows, it is not as clear as many historiographers of psychology suggest why the natural science paradigm became so powerful in twentieth-century psychology. They propose that culture as a psychological topic was not taken seriously before the twentieth century, before psychological instruments were used in anthropology, before the Russian school of Vygotsky investigated the influence of socio-cultural aspects on human development, and before cross-cultural psychology—the nomothetic approach to culture-inclusive psychology—was formally acknowledged as a subdiscipline of psychology. However, highly sophisticated theorizing about the cultural nature of man has existed for centuries. If we only identified as beginnings those that follow natural science models, we would be ignoring previous theorizing and the quality thereof. This momentous decision, however, could remain incomprehensible if the factors leading to the self-understanding of our discipline and the cultural narrations about its development are not investigated using a cultural and indigenous psychological approach. To my knowledge, such an analysis of the mainstream historiography of psychology has never been conducted. However, it would help us understand why important contributions to the changed

and much more diverse field that now makes up what we call “psychology” were overlooked and did not find the recognition they deserve. In the following, I will provide a short example of early contributions to our field of research that foreshadowed many of the topics, theories, and methodologies at the core of approaches like cultural and indigenous psychology.

### ***Missionaries as Forerunners of Cultural and Indigenous Psychology***

When the Age of Discovery began in the late fifteenth century and European overseas expansion led to the rise of colonial empires in remote parts of the world, there was an increase in reports and reflections on non-European cultures, expedited by the introduction of Gutenberg’s printing press. Interestingly, at a time when Christian mission was closely linked to European imperialism, the main progress in the attempt to methodically investigate foreign cultures and their members was achieved by sixteenth-century missionaries. Perhaps the most impressive account in this regard was given by the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún in Mexico.

Sahagún studied at the University of Salamanca, the birthplace of modern Western linguistics and philology. He was therefore very much aware of the complex problems involved in spreading the word of the Gospel among the natives who only spoke Nahuatl and were unable to understand Spanish, Latin, or any other European language. So Sahagún, who was to stay two-thirds of his long life in Mexico, trained some of the natives in Spanish and field observation, had them interview indigenous experts, and took the data collected as well as data from his own observations as a starting point for the construction of questionnaires written in Nahuatl. He selected three groups of Nahuatl experts from three different regions, who studied the data collected and confirmed that the testimonies Sahagún had gathered were authentic and not biased by Christian or Spanish attitudes or points of view. He sorted the information into three categories or main themes: information related to gods, religious beliefs, and religious practice; information related to the “human sphere”; and information related to “facts of nature.” It took Sahagún decades to complete his project of documenting the indigenous perspectives on religion, history, aspects of social life (e.g., characterizations of good and bad qualities in parents as well as children, the respondents’ perceptions of others—for example,

neighboring peoples and European foreigners), and information about the geophysical environment, including flora and fauna. The product was his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, later known as *Florentine Codex*, a bilingual opus written in Nahuatl and Spanish, supplemented by hundreds of ethnographic illustrations and various comments by Sahagún himself (Leon-Portilla, 2002).

Sahagún was not the only missionary who refined social scientific fieldwork in the sixteenth century. Many examples can also be taken from the Jesuits’ approach to intercultural perspective-taking. In China, for example, they further developed their accommodation method: They acquired profound general and intellectual knowledge of the host society, dressed, behaved, and talked like the members of the various Chinese societal groups—especially the literate elite because they were the ones most interested in the Western scientific knowledge that the Jesuits were able to offer and that served as a common ground of understanding on which the missionary work could be built. The Jesuits applied psychological assumptions in the field of intercultural communication. Instead of simply trying to convey Christian concepts and beliefs to the Chinese, they tried to find out what field of knowledge their Chinese interaction partners were especially interested in, what they had already contributed to that field, and what kind of Western knowledge could serve as a valuable contribution to the Chinese body of knowledge. Thus, they first tried to identify culture-specific intellectual interests that promised a successful intercultural exchange and then took that exchange as a starting point for further exchange on various levels and topics, including religion and philosophy. One famous example of this method was Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci’s “Treatise on Mnemonic Arts,” which he wrote to teach Western memorization techniques to the Chinese. Ricci, who had studied the Chinese and their languages for more than a decade before writing his book, chose this topic cognizant of the importance of memorizing vast amounts of text from the Chinese classics when preparing to apply for a position in Chinese civil service administration. At least in Ricci’s case, the Chinese nobility and literati welcomed his efforts and—as he had expected—became interested in learning more about Western and Christian thinking in general.

Like Sahagún, many of these missionaries developed outstanding approaches to methodically investigating a foreign culture to understand

how people from that culture view and understand the world. They learned the languages of the cultures they were staying in fluently, became familiar with the natives' oral and written traditions, and employed the method of long-term interactive and non-interactive observation in manifold ways. Although these missionaries' main goal was always to promote their faith and to persuade the natives to convert to Christianity, the methods they used to achieve this goal were culture-sensitive and rooted in the methodological, hermeneutical, and psychological question about how beliefs, worldviews, and concepts can be translated into the meaning systems of a foreign culture without naively tapping into the pitfalls of ethnocentrism. Thus, these missionaries became forerunners of cultural anthropology, ethnolinguistics, and cultural psychology. In so far as they were interested in the indigenous cultures and mindsets of their members, they were also pursuing one of the main goals of indigenous psychology: acknowledging that scientific theories have a certain cultural and historical range and that in many cases they may not provide the concepts, the methodological equipment, or the intercultural competence to adequately deal with the foreign and the others.

Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church criticized many of the missionary field workers for their attempts to combine Catholic tenets with elements of the indigenous (e.g., Nahua or Confucian) belief systems. Sahagún's work, for example, was not published until the early nineteenth century. The Spanish inquisition prevented the publication, because—willingly or unwillingly—it attested to a remarkably high level of civilization of the Nahua people and their culture, even before their conversion to Christianity. Moreover, because Sahagún's emic approach had allowed the indigenous people to convey their own views, the 12 volumes of the Florentine Codex contained depictions of the Spanish that were not altogether favorable. After publication, it contributed to that century's culturalist perspectives in the social sciences but was mainly ignored by the historiography of the social sciences, including the historiography of psychology, even of culture-inclusive psychology.

### ***Historiography and Scientific Importance of an Indigenous Psychological Perspective***

Western historiographies convey a number of assumptions about culture-sensitive psychology, including the following:

- Compared to Western psychological thinking and research, as it was laid down in the nineteenth century within the framework of the laboratory-based experimental and nomothetic paradigm, all previous thinking and research of a psychological nature is prescientific.

- The academic institutionalization of culture-sensitive psychology became possible as soon as psychology conceived of culture as one more independent variable within an experimental or quasi-experimental research design. Because that—at least as a broader movement—did not take place before the twentieth century, all earlier approaches to the psychological investigation of the relationship between culture and humans were, scientifically speaking, inadequate and unsuitable.

- The history of psychology is a success story of scientific progress. Within this linear understanding of progress, it seems that culture-sensitive psychology developed from prescientific speculation during the Early Modern Age, to naïve conceptions of “folk psychology” in the nineteenth century, to the testing and measuring procedures within psychological anthropology at the turn of the twentieth century, and finally to cross-cultural psychology, the nomothetic approach of culture-informed psychology.

- Against this background, cultural psychology then appears to be a new and critical endeavor that, just a couple of decades ago, resulted from dissatisfaction with cross-cultural psychology's ways of dealing with the topic of culture.

- Finally, indigenous psychology appears to be the latest of the branches of culture-sensitive psychology and seems to have its beginnings within the academic post-Colonial protest movement against imperialistically imposed (culture-insensitive) guidelines and standards of the best way to do culture-informed psychology.

As the few examples given above have shown, and as I tried to show in more detail elsewhere (Chakkarath, 2003), this historiographical account is unconvincing. Essential features of both cultural and indigenous psychology can be traced back at least to the culture-informed scientific fieldwork performed in the sixteenth century, shortly after Europe's discovery of distant cultures in the West and the East. Thus, achievements by researchers like Sahagún and Ricci took place far before the scientific revolution and far before the culturalization of the social sciences in the nineteenth century. Scholars like Vico, Herder,

and Humboldt emphasized early that humans, because they are social, cultural, and self-conscious beings who give meaning to their lives, actions, and beliefs, cannot be scientifically investigated within the experimental and mathematical-statistical paradigm of modern physics. Against this history of ideas, nomothetic approaches to the investigation of the cultural dimension of the human psyche do not appear to be a plausible consequence of consecutive linear steps toward cross-cultural psychology. Rather, nineteenth-century psychology can be seen as an interruption of a scientific tradition that foreshadowed core positions and methodological convictions held by cultural and indigenous psychology until today.

With regard to the psychological aspects of historiography and what is usually called “scientific progress,” there are some interesting lessons to be learned that can be related to important theories of the philosophy of science and moreover to Wundt’s idea of a dual psychology. Like Herbert Butterfield (1949), Michael Polanyi, and Stephen Toulmin (1961) before him, it was especially Thomas Kuhn (1970) who tried to explain scientific progress—that is, the success of certain paradigms over others—by drawing upon concepts taken from cognitive and social psychology. His model of paradigmatic change makes use of Butterfield’s theory about “mental transpositions” that take place when scientists—primarily in times of considerable and rapid social change—put on new “thinking-caps” that help them to assess various phenomena in a new way so that they can still be interpreted and understood although the contextual conditions and familiar frameworks of thinking might be changing. Kuhn uses the term *gestalt switch* to describe the change within the cognitive process that supports the paradigmatic change. We could also call it a change within the scientist’s mindset.

If we take this psychological view on the history and the historiography of psychology seriously, it becomes obvious that this perspective is an essential aspect of what Wundt called the “higher” mental faculties and processes of our mind, which he—in line with Vico, Herder, Humboldt, Lazarus, Steinthal, and others—wanted to be investigated so that we would understand the inter-relationship between onto- and phylogenesis and between the individual psyche and the social and cultural conditions of its functioning and development. Moreover, this perspective demands a culture-sensitive approach to investigation because different socio-cultural and

historical contexts might foster different paths of individual and social development, including the development of scientific thinking. These differences could include the concept of development, which is not necessarily as tightly linked to the concept of science as it is in the dominating Western traditions of thought. Concepts like these might function as thinking caps, which might be useful in a certain regard but might also be a hindrance to a sounder understanding of the psychological meaning of culture in the world of meaning-making humans (Bruner, 1987; 1991). It might also prevent us from identifying and acknowledging valuable contributions to our discipline because having a certain mindset prevents us, for example, from expecting contributions to culture-sensitive science from missionaries and within the early times of Western colonialism. Moreover, the evaluation of the quality of these contributions—especially within a culture-specific understanding of development and progress—might be guided by presentist judgments (i.e., by measuring achievements of the past against our current understanding of proper science). This is not only true in diachronic perspective—that is, the genesis of science over time in its own culture as well as in other cultures—but also in synchronic perspective (e.g., with regard to judgments about different current approaches within a given culture as well as across cultures). Here, we also have to face one of the most problematic impediments when dealing with the psychological investigation of culture: culturally and historically embedded stereotypes about “us” and the “others,” and the dense bundle of stereotypes known as ethnocentrism (Chakkarath, 2010c).

It should be clear that the psychological investigation of these aspects in a culture-sensitive way can profit considerably from conceiving of certain traditions of doing psychology as indigenous traditions. Of course, that includes Western psychology and all its subdisciplines as well and is not challenged by Western psychology’s claim that it is oriented toward universalism because (1) the frequent reiteration of its claim of universal validity might be one of its many indigenous features, and (2) even most non-Western conceptions of psychology that we know of share the very same claim. A closer look at some of the key features of current indigenous psychology as well as some examples from Indian psychology, which I will present in the next section of this chapter, will help illustrate these points.

As a first result, we should keep in mind that only a proper historiography of psychology can help us understand the development of cultural and indigenous psychology (Pickren, 2009), and that, at the same time, it is an indigenous psychological perspective that can help us develop that kind of historiography. It is also an indigenous psychological perspective that helps to arrive at a sounder and *culturally informed* understanding of psychology as a cultural construction (Marsella, 2009) and its role in shaping the cultural and mental frameworks of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

### **Indigenous Psychology** *The Recent Development of Indigenous Psychology*

*Indigenous psychology* is a term that characterizes the latest approach within culturally informed or culture-sensitive psychology that aims to deal more appropriately with the relationship between culture and the human psyche. Although frequently the beginning of indigenous psychology is associated with the books and articles that first started using the term in the 1970s, as we saw in the historical sketch given above, key elements of the approach can be traced back much further, at least to the theoretical and methodological attempts of certain sixteenth-century missionaries to make learning about the perspectives of members of indigenous cultures an essential part of empirical social scientific work by letting those members speak for themselves. Within the more recent discussions about the status quo of psychology, however, one notices that, at least in Europe, many of the debates within so-called “critical psychology”—especially as initiated by the German psychologist Klaus Holzkamp in the mid-1960s—concerned topics and questions broached by cultural but also by indigenous psychologists. A strong critic of behaviorism, Holzkamp drew upon the theoretical foundations of the Russian socio-historical school of psychology and analyzed phenomena like perception, cognition, and motivation as historically and culturally shaped concepts of meaning. Moreover, his critical psychology also focused on aspects of power and power differences in relationships and society as well as their effect not only on the psycho-social well-being of individuals and groups but also on the success of certain psychological theories. As for the latter, critical psychology took up many elements of Thomas Kuhn’s analyses of the mechanisms behind what is considered scientific progress. Although cultural psychologists and

indigenous psychologists share many of critical psychology’s point of views, the topic of power and how it has been exercised in spreading Western psychology all over the world plays a much more important role in the indigenous psychology literature. Thus, it is not surprising that indigenous psychology, at least in this regard, echoes the main themes of postcolonial studies, which frequently reflect on the lasting psychological effects of colonialism, including the role of science as one of colonialism’s most effective instruments. Within the latest discussions of indigenous psychology, the question of power with respect to various levels of human relationships is a crucial one. Critical psychology and cultural psychology have been focusing more closely on intracultural aspects of unequal power distribution—for example, debates about appropriate scientific approaches (and the dominance of quantitative methods) or gender-related issues. Indigenous psychology adds a focus to the intercultural, international, and global effects of power (e.g., the role and effects of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and scientific hegemony).

Apart from this specific point of view, indigenous psychologists and cultural psychologists often cite the same intellectual sources. Thus, the contributions of Jerome Bruner and Ernst Boesch, the founders of twentieth-century cultural psychology, also play a prominent role in indigenous psychology. This is especially true for their criticism of mainstream psychology’s attempt to decontextualize human behavior, thought, and feelings, an effort that lost sight of human beings as intentionally acting individuals who are deeply embedded in a complex web of culturally mediated meanings from birth on. According to this picture, humans are bound to this web and at the same time take part in weaving and modifying the web. Although these webs are the scaffolds of what we call culture and are therefore universal, the structures themselves are different and even vary within a given society and its subgroups. They also vary between people from different regions and environments and between people with different socio-cultural histories, worldviews, and value and belief systems. As we saw above, these contributions to the European history of science were quite early and elaborate but were superseded by the paradigm of natural science as it was promoted by biological and psychological behaviorism.

Along the lines drawn by critical psychologists and cultural psychologists and dating back at least to Vico, scholars from non-European and non-American countries, many of whom had become



acquainted with Western psychology during a period of colonialization, began evaluating the adequacy of Western psychological theories and procedures for their indigenous populations. One of the first attempts to contrast a specific national psychology with mainstream (especially U.S. American) psychology was Berry's (1974) portrait of a "Canadian psychology." A few years later, Rieber (1977) used the term *indigenous psychology* to describe early nineteenth-century attempts to develop an American psychology that would fit the genuine socio-historical and intellectual context of the United States. Interestingly, however, most assessments in this direction came from countries that were not usually represented in the samples of mainstream psychology: the so-called "WEIRD" samples of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic societies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Sinha (1969, 1984, 1986) documented the necessity of indigenizing Western psychology to fit the people and their specific cultural environments in India; Doi (1973) and Azuma (1986) followed suit in Japan, Diaz-Guerrero (1977) in Mexico, Enriquez (1977, 1978, 1990, 1993) in the Philippines, Ho (1982, 1998) in China and other East-Asian countries, Yang (1986, 2000) in Taiwan, and Kim (Kim & Berry, 1993, Kim, 2001; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006) in the Republic of Korea. Moreover, *Indigenous Psychologies* was also the title of a frequently cited collection of essays documenting the early attention that the approach received at the interface of anthropology and psychology (Heelas & Lock, 1981).

Of the earlier publications mentioned above, some not only request modifications of Western approaches to make them fit non-Western contexts and subjects, but they also doubt the general scientific value of some core Western concepts when it comes to merely understanding psychological phenomena in certain cultures. The probably best-known example of this challenge to Western psychology is Takeo Doi's (1973) criticism of Western attachment theory and his assumption that the Japanese concept of *amae* represents a culture-specific form of interpersonal behavior and related personal feelings that can only be understood within the semantics of the Japanese language. He offered various approximate translations (e.g., "indulgent dependency" or "craving for affection") that are meant to describe the unique relationship between Japanese mothers and their children and that he sums up as "personal freedom within safety and dependence,"

emphasizing that the Western notion of autonomy, which is understood to contrast with dependence, is not applicable to the specific make-up of the Japanese psyche. Within the *amae* relationship, the mother exercises a maximum of indulgence and care that, according to Doi, serves as the basis for the child's efforts to become an autonomous person in the Japanese sense. According to Western attachment theory, an overprotective mother hinders her child's autonomy development and is therefore evaluated as problematic. However, the Japanese mother experiences herself as warranting her child's positive development, which makes her feel fulfilled and happy. Doi thus questions Western attachment theory's characterizations and categorizations of secure as opposed to insecure types of children and mother-child relationships. He then uses his analyses to develop a more general theory on the indigenous specifics of the Japanese understanding of individuality, autonomy, responsibility, freedom, and self, thereby showing the broader relevance of *amae* for a deeper psychological understanding of the Japanese culture and its members.

Some of the main aspects of Doi's theory, especially his insistence on the strictly indigenous and unique nature of self-development in Japan, have been criticized (e.g., Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2006). Nonetheless, his assessment that the range of Western attachment theory is culturally restricted was also welcomed within Western psychology (Rothbaum & Morelli, 2005) and psycho-analysis (e.g., Johnson, 1993) and thus serves as one of only a few examples of the success of a non-Western theory in Western psychology. Like Doi, other researchers, including cross-cultural, cultural, and indigenous psychologists, identified concepts they believed to be culture-specific—that is, indigenous (for a list of researchers, countries, and examples, see Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Similarly, the fields of cultural psychiatry and counseling have identified indigenous features of mental illness and therapy as well as different attitudes toward the "abnormal" in different cultures (Gielen, Fish, & Draguns, 2004; Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, & Trimble, 2002) that are of interest for indigenous psychological perspectives. Taken together, the sum of examples and the perspectives taken by some authors might create the impression that indigenous psychology advocates a strong cultural relativism that shows up when, for example, the term *indigenous psychology* is replaced by *indigenous psychologies*. However, as we will see, this may only be true for a minority

of psychologists, even for a minority of those who would call themselves indigenous psychologists. All in all, one can state that indigenous psychology is currently undergoing a phase of self-discovery as can be seen in the special issue of *Applied Psychology: An International Review* (1999) as well as in the variety of topics and methodological approaches documented in the *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, the journal of the *Asian Association of Social Psychology (AASP)*, which was founded in 1995. A special issue published in 2000 documents the historical, philosophical, and methodological debates that have continued since then (e.g., see Greenfield, 2000; Jing & Fu, 2001; Kim, 2001; Kim, Park, & Park 2000; Moghaddam, 1987; Shams, 2002; Shweder, 2000; Sinha, 1998; Triandis, 2000; Yang, 2000; see also the additional special issues on indigenous psychologies of *Australian Psychologist*, 2000, *Asian Journal of Psychology*, 2005, *The Psychologist*, 2005, and the *International Journal of Psychology*, 2005 and 2006). The manifold spectrum of the field is also well-documented in two books edited by Kim and Berry (1993) and Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006). Although both publications show that the movement is represented by psychologists from many corners of the world, they also show the striking number of Asian psychologists among its prominent spokespeople. For example, the increasing role of indigenous psychology in India is tellingly documented in the so-called “Pondicherry Manifesto of Indian Psychology” (2002). Signed by 160 Indian psychologists in 2002 (among them some of the most prominent Indian researchers), the manifesto characterizes psychology in India as a “western transplant, unable to connect with the Indian ethos and concurrent community conditions (...) by and large imitative and replicative of western studies, lacking in originality and unable to cover or break any new ground” (p. 168). Also, the first International Conference of Indigenous and Cultural Psychology was held in Asia (Indonesia) in 2010. On that occasion, the *Asian Association of Indigenous and Cultural Psychology* was launched and the publication of the *Asian Journal of Indigenous and Cultural Psychology* announced.

### ***On the Current State of Indigenous Psychology***

As mentioned above, the first book entitled *Indigenous Psychologies* (Heelas & Lock, 1981) was published in the early 1980s and combined perspectives from cultural anthropology and psychology.

Whereas that book focused on the “anthropology of the self,” a later book edited by Enriquez (1990) presented the first collection of international essays addressing a larger number of more genuinely psychological topics (with a clear emphasis, however, on “Filipino psychology”), thus documenting the broad spectrum of a field that the title of the book identified as *Indigenous Psychology*. Three years later, Kim and Berry (1993) published a volume with a title focusing again on numerous *Indigenous Psychologies*. Their book gained more recognition, probably in part because the selection of topics as well as the higher number of authors from different countries showed that the movement had already gained momentum. In the introduction to that book, the editors suggested that we conceive of indigenous psychologies “as the scientific study of human behavior (or the mind) that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its people” (Kim & Berry, 1993, p. 2). Although this definition gives us a glimpse of the direction of impact the investigation of indigenous psychologies might have on mainstream psychology’s claim of universal validity, it also raises questions about the character and aims of indigenous psychologies. First, it is almost impossible to verify whether a tradition of psychological study was solely developed within a given region and only for the people of that region. From what we know about the history of science, we may assume that scientific knowledge—as almost any cultural achievement—has been spread across regions and cultures since the beginning of scientific thinking. We may also assume that one of the reasons why the diffusion of psychological knowledge across cultural boundaries was frequently successful is that various cultures found at least some of the foreign psychological theories applicable to themselves. So it seems more plausible that in many cases we are dealing with indigenous psychologies that resulted from import and *indigenization*. We need to remember that, for most of history, human societies did not develop psychologies solely for themselves and that many societies were willing and quite flexible in integrating foreign knowledge into an already existing indigenous body of knowledge. The readiness of European regions to import U.S. American psychology since the early twentieth century is a very prominent example of the continuity of this development. However, a process in which indigenous psychologies were designed hermetically within a specific region and only for that region’s people,

and then exported into the regional and cultural contexts of other people, would have to be considered an imposition. A prominent example of this kind of process—at least if we take the critical assessment by many Asian, African, and Latin American psychologists seriously—is the export of psychology during European imperialism and colonization (Holdstock, 2000; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Moghaddam, 1987; Paranjpe, 2002). Moreover, with regard to the validity and reach of psychological theories, the definition of indigenous psychologies as given above suggests a certain relativist position that, according to some researchers in this field, actually became quite influential.

A third collection of essays (*Indigenous and Cultural Psychology*) edited by Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) documents the development of indigenous psychology since then and its state of the art in the early twenty-first century. In part, the title signals how the issues mentioned above entered the discussion about the character and goals of the discipline. Instead of highlighting several indigenous psychologies, the title advocates one indigenous psychology—that is, it focuses more on one overarching conceptual and scientific approach than on multiple traditions of psychological thinking. In addition, the title (as does the whole book) emphasizes indigenous psychology's familial relationship to cultural psychology.

In light of the debates mentioned above and by extending and modifying Kim and Berry's (1993, pp. 3–4) list of six aspects of indigenous psychology, Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) provided a list of 10 aspects that, against the background of discussions I have portrayed so far, reflect how the discipline is striving for a clearer scientific profile. I paraphrase:

1. Indigenous psychology emphasizes the need to investigate psychological phenomena in their specific ecological, historical, and socio-cultural contexts.

2. It does not, as the term might suggest and as many of the leading cultural and psychological anthropologists of the twentieth century did, concentrate on the investigation of so-called “exotic” people in distant regions of the world. Rather, it aims to investigate all cultural and ethnic groups. Of course, this includes the WEIRD samples, but it recognizes them as only one very specific sample that neither reflects the variety

of groups in developed Western societies nor the plethora of cultures and subcultures distributed across the world.

3. Indigenous psychology advocates the use of multiple methods and various research designs and does not consider an exclusively quantitative research design appropriate for dealing with a variety of cultural environments and subjects.

4. Indigenous psychology considers a close cooperation between “insiders” and “outsiders”—that is, the conflation of internal and external views, a sine qua non for the development of integrative theories about the relationship between culture and individuals.

5. Psychologists within mainstream Western psychology have been testing the hypotheses that are based on Western samples using new samples in foreign cultures. Thus, they have mainly been testing the ethnocentrically biased, ready-made psychological theories formulated by the specific sample of psychologists they belong to. Indigenous psychology acknowledges that individuals in all cultures have a complex and developed, practical and episodic, understanding of themselves. However, most of them are not trained academically to identify and describe the structures and processes that are the grounds for the development of such understandings. It is therefore the task of indigenous psychology to translate and arrange the indigenous subjects' knowledge in a way that allows for accurate psychological testing.

6. Indigenous psychology pushes for the integration of various perspectives without advocating various psychologies. In other words, it is not to be equated with cultural relativism but rather with a culture-informed and genuinely integrative psychological approach. At the same time, facing the claim that there may be many examples of indigenous concepts that do not have an equivalent translation in other languages, indigenous psychology aims to verify the psychological relevance of these concepts. In this regard, it has two complementary goals: to identify truly indigenous psychological phenomena and, at the same time, to more thoroughly test psychological theories that claim universal validity.

7. Although there are attempts to stress the relevance of philosophies, religions, and other worldviews within indigenous psychology, indigenous psychology should not be equated with a thought tradition of a specific culture. To prove

that any given thought tradition has psychological relevance, its hypotheses need to be translated into psychological concepts and empirically tested.

8. Humans are culturally shaped agents of their culture who themselves stabilize as well as change it. They are the subjects as well as the objects of psychological research who not only possess insight into their inner and outer worlds but also send and receive communications about their and others' insights. To deal with this complexity adequately, researchers must integrate the perspectives taken by all individuals participating in the interactions under investigation, including their own scientific perspective.

9. Indigenous psychology supports an interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of culture. It should be clear that, by definition, any culture-informed psychology should take advantage of knowledge provided by other scientific disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, philosophy, philology, the science of religion, history).

10. Finally, according to indigenous psychology, indigenization from without can be as useful and necessary as indigenization from within. "Indigenization from without" refers to the importation of already existing psychological theories and methods into another culture and the process of their adaptation to the cultural and environmental specificities of the other culture. "Indigenization from within" refers to the development of theories and methods within a certain culture, based on indigenous knowledge; of course, this "internal" knowledge can also be exported to refine general psychological knowledge.

This characterization of indigenous psychology contains key features emphasized by most researchers within the field. However, although certain features are highlighted, others are not mentioned at all or downplayed, thus reflecting a certain ambivalence toward particular issues that reflects the differing views held by different researchers.

For example, as I mentioned before, the list attempts to avoid the impression that indigenous psychology advocates cultural relativism, which might be the reason why the term indigenous psychology is favored over the term indigenous psychologies. However, without going in depth into the fields of the philosophy of science and epistemology, let us simply note that in one way or another, the position

of cultural relativism has been held by or attributed to many different prominent social scientists (e.g., Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Clifford Geertz, Kenneth Gergen, Richard Shweder) and has played and still plays an important role as a heuristic and critical tool in cultural anthropology as well as other cultural sciences. It is not an unscientific position, but one that characterizes specific traditions and schools, cultures of scientific thinking, so to speak. As such, from a scientific point of view, it is nothing to worry about (contrary to the reservations of prominent cross-cultural psychologists like Poortinga, 1999, and Triandis, 2000) but, rather, something we need to deal with scientifically (Geertz, 1984). Moreover, if we take the approach called indigenous psychology seriously, we should be open to the possibility that we may find psychological phenomena that can only be found in certain cultures and contexts or that function differently across cultures—that is, play a different role for different people who are embedded in different webs of meaning. We would then call these phenomena indigenous. If, however, indigenous psychology is not open to that perspective and considers itself an approach that is exclusively interested in universals, then it becomes a mere complimentary science to mainstream psychology and I am not sure if that would fit its self-understanding.

The list given above also shows an ambivalent attitude toward the role of religions and other worldviews. On the one hand, it emphasizes that we should not hasten to view historically developed worldviews or any other traditions of thought that somehow address psychological issues as relevant for indigenous psychology. On the other hand, many examples of so-called "indigenous concepts" presented in various studies are embedded in the context of religions or other worldviews, which are also frequently used to explain certain aspects of human thought and behavior. Although it is certainly true that we need to prove empirically the psychological relevance of these kinds of theories, it is also true that before doing so we need to render more precisely the theories in question and also evaluate whether there are indigenous theories of psychological relevance. Therefore, indigenous psychology should consider as one of its tasks and competencies the identification and accurate presentation of indigenous theories that have hitherto been ignored by mainstream psychology. In this regard, it is also important to note that the relevance of these kinds of indigenous theories should not depend solely on

their successful translation into the nomenclature of previously existing theories but on the evaluation of the role they play within the theory of origin. In addition, if indigenous psychology shares the cultural psychologist's conviction that we need to investigate psychological phenomena in their specific ecological, historical, and socio-cultural contexts, then it should acknowledge that these contexts are often co-constructed, structured, and considerably influenced by religions and other worldviews.

Against the background of the socio-historical aspects of psychology and their importance as outlined in the first section of this chapter, let us add a final comment: Indigenous psychology should consider the analysis of psychology's development to be one of its main tasks, especially with regard to indigenous and national but also global aspects. Some researchers highlight the effects of colonialism and the colonialists' psychology on the people living in former colonies and also note that the recent emergence of indigenous psychology is related to post-Colonial reassessments of the socio-cultural impact of Western science in general (Bhatia, 2002; Marsella, 2009; Moghaddam, 1987; Smith, 1999). Others tend to deal with these issues at the periphery of their work or even largely ignore them. However, ignorance toward these aspects will fail to do justice to the goal of properly understanding all aspects involved in human psychological development. Therefore, these issues should not be left to historians, sociologists, and politicians but should be of utmost importance to psychologists, especially to psychologists interested in indigenous perspectives.

I will return to this characterization of indigenous psychology in the last part of the chapter, but now, following this portrayal, I believe it is necessary to raise the question concerning the extent to which the aims of indigenous psychology listed above differ from those of cultural psychology. As we saw above in the historical sketch of early culture-sensitive field research, both the indigenous psychology approach and the cultural psychology approach can be traced back to the same historical beginnings. It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to list the main characteristics of cultural psychology, but I will say this: I cannot help getting the impression that most of the foundational work outlining cultural psychology's program and self-understanding proposes a very similar view of humans as culturally shaped shapers as well as very similar perspectives on how to proceed methodologically when investigating the human psyche in a culturally informed way (Ratner,

2002; Straub, 2006). Because the question of what cultural psychology can learn from the indigenous approach is at the center of this chapter, it needs to be addressed. However, before I attempt to propose an answer, I think it would be appropriate to at least give an exemplary sketch of an indigenous psychological perspective on a key topic of psychology in general, to show how it helps to decrease stereotypical and ethnocentric perceptions of the "other" that are deeply embedded in our cultures, including the sciences, and to show how it might help refine our understanding of the inseparable relationship between culture and humans, an endeavor that cultural and indigenous psychology share.

### ***Psychology of the Indian Self: Eurocentric and Indigenous Views***

#### **STEREOTYPES IN THE WESTERN VIEW**

##### **OF ASIA AND INDIA**

There is a long and influential Western tradition of viewing the regions and peoples living to the east of Europe, the formerly so-called "Orient" and the "Orientals" (Said, 1978/2003)—especially "Asia" and the "Asians"—as distinctively different from "Europe" and the "Europeans" (Chakkarath, 2010a). The interest of culture-inclusive psychology in the comparison of "East" and "West" is still salient in many research designs and publications of cross-cultural and cultural psychology (Ward, 2007) and was also the focus of earlier influential contributions by Western sociology or cultural and psychological anthropology. For example, Max Weber's seminal studies on world religions and their meaning for cultural and economic development was to a considerable extent a comparison of Western and Eastern rationality and had a profound influence on Western scientific assessments of Asian culture and psyche. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* may have been criticized by many for its "national character" approach and overly simple (and somewhat demeaning) dichotomous comparison of the Japanese "shame culture" with the Western "guilt culture," but it nonetheless established patterns of comparison that still have a palpable impact on cross-cultural comparisons of "Easterners" and "Westerners" (cf. Chakkarath, 2010c).

In culture-inclusive psychological research, the focus of interest is frequently on "self" and "cognition" (i.e., two central domains of psychological research in general). These topics, especially with regard to self-concepts, have been investigated for several decades now, ever since Hofstede based his

individualism–collectivism differentiation on an impressively large data pool from more than 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980). This differentiation has also been discussed among European scholars since antiquity and regained prominence with the individual-centered view of man propagated by thinkers of the European Renaissance. It also shows up in Triandis' (2001) differentiation between *ideocentric* and *allocentric* tendencies and Markus and Kitayama's (1991) well-established distinction between the *independent* and *interdependent* self. These and similar theories frequently draw upon the broader differentiation between Westerners and Easterners and also make use of additional dichotomous constructs like individual orientation versus group orientation, autonomy versus relatedness, separation versus connectedness, high versus low self-monitoring, high versus low context dependence, stability versus instability, and so forth. Theories about the underlying cognitive basis of intercultural varying self-other perceptions and thinking styles also place their bipolar concepts in the framework of the geographical East–West dichotomy. Well-known examples are Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought*, in which Western and Chinese cognitive styles are contrasted (2003) or Peng's studies on differences between U.S. Americans and East Asians in perception, interpretation, and reasoning (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Against this background, I have chosen the analysis of the self to illustrate how an indigenous perspective might increase our culture sensitivity in developing psychological theories and research. The example I am going to present as an indigenous psychological discourse is taken from India and focuses on the academic debate between Hindu and Buddhist scholars about the nature of the self. I will start with a few remarks about some influential stereotypes in the European tradition of portraying India and the Indian self before I contrast these views with indigenous Indian accounts of the self.

In many of the theories mentioned above, the attributes of a stable, independent, autonomous, rational, and responsible self are usually related to Westerners, whereas attributes deficient in these qualities are usually related to Easterners. This line of thought can also be found with regard to many European scholars' view of India, which itself can easily be traced back to European antiquity where the earliest written accounts of India and its people by "Westerners" can be found in the works of Greek and Roman authors (e.g., Ctesias' *Indica* and

Herodotus' *Histories* from the fifth century BC or Pliny's *Natural History* from the first century AD). According to most of these authors, India is a land of miracles and wonders, an image that has survived for millennia and that became the basis of India portraits, especially in the age of Romanticism. Although this portrait is not necessarily pejorative, in many cases it was accompanied by assumptions about the almost complete "otherness" of Indians as compared to other peoples of the world. For example, until the Middle Ages, even "monsters" (i.e., creatures [like dog-headed men] that bridge the gap between animals and humans without belonging to either of the two groups were said to abound in India, reiterating a topos deeply embedded in European views about the East; see Jahoda, 1999). Accordingly, many European travelers like Ludovico di Varthema, who visited the country in the sixteenth century, interpreted sculptures of Indian deities as images of monsters. Even in the Age of Enlightenment and under the perspectives of philosophical rationalism and empiricism, historically developed stereotypical ideas about India were not completely abandoned (Chakkarath, 2010c). Hegel was only one of many leading European scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who declared these alleged intellectual deficits to be psychological deficits and related them to societal deficits,—an enduring thinking pattern that Gergen (1994) identified as a "deficit discourse." Although Hegel's verdict on the intellectual achievements of Asian cultures was broadly general, he found some gradual differences between different Asian civilizations, especially between China and India. In comparing the Chinese and the Indian cultures, he claimed that the failure of Indian thinkers to come up with the idea of a stable and autonomous self was to blame for their failure to build modern, clearly defined, stable, autonomous, and reliable nation-states like those in Europe or that in China. Instead, the almost complete lack of proper scientific thinking and the boundless and erratic style of Indian self-theories resulted in declaring the subject–object difference an illusion so that neither a concept of individuality or personality nor a historical consciousness or a conceptualization of individuals as historical persons could arise. Hegel's account of the psychological nature of the Indian self is a diagnosis of deficits, and as for many scholars after him, including some twentieth-century social scientists (e.g., Weber and Benedict), it is especially these deficits that allow

one to differentiate between Westerners and most Easterners, including Indians.

In the following, let us try to take an indigenous psychological perspective on the Indian self and see the extent to which it confirms or disputes core aspects of the Western assessments exemplified above. To also show the character and quality of academic discourse within indigenous Indian analyses of the self, I will first present some key features of Hindu traditions of thought and then contrast them with assessments by Buddhist psychology.

#### INDIGENOUS VIEWS OF SELF AND IDENTITY: HINDU AND BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES

Hindu beliefs play different roles in the everyday lives of different Indians—depending especially on the region they live in, their social class, caste, gender, and education—but there are central tenets that most Hindus share (for a more detailed description, see Chakkarath, 2005; in press). One is the belief in *brahman* (“eternal universal soul”), the all-encompassing life force that embodies all aspects of existence and that is reflected in *atman* (“individual self”), the life force that makes any living being part of *brahman*. It is a core conviction of Hindu believers that not understanding the relationship between *brahman* and *atman* is deeply problematic because ignorance of the true nature of this relationship results in suffering. Suffering is the underlying principle of all existence, and human beings are equipped with a cognitive system that is the main source of human suffering. However, they can be trained to cope with life’s miseries and even to overcome them.

The problem of suffering arises especially from the nature of the individual self and the psychological processes that cause its development. In other words, it is mainly caused by processes within the human psyche: The individual develops the conviction that he is a unique and separate entity, in principle unrelated to the rest of the world, which he sees as the “other” sphere of life. Thus, the individual constructs an opposition between himself and the world instead of recognizing that all beings and things and phenomena of the world, including himself, are reflections of one and the same—that is, *brahman*. This ignorance is the source of egoism (i.e., unawareness of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all existing things) and results in selfish behavior, driven by uninhibited emotions, greed, the need for a diversified and adventurous life, and so forth. Because these kinds of desires

and needs constitute the root of failure, disappointment, frustration, aggression, shame, and many other negative states, it follows that the psychological processes that lead to this fateful condition of selfishness need to be analyzed, understood, and controlled. Otherwise—and this is another central conviction in the Hindu belief system—the selfish actions and behavior will result in a cycle of endless death and rebirth (*samsara*). The driving force behind the process of *samsara* is believed to be the accumulated sum total of the individual’s good and bad deeds that Hindus relate to the universal law of karma. The function of the *karma* concept can be illustrated as follows:

*Karma* can be conceived of as similar to the law of gravity that, metaphorically speaking, “weighs” and “judges” the qualities of matter and decides its velocity, direction, and place in the universe as well as its function within the larger cosmic order. A fundamental assumption of this theory is that, like matter, psychological phenomena, too, are subject to natural laws. The natural law of *karma* is believed to evaluate one’s moral behavior as “good” if one lives according to the cosmic law of being (*dharmā*). Because *dharmā* is understood as the representation of a just world that attributes a precisely defined place and function to everyone and everything, each Hindu must follow certain rules and fulfill specific duties, recognizing that selfishness will only harm that order. This code of conduct that constitutes the Hindu way of life involves doing what is right for the individual, the family, the caste (*jati*), the society, and the cosmic order. The rules of conduct were laid down in various *dharmā shastras*, compilations of laws that help one to give practical meaning to the theoretical aspects mentioned above and thus show that, from a Hindu point of view, there is no real difference between the religious and the social spheres. This becomes even clearer in the conviction that not only one’s membership in a particular caste, but even the biological, physical, psychological, and social conditions of one’s life (whether one ends up being a plant, an animal, a demon, or a human being, a member of a higher or a lower caste, male or female, attractive or unattractive, ambitious or unambitious, more or less intelligent) are decisively influenced by one’s conduct in one’s previous life. Thus, the whole belief system is metaphysically legitimized, which makes it possible for anyone to perceive social reality as just and fair, an assessment that has helped stabilize the Hindu society and the caste system for thousands of years.

Here, we should note that contrary to many Western thinkers' stereotypical assessments of the Indian self, the metaphysically induced, psychological pressure put on the Hindu to take care of his psyche actually results in stability, not diffusion. One can easily recognize the importance of a stable self within the Hindu self-theory in the idea of rebirth: According to the *atman* concept, there are core aspects of the individual self that remain stable and unchanged through all rebirths. Thus, a person's (immortal) core identity is composed of a kind of matrix into which the sum total of his *karma* is entered from birth to birth. This core identity ensures that much of the responsibility for the current life as well as for the preceding existences can be attributed to the individual himself. In addition, we should note that following a rigid normative system of rules and fulfilling one's spiritual as well as social duties does not result in world renunciation (as, for example, has been claimed by the classical Western sociology of religion, following Max Weber and Louis Dumont) but in commitment to worldly things that need to be taken care of for the sake of societal and universal order as well as for individual satisfaction. This aspect is also emphasized in the socially institutionalized Hindu model of ideal human development (*ashramadharma*), a four-stage life-span model that aims to help (mainly male) members of society attain the central material, psychological, and spiritual goals that not only reflect the Hindu value system but also Hindu psychology's assessment of human needs and desires (see Chakkarath, 2005; in press). The consecutive goals encompass the acquirement of knowledge (including knowledge about one's ritual and social duties); the accumulation of material wealth; the satisfaction of genuine human desires, such as the desire for sexuality, conjugal love, art, filial affection, fine clothes, savory food and other luxuries; and finally spiritual development and release from *samsara*. The model also suggests at what stage in life one should pursue the different goals and makes clear that human development, including cognitive development, does not end with old age because spiritual goals can be achieved more easily when the need for material and sensual satisfaction have calmed. Moreover, the model makes clear that possessing specific psychological capabilities are especially necessary to pass through the life stages successfully—namely, knowledge and the readiness to learn, concentration and truthfulness, honesty, reason, patience, forgiveness, self-control, control of

the senses and the emotions (e.g., absence of anger). The model also helps one to train these capabilities: According to the Yoga system, the best known system of Indian-applied psychology, these capabilities correspond to those that constitute the moral prerequisite of *moksha*.

Buddhist analyses of the self are partially based on the Hindu diagnosis that psychological problems are caused by cognitive processes. However, although the Buddhist scholars have maintained various elements of the Hindu framework (e.g., the idea of suffering as the fundamental principle of all being, the concept of *karma* as well as the belief in *samsara* and *karma*-dependent rebirth), there are crucial differences. From early on, Buddhism argued against the idea of an immortal core self (*atman*) that provides personal identity through all transmigrations. Similarly to the Hindu self-theory, the Buddhist theory of the non-self (*anatman*) is closely related to psychological theories of cognition.

The Buddhist theory of cognition and self is based on a detailed analysis of the psychophysical condition of humans, which is believed to be empirically examinable by anyone through systematic and regularly executed meditation exercises, which play an important role in the Buddhist way of life. With respect to contents as well as abstraction and systematization level, these analyses rank among the most important psychological contributions of Asian science. Again, I can only describe the analyses here very briefly, so what follows is merely a sketch (for a more detailed description, see Lamotte, 1988).

At the core of the analyses is the view that a person or one's "I consciousness" is collectively constituted by the five "aggregates" (*skandha*):

1. physical form (*rupa*), which includes the four elements: earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (temperature), and wind (expansion)
2. sensations and feelings (*vedana*): unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral sensations that stem from contact between the six internal sensory organs (eyes, nose, ears, tongue, body, and mind) and the corresponding external objects (appearance, smell, sound, taste, touch, and mental object)
3. perceptions (*sanna*): the perception of appearance, smell, sound, taste, physical form, and spirit
4. volitional formations (*sankhara*), from which the six expressions of will emerge, which



can be directed toward all of the sensations and perceptions specified above

5. consciousness (*vinna*), consisting of consciousness of the six sensory organs and the external objects assigned to them.

Humans are thus described as an aggregate of different mutually causal factors that are in constant flux and temporary. The 6 internal sense bases (organs) and their 6 external sense bases (objects) are called the 12 sense bases and, combined with the 6 forms of consciousness, they are called the 18 elements (*dhātu*). When the physical factors are taken into consideration, every mental procedure can be described as an entirely specific combination of these elements among themselves and with the perception and will phenomena they cause. The key result of this Buddhist analysis is that by means of this thus restructured and constantly changing causal structure, the illusion of a “self” that witnesses all these events is created that does not correspond to anything in reality because this self is also only the result of a process that is constantly beginning and ending. Thus, the notion of a personal soul or a lasting identity, for example, of the baby growing to become an adult or even the dead person is refuted. On the one hand, reconstructing (i.e., interpreting) such convictions as the result of psycho-physical causal relationships provides a way of explaining the development of an individualistic self-concept. In addition, we also see why a key factor of human suffering is seen in this view of self. In the causal nexus mentioned above, it causes selfish attitudes and resultant actions, which lead to negative *karma*, which results in rebirth yet again.

The question concerning what can be understood by “rebirth” if there is no “soul” with lasting identity is the most-discussed philosophical question of Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics. The perhaps most descriptive and most concise answer, which will have to suffice here, is a parable from the non-canonical text *Milindapanha*, in which an Indian Buddhist monk explains the theory to one of the Greek governors installed in Northern India by Alexander the Great in fourth century BC: Rebirth without a soul is like the flame of an oil wick, which was ignited with the flame of another oil wick; the second flame is not identical to the first but was created as a function of the first and continues on when the first is extinguished. Although we can admit that there is some causal nexus between the first and the second flame, we do not have plausible arguments

to defend the idea that both flames are identical. Buddhism declares the Hindu belief in a stable, unchanging, and even immortal self an expression of psychologically deeply rooted human selfishness: It is out of ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire that man develops the idea of *atman* to find consolation. Considering itself partially a critical reform movement, from early on, Buddhism aimed to destroy the psychological roots of these kinds of metaphysical beliefs and thus also developed a perspective on the psychology of psychology and psychologists.

Although the various schools of Hindu and Buddhist thinking forbid us to make overly general statements about the two traditions, nonetheless, the basic differences in the conceptualizations of the self may have some explanatory power with regard to differences in certain attitudes favored within Hindu and Buddhist conceptualizations of the relationship between the self and the “other” (Chakkarath, 2010). Although it is not my intention to say that in practice Hindus do not show compassion for the misery of others, it is still interesting to see that, at least on a theoretical level, the development of compassion plays a conspicuously more important role in Buddhism. As we have seen, it is a Hindu conviction that each individual forges his own destiny and that it is the destiny of an ignorant and selfish individual to be punished with new suffering in another life. This view, together with the Hindu understanding of unchanging personal identity through all rebirths, is the basis for the idea that, on the whole, *samsara* provides cosmic and societal justice. The orthodox Buddhist theory, however, holds that there is no identity between the producer of bad *karma* and the being that results from it (for Vasubandhu’s classic arguments, see Duerlinger, 2006). This means that in the end, the one who is accumulating bad *karma* is causing suffering for another being. In other words, the producer of bad karma is responsible for the creation and suffering of an existence that itself is innocent. Therefore, at least in theory, the *karma*-related guilt that a Buddhist feels is different from the guilt experienced by a Hindu. It follows that a Buddhist believer should show compassion for everything that suffers because everything that suffers is suffering innocently. Of course, the concept of the non-self (*anatman*) serves as an argument for Buddhism’s rejection of the Hindu caste system. Against the background of the Buddhist self-theory, membership to a certain caste cannot be justified by personal guilt. On the contrary, according to the

Buddhist point of view, the caste system does not reflect justice but adds to injustice and the miserable situation of the lowest castes and the outcasts. For Hindus, however, their caste is an important aspect of their belief system and their socialization context. It is the cornerstone of Hindu identity that is constituted within the manifold and intertwined aspects of the Hindu worldview, psychological analysis of cognitions and the self, conceptualizations of the other, and a model of ideal development that along with the caste system provides the framework to socially institutionalize this “identity web.”

Descriptions of Hindu and Buddhist analyses of psychological phenomena can hardly be adequate when they are removed from the general philosophical and spiritual framework in which they were developed. For most of the time since psychology was established as a modern Western science at Western universities and then implanted in universities around the world, these philosophical and spiritual elements made it easy for modern psychologists, including modern Indian psychologists, to disregard India’s and other cultures’ indigenous theories as mere pre-scientific speculation (Chakkarath, 2010b). Another indicator of the “unscientific” character of these theories was the assumed lack of an empirical method, which would assure that these theories meet the standards of modern Western psychology. However, at least in the case of the indigenous theories and debates presented above, one should be aware that the analyses of the interrelationship between cognition and self as well as the development of coping and regulation strategies were carried out by employing the probably most elaborate techniques of introspection known in the history of psychology. Interestingly, introspective methods of a different kind were considered useful in the beginning of modern Western psychology. Although Wundt did not consider them a reliable method, on certain occasions in his laboratory in Leipzig, subjects were asked to give verbal protocols of their inner experiences. More advanced introspective methods were used regularly by researchers from the Würzburg school (e.g., Bühler, Külpe, and Marbe), who trained their subjects’ introspective skills before asking them to report about their inner experiences during certain problem-solving tasks. Binet used similar methods in France, as did Titchener in the United States. James M. Baldwin, in his *The Story of the Mind* (1898), even called introspection the most important source of psychological data. Nonetheless, attempts to advance

introspective methods as a basic research procedure were short-lived in Western psychology. In fact, Watson, the father of behaviorism, even called them an alien and “un-American” import from Germany, thus contributing a little anecdote to the question concerning whether behaviorism would consider itself an indigenous psychology (Costall, 2006).

In contrast, in India and other Asian countries, more elaborate techniques of introspection and training of respective skills have been employed and refined for more than 2,500 years and are commonly referred to as “meditation.” Especially Buddhist scholars have provided extensive, highly detailed, and very precise theories and descriptions of meditation practices that not only serve the observation and analysis of psychological processes and mental states but are also employed to achieve those changes in behavioral and psychological traits said to decrease suffering and increase well-being (Conze, 2002; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007). Of course, this twofold function of meditation practice can also be found in non-Buddhist traditions of psychology—for example, in the Hindu systems of Patanjali’s *Yoga* and *Siddhi Yoga* or in the Hindu medical system of *Ayurveda*. The systematic procedures that can be found in all these traditions have often been compared to the systematic steps taken in medicine: Identification of disease via detection of symptoms, diagnosis of causes, prognosis, treatment, and prescription. From a psychological point of view, we can hardly challenge the scientific nature of these highly systematic procedures. On the contrary, we should recognize that they aimed at a synthesis of careful observation, scholarly exchange about the adequacy of the observation and the observation techniques (over the millennia), theory development based on the analysis of the phenomena observed, and application of the resulting knowledge—for example, in therapy (Rosch, 1997). Although there is little reason to doubt the scientific nature of many aspects of Hindu and Buddhist psychology (Paranjpe, 1998), we have good reason to acknowledge that the indigenous psychological traditions, which could only be presented fragmentarily above, applied psychological knowledge within an integrative view of the psychophysical and social aspects of life, an aim that is not unfamiliar to Western psychology.

### **What Can Cultural Psychology Learn from Indigenous Psychology?**

We began this chapter with a critical look at the mainstream historiography of psychology and

its culture-sensitive branches. We saw that when a view of the genesis of so-called “Western” (especially European and U.S. American) culture-sensitive psychology tries to avoid stereotypical narrations about linear development and steady scientific progress, a very different picture of psychology’s history results than that conveyed in mainstream Western historiography. For example, we saw that high-quality culture-sensitive field research, which foreshadowed central positions of cultural and indigenous psychology, was carried out long before the Newtonian paradigm of laboratory- and experiment-based modern natural science was introduced. A certain group of psychologists adopted that monistic and nomothetic paradigm, whereas others suggested alternative approaches. Although these alternative approaches were rooted in some of the best traditions of European intellectuality and scientific research and had considerable impact on other cultural sciences, in psychology, they were typically ignored for most of the twentieth century. In this historiographic description, which does not show a continuous linear development but a variety of paths and interruptions, things are much more difficult to explain, and questions arise that are more difficult to answer. Of course, the explanations and answers cannot be given in a single chapter, but hopefully it has become clear that the answers need to include the psychological factors that Wundt and other forerunners of cultural and indigenous psychology identified as “higher” or more complex processes and products of the mind. When these scholars propagated an interdisciplinary and multimethodical approach for the psychological investigation of domains like history, religion, art, science, myths, social institutions, and interactions, they held core positions of current cultural and indigenous psychology. The issue concerning how certain psychological traits on the cultural and individual level are reflected, socio-culturally fostered, and intergenerationally transmitted is crucial for understanding the interplay of the various factors in various cultural domains that influences human psychological development and socialization. Of course, in this context, from a traditional cultural psychological point of view, the history of psychology might appear as only one discipline among innumerable scientific disciplines in which investigators could be interested. From an indigenous psychological perspective, however, the genesis of specific traditions of doing psychology comes into focus for several reasons that result from indigenous

psychology’s self-understanding and goals that were described in the second section of this chapter.

First, indigenous psychology can be seen as an approach that adds to our psychological knowledge by investigating various indigenous psychologies—that is, traditions of psychologically relevant thought and research. Second, this investigation itself profits from the expertise of the indigenous researchers involved. Third, the beginnings of recent indigenous psychology are rooted in historical, political, and sociological discussions about Western psychology’s international hegemony that was established in the era of Colonialism. Therefore, it is natural for indigenous psychology to deal with questions about the indigenous character of Western psychology, the question of indigenization from within and without, and the effects of an imposed psychology on people who experience it as unfamiliar to the ecological, historical, and socio-cultural environments in which they and their ancestors have lived. Of course, this is felt especially strongly if essential aspects of these environments still have the influence they have had for hundreds and thousands of years (e.g., the philosophical and psychological foundations of the Indian caste system). Such socio-historical dimensions and the relationship between simultaneously existing (e.g., imported and indigenous) conceptions of psychology can both be investigated much more thoroughly if we apply an indigenous psychological perspective.

Apart from what can be learned about the higher mental processes from investigating the manifold paths that scientific thinking can take, a less ethnocentric account of psychological theories and applications that can be found across cultures might provide even more accurate and fairer historiographies. It might also provide psychological knowledge from which other indigenous traditions, including Western traditions, can profit. For example, as the illustrations taken from Indian psychology have shown, a life-span perspective on development, and the insight that cognitive development does not end after schooling or with early adulthood, might appear to be a revolutionary perspective only within the paths taken by the European psychology of cognition and aging. In other traditions, this perspective might have been there for millennia and might have affected human psychological development in ways all psychologists are interested in. The same holds true for Buddhist scholars’ analysis of identity and their theory that self and personality are in a constant flux that depends on changing contexts

and interactions that simultaneously influence cognitive, emotional, and volitional processes within the individual. In the elaborate analyses of Indian psychology, there are many findings and ideas that foreshadowed modern Western perspectives on the topic of self and identity. This includes more recent theories in Western personality research—for example, the concept of identity configurations (i.e., the modes in which individuals integrate the manifold [e.g., worldly and religious] aspects of their self–other perceptions into a meaningful whole) (Schachter, 2004, 2005). Because indigenous psychological perspectives can help detect these contributions and inform the scientific community about the findings, there might be a lot to learn, not only from our own culture’s past but also from going beyond the ethnocentric boundaries of our own cultures. There we might find the roots of theories that we usually find exclusively in historiographies of Western psychology and other social sciences and celebrate as the milestones of these disciplines.

As the examples of psychological research on self-concepts have shown, socio-historically grown stereotypes and the resulting ethnocentric perspectives still have an impact on how we conceive of “the others” and is one of the main reasons we conceive of them as others at all. Interestingly, even cross-cultural psychology, which largely favors the nomothetic paradigm of the natural sciences and emphasizes the scientific need to identify psychological *universals*, has come up with countless theories that focus on cross-cultural *differences*. Hofstede’s culture dimensions, probably the most influential theory in cross-cultural psychological research and upon which a lot of cross-cultural research is based, is a prime example. The same holds true for many theories developed by cultural psychologists. Taken together, many aspects of the frequently cited theories in so-called “culture-sensitive psychology” remind one of stereotypical assessments that are deeply embedded in Western traditions of thinking about the “others” and can be traced back to antiquity. From a psychological point of view, it is not astonishing that these stereotypes also show up in the theories proposed by some indigenous psychologists. In the long run, stereotypes (especially when they successfully enter the frameworks of our scientific thinking or are already part of frameworks that are imported from other traditions) can make us believe in the accuracy and the heuristic value of the stereotypes ourselves. One example illustrating the complex problems that need to be solved here is

the question concerning the scientific value of religions and worldviews for indigenous psychology. As we have seen, people hesitate to acknowledge the value of psychological theories that can be found in religious, philosophical, or any kind of ideological frameworks. This skepticism is typical within post-Enlightenment Western science, although there were once intellectual Western traditions that aimed at reconciling our interest in spiritual goals with our interest in scientific goals. This integrative concept of knowledge can still be found in living intellectual traditions—for example, in Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian schools of thought. Lately, it has even been rediscovered in Western psychology, where investigating the concept of “wisdom” has gained some interest (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 1993; Richerson & Boyd, 2005). If indigenous psychologists are hesitant to acknowledge the scientific value of these thinking traditions for their own work, then they may of course have good reasons for it. However, they might also be influenced by ethnocentric conceptions of science that are not necessarily part of the indigenous psychologies that, according to a prominent definition discussed in the second section, were once designed for the indigenous populations. In other words, indigenous psychologists should always ask themselves whether their discipline and their own mindset really provide the openness for new perspectives that is required if they want to take the investigation of any indigenous phenomena seriously and not simply stumble into the pitfalls of stereotypes and ethnocentrism themselves. Parenthetically, labeling certain non-Western traditions as “Hindu,” “Buddhist,” or “Confucian” also contributes to a stereotypical differentiation between “real” science (e.g., “Western” psychology) and “worldviews.” Moreover, it has successfully distracted us from the question whether “Western” science is also a worldview or at least unreflectedly transports stereotypes that, for example, can be traced back to Christian traditions of thinking (Altman & Rogoff, 1991). It is interesting, anyway, that one of the most influential concepts in culture-informed psychology, the concept of individualism, is frequently traced back to Christian—especially Protestant—roots. Nonetheless, no one would seriously propose renaming “Western psychology” as “Protestant psychology.” However, from an indigenous psychological perspective, it makes perfect sense to instead call any tradition of psychological theorizing and research indigenous. Although considerations like these are not completely new to

cultural psychologists, the indigenous psychological approach and the methodological reflections it requires could help to improve cultural psychology's methodological awareness, too. This includes what can be learned about the very specific role of indigenous psychologists studying natives in indigenous contexts outside the Western world, which is nonetheless, to a certain extent, represented in these contexts—for example, by the indigenous psychologists themselves. By borrowing well-known concepts from post-Colonial studies (Bhabha, 1994), we may say that the hybridity of these research contexts, as well as the hybridity of the psychologists dealing with it, puts them in a “third space” and shows that for them there is much more involved than for most of their colleagues in Western parts of the world.

In addition to the points already mentioned, I want to emphasize that the psychological relevance of indigenous traditions of thought, including psychological theories, does not solely depend on the question whether they meet specific standards of scientific truth. Many of the thoughts presented in the examples from so-called “Hindu and Buddhist psychology” can be understood as answers to questions that are very familiar to Western psychology, too: What factors influence human development and to what extent are individuals and societies able to influence them? What role do culture and worldviews play with regard to developmental paths, developmental tasks, educational goals, socialization and internalization processes, cognitive styles, attribution styles, evaluation of the “normal” and the “abnormal,” and intervention strategies? The answers usually have an impact on the social and the individual level. On the social level, for example, they find expression in social institutions and formalized social interactions; on the individual level, they are reflected in many individuals' subjective theories about selfhood, the others, relationships, proper attitudes, life goals, suitable coping strategies, and so forth. Therefore, indigenous theories play a crucial role in culture-specific features of the socialization context and thus assist us in guiding our thorough investigation of the complex developmental niche. In part, they can be compared to the impact that Freud's seminal theories had on so many levels and so many domains in Western societies and sciences, although the value of Freud's work as a *scientific* theory has never been unchallenged.

Because indigenous psychology not only strives to develop theories and approaches through indigenization but also aims to identify psychologically

relevant theories that already exist in indigenous traditions of thought, it often has to deal with the religions and other worldviews in which these theories are embedded. Although even some indigenous psychologists are hesitant to occupy themselves with worldviews, we should be reminded that, for example, religion was a central topic in the beginnings of modern psychology, and many of the founders of the discipline were also founders of the psychology of religion. Although the investigation of these topics continued to play an important role in neighboring disciplines like anthropology and sociology, they almost disappeared in mainstream psychology. Interestingly, there is also little interest in the culture-inclusive branches of psychology, including cultural psychology (*see*, for example, Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003; for rare cultural psychological approaches to the study of religion, *see* Belzen, 2010; Chakkarath, 2007; Sen & Wagner, 2009; Straub & Arnold, 2008). Therefore, the indigenous perspective on what is relevant for doing proper culture-sensitive psychology might draw cultural psychologists' attention to its neglect of these (and other) topics. We will only be able to provide the kind of “thick” description (Geertz, 1973) necessary for attaining a sounder understanding of the relationship between culture and psychology if we succeed in understanding which topics, domains, and phenomena are really *relevant* for achieving the goals of culture-informed psychology.

Although the psychological relevance of indigenous theories does not depend on the proof of their scientific validity, some theories might nonetheless meet the standards of valid scientific principles. As stated above, some indigenous theories might even add to our scientific insight and help modify or increase our inventory of theories. As I have indicated in the context of indigenous Indian psychology, indigenous theories can even make us reconsider the adequacy of our inventory of *methods*. The experience of doing research in contexts in which the subjects are less familiar with typical (and frequently standardized) testing or interview procedures has resulted in the indigenization of various methods commonly used in Western psychology. One example is the so-called “ladder rating” in which the standard two-dimensional, multiple-point rating scale is substituted by a tiny wooden ladder with multiple steps. Using this three-dimensional instrument, researchers ask illiterate Indian respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement with certain statements by placing their fingers on one

of the lower or higher steps of the ladder (Sinha, 1969). Apart from making such a simple modification to meet at least some of the necessities of the specific context, indigenous psychologists have also come up with more complex adaptations of research procedures to the indigenous people. For example, based on his experiences with qualitative field work in the regional and ethnic variety of the Philippines, Enriquez (1993) proposed to relate duration, place, and frequency of investigations as well as the size of the investigated groups and the selection of research staff to the habits of the investigated people. For some cases, “Filipino psychology” even recommends having the subjects interview the researchers before they are interviewed themselves because that would familiarize them with the unfamiliar procedure and result in less of a feeling of hierarchical asymmetry between the investigators and the respondents (Pe-Pua, 2006). Although these are examples of the indigenization of methods used in Western psychology, meditation techniques as described earlier can be considered indigenous methods. Usually, however, in Western psychological literature, meditation is emphasized as a coping strategy, a therapeutic procedure to reduce suffering and to increase well-being (e.g., Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007). Western psychologists largely ignore—and that is true for cultural psychologists as well—the fact that meditation is also a highly advanced introspective method that has always been the basic empirical procedure by which many results of indigenous Asian psychology were obtained. So, with regard to indigenous psychological methodology and methods, there are also things that can be learned or at least considered by cultural psychologists, too. Is it possible that Enriquez is right that outside the Philippines, we should also adapt our procedures much more frequently to the different groups that vary with regard to social origin, education, ethnicity, gender, and so forth? And is it possible that even most cultural psychologists do not really expect that there are non-Western traditions of methodical empirical research that could be valuable for the whole discipline? In other words, would it be useful to transplant non-Western indigenous concepts into Western psychology? It is worth mentioning that compared to their treatment in psychology, these kinds of questions are dealt with much more visibly in anthropology (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999).

Finally, let me return to the question concerning the differences between indigenous and cultural psychology if there are any. Actually, it seems obvious

that both culture-sensitive perspectives have a lot in common and share some of their intellectual and historical roots. As we have seen, the main differences arise from the different socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances of both perspectives’ more recent development and the related different problems most indigenous psychologists have to deal with as compared to most cultural psychologists. Let me summarize these differences, this time with an emphasis on the unequal distribution of certain intercultural competencies.

The broader historical sketch given in the first section of this chapter and the description of indigenous psychology’s more recent development as portrayed in the second section give the impression that the theoretical and methodological foundations are to be found in German folk psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*), the Russian cultural historical school, critical psychology, and cultural psychology. Even if we think about earlier roots like the field studies conducted by some missionaries in the sixteenth century, the impression remains that even indigenous psychology owes its main assumptions to discourses within Western psychology (or psychologies). It is thus not surprising that indigenous psychology seems so similar to cultural psychology. However, this impression may have resulted from a mainstream historiography dominated by a Eurocentric assumption that outside of Europe, there were no important contributions to what we call “psychology” (in a Western sense). Thus, it is still a task for indigenous psychologists to come up with alternative indigenous historiographies of non-Western contributions.

The dominance of Western historiography as well as the need to relate indigenous psychological work to Western conceptions of psychology to be taken seriously in the international scientific community are symptoms of an ongoing asymmetry of power distribution in international psychology (Moghaddam, 1987). It becomes especially evident in the fact that even indigenous psychologists most frequently link their work to psychological theories of Western origin and research executed within the standard framework of Western psychology. Western discourses are mainly about Western authors as are the so-called “international discourses.” The dominant language of psychology is English, and therefore any findings from indigenous psychology, even potentially culture-specific concepts, need to be translated into English to be published in the leading journals. This situation is quite comfortable

for most Western psychologists, who often live in English-speaking countries, whereas indigenous psychologists from non-English-speaking countries have to adapt to psychology's dominating culture. They have to learn its language, read its psychological literature, take part in its debates (which are mainly about its authors), and so forth. At the same time, indigenous psychologists need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge required to conduct the kind of research that meets the standards of their own scientific perspectives (as described above): language skills, sufficient knowledge about the indigenous environments and the people, about indigenous authors and their literature, methodological versatility, and so forth.

The effects of this asymmetry of power and of intercultural competence can be summarized as follows: The intercultural competence and expertise that an indigenous psychologist needs to meet the standards of his discipline and to be heard are rarely met by Western psychologists. Not even the Western cultural psychologists read non-Western texts having psychological relevance in the sense described above. Their discourses are mainly influenced by Western—mainly Western European and U.S. American—intellectual traditions. This situation not only underscores why indigenous psychology is needed and could improve cultural psychology, it also appeals to all branches of culture-informed psychological research to inform themselves much more than they currently do.

## Conclusion

Having developed from similar traditions within the history of psychology, cultural and indigenous psychology share many common features and goals. Both favor the emic over the etic approach and both suggest multimethod research designs for the investigation of culture and the human mind. Moreover, both share the conviction that the higher cognitive processes and their inter-relatedness with environmental aspects as well as with the elementary cognitive processes need to be investigated in an integrative and interdisciplinary manner that reflects the human potential to give meaning to the world and ourselves in manifold ways and innumerable areas. Therefore, both disciplines investigate history, mythologies and other cultural narrations, art, social institutions, religions, world views, science, and so forth, to identify the psychological relevance of these topics for human development, thought, feeling, and behavior. However, although

cultural psychologists and indigenous psychologists share many scientific positions, all in all, they are differently positioned. Because cultural psychology's more recent development has been situated in a predominantly Western setting and accompanied by scientific debates that mainly reflect corresponding intellectual traditions, most psychologists who advocate the indigenous perspective work in non-Western environments with non-Western people who usually do not correspond to the WEIRD samples that provide the largest proportion of data collected to test Western psychological theories. Many of these indigenous psychologists are trained in Western psychology and equipped with the knowledge this training provides. Frequently, however, they experience dissatisfaction with this Western knowledge in non-Western research contexts. The criticism that has arisen from this situation is very similar to the critical assessments of Western science and its exercise of power that is brought forward within post-Colonial studies. The situation in which many indigenous psychologists are working can thus be described as a third space constituted by shared histories, overlapping contexts, and hybrid actors. It is especially this difference from which the specific expertise and the specific competencies arise from which cultural psychology can profit in many ways. This includes a greater knowledge of *all* topics and methods that might be relevant for psychological research (e.g., religions and other world-views, indigenous concepts pertaining to self and other, indigenous methods like meditative introspection) and, in addition, a more thorough reflection on the role of the psychologist as a culturalized figure within various and sometimes very different contexts. For the future development of both, psychologists from both fields should not just be satisfied with peaceful co-existence but intensify their peaceful collaboration. Both fields would fulfill the main purpose of all branches of culture-informed psychology: to collect as much psychologically relevant information as is needed to understand humans and culture.

## Future Directions

1. How can indigenous psychologists find a common definition of their discipline and their relationship to other culture-sensitive psychologies, including cultural psychology?
2. How can psychological methodologies profit from indigenous/indigenized methodologies and indigenous/indigenized methods?

3. What cultural psychological insight can be gained by investigating the specific situation that many indigenous psychologists are in and that we characterized as “third space,” in which hybrid researchers study indigenous (and occasionally hybrid) subjects?

4. What can be done to minimize the negative effects of politics and unequal power distribution in the field of international psychology?

5. To what extent can indigenous psychology refine our understanding of “psychological relevance?”

6. Do we need a historiography of psychology written from a cultural and indigenous psychological perspective, and how would it differ from conventional historiographies?

## Acknowledgment

This chapter was written during a fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Konstanz, part of the university’s “Cultural Foundations of Integration” Center of Excellence, established in the framework of the German Federal and State Initiative for Excellence. The author would like to thank Tamara Herz for proofreading the final draft of this paper.

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# Cultural Anthropology

Susan J. Rasmussen

## Abstract

This overview of cultural anthropology begins with a brief discussion of historical, recent, and current trends in theory and method. Next, there is a critical analysis of two broad issues concerning the anthropological subject: namely, tensions between approaches and perspectives emphasizing the individual, practice, and agency, on the one hand, and those emphasizing collectivities, institutions, and structure, on the other; and tensions between shared universal themes, on the one hand, and local cultural variations, on the other. There follow illustrative examples from selected relevant topics, including enculturation, altered states, healing, the body and senses, and personhood. The chapter concludes with a brief sum-up and key questions for future directions in cultural anthropology.

**Keywords:** cultural anthropology, cultural theory, ethnography, psychological anthropology, enculturation, altered states, personhood

Anthropology, the study of humankind at the most comprehensive and holistic level, is a broad discipline that straddles the social sciences and the humanities and is comprised of several subfields or branches: social/cultural or simply, cultural anthropology; linguistic anthropology; archaeology; and physical or bio-anthropology. Some anthropologists also recognize an additional branch called applied anthropology, which involves the application of anthropological concepts, theories, and methods to public policy recommendations; whereas others locate this latter specialty within each of the traditional four branches. Central to social/cultural anthropology are several key concepts: culture, cultural relativism, holism, field research or fieldwork, ethnography, ethnology, comparison, translation, and concern with both shared (universal) themes and local diversity or variations in the expression of culture and the organization of society. This chapter will examine cultural anthropology; it will particularly focus on concepts and

issues concerning relationships between individuals, cultures, and collectivities as well as variations on universal themes.

Although in some respects, cultural anthropology's subject matter overlaps with its "sister" social sciences, sociology and psychology, its distinctiveness consists in its tendency toward more qualitative, micro-, small-scale, and intimate perspectives on cultural phenomena. Whereas most sociologists tend toward the study of groups and institutions as their subject or unit of analysis, and most psychologists focus on mental processes, most cultural anthropologists emphasize their holistic interconnections and work within a theoretical framework built on the *culture concept*.

## The Concept of Culture

Although the *culture concept*, in its classic and reformulated senses, constitutes the unifying paradigm for all subfields or branches of anthropology, cultural anthropology is that branch that focuses

most intently on contemporary (living) human cultural and social beliefs, knowledge, and practices through in-depth study of a single cultural setting, as well as comparative cross-cultural studies. Cultural anthropologists conduct ethnographic field research or “fieldwork,” which includes a method called participant-observation, involving intensive submersion in the everyday life of the community, and depending on the topic and setting of research, also additional techniques, such as guided conversations and more structured interviews, life histories, case studies, genealogies, censuses, and (in more complex settings) network analysis and snowball sampling. Ideally, anthropologists approach field research with an attitude called *cultural relativism*. Cultural relativism does not imply justifying practices that the researcher finds morally or ethically repugnant but, rather, involves refraining, in so far as possible, from judging cross-cultural practices solely from the standpoint of the researcher’s own cultural values and being aware of one’s own biases and their sources and effects on constructing ethnographic knowledge. In contemporary cultural relativism, there is particular effort made to refrain from ranking beliefs and practices across different cultural settings and in historical eras: ideally, the researcher analyzes social/cultural beliefs, knowledge, practices, and behavior in a variety of contexts: historical, political, social, psychological, and economic. On the other hand, some anthropologists today advocate “activist anthropology,” an approach involving greater engagement with political issues—for example, advocacy for indigenous peoples’ rights. There is much debate in the discipline concerning these issues (Bodley, 1975; Tsing 2005).

### ***History of Cultural Anthropology and the Culture Concept***

Until very recently, anthropology was primarily a western European science. Many concepts central to the discipline originated in philosophical concepts and political policies extending from classical Greece through the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. Although there are increasing influences from scholars from post-colonial backgrounds today, anthropology nonetheless owes much in its origin and development to these historical legacies in Europe: for example, tensions between the “sacred” and “secular” worldviews of the Medieval Catholic Church and the secular views of the Renaissance and ensuing Age of Reason, with

the rise of science in western Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, contributed to increasing interest in a human- and nature-centered universe. Discoveries by Charles Lyell, the geologist, suggested that the age of the Earth was much older than that proposed by the Church, and the evolutionary theory proposed by Charles Darwin, the naturalist, emphasized transformation, rather than immutability, of life forms and suggested long-term evolutionary interconnections. Much of this work was stimulated by European exploration and colonial domination, which promoted a growing interest in human physical and cultural variation and change. Eighteenth century philologists studied the history of languages, and, with the German Idealist philosophers, became interested in the connections between language, mind, and nation—for example, Kant’s distinction between noumena (things or objects directly perceived in the world) and phenomena (things or ideas indirectly experienced) as well as Hegel’s concept of *zeitgeist* or “spirit of the times or nation,” which associated culture, in its early conceptualization, with learning, language, individual psychological identity, and group affiliation. Naturalists pursued the connections among plant, animal, and human life. Many traveled on scientific exploratory expeditions beyond Europe.

### ***The Main Issues***

The problem for many theorists, in these contexts, was the following: how humans were similar, how they were different, why, and what shared universal themes and local variations implied. These conditions prompted the collection of data on this diversity—for example, flora, fauna, and folklore from the “folk” at home and from so-called “primitive” peoples abroad, for purposes of classification. Carolus von Linnaeus formulated botanical and zoological taxonomies, and the Romantic Nationalism movement encouraged the preservation of “quaint” customs from the rural peasants. Some early evolutionary anthropologists, such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer, interpreted exotic customs as “survivals” or remnants of past practices; ethnographic analogies were made between marginal practices assumed to derive from Europe’s past and the practices of non-Western peoples, in grand schemes of the origins of culture. This early version of the comparative method, which featured ethnocentric and racist ranking of cultures and societies in an effort to find the origins of civilization, differed from the relativistic cross-cultural comparison as practiced

by anthropologists today, whose purpose is not to rank or find origins but rather to yield insights into the range of human cultural and social behavior in terms of similarities and differences. At that time, anthropology was only beginning to emerge as an academic discipline at universities in Europe and the United States, and its branches or subfields of study had not yet become distinct; for example, biological or physical anthropology was not yet separate from cultural anthropology, and there was a conflation of physical characteristics with sociocultural phenomena—for example, a misguided equation made between physical attributes of so-called “race” and culture. In the first theoretical school called unilineal evolutionism in academic anthropology, which arose in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, peoples outside of Europe and their beliefs and practices, as representatives of earlier phases or stages of European institutions, beliefs, and practices, were thought to be capable of progress on the ladder of civilization but moving at different rates.

Additional processes—wider, wider demographic and economic changes in Europe from industrialization and bureaucratization in the nineteenth century—also encouraged the growth of the social sciences—for example, the rise of penal reform, and the disciplines of demography, sociology, and psychiatry (Foucault, 1978). Emile Durkheim (an early founder of anthropology and sociology) and his student Marcel Mauss were concerned with the perceived breakdown of reciprocity in European society in the wake of these changes. August Comte promoted positivist objective data collection. Karl Marx formulated his theory of alienation from the products of one’s labor is his critique of capitalism.

All these questions were initially addressed in a context of domination: increasing colonialism by European state powers beyond Europe and nationalist domination by these state governments over marginalized rural peoples, so-called “peasants” or “folk,” in Europe itself. There was the view that administrators and missionaries shared a civilizing mission, popularly called the “White Man’s Burden.” Many Victorian unilineal evolutionists at first worked at a distance from these remote locations, conducting armchair research; only a few of the early anthropologists conducted direct fieldwork.

#### IMPACTS ON CULTURE THEORIES

These conditions had several consequences for early theories of culture. First, in Darwinian circles, at least, culture tended to be equated with race—the

latter concept now recognized as a political device and an oversimplification, despite human physical variation. Second, for some time culture remained defined in the singular, in the Enlightenment sense of a civilization—that is, with implied greater or lesser degrees of cultivation—and having superior or inferior connotations, all based on very ethnocentric value judgments, with Europe believed to stand at the pinnacle or apex of development.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, anthropologists such as Franz Boas in the United States and Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in Britain spearheaded the newly diverging branch of (socio)cultural anthropology; they began to question the assumptions, theories, concepts, and methods of the nineteenth-century unilineal evolutionists and began to promote direct fieldwork and cultural relativism. Yet many, despite individual opposition to colonialism, continued to work for colonial administrations—for example, Evans-Pritchard (1940) among the Nuer in the then-Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The concept of culture changed radically. The method of field research became mandatory for full professional status in cultural anthropology. Modern anthropology today owes a debt to these theorists, who reacted against previous Victorian anthropological paradigms of unilineal evolutionism—for example, “social Darwinism,” the distorted application of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory to human social practices. Franz Boas, a German-Jewish immigrant who had suffered from anti-Semitism, became interested in salvaging the cultures of the Native American Indians. Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish aristocrat who became stranded in the Trobriand Islands off Australia upon the outbreak of World War I, similarly experienced marginal status himself, began undertaking intensive fieldwork and local language study, and became interested in the function, rather than the origin, of practices such as ritual and economics. Both these theorists rejected the heretofore prevalent “armchair scholarship,” racism, and speculative grand generalizations on the origins and sequences of human culture.

In the United States, Boas’s historical-particularism school of thought distinguished among culture, race, and language and advocated studying particular cultures and their histories directly, without ranking or proposing grand universal schemes of human origin or development. Boas and his colleagues and students also founded the subfield of culture and personality within cultural anthropology, which examined child-rearing customs across diverse cultures, emphasizing

learned cultural—rather than universal biological— influences on personality.

#### **ANTHROPOLOGIES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC**

Initially, ethnographies tended to describe entire cultures or communities comprehensively (Malinowski, 1926). Soon, however, cultural anthropologists began to focus intently on a specific problem or issue in anthropological theory, either drawing on their primary data from a single cultural/social setting in an ethnography or, in other cases, drawing on secondary data collected by several different researchers in several different cultural settings, in a cross-cultural comparison or ethnology. The ethnographies of Margaret Mead, a student of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict and an early theorist in the “culture and personality” school, examined concepts of adolescence and gender in Polynesian societies (Mead, 1928, 1935), exploring how these differed from American psychologists’ concepts at that time. For example, Mead found that Samoan adolescents were permitted much more freedom and experienced less anxiety than their American counterparts, thereby suggesting, she argued, that the alleged stresses of adolescence were neither universal nor biologically based. Mead also studied gender constructs in three societies of New Guinea and argued that male and female roles were a result of nurture, rather than nature. Although some of Mead’s findings were later disputed by other anthropologists (Freeman, 1983; Gewertz, 1983), her work was nonetheless important in its early questioning of widely held assumptions of universals in life course and gendered experiences.

In Britain, the structural-functionalist school of thought similarly opposed unilineal evolutionism, eschewing history and origins and instead, somewhat like Durkheim in France, advocated synchronic analysis of the structure and function of institutions in terms of how they promote harmonious continuity of society. Later, students of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown developed increasingly complex theories of the connections between social structure and cultural knowledge or belief: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, in his works on the ecology, political system, and religion of the Nuer people of the then-Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, described how local religion was refracted in social life and how local philosophy was not child-like but, rather, was metaphorical (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, 1956). For example, when some Nuer say that “twins are birds,” they do not view them as equivalent but, rather, view human

twins as anomalous, and thus analogous, to birds in that both share qualities such as multiple births, and both are believed to mediate, in the sky, between humans and Kwoth, or Spirit. In France, Durkheim and his students also emphasized the importance of “social facts,” from direct observation, and developed the concept of the collective unconscious as an overarching belief of a group, much more than a sum total of individual viewpoints. Durkheimian sociology also analyzed symbolic classifications as reflecting society, not nature—for example, spirit pantheons often reflect human social divisions.

#### **Recent Trends in Modern Cultural Anthropology**

From these insights, there emerged several important new understandings of culture. This concept became defined more in the plural than in the singular and acquired more neutral connotations, as denoting the sum total of a group’s belief system. In the formulation of Clifford Geertz, founder of interpretive anthropology, culture is transmitted through learning and is widely shared (Geertz, 1973). In this formulation, the anthropologist “reads” a culture like a text—that is, as one would interpret and translate a poem or novel. Thus, the cultural anthropologist first interprets the local culture in the field in Geertz’s words, reads it “over the shoulders of the native,” and then “translates” this into terms understood by his/her audience at home. Thus culture is like a literary text. In Geertz’s textual approach, as in the pioneering Boasian schools of historical-particularism and culture and personality, the anthropologist seeks cultural relativism, but nonetheless still retains much authority as translator, and the culture concept, although more relativistic, tends to imply a monolithic homogeneity.

This more modern view of culture has been accompanied by important changes in anthropologists’ methods; “ethnography” has come to refer to several practices: fieldwork with participant-observation, the description of a cultural setting or community (usually focused on a specific issue or problem in anthropological theory), and the writing practice itself. Ethnology, more comparative work, draws more systematically on data from different settings to compare several distinct societies, to pursue cross-cultural comparisons of specified beliefs and practices. Notwithstanding their differences, both ethnography and ethnology are analytical, in the sense that they both engage wider issues and debates in anthropology. For example, the work

of Mary Douglas (1966) examined the meanings of purity, pollution, and ritual restrictions called “taboos” in both historical and cross-cultural terms. In her theory of anomaly, Douglas argued that food taboos’ meanings, for example, do not arise from strictly hygienic or ecological conditions in local consciousness (even if one of their functions may be hygienic or ecological) but, rather, have to do with symbolic classification of human cultural systems; many forbidden foods, such as pork in Islam and Orthodox Judaism, are not easily classified and therefore are anomalous. Here, meaning rather than origin, cause, or function is important in cultural classification, recalling in some respects Durkheimian sociology and also Levi-Straussian structuralism.

Since approximately the mid-twentieth century, in addition to Geertz’s comparative literature hermeneutic approach to culture as text, additional influences have derived from linguistics. French structuralism, brought by Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) to cultural anthropology, draws on principles and methods from linguistics: culture is seen as a system of communication, and meaning derives from contrast. In particular, Levi-Strauss analyzed the structure of myths and symbols to elicit meaning from binary oppositions, which revealed mythemes, or the smallest units of meaning in myth, which were analogous to the phonemic principle in linguistics. According to Levi-Strauss, this construction of meaning is a universal characteristic of all human mental logic, which finds expression in a variety of domains. Symbolic anthropologists and semioticians drew extensively on these ideas, applying them to ritual symbolism (V. Turner, 1967), kinship (D. Schneider, 1980), popular culture (Drummond, 1996), and advertising (Barthes, 1982).

Other trends have addressed ethnography. Until recently, much anthropological field research focused on small-scale and rural communities remote from the researcher’s own (home) community. In current reformulations of culture, which have responded to new cultural formations such as globalization, borderlands, and dynamic practices (such as science and technology), the concept of culture has expanded to include more complex settings, such as urban milieu and even virtual, online communities; accordingly, fieldwork may now take place in any community—rural or urban, locally or abroad—and sites of fieldwork for cultural anthropologists today are expanding to include such places as scientific laboratories (Rabinow, 2003) and virtual

communities, as well—for example, the Internet (Boellstorff, 2010).

There have also been changes in the writing of ethnographies, a practice following data collection in the field, in which the cultural anthropologist proceeds to analyze the data and write a description of a single cultural or community setting. This description, a literary genre using literary devices (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), has recently been the topic of much critical reflection in cultural anthropology. Classical or “realist” ethnographies—for example, those of Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer (1940, 1956) and of Malinowski on the Trobriand Islanders (1926, 1927)—tended to use rhetorical techniques similar to those used in a novel, which were previously considered objective, with only a single meaning determined by the author/researcher. More subjective reflections by the author/researcher, as well as his/her consultants and assistants in the field, initially were either omitted or appended in separate prefaces and afterwords (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Recently, there have been efforts at greater experimentation in ethnographic writing projects—for example, including references to the personal experiences of the researcher, accounts of the circumstances of data collection, and recognition of local collaborators (Rabinow, 1977; Stoller, 1987, 1989; Gottlieb & Graham, 1994; Marcus, 2005).

Most recently, the concept of culture has been undergoing additional revisions, for several reasons. The mid-to-late twentieth century saw liberation movements among colonized peoples, ethnic minorities, and women, who have contributed much more to cultural anthropological theory. Anthropologists now come from diverse backgrounds. Postcolonial, post-structural, post-modern, and gender studies have conducted critiques of the old canons, in some cases rejecting all the major schools of anthropological thought. Feminist anthropologists (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Butler, 1999) have critiqued androcentric male bias in some earlier anthropological works. Other scholars—for example, Byron Good (1994) in medical anthropology—have proposed replacing *cultural belief* with *cultural knowledge* to render anthropological concepts of non-Western systems more commensurate with Western systems. Talal Asad (in Clifford & Marcus, 1986) conducted a critique of the Geertzian interpretive anthropological concept of cultural translation, arguing that the translation of culture is not the same as the translation of language. Asad has also written a critique

of the old structuralist binary opposition between “sacred” and “secular” in anthropological studies of religion and has questioned the assumption that secularism always produces greater liberty, drawing on examples from history, and arguing that there can be oppression in both religious and secular settings (Asad, 2003).

### ***Interdisciplinary Links***

In tandem with these trends, there have also occurred much cross-fertilization and interdisciplinary dialogue between the social sciences and humanities—particularly among anthropology, literary criticism, semiotics, and comparative literature. For example, the comparative literature scholar Edward Said (1978) in his work, *Orientalism*, critiqued some ethnographic portrayals of Middle Eastern peoples in an exaggerated exoticism (e.g., literary and historic portrayals of the Orient as sensual and the West as logical) and encouraged anthropologists to reflect more carefully on the history of their relationships with peoples glossed as “Other.” In his work “The Invention of Africa,” V.Y. Mudimbe (1988) explored the historical and social construction of the “idea” of Africa.

Additional influences have come from the Soviet Semioticians Mikhail Bakhtin and V.N. Volosinov, whose works written during Stalin’s reign and later translated into English critiqued authoritarian forms of literary analysis: these scholars proposed locating meaning not in the text but rather in the utterance, suggested that meanings are not monolithic but are multiple, and that meanings are dialogically constructed by not solely the author but also by the reader and other forces such as the histories readers of a text bring to the interpretation of a literary work. These critiques, as well as wider political and economic processes of globalization, mass media and communications, and transcultural or transnational processes, such as accelerating labor migration and refugee flight of vulnerable peoples and human rights concerns, have encouraged moving toward a concept of culture emphasizing more process and practice—of culture as an encounter, as negotiable, and as relational (Eriksen, 2003; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997) rather than textual or structural in the older, static sense of this concept. Arjun Appadurai (1996), for example, has proposed new terms for culture such as *ethnoscape* and *technoscape*. These terms have not, however, replaced the term *culture* in the mainstream disciplinary discourses. But they have brought greater

sensitivity to the need for specification in cultural analysis, and some anthropologists now tend to use “cultural” in the adjective form more often than as a noun to avoid the older totalizing, neatly bounded sense of this concept (Faubion, 2001; Rasmussen, 2008). However, locality remains important, albeit not as an isolated entity but more as a space of encounter. In these newer formulations, moreover, political-economy approaches emphasizing power and semiotic-expressive approaches emphasizing symbolism, once seen as oppositional, are often becoming intertwined (Rasmussen, 2001; Tsing, 2005). In these developments, a central concern has been with the units of analysis—that is, the anthropological subject.

### **The Anthropological Subject** ***Recurrent and Emerging Issues in the Study of Culture, Society, and the Individual***

Cultural anthropology, from its inception and throughout its transformations, has been concerned with what constitutes the human subject. As a science of *anthropos* (Rabinow, 2003), anthropology’s most basic, pervasive concern has been with relationships among individuals, institutions, and belief/knowledge systems. In this focus on individual/culture/collectivity connections, two broad issues have reverberated throughout the discipline. First, there have been tensions between theories and concepts emphasizing personal/individual agency and practice on the one hand and those emphasizing collective/institutional forces of structure and the group on the other. Second, there are debates over the extent of universals in human belief and practice, on the one hand, and the extent to which, and what explains, specific cultural differences in human belief and practice on the other. In this latter concern, studies have tended to emphasize either cultural universals (e.g., Levi-Strauss’s analysis of myths as manifesting a universal human mental logic) or cultural specifics (e.g., Mead’s ethnographic critique of T. Stanley Hall’s theory of a universal, biologically based experience of adolescence). The individual/collectivity issue, its roots pervasive in social theory, is addressed here first, in terms of the tendency of the theoretical pendulum to swing back and forth between these two poles of emphasis. Addressed next is the problem of universals versus local cultural variations, with a particular focus here on approaches in the sub-field of psychological anthropology within cultural anthropology.



Following discussions of these two theoretical issues pertaining to the individual in culture and society, there is a review of work relevant to these concerns: culture and personality and enculturation; altered states, including trance possession/mediumship and dreams and healing and medicoritual specialists; and concepts of body, senses, and person/self. These topics, although not representative of all issues or topics in cultural anthropology, have received much attention, have raised key questions, and have suggested future directions in the discipline.

### ***Collectivities and Individuals; Structure and Agency***

Structure and agency constitute two main shapers of outcomes. Most theories tend to emphasize individual practice or collective social action. In this trend, there have been approximately three main positions taken. First is the position involving doctrines that social/cultural life is largely determined by social structure and that individual agency or practice can be explained as mostly the outcome of structure or institutions; examples include French Structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss, with its emphasis on universal mental logical structures; Durkheimian normative sociology and its influence in anthropology; the British social anthropological school of structural-functionalism (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown); and some Marxist theories.

The second position includes doctrines that reverse the above emphasis, stressing instead the capacity of individuals (individual agents) to construct and reconstruct their worlds, and the necessity of explanations in actors' terms. Examples include utilitarianism as formulated by John Locke, and the associated Economic Man liberal and neo-liberal economic theories of cost-benefit analysis; ethnomethodology and related game theory studies of Frederik Barth (e.g., the individual flexibly wearing different "hats" of identity); and the dramaturgical concept of social action analogous to theatrical performance of Erving Goffman, centering on the human actor's presentation of self and impression-management on a kind of stage. These share an emphasis on the immediate situation and individual calculations during social interaction, a philosophical school of thought holding that utility entails the greatest happiness of the greatest number of persons and in which the assumption is that individuals rationally pursue their own interests and this seeps down to benefit all in the long term. Here, society is

no more than an aggregation of individuals brought together in realization of individual goals. The focus is not on wider power structures, whether cultural/symbolic, social, or material.

The third major position on this issue includes doctrines that emphasize that these two processes and forces are complementary—that is, both structural influences on human action and individual agency are capable of changing social structure. In this view, there are moves toward emphasizing practice, process, and relations (e.g., post-structural and post-modern theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu). In these works, a number of interesting formulations of alternatives to either extreme of emphasis have emerged; for example, Peter Berger and Steven Luckman in *The Construction of Social Reality* (1966) argued that society forms individuals, who create society in a continuous dialectic. Anthony Giddens (1984), in his concept of structuration, opposed the dualism of structure and agency out of hand, favoring a duality of structure in the sense that structure constitutes both the medium and the outcome of conduct it recursively organizes and structure constitutes rules and resources that do not exist outside actions but continuously impact its production and reproduction of action. Giddens also opposed analogies between social and physical structures (e.g., the British structural functional "machine" or "body" model of society). For Giddens, there is structure, but this is more fluid and negotiable. Even in these more nuanced approaches, the issue remains of not solely who we are but who we are in relation to ideas (cultural knowledge, or values), practice (agency), and structure (institutions).

One prominent concern, shown in the pervasive presence of the adjectives "structural" and "post-structural" in anthropology, has been with structure: what is it and from where does it derive? Also, how does one conceptualize the changing relationship between structure and agency? These concerns, still very much alive in cultural anthropology, can be traced back to the emergence of the social sciences as academic disciplines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As founder of both anthropology and sociology, Emile Durkheim (1859, 1912) addressed the problem of social cohesion in so-called "poly-segmentary societies" that he considered based on mechanical solidarity, in contrast to the organic solidarity of modern societies with their division of labor (Parsons, 1965, p. 39). Parsons traces Durkheim's early opposition to utilitarian

and psychological explanations to other currents in French intellectual history—namely, Descartes, Rousseau, Saint-Simon, August Comte, and Fustel de Coulanges (Parsons, 1965, pp. 39–65). His deep concern was to mediate between British empiricism and utilitarianism and German idealism.

### THE ISSUE OF STRUCTURE

In his *Rules of the Explanation of Social Facts* (1895 [1958]), Durkheim critiques functional utilitarianism (Parsons, 1965) and, in my view, implicitly, also British structural-functionalism, by arguing there is more to interpreting social facts than social morphology; the utility of a social fact may lead to social insight, but it does not explain its origins. Function does not create the social fact; facts come from somewhere deeper. Prior forces must exist to produce the fact. Also, facts can exist without serving a purpose; they may have never been used or may have lost their utility—for example, because of this, causes of a social phenomenon and its function must be studied separately, and cause must be studied before its effects. Also confronted here is the issue of where social phenomena originate. Previously, Comte and Spencer asserted that society is a system derived from an individual psyche of humans set up to achieve certain goals. In their view, social theory is an extension of psychology. Durkheim disputes this argument: it is not individual wants and needs that dictate how humans act but social forces that transcend them; he asserted that it is not individual wants and needs that dictate how a human acts but, rather, social forces that transcend them. Only society remains to explain social life, as this pressures an individual to act and think in certain ways. This is accomplished through association. We are not merely the sum of our parts; in association, we act differently than we do as individuals. We become a separate entity that transcends our individuality. For example, this view would explain some unexpected election results as not resulting from the sum total of atomistic, individual opinions but instead from the work of structural facts (e.g., economic forces) and collective representations (e.g., cultural values) that transcend individuals' consciousness and actions—in other words, a collective conscious in a kind of crowd psychology à la Gustav Lamont. Society is a given reality, having exteriority from the point of view of its own members, but it also regulates or constrains their action. This view is very opposed to a utilitarian view, as expressed by the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in

her statement that “there is no society, only individuals and families.” For Durkheimians, by contrast, society is a system formed by association and a different reality with its own characteristics.

Yet Durkheim does not dismiss psychology completely; he believes it plays an important role in preparing for the study of social phenomena (Parsons, 1965). Indeed, Durkheim thought that the essential elements of culture and social structure are internalized as part of the individual personality. Nevertheless, an element of exteriority is involved in moral authority because, although internalized, the normative system must also objectively be part of a system extending beyond the individual (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 2011; Tavory, Jablonka, & Ginsburg, 2011, this volume). It is not subjective in the sense of a purely private individual, for it is also a cultural object in sense relevant to idealistic tradition. For example, the meaning of success cannot be established without understanding the interplay between the motivation of the actor and the normative claims impinging on him from his social environment, expressed in the distinction made by a student of Durkheim's, Marcel Mauss, between two types of personhood/self: *le moi* (me) and *la conception de la personne sociale* (concept of social person). For, at the same time, as Nsamenang (2011) points out in the present volume, the social environment of any given actor of reference is composed of other actors whose action must be also analyzed as interactional. Anomie, or normlessness, thus makes achieving goals meaningless from lack of clear criteria.

Durkheim later theorized on religion, symbolic systems, and collective representations (1912 [1954]) and emphasized a theory of culture in relation to that of society. Here religion is the primordial matrix, from which principal elements of culture emerged by the process of differentiation—specifically, in totemism, the origin of religion. The classification in cultural belief/knowledge that distinguishes between sacred and profane is similar to the distinction between moral obligations and expediency or utility. For Durkheim and those influenced by this theorist, such as Marcel Mauss (1936) and later, Mary Douglas (1966), the quality of sacredness does not reside in any intrinsic properties of the object treated as sacred but, rather, in its properties as a symbol and its position to other objects, seen by Durkheim as collective representations, which became defined in recent and contemporary cultural anthropology as symbolic systems (Turner, 1967). In this formulation, there is a close

integration between the religious system of representations and the structure of society itself, linked by the attitude of moral respect that Durkheim called “awe.” According to Durkheim, this integration is particularly close in primitive religion but also exists in others. Any cultural system must have a collective aspect, for symbolization that is wholly private is no longer cultural or even truly symbolic; this later influenced Clifford Geertz’s (1973) concept of culture as shared, public, and translatable.

In the wake of this legacy, several more nuanced approaches to this issue have tended to retreat somewhat from the normative traditions of the Durkheimians and the British structural-functionalists and place greater emphasis on agency and practice, although differing nonetheless from the older ethnomethodological and utilitarian emphases, by giving some nods to the power of structure.

For example, in his work *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu addressed continental philosophy as much as anthropology. But Bourdieu drew on the Marxist concept of *habitus* and also emphasized practice to explore the question of human agency. In Bourdieu’s formulation, *habitus* consists of a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as principles of generation, and structuring of practices and representations that can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules. The term *disposition* signifies the special place the body occupies in *habitus*; dispositions are cultivated through interaction with a whole symbolically structural environment, and these cultivated dispositions become inscribed in body schema and in schemes of thought. For example, Bourdieu discusses the Kabyle sense of honor, emphasizing the dual location of honor in both the mind and the flesh. In Bourdieu’s conception of *habitus*, mastery of body is essentially successful in incorporation (literally, the taking into the body) of particular social meanings, inculcated through various bodily disciplines oriented to such mundane practices as standing, sitting, speaking, walking, and organization in space. In mastering the body, the child develops skills to act in and on the world. This is a dialectical process Bourdieu calls “the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 89). Thus the ideology or culture is not only in our head but also in our bodies (e.g., is embodied), and although there is some room for agency, structure tends to reproduce itself.

### *Shared Universal Themes, Local Cultural, and Personal Variations*

Another stream of thought in cultural anthropology, psychological anthropology (which arose from its ancestral school, culture, and personality) approaches the problem of the anthropological subject by focusing on individual mental aspects of humankind in learning the culture and weighs the relative power of shared universal common themes and local variations. The complex processes by which an individual acquires traits his or her society considers desirable—or undesirable—involve learning to experience the world in a particular way. Enculturation and socialization practices are one focus. These differ widely from culture to culture and are processes by which the individual learns knowledge, values, and skills required in a particular society. Because of this great variation, anthropologists have asked whether people who grow up in different societies learn to see the world differently. So completely does socialization shape our experience of the world that we come to see our own worldview as natural. Psychologically oriented cultural anthropologists have used cross-cultural studies as a basis for considering whether people universally perceive the world in the same way in some contexts, whether they think about it in same way, and whether concepts of person/self are universal.

The history of psychological anthropology has been marked by attempts to distinguish human universals from characteristics that are particular to specific, local populations of different cultural and community settings. One major focus in this debate has been Sigmund Freud’s concept of the Oedipal complex. Freud thought that all male children are subject to the Oedipal complex, in which they sexually desire the mother and resent the father. Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) suggested that the Oedipal complex is associated with patrilineal inheritance, but some other anthropologists see what they consider to be Oedipal patterns cross-culturally in myths and dreams.

The Oedipal complex takes its name from the story of the Greek hero Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. Freud suggested that the Oedipal story expresses conflicts that are universal in the developmental cycle of males throughout the world. According to Freud, boys become sexually aroused by their mothers during intimate contact occasioned by maternal nurturing and, as a result, become envious of their fathers. Melford Spiro described the resulting conflict in the

boy's mind: "As result of his wish to possess exclusive love of the mother, boy moreover develops wish to kill father and to replace him in his relationship with mother (in mind of little boy, to kill means to eliminate, to banish, to get rid of)" (Spiro, 1982, p. 4). At the same time, the boy admires his father and seeks to emulate him.

Malinowski ([1927] 1955) rejected Freud's contention that the Oedipal complex is universal. Rather, he argued, the tension between father and son described by Freud results from European system of patrilineal inheritance, rather than from sexual competition for the mother. Because, under the patrilineal system, a boy inherits property and social status from his father, the boy feels resentment toward his potential benefactor, who has authority over him. At the same time, the father feels ambivalence toward his son, who will eventually assume control of his status and property as the father grows older and dies.

Among Trobriander Islanders, Malinowski noted, descent is matrilineal, which means a boy inherits status and property from his mother's brother rather than from his father. In the Trobriands, boys have warm, affectionate relationships with their fathers because they do not see them in authoritarian role (Malinowski, [1927] 1955, p. 31). By contrast, the relationship between the boy and his mother's brother is one of tension and conflict, as the boy will inherit his status and property through his mother's line, from the senior male, his maternal uncle. The maternal uncle is also in charge of disciplining the boy and feels ambivalent toward his heir, who will eventually displace him and take property away from his own son. According to Malinowski, it is competition over authority and status, rather than over sexual access to the mother, that is the source of anxiety between a boy and the man from whom will inherit his social position. Thus the Oedipal complex does not exist among matrilineal Trobriand Islanders.

Other anthropologists have more recently re-analyzed Malinowski's data to challenge his view that the Oedipal complex does not occur in matrilineal societies. For example, Annette Weiner (1976) found that fathers in the Trobriand Islands still maintain social, emotional, and economic ties with sons, despite the matrilineal emphasis, in gift-giving and other exchanges. Melford Spiro (1982) found that in their dreams, Trobriand subjects never dreamed of having sexual intercourse with their mothers but did have some sexual dreams about

their sisters, despite strong sexual taboos between siblings. Brother-sister incest is also a prominent theme in Trobriand myths. Melford Spiro argues that the brother-sister incest theme in these dreams and myths suggests that sexual attraction and hostility are deflected from their true objects, mother and father, and displaced onto less threatening subjects, sister and maternal uncle. Thus Oedipal complex is not absent among Trobrianders; rather, it emerges in disguised form as love for one's sister and hostility toward one's mother's brother (Spiro, 1982).

Whether the Oedipal complex is universal continues to be debated in anthropology. Freud suggested that unconscious conflicts are expressed in dreams of individuals and myths of societies. Allen Johnson and Douglass Price-Williams (1996) conducted a cross-cultural survey of myths and tales and concluded that the Oedipal complex is indeed universally represented in these societies, suggesting that mother-son attraction and father-son hostility is a theme in all societies (Womack, 2001, p. 186). This debate is not settled, however.

The foregoing debate raises wider issues, such as the relative influence of socialization and patterns of social organization on individual practices (Nsamenang, 2011, this volume). Recall that Franz Boas, as founding father of American anthropology, in the early twentieth century emphasized the importance of culture. This insight influenced a number of anthropologists who studied the relationships among culture, childrearing practices, and adult personality. The works of those anthropologists became known as the culture-and-personality school. Although contemporary anthropologists reject these researchers' overemphasis on uniformity within cultures and oversimplification of complex variables, the culture-and-personality school provided an important basis for development of psychological anthropology.

One topic within this school concerned defining "normal" and "deviant" behavior as shaped by socialization or enculturation. Ruth Benedict (1934) discussed how societies tolerate a range of behaviors considered normal and have means for dealing with behavior that violates the norm—sometimes providing a niche for those who do not conform to normative expectations; for example, some Native American Indians have very flexible concepts of gender roles in which biological men may become cultural females, formerly called "berdache" and now called "two spirits" (Whitehead in Ortner, 1981).

In some non-Western medicine, shamans or mediumistic healers treat a variety of disorders, both physical and psychological. Anthropologists (Harner, 1990; Kendall, 1989; Winkelmann, 2000) have noted that shamanic healing can be effective, in part because it treats underlying tensions in the group instead of isolating the individual. Shamans also treat illnesses through medico-ritual therapies, such as spirit possession (Rasmussen, 1995, 2001), that are similar to techniques used by Western psychotherapists.

#### **ALTERED STATES (SPIRIT POSSESSION/ MEDIUMSHIP/SHAMANISM; DREAMS) AND HEALING**

According to the widespread biomedical model, a human being is a physical entity, a thing existing apart from other such physical entities. These individualistic and Cartesian mind/body dualist views are reflected in the allopathic or biomedical model of healing, in which illness is treated as a failure of one's organs or of bodily mechanisms. For example, an illness may be diagnosed as a renal failure, a failure of kidneys to perform as they ordinarily do. Following from that diagnosis, treatment may be confined to repairing kidneys rather than treating the system that gave rise to failure of kidney to perform as expected. In fact, kidneys share a relationship with every other aspect of body, including the circulatory system, which delivers oxygen and other nutrients to kidneys, and lungs, which take in air and provide oxygen that every part of body requires (Womack, 2001, p. 183).

By contrast, shamans or mediumistic healers trace the origins of illness to disrupted social relationships. This is an alien concept in Western bio- or allopathic medicine, which until recently has tended to emphasize isolated, biological causes of disease. Recent research is suggesting that although the biomedical tradition is necessary for healing some diseases, it is an oversimplification in some contexts of healing. Medical conditions such as cancer, hypertension, and asthma may be related to the expression or repression of emotions, which is also related to socialization and cultural expectations about the appropriate way to behave in social groups. Underlying the biomedical model is the idea that individuals are discrete units that stand in opposition to a culturally coherent group. This view is at variance with some other models, which view humans as members of groups, fulfilling their destinies only through social interaction.

Cross-cultural studies of medico-ritual healing through altered states of consciousness—namely, trance—illustrate these dynamics vividly. According to the established biomedical allopathic medical model, recall that illness tends to be classified as either physical or mental (organic or non-organic). Deviance from the ideal is often regarded as an individual problem rather than as an affliction of the group as a collectivity. Most societies do not, however, distinguish so neatly between physical (organic) and mental (non-organic) illness, nor do they always draw a rigid boundary between intentional and unintentional deviance. Treatment is usually aimed at identifying problematic relationships within the group. In these societies, the source of the problem is often attributed to outside forces, either naturalistic, human/social (personalistic), or spiritual—for example, malevolent ghosts or shades (Foster, 1977). Traditional mediumistic healers, widely called shamans in anthropology, frame their diagnoses and treatments in symbolic terms. The use of symbols in medico-ritual treatments express complex ideas in dramatic forms and allow indirect expression of emotional and social issues, (Turner, 1967), such as the unequal treatment of co-wives (Rasmussen, 1995, 2001, 2006).

By attributing illness or nonconforming behavior to demons or spirits, the shaman can diffuse and defuse the powerful emotions generated by competing interests and conduct psychotherapeutic healing. The shaman uses symbols to treat a disorder within the social context. For example, he/she might diagnose an illness as the result of not pleasing an ancestor. In so doing, the healer brings to the surface tensions underlying the illness or deviant action of patient undergoing the medico-ritual and addresses wider social conflicts.

Anthropologists have noted that many indigenous healers use techniques similar to those used in Western psychotherapy. In the former, symbols are used to communicate, whereas in the latter, medical terminology is used. For example, a shaman may perform a ritual drama by symbolically journeying into the realm of spirits. This journey is usually accompanied by percussion music, which encourages the patient and/or the healer to enter an altered state of trance, and malevolent spirits are dramatized with gestures and/or obliquely referred to in song verses (Rasmussen, 1995). Levi-Strauss (1963) explained the effectiveness of a shamanic treatment of a difficult labor among the Cuna Indians of Panama, who guided a woman through a potentially fatal

childbirth through ritual use of symbols. The shaman made ritual figures, chanted invocations personifying the birthing woman's pains as important figures in local myth, and purified the birthing room by burning herbs. He changed the story of his journey to the realm of Muu, the female power responsible for forming the fetus. The shaman diagnosed the problem as Muu having exceeded her role and capturing the soul of the mother-to-be. Through the persuasiveness of these metaphoric chants, in which Muu is persuaded to release the woman's soul, and the shaman exhorted his spirit figures to help him rescue her soul, a successful childbirth occurs. These rituals, featuring spirit possession and mediumship, are often open to the public, and the audience may participate in the healing process through support for their person undergoing the healing. Whereas in Western psychotherapy the patient speaks, in this case the healer speaks (chants). Levi-Strauss analyzes the shaman's account of his journey into the abode of Muu as a description of the woman's body, and the patient understands this subconsciously and then relaxes, understands pain as not arbitrary but rather meaningful, and allows the birth to take place. Thus, in his symbolization, the shaman provides the sick woman with a language by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexplicable, psychic states can be immediately expressed (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 198).

Another important altered state or out-of-body experience is dreams, but these are given diverse interpretations in different social and cultural settings. Thus, although dreams are individually experienced, they are culturally informed (Lohmann, 2003, p. ix). Dreams are expressed in accordance with social values pertaining to communication, concepts of person, spirituality, and notions of public/private. Roles of dreams vary, from a casual topic of conversation, a psycho-analysis topic, to divine revelations, shamanic mediumistic journeys to heal, and political meetings. Dreams also allow many people to experience continued participation of ancestors in their daily lives, and this too may influence decision-making. Stewart and Strathern (in Lohmann, 2003, pp. 43–61) examine dreams phenomenologically in two Melanesian societies, the Hagen and the Duna; here, the dead come to visit the living in dreams and may warn of future problems or attacks.

The spiritual and emotional connection of dreams is widespread. Roger Ivar Lohmann (in Lohmann, 2003, pp. 189–211) presents a series of

first-person spirit encounter narratives from Asabano culture. Asabano understand dreams to allow travel in a spiritual dimension, such that a personal soul can leave the body and contact other spirits. The Asabano spiritual world is rich in indigenous tradition but also reflects rapid cultural change they have seen in recent decades. Dreamed spiritual encounters predispose people to perceive spirit beings in waking life and are a significant cause of religious convictions.

Despite the diverse ways cultures influence and extract meanings from dreams, everywhere at least some dreams are understood as a means of actually traveling across spatial, temporal, and spiritual dimensions (Lohmann, 2003). Common dream experiences are of person/self in motion, being and doing what one cannot in alert consciousness. Thus dreams are experiences of some kind of transportation and transformation of body and soul. There are many shamanic dream journeys reported in anthropology of religion and medical anthropology from different parts of the world. Thus there are rich variations on common themes in cultural understandings and practices surrounding transformations of body, senses, and person or "self."

### ***Concepts of Body, Senses, and Personhood/Self***

In anthropology, the body, senses, and personhood have been accorded central importance since approximately the nineteenth century. This interest developed along several lines. First, historically, anthropology has been more inclined to pose questions about the universal "essence" of humanity, as the context of European colonialism prompted early scholars to address problem of human universals of ontology (knowing; understanding) in relation to variations of social relationships. As a consequence, the ontological centrality of human embodiment became one focus in the quest of universals.

One early question raised concerned the range of social and cultural arrangements necessary for survival and reproduction of self and body. Several streams of study were important here: in nineteenth century unilineal evolutionism, there was a convergence of questions of universals in these theorists' quest for universals in human origins. Central here was the relationship between culture and nature. In this, the body played a part, as it offered one solution to the problem of cultural relativism and psychic unity of humankind. But opposed to this was another line of development that contributed

to anthropological study of the human body in nineteenth century social Darwinism during the Victorian period. There were three key ideas here: that human beings were essentially a part of nature, rather than outside it; in a distortion of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, there arose the theory of universality of the fittest and unequal ranking of cultures in terms of phases of progress to explain social change; and more recently, there have been studies in twentieth century physical anthropology of the expression of emotions in humans—for example, Konrad Lorenz on aggression.

Another question that directs anthropological attention to person/self and body has been, "What is it to be human?" In more recent structural and symbolic studies of the late twentieth century, theories such as Claude Levi-Strauss's proposed that humans are cultural because of meaning contrasts—specifically certain prohibitions (e.g., the incest taboo and purity and danger categories) (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Douglas, 1966). This focus on contradictions between body and soul, and instinct versus social solidarity, opposed civilization to nature and argued that categories of reality—for example, pure and impure, sacred and profane—reflected categories of culture, not nature.

Also relevant to these ideas was German romanticism of the nineteenth century, whose tripartite division of body (*Leib*), spirit (*Geist*), and soul (*Seele*) conveyed that idea that because humans are unfinished as biological creatures, not at home in nature, they require the protective canopy of institutions and culture. The point here is that the body is constructed by culture and society; the latter, with language, filter and buffer nature (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 2011, this volume).

Now, from these streams of thought, three fundamental propositions have remained influential in anthropology and sociology: human embodiment creates a set of constraints, but also the body has the potential to be elaborated on by socio-cultural development—that is, in Western philosophical and social theory, the body generally appears as a constraint and potential; there are contradictions between human sexuality and socio-cultural requirements; and these natural facts are experienced differently according to the classification system (e.g., gender constructs). This insight lead to the issue of body as a classificatory system. Mary Douglas (1966), for example, theorized that humans respond to disorder, such as risk, uncertainty, and contradictions; their principal response

was symbolic classification through the medium of the body itself; for example, the body becomes a central metaphor of political and social order (e.g., food taboos reflect the wider order).

The body has long been an important locus of discourse, not solely in biology and medicine but also in the human sciences, although in the latter it has often been denigrated. In the seventeenth century, rationalists believed that the sensuous body was an object to be distrusted because it led to subjective, rather than objective, perceptions. Also denigrated were the "lower senses"—that is, non-visual sense modalities. But later there were trends toward greater attention to the body and extra-visual modalities, as well, as a vital subject of cultural study. These trends arose from critiques of the rationalists—for example, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger.

Karl Marx suggested a dialectical relationship between the body and the social and natural worlds. For example, Marx recognized that it was only by attending to human engagement in sensuous practical (i.e., material) activity that he could understand "real, corporeal man." In other words, Marx insisted that the body is not just there but acts upon the world and is, in turn, acted upon by the world that they body has helped to create. Marx saw this dialectic as mediated most fundamentally by human labor. However, subsequent writers have explored this dialectic in terms of a much broader compass; for example, Michel Foucault (1978) traced the historical development of scientific discourse (i.e., conversations that represent and study and form policies) and institutions impinging on the body in practices seemingly as disparate as sexuality, psychoanalysis, medicine, and the penal system, as well as physical spaces such as architecture. Scientific study involves surveillance and control, not merely knowledge, of the body. This is Foucault's concept of the panoptic gaze, power at different levels in the system.

In more recent social theory, most views of the body analyze this as not merely a natural object but as one socially, historically, and politically constituted. This idea animates the most recent and current (i.e., mid-to-late twentieth and twenty-first century) work on the body. Erving Goffman has described how the body forms the implicit foundation for stigma. Feminist theorists such as Susan Bordo (1993) examine more general representations of bodies—particularly of women's bodies—within myriad discourses and institutions, such as

art, advertising, and popular romances, and ask how these shape both how women experience their bodies and how others treat them as embodied beings. Now, these writers insist that discourses and institutions impinge as powerfully as does (Marxian) labor process on how body is lived.

Also, another aspect of common ground shared by Marx and many of these writings is a dual concern with the ideological (symbolic and expressive) and material (political and economic) aspects, or, in Foucaultian terms, discourses and techniques of the lived body. But Marx's and Foucault's and many feminists' body studies almost always and often implicitly concern the Western (Euro-American) body.

Finally, also relevant in developing a theory of body was the traditional emphasis in social/cultural anthropology on comparison and the study of small-scale, non-industrial, and more recently, of more industrial large-scale societies. Scholars from Marcel Mauss's (1935) "Techniques of the Body" have found that cross-culturally, the body is an important surface in which marks of social status, family, position, ritual prohibitions, social affiliation, and religious condition are displayed (e.g., tattoos in Polynesian societies). Mauss catalogued cross-cultural variations in bodily techniques for all manner of activities, from swimming to sex, emphasizing how powerfully each society inscribes itself on the body of each of its members and how resistant the body can be to altering techniques it "knows." Although these processes are present everywhere, they are most obvious and directly expressed in smaller-scale societies. Mauss's point here was that these techniques are not consciously taught; rather, they are shaped by and express a *habitus*, a notion Mauss invented, but one that the French ethnographer and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, as shown, later developed further.

The body has also become a popular focus in medical anthropology within both cultural and bio-anthropology, over the past several decades in particular, from concerns over AIDS and other pandemics. A seminal essay on the body in this area, "The Mindful Body" (1988), was authored by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock. This is an attempt to deconstruct, uncover, and problematize and ultimately to encourage resistance to conventional Cartesian concepts of the body heretofore accepted by earlier anthropologists. Scheper-Hughes and Lock label the failure of medical anthropology to critically examine accepted conceptions of the

body as a "prolegomenon," suggesting that the lack of more critical analysis of the body could lead to anthropology's falling prey to biological fallacy and related assumptions that are paradigmatic to biomedicine (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1988, p. 6). This biological fallacy, the Cartesian mind-body split, has multiplied into a number of other binary relationships in Western societies, such as culture/nature; society/individual, spirit/matter, and so forth (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1988, p. 10). These authors write this essay specifically because they see body concepts as being quite significant to anthropologists for understanding culture and societies, on the one hand, and for increasing knowledge of the cultural sources and meanings of health and illness, on the other (*ibid.*, p. 8), and because they want to prescribe alternatives to accepted approaches and concepts.

These authors propose seeing the body as "physical and symbolic artifact, naturally and culturally produced" (*ibid.*, p. 7). They conceptualize three distinct but related body perspectives anthropology should take in its study: the individual body; the social body; and the body politic. They assume that most humans have a concept of individual body—that is, they phenomenally lived experience of the body-self, separated into other body-selves. They highlight alternative ways of looking at the individual body-self and accounting for relations between mind, body, culture, nature, and society (*ibid.*, p. 11). Recognizing different concepts (monistic, holistic, multiplistic) of body-self is key to any anthropological understanding of way societies diagnose and treat illness and the way they define health, the way they define selves as healthy and treat perceived individual and societal illnesses. These authors make a final suggestion that an exploration of body-image (body boundaries, distortions in body perceptions) is essential to the concept of individual body—for example, point out that a relationship between people's choice of symptoms and concepts of body image should be considered to come to a better understanding of social and cultural meanings of humanity and perceived threats to human health, well-being, and social integration (*ibid.*, pp. 17–18).

Turning to their concept of the social body, Lock and Scheper-Hughes discuss how the body is culturally and socially representative, stating that "Cultural constructions of and about the body are useful in sustaining particular views of society and social relations" (*ibid.*, p. 19). The body is used



representationally to devise and justify social values (e.g., as in symbolic equations involving left and right handedness). Links have been made between health or sickness of individual bodies and social bodies for centuries. These authors suggest that most common symbolic use of body has been to classify and humanize living spaces (*ibid.*, p. 21). Point to differences between ethnomedical and biomedical concepts of social relations in the healthy or sick body; for example, ethnomedical systems see social relations as inevitably linked to individual health and illness. They suggest that ethnomedical concepts seem to entail a unique kind of human autonomy (*ibid.*, p. 21) that industrialized modern world has lost. These societies do not appear to experience the same sort of body alienations (anorexia, bulimia, etc.) experienced in Western societies, which seems also to be linked to capitalism and its regimentation. They point very specifically also to the body as machine metaphor as one of the sources of body alienation in industrialized societies. Their overall sentiment is that in industrialized Western society, “the human shape of things and even the human shape of humans is in retreat” (*ibid.*, p. 23).

Expanding on the concept of social body, Scheper-Hughes and Lock use the concept of body politic to suggest that the relationship between social and individual bodies is more than metaphors and collective representations of natural and cultural (*ibid.*, p. 23). This relationship is ultimately about power, about social control of bodies. Societies do not control bodies only in times of crisis but often aggressively reproduce and socialize kinds of bodies they need or require to sustain themselves (*ibid.*, p. 25). Ways in which societies reproduce and socialize bodies are through body decoration and through constructing concepts of politically correct bodies. Although the politically correct body is often supposed to be healthy, it can actually mean grotesque distortions of human anatomy. The body politic has brutal ways of conforming individual bodies to requirement of socio-political establishment: medicine, criminal justice, psychiatry and various social sciences, and even torture. They further point out that, post-Malthus, the body-politic concept involves finding ways to control populations, involving control of sexuality, gender, and reproduction. These authors propose that an anthropology of the body involve a theory of emotions because emotions may provide a vital link, a bridge, between mind and body, individual, society, and body politic (*ibid.*, p. 29). Tracking emotional states

or altered states experienced in illness and healing is, as shown, another way anthropologists attempt to move beyond a restrictive, Cartesian viewpoint and re-explore notions of human agency in society.

Another trend, since around the 1970s, has been to question the classical supposition that rigorous research methods always result in objectively “true” observation. The concept of the sensuous body (i.e., focus on the senses in studies) emerged as a new site of cultural and political analysis. Initially, many works considered the body as a text that could be “read” hermeneutically and consequently tended to ignore context and multisensorial modalities. There have been calls for greater attention to not solely cataloguing local cultural concepts of body and senses into the ethnographic record but also incorporating them into anthropological theory. As Herzfeld (2001, Chapter 11) notes, sight and writing have been widely associated with power; anthropology is primarily verbal and textual, but much cultural and social life is more complex and involves additional, extravisual, and nontextual sense modalities.

In response to these problems, there are attempts to consider how knowledge and perceptions of legitimacy and truth in many societies devolve from not simply vision and text, but also from modalities of smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Classen (1997) describes how historically and culturally in Euro-American philosophies and cultures, theories tend to be based in perceptions of the body and senses that are inflected with gendered values. For example, the sense modality of sight has in the west often been considered associated with masculine values and the sense modality of touch with feminine values. In pre-modern Europe, women were seen as the imperfect result of an insufficient amount of heat during the process of conception and gestation. Sex differences in temperature were drawn from Aristotle, Galen and other ancient authorities and supported by contemporary scholarship and folklore. The innate coldness of women was considered by physicians and philosophers to be the cause of particular characteristics of the female body: storing food as fat, menstrual blood, milk, enabling them to carry and nourish children (Classen, 1997, p. 3). Because of this lack of heat rising up into their heads, women’s bodies were allegedly broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. By contrast, “hot” men had narrow hips and broad shoulders; baldness was a sign of burning up of the hair on their heads. Heat also caused men’s sexual organs to be external, whereas

insufficient heat obliged women's sexual organs to remain within the body (Classen, 1997, p. 3).

Among some other peoples, the thermal attributes of the body and the different senses are not conceived as hierarchically nor represented as rigidly in ranked or oppositional terms, as in the major European philosophical and scientific traditions, despite widespread cultural differentiation according to gender constructs—for example, the prevalent association in some cultures of written texts with scriptural scholarship. Rasmussen (2006) describes how, in Tuareg culture, visual and written texts are associated with Islamic scholarship and Qur'anic healing, which tends to be dominated by men, and touch in healing is more associated with female herbalists and other non-Qur'anic healers. All of these healers are respected and sought out by both women and men at different times; thus, here the sense modalities, although having associations, are not rigidly dichotomized by gender, nor are they hierarchically ranked. Although the Quranic healing by marabouts is often described as a science, nonetheless, non-Qur'anic healing is not denigrated or considered less reliable but as specialized in healing certain ailments—for example, stomachaches and women's reproductive and marital problems (Rasmussen, 2006). Although Tuareg also differentiate according to gender and make gendered thermal/humoral associations in their counteractive medical system, there is marked absence of a deficiency model here. There is also flexibility according to context. In local counteractive theories of balance and harmony, for example, hot and cold states of the body and diseases are caused for men and women alike by an imbalance of these forces (Rasmussen, 2006). Women should ideally be cool, and men ideally warm, but even these ideals should not become too pronounced or intensified; for example, a man can become too hot and fall ill. The goal is to find equilibrium between hot and cold; one should avoid an excess of either thermal states.

Recently, there have been analyses of how anthropological and ethnographic knowledge systems are constructed through extravisual sense modalities. Paul Stoller (1987, 1989) has described ethnographic insights from sound and taste. In his apprenticeship with a Songhai sorcerer/healer in Niger, he learned about ritual healing powers by tasting local herbs and listening to the healer's incantations and learned about social conflicts through the gustatory medium of food, when a co-wife of his field host prepared a bad sauce to express

her anger at her husband. He also described vividly how Songhai cosmology/philosophy and medico-rituals later inspired him to cope with his cancer treatments in the United States (Stoller, 2004). Rasmussen (1999) analyzed the role of aroma as channeling communication in Tuareg society and also analyzed its role in constructing ethnographic knowledge; among the Tuareg, for example, scents are used to diagnose non-organic (mental) illnesses, and many pleasant scents are associated with spirits. Perfume and incense are used as a medium to communicate among humans and between humans and spirits—for example, in medico-ritual healing. Their use is taken seriously and are not merely aesthetics, an alternative, or less credible, in contrast to aromatherapy in the United States. Islamic scholars use scents to diagnose mental states. Diviners place scented bark inside their mouth to aid their memory in healing and place perfumes in cowrie shells to their tutelary spirits in a special pact that enables the diviner in a dream to foretell the future and conduct psycho-social counseling. Certain scents, however, are also considered dangerous, and aroma in general can also be used to express anti-social feelings, conflicts, and struggles. For example, many Tuareg believe that a person can catch illness through the scent of someone who already has the illness, somewhat like Victorian contagion theories. The aromas of certain medicinal trees are believed to cause infertility in young women; that is a reason given by some Tuareg for the predominance of older women in the herbal healing profession. The nose and mouth are the principal orifices through which disease and more general pollution (from both physiological and social sources) enter the body; for example, smith/artisans can convey anger at nobles' not sharing food with them, even if food is out of sight, through smelling it. Thus one must hide food from smell and not solely from view. Also, local cultural values show great concern with protecting the body from what enters through the nose, as well as the mouth. In rural areas, most men wear a face-veil over the nose to protect from evil spirits and other malevolent powers, as well as to express respect and reserve, important values in the male gender role, particularly among nobles. Also, incense and perfume are believed to not just mask unpleasant odors but to actually dispel them, to repel evil spirits and disease; they work like a religious amulet. For example, incense is burned during weddings and passed around a circle of guests, who saturate their clothing with it. New mothers and babies also are protected

from jealousy by incense burning nearby along with a metal knife stuck in the sand of the tent floor and Islamic amulets placed around it. Thus in Tuareg culture, society, ritual, and healing and sociability, aroma is not solely a part of cosmetics and aesthetics but also acts powerfully in medico-ritual and pharmaceutical contexts (Rasmussen, 1999, 2006).

More broadly, the studies of these cultural uses of taste, the gustatory modality, and scent and the olfactory modality reveal magic, religion, and science as not so neatly opposed. Anthropologists should attempt to understand, represent, and take seriously other peoples' ways of constructing experience and knowledge, and the study of sense modalities and body and person/self contribute profound insights into these issues.

This demonstrates the need, recognized widely in anthropology, to take analysis of the body to another level. The focus here is on the cultural construction of what it means to be a person, or human—that is, identity and expectations concerning how the person or “self” acts in cultural and social settings and how different cultures elaborate on this identity. Despite their very different approaches to this topic (philosophical approaches tend to be more influenced by European Enlightenment concepts and Anthropological approaches attempt to elicit more culturally relative concepts), there has been some influence of philosophy on anthropological theories, and both anthropology and philosophy share questions regarding how the concept of person is defined and used in social interaction. Both anthropology and philosophy, as heirs to Classical and Enlightenment theories predominantly from Western European historical and political and intellectual milieu, are concerned with distinguishing between continuity over time that enables social agents to characterize an individual as a person and with an epistemological problem posed by differences between social attributes and self-knowledge. For example, in an early study, Marcel Mauss distinguished between *le moi* and *la conception sociale de la personne*; the former is the externally imposed cultural and social identity; the latter consists of one's self-definition or self-concept.

How is person/self relevant to the anthropological subject? Anthropology's primary concern is to examine comparatively and historically ideas about power, personhood, and agency, cultural ideas about how humans interact with each other in terms of self and social concepts of identity. For example, Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1956) described the case of a man

who had been missing for a long time from his Nuer community, for whom mortuary rituals were held, thereby defining his status as deceased. Even upon his return many years later, he remained defined as deceased and thus was no longer a full social person in the community of the living. In many cultures, there is no concept of what the English expression “self-made man” (or person) implies; rather, one's achievements cannot be isolated from the achievements of one's lineage or clan. Also, many cultural knowledge systems conceptualize components of personhood in distinctive ways: for example, in some communities in the Congo, a person's shadow is key to identity and cannot be stepped on or photographed without threatening one's identity (Jacobsen-Widding, in Jackson & Karp, 1990).

Historically, there have been at least three basic attempts to define personal identity in Western (i.e., Euro-American) philosophy since the Enlightenment that have influenced, to varying degrees, anthropology: (1) mental/idealist based; (2) material based; and (3) illusion, construct, or memory-based. First, those who define personal identity in mentalistic terms view our identity through time as a function of the continuity of our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings—for example, medieval religious theory of the soul as the seat of personal identity, where reason and will reside (e.g., St. Augustine) (later, Rene Descartes substituted mind for soul in this scheme). Next, those who explain personal identity in terms of the continuity of our bodies; according to this group, despite changes we undergo in growth and development, there is a basic physical unity of our identity that is responsible for our remaining the same person (e.g., Gilbert Ryle); this position opposes Cartesian and other older forms of dualism. Finally, some philosophers have argued that personal identity is just an illusion without an independent existence or substance. For example, Thomas Hume believed that all existence was a matter of perception. For John Locke, personal identity was seen as based on self-consciousness, in particular on the memories of past experiences. All these theories suggest a non-uniform (Western and other view of) notion of personal identity and self; even in our own culture, we can hardly sum up in one set of language terminology a unitary notion of self, because there has been historical change and internal cultural diversity even within that category commonly called “the West.” Thus the problem is how we know this: Which data do we examine? Useful are data from psycho-analysis;

popular lay folk notions; childrearing advice; and healing systems. Thus one may tentatively generalize, with some caution, contemporary “Western” (i.e., Euro-American) notions of personhood as generally (albeit with exceptions) more individualistic (Battaglia, 1995, Introduction) relative to some other cultural concepts of personhood. Yet neither Western nor non-Western concepts of personhood are unitary or static; everywhere, these concepts may change in relation to economics, history, politics, and social processes.

Thus, most recent and current studies of concepts of person/self attempt to elicit a fuller range of expression of person/self beliefs in different contexts, regardless of where these prevail. For example, according to Didier Kaphagawane (in Karp & Masolo, 1990), the work of early scholar Placide Tempels on Bantu philosophy tended to reproduce Enlightenment philosophical bias viewing a person as divided between mind or ideas and material body. Kaphagawane shows how, among the Bantu-speaking Chewa in Malawi, *munthu* denotes humans in certain situations but not others. *Munthu* refers to a person with social and morally valued qualities, not without them. Thus to state that someone is not a *munthu* does not imply he/she is not a human but, rather, that he/she lacks approved moral and social conduct. Thus personhood is not a stable category but is disputed and negotiated, and changes, even within a single community and during the same era.

In addition, most recent studies of personhood or concepts of person/self in anthropology have focused on factors that shape cross-cultural variations in definition of self/person. The question posed is, “Where do these concepts come from?” Based on her study of French-Portuguese bilingual speakers, Michele E.J. Koven (2000, p. 437) suggests that bilingualism allows people to express different kinds of selves in each language. Desjarlais (2000, p. 467) suggests that actions and diffuse understandings they effect are commonly rooted in relations of differential powers and authorities. Alice, a resident of a shelter, had represented herself as “happy on the street” until authorities (police, psychiatrists, social workers) started to treat her badly by forcing her to take medications, confining her in psychiatric hospitals, and requiring her to follow the edicts of psychiatric and legal institutions (Desjarlais, 2000, p. 468, quoted in Womack, 2001, p. 184). Whereas Alice had seen her life on the streets as an expression of her competence, authorities viewed Alice

as mentally ill and felt they were helping Alice by preventing her from engaging in what they saw as inappropriate social behavior.

## Future Directions in Cultural Anthropology

These highlights in cultural anthropological studies share a concern with representing culture and society as more fluid, dynamic, and relational and a vision of individuals and collectivities as mutually influential. As noted, there have recently been critiques of all the canons of anthropological thought (culture and personality, Durkheimian, structural-functionalism, interpretive, and French structuralism schools) for oversimplifying the variables involved in studying culture and society and also for overestimating the degree of conformity and continuity in culture and society. In all societies, values are often contradictory. Culture and society and the persons comprising them can no longer be reduced to clear-cut, essentialized entities, and their localities are no longer always literal, geographical, or neatly bounded.

Thus many cultural anthropologists now recognize the need to explore the following questions:

1. What are some emerging new spaces or localities of culture?
2. Why, alongside resistance, dissent, and personal practice and agency, does society nonetheless tend to reproduce itself?
3. What leads some persons to internalize the rules or habitus of learned dispositions more fully and others less fully?
4. In globalization, what are some forces of relocalization, and how can scholars in their analyses escape this binary opposition?
5. How can scholars in their analyses, similarly, escape circular arguments concerning individual/culture/collectivities and local/universal processes?
6. How can the culture concept be reformulated to encompass virtual aspects of human life?

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# Cross-Cultural Psychology: Taking People, Contexts, and Situations Seriously

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## Abstract

This chapter explores the role of culture for human psychology. First, the history of this relationship is briefly outlined. The early conceptualizations were characterized by a holistic understanding and methodological plurality. This wisdom, however, was ignored for much of twentieth century psychology, when different perspectives with different ideological underpinnings prevailed—notably, cross-cultural approaches, cultural approaches, and indigenous approaches. Recently the field has opened again, setting the stage for the development of integrative views. Different challenges for the future are formulated. The careful conceptualization and definition of culture for empirical studies, diverting from the practice of comparing the needs of citizens of different countries is a necessity. An integrated conception of culture and biology is an inevitable next step. The contents of cultural models need to be considered. Finally, a developmental perspective on psychological phenomena is crucial. Methodological openness and plurality of approaches is needed for the empirical realization. It is concluded that psychology in general needs to be culture-inclusive to overcome the sole representation of a minority of the human population.

**Keywords:** *Völkerpsychologie*, cultural, indigenous, socio-demographic characteristics, autonomy, relatedness, developmental tasks, evolutionary approaches, mixed methods

Cross-cultural psychology in its most general sense deals with the study of the relationships among culture and human behavior, emotion, and thought. The International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (founded in 1972) defines its scope in the constitution as follows:

“... further the advancement of knowledge about psychological functioning of humans in all human societies; develop and test theories about the relationships between culture and human behavior; test the generalizability of theories from all branches of psychology and related disciplines in all human societies . . . . encourage the development of valid measurement techniques and research methodology

in the study of human behavior . . . . encourage the incorporation of the knowledge and expertise gained by cross-cultural . . . psychology into the main body of psychology and develop and promote the application of psychological knowledge to social phenomena and problems in all countries. Last but not least IACCP wants to facilitate communication and cooperation among scholars who study the relationships between culture and human behavior and serve as a fertile ground for communication, discussion and social encounters in general.”

(<http://www.iaccp2010.com/>)

Cross-cultural psychology is understood here as one, nevertheless very important, branch of

psychology. The argument developed in this chapter, however, will be that psychology and culture mutually constitute each other and that all branches of psychology need to be culture-inclusive; Joan Miller made this claim in 1999 when she stated that psychology is and always has been cultural (Miller, 1999). Most of the psychological science is developed by Western scholars and is based on empirical findings from Western research participants. It is even worse because it is not only Western, but Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, (Democratic origin) (WEIRD), as Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) have argued in a review paper. Thus, the majority population of this planet is not represented in psychological science. Before we look into the future, first we shall look back briefly to track the origins of thinking about the role of culture for psychology.

### **Culture in Psychology—Before Cross-Cultural Psychology**

The concern about the influence of culture on psychology goes back to Moritz (Moses) Lazarus (1824–1903). He applied the laws of the psychology of the individual to the nation and to mankind and established a new branch of research with his article, “Über den Begriff und die Möglichkeit einer Völkerpsychologie als Wissenschaft” (“About the term and possibility of folk psychology as a science”) (in Prutz’s “Deutsches Museum” [German Museum], 1851) in which he coined the term *Völkerpsychologie* (folk psychology; for more extensive discussions of the historical origins, see the chapters of Diriwächter and Johoda in this volume). Some years later, Lazarus, in collaboration with Heymann Steinthal (1823–1899), his friend and brother-in-law, established the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (*Journal of Folk Psychology and Language Science*, vols. i–xx, Berlin, 1860–90; continued as the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* [*Journal of the Association for Folk Science*]).

Lazarus and Steinthal developed the conception of *Volksgeist* (folk consciousness) as the structure of congruent, historically emerged values. They considered every person to be unique, and such uniqueness was expressed through its *Volksgeist*, the unchanging spirit of a people refined through history. *Völkerpsychologie* as a science, however, only became popular in psychology much later and mainly with reference to the 10-volume edition of Wilhelm Wundt, (1832–1920), who was also the

founder of modern psychology with the establishment of the first psychological experimental laboratory in Leipzig, Germany in 1879 (for a more detailed discussion, see the Chapters 1 and 2).

Based on Lazarus’ and Steinthal’s ideas, Wundt conceptualized *Völkerpsychologie* as complementary to the psychology of the individual with an emphasis on the historical and social dimensions of human behavior and experience. The target was the cultural-historical analysis of the *Volksgeist*, especially language, art, myth, and customs. He understood human psychology and psychological development as not determined merely by sensation but also by the meaningful influences of the individual’s spiritual and mental [*geistig*] environment—his culture. Wundt thus clearly stressed the cultural dimension of human psychological functioning and the importance to understand human behavior within the complexity of its historical and cultural embeddedness. He also made clear that the prevailing research methods adopted from natural sciences are not sufficient to study human psychological functioning adequately. As Edwin Boring (1950) concluded: “Wundt never held that the experimental method is adequate to the whole of psychology: the higher processes, he thought, must be got at by the study of the history of human nature, his *Völkerpsychologie*” (Boring, 1950, p. 328).

This holistic understanding of psychology and the necessity of different methods for the study of human psychological functioning, however, got lost afterward for most of the twentieth century and has only recently come at the verge of rebirth. This temporary amnesia can be certainly attributed to psychology’s struggle to belong to the pantheon of science that was understood for a long time as natural science and experimental methodology.

### **Different Perspectives on the Role of Culture for Psychology**

The loss—or rather the ignorance—of a holistic approach to human psychology in North American and European mainstream psychology has been embodied in different perspectives that were discussed in quite controversial terms in the following decades. These different views (characterized as *cross-cultural*, *cultural*, and *indigenous*) as well as their methodological implications will be briefly portrayed in the following as the prevalent perspectives in the past. Such brief characterizations by



necessity risk being stereotypical, and it should be stressed that there is considerable variation in each of the conceptions, as well as overlap among them. Nevertheless, the stereotypical portraits capture some of the reality of the field—for example, that some cross-cultural psychologists accuse cultural psychologists of being hermeneutically unscientific whereas some cultural psychologists accuse cross-cultural psychology of being positivistic and reductionistic. These debates somehow represent continuity of the nineteenth-century ideological struggles. In fact the stereotypical views are particularly pronounced in this area because they tap into the basic understanding of the model of man and personhood.

### ***Cross-Cultural Psychology***

Most of cross-cultural psychology—especially in its early days—can be characterized as conceiving of culture as outside of the individual, a bounded entity that can be treated as an antecedent or independent variable. The comparison of different index variables (cultures) should explain or predict differences in psychological phenomena. Much of the studies reporting differences on cognitive styles can be subsumed here (e.g., Witkin & Berry, 1975), demonstrating, for example, differential susceptibility to optical illusions depending on contextual/cultural (socialization) experiences. There has also been some recent research on information processing labeled as cultural psychology that seems to be conceptually similar to the cross-cultural research ideology. Comparing East Asians and Euro-Americans, Nisbett and colleagues (e.g., Masuda & Nisbett, 2001) have demonstrated that East Asians perceive and reason more holistically, whereas Euro-Americans perceive and reason more analytically. However, proponents of this research tradition do not understand themselves as cross-cultural in the aforementioned sense, but as using experimental methodology to prove the inter-relationship between culture and social systems.

Another branch of cross-cultural psychology manipulates culture as an independent variable to demonstrate its nonexistence. These studies are mainly aimed at confirming the universal nature of humans and psychological laws. This conception of absolutism (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002) is based on the assumption that all psychological processes and the way they are expressed are universal. An example of this line of thinking is research on the conceptions of personality, especially the big Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae,

1992). The Five-Factor Model is conceptualized as a comprehensive taxonomy of personality traits, which are thought to describe consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions. Originally identified in the United States, it is repeatedly demonstrated that openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism can be identified in a wide variety of cultures, suggesting that the personality trait structure is universal. Much effort is being awarded to methodological issues and sophisticated statistical procedures to prove this aim. This conclusion, however, remains nevertheless an illusion because the statistical absence of differences does not confirm that there are no differences. Evidence for other factors and other structures of personality from non-Western cultures, which have been presented as well, are often criticized from methodological points of view.

Another strand of research that follows this second approach is informed by biologically based assumptions about the universality of human functioning—for example, attachment research. It is argued that all infants are biologically predisposed to develop attachments to caregivers to survive and develop. This assumption is extended to the notion that attachment is the same across cultures, emerges along the same developmental trajectories, and has the same developmental consequences across cultures (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). To prove these claims, evidence from diverse cultural contexts is accumulated, yet very often on very shaky conceptual grounds when, for example, the age of the mother is taken as a measure of her sensitivity toward her infant with the argument that older mothers have more domestic helpers and therefore more time for infant care.

Although in general, biological approaches informed by ethology utilize a variability of assessment procedures (e.g., observations, contextual analyses, interviews), the universalist cross-cultural approach mainly draws on experimental methodology and self-report measures. Experiments by definition manipulate variables, so that particular functions can be observed. However, the experimental setting is always reducing the complexity of psychological processes and moreover is context-independent. Experimental paradigms as well as self-report measures have mainly been developed in Western laboratories but are nevertheless applied in diverse environments. The epistemological challenges of equivalence of meaning, structure and

function go well beyond the – nevertheless serious – problems of translation.

Although all of these so-called “cross-cultural approaches” explicitly include culture to explain human psychological functioning, little emphasis is actually assigned to the definition of culture. Culture is basically set equivalent with country. According to this understanding, individual persons belong to a culture assuming the relative similarity of all the persons who belong to the given culture as well as stability of culture over time (Valsiner, 2007). If culture is further specified, mainly overarching cultural dimensions, especially individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1980/2001; more sophisticated systems of value are also widely discussed, *see* Schwartz, 2006). Individualism/collectivism had an overarching success story in dominating cross-cultural research for several decades while being heavily criticized at the same time from empirical as well as conceptual grounds (e.g., Poortinga, 2011; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). We will come back to these dimensions later. Culture as a system of meanings that can be defined and described has been left to cultural anthropology to a large extent.

Because individuals belonging to one national group have been assumed to share culture, the selection of participants for empirical studies was rather convenience-guided. Therefore, the prioritized participants of cross-cultural studies have been college students for a long period of time. College students are certainly not representative—if there is such a thing like representativeness—for their respective countries. They are higher educated, coming mainly from middle-class backgrounds, and often represent outliers in a more global perspective (for more discussion on this, *see* Henrich et al., 2010). Given the socio-demographic similarity of college students across countries, it can be assumed that they form a special cultural group in itself, so that similarities in psychological phenomena can be expected. We will revisit these contextual considerations later.

### **Cultural Psychologies**

Cultural psychology, in its most general sense, deals equally with the study of the relationships between culture and human behavior. However, the relationship between culture and person is differently conceived of as compared to traditional cross-cultural psychology: some approaches within this field conceive of culture as inside the individual (e.g., Boesch, 1980) and others as being in dialogical relationship to the person, so that culture and

personality/psychology make each other up (e.g., Schweder, 1990; Valsiner, 2007). In both cases, culture, behavior, and mind are not regarded as separate entities. Another distinction within the various approaches, which can be subsumed under the umbrella cultural psychology, is the focus on either symbolic meaning or shared practices. Because there are vast differences among different strands of cultural psychology (for an overview, *see* Valsiner, 2007; Boesch & Straub, 2006), however, we use the plural in the following.

Cultural psychologies aim at studying meanings and activities *in context* to assess how cultural beliefs and social practices regulate, express, and transform the human psyche. There is a wide spectrum of vigor concerning this conception ranging from culture-specific expressions of universal predispositions to the rejection of the psychic unity of humankind altogether. The focus is on everyday practices and routines that are considered to express as well as create culture. The prime subject of study is individuals’ creation of meaning systems—particularly shared or normative systems of social groups. The conception of a dialogical nature of person and culture requires a naturalistic approach and the study of everyday practices. The focus on meaning systems implies a primacy role of language and its constitutive function, as well as an interpretative methodology.

Moreover, individuals are not considered as passively “acquiring” culture; rather, culture is dynamically created and recreated in social interactions, which in turn are embedded in broader cultural meaning systems and practices. Individuals can “distance” themselves from the concrete activity setting by reflecting on the context of which he or she is a part. Thus cultural meaning is analyzed and reorganized in personally novel forms as it is being constructively internalized (Chaudhary, 2004; Valsiner, 2000, 2007).

In contrast to cross-cultural psychology, the conception of culture and the contextual situatedness of individual’s behavior are central to the research. The consequence is that studies are often non-comparative but concentrate on an in-depth understanding of one culture and is changing dynamics over historical time.

In her book, *Weaving Generations Together* (2004), Patricia Greenfield documents 20 years of research with the Zinacantec Mexican Indians, where she not only could document and analyze cultural practices and their socio-cultural change (e.g., changing strategies of girls learning to weave) but also the

implications of such changes on both the cultural products (patterns and designs of fabrics) and cognitive processes within this group. However, cultural comparisons are not excluded but may serve the purpose of elaborating meaning systems by the method of contrast (e.g., *see* Demuth, 2008).

As mentioned before, there is a relatively new branch of cultural psychology that focuses on cultural differences in attention, perception, cognition, and memory—especially between East Asian and Euro-American participants. This approach is rather experimental or quasi-experimental in nature. Although participants in studies are selected according to citizenship of countries, underlying cultural conceptions of the self are implied, especially the conception of the independent (Euro-Americans) and the interdependent (East Asian) selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These self-construals are based on broader cultural meaning systems such as Western individualism and East Asian Confucianism.

Common to all branches of cultural psychology is the understanding of culture as an inherent part of human psychological functioning. Some cultural psychologists share with cross-cultural psychologists that cultural evidence is needed for basic psychological theories to refine and/or expand these theories so that they become more relevant to the predictions, descriptions, and explanations of *ALL* human behaviors—not just Western ones (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

### ***Indigenous Psychologies/Psychology***

The emergence of indigenous psychologies is often characterized as motivated by the intention of decolonizing the mind. To achieve this mind decolonization, research and theories should be developed from a within-culture/indigenous perspective without participation from abroad. It is therefore a vital characteristic that indigenous psychologies can only be formulated by indigenous people—that is, cultural insiders by socialization. Particularly prominent are the Indian perspective (as formulated by Durghanand Sinha), the Philippino perspective (developed by Virgilio Enriquez), and the Mexican ethnopsychological perspective (as developed by Rolando Diaz Guerrero). This origin is different from cultural psychologies that mainly are the field of alien researchers who nevertheless spend a substantial amount of time in “their” culture and learn the local language. Indigenous psychologies share with cultural psychologies the prime subject of study—that is, subject’s creation of meaning

systems, particularly shared or normative systems of a cultural group. Besides the development of procedures and assessment tools from a within-cultural perspective, indigenous psychologies also aim at the development of psychological concepts and theories. Thus, folk theories, for example, are not an object of study as for cultural psychologies but are also the source for the development of formal psychological models and theories (Greenfield & Keller, 2004). Indigenous conceptions are part of a scientific tradition advocating multiple *perspectives* but not multiple *psychologies*. Therefore, modern proponents of indigenous psychologies have abandoned the plural form and instead talk about indigenous psychology.

The preferred participants and contexts for cultural psychologies are relatively stable subsistence village cultures, whereas indigenous psychologies mainly address elite populations like university students and deal with cultural change primarily. However, the founders of indigenous psychologies mentioned before did not primarily work empirically, with the exception of Diaz Guerrero, who developed the Mexican psychology also by contrasting it to Euro-American views. In any case, the cultural inside view serves the goal to develop indigenous conceptions of psychological functioning, which is also demanding the development of indigenous methodologies.

Indigenous psychology also has a political stance in voicing non-Western perspectives as equally important as Western ones to develop a truly international psychology—a seemingly trivial notion that nevertheless is grossly under-represented in scientific discourse still today (*see* the weird psychology, Henrich et al., 2010).

Also until today, there have been voices arguing that these different approaches are incommensurable, because they rest on different science theoretical paradigms and models of the person that are exclusive of each other. However, what is congruent or contradictory, commensurable or incommensurable, compatible or incompatible is itself a matter of the worldview one holds. A Confucian or Hinduistic worldview will have different conceptions of compatibilities than a Western eclectic philosophy or neo-Kantian analytical worldview. In the remainder of this chapter, we pursue the argument that these different perspectives are complementary in several respects. Basic to this point of view is the definition of some core terms/conceptions that will be presented in the following. The conception of

culture with which we will begin is certainly the most central one.

### Conceptions of Culture

The three approaches differ in their conception of culture. Whereas much of cross-cultural psychology equates culture with country or concentrates on the bipolar dimension of individualism/collectivism, cultural psychologies often focus on processes and neglect content and indigenous psychology spans from a process orientation to a comparative perspective (Mexican ethnopsychology) without further specification.

In the following we would like to propose an approach that defines culture as a contextual-adaptive process through differential emphasis of particular content domains. In line with cultural psychological conceptions, our starting point is culture as a socially interactive process with two main components: the creation of shared activity (cultural practices) and the creation of shared meaning. Shared activities concern the material side of culture. They are adapted to survival, which brings in the inseparable relationship between culture and biology that will be dealt with later, and it involves goal-directed action. Shared meaning (cultural interpretation) concerns values, beliefs, folk models, and ethnopsychologies. This conception situates culture in everyday contexts and behaviors (Greenfield & Keller, 2004; Keller, 2007).

### Adaptive Nature of Culture

We consider cultural practices and meaning systems to be *adaptive*. The aspect of adaptation defines culture as a functional system in an eco-social environment. Thus, cultural practices, routines, and artifacts help to master environmental challenges and define competence. Children co-construct cultural knowledge during ontogenetic development with their social partners. They profit from the accumulated cultural knowledge of the ancestral generations and the cultural niches that prior generations have constructed (Tomasello, 1999; Laland, Odling-Smee, & Feldman, 2000). During developmental processes, knowledge is acquired that is helpful for current problems and at the same time a preparation for future challenges. However, knowledge that is functional at one ontogenetic level must not need to be helpful at later levels and vice versa (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002).

Culture, as such, is part of our biological nature. Humans are equipped with the means to acquire

and to transmit culture. Therefore, development can be understood as cultural learning. Culture has evolved to facilitate individuals' social encounters with each other as a faster track than genetic adaptation. Therefore, culture is situated in social processes. For too long, an unsubstantiated rejection of the role of biology for human psychology has dominated all three perspectives represented earlier. It is therefore necessary to develop a differentiated view on the interplay of culture and biology.

### The Role of Biology for Cross-Cultural Psychology

A consideration of the impact of biology and the evolutionary history of humans beyond the physical body structure has been regarded as an attack against the free will, self-determination, and reflexivity. Although this debate can by and large be regarded as historical, there are occasionally voices coming up that try to question the role of biology for human psychology. The sometimes hostile attitude toward biology has been expressed from cross-cultural psychologists who, interestingly enough, share with ethologists the search for universals and by cultural psychologists who emphasize the uniqueness of humans, however, without consideration of the content, hence also focusing on a universal nature. It is amazing that the self-evident question, "How can the universal human nature appear irrespective of extremely different environments?" has so far not been raised. This question on these premises would lead logically only to one answer: Culture does not matter—a truly biologicistic attitude. On the other hand, nobody questions that, for example, plants develop very different phenotypes depending on the ecology in which they grow.

In fact, evolutionary theories assign culture a systematic place for understanding human psychology, and there is a conceptual closeness between genuine cultural and evolutionary approaches. This closeness will be demonstrated with a comparison of one of the most important conceptions of psychocultural research, the Whiting model (1975), which has set the stage for the famous six cultures study, the first cultural comparative study of child-rearing and development with basic assumptions of evolutionary theory (Keller, 2010).

Whiting summarized the philosophy of the psychocultural model in the introduction of the six cultures book on child-rearing (Whiting, 1963, p. 4):

Implicit in the research design is a general concept of the relation of personality to culture, which may

be presented as follows: The ecology of the area determines the maintenance systems, which include basic economy and the most elementary variables of social structure. In other words, the type of crops grown, the presence or absence of herding, fishing, and so on, depend on the nature of the terrain, the amount of rainfall, the location of the area vis-à-vis centers of invention and diffusion. These basic economic conditions determine in part the arrangement of people in space, the type of houses, and household composition. These in turn set the parameters for child-rearing practices.

(p. 4)

And continues:

It is assumed that different patterns of child rearing will lead to differences in the personality of children and thus to differences in adult personality.

(p. 5)

Child-rearing practices eventually lead to the shaping of the adult personality. Thus, the original model assumes a causal chain from ecological context to the adult psychology.

#### THE INPUT FROM EVOLUTIONARY THEORIZING

Evolutionary theorizing also considers the environment as the starting point of the causal chain leading to human psychology and behavior but adds to the proximate level of functional relationships between context and psychology the ultimate goal of reproductive success, or optimal genetic fitness. Thus, the core assumption is that humans, like any other species, strive for optimal representation of their genes in the next generation. This is, of course, an assumption of unintentional, maybe unconscious, “as-if” decisions. Environmental conditions comprise material and ecological resources as well as social complexity including material and social niches that prior generations have created. The crucial components in the environment are the resources that an individual is able to exploit and possibly to accumulate. Whereas the model for psychocultural research deals with the environment on a descriptive basis, evolutionary theory differentiates types of environments with respect to strategic reproductive decisions.

Both conceptions are turning the prevailing theories of socialization upside down:

Rather than analyzing the age, sex, and cultural differences in children’s activities and companions as simply the result of developmental changes of

socialization pressure by parents, other caregivers, and teachers, we are analyzing these differences as a cause in the process of socialization.

(*Whiting & Pope Edwards*, 1988, pp. 5–6)

Age, gender, and context are the major determinants of behavioral and psychological differentiations from evolutionary theories as well.

Moreover both approaches share the common interest in universal as well as differential patterns. “... [I]n spite of individual differences, there are behavior regularities for children of a given age and sex in each cultural community. That is, there are meaningful norms ...” (Whiting & Pope Edwards, 1988, p. 10)

To test the universal patterns, a cross-cultural approach is crucial, because looking for universal principles can best be achieved “... by replicating studies in a variety of cultural contexts” (Whiting & Pope Edwards, 1988, p. 10). This approach is clearly different from cultural (as well as anthropological) perspectives that assume that behavior is infinitely malleable and that cultures produce uniqueness. The focus of the research following the Whiting psychocultural model is on normative aspects, on the “natural man” approach, indicating great psychobiological similarity among the peoples of the world (Whiting, 1977).

We are impressed that there is a finite number of general programs governing the lives of children growing up throughout the world, as well as a finite and transculturally universal grammar of behaviour that children can use in interpersonal interactions.

(*Whiting & Pope Edwards*, 1988, p. 17)

This matches exactly the biological notion of an inborn reaction norm. A reaction norm describes the pattern of phenotypic expressions of a single genotype across a range of environments. The pattern, however, does not contain numerous options but a limited number of possibilities (Keller & Chasiotis, 2006).

Both approaches stress the contextual adaptation, on the one hand, and consequent necessary variability, on the other. This does not mean universality with regard to human psychological functioning but phrasing the assumption that universal principles underlay the human nature that allows for diversity.

As a species, humans are biologically primed to acquire, create, and transmit culture. Cultural differences are variations on themes of universal importance and differential emphases put on particular practices (Rogoff, 2003). Culture represents

the legacy of preceding generations as expressed in the dispositions, the consciousness, and the psychology of each living individual whose plasticity allows change to adapt to changing surroundings. At the same time, humans inherit niches that are composed of material and social resources. As such, culture is the primary mode of human adaptation (Keller, 2007).

Culture and biology are not opposites, and they are not independent forces. They are both part of the human nature and have to be conceived of as systematically inter-related. Culture selects, reinforces, and optimizes biological predispositions. The challenge for cross-cultural psychology in the future will be to assign a systematic place to biology, especially evolutionary theorizing for its further development. Moreover, process and content need to be addressed. The question that therefore has to be addressed is: How can groups of people be defined who share culture?

### ***Who Shares Culture?***

Because culture is the nature of humans, it is evident that humans generally share culture. However, this statement is not as trivial as it sounds at a first glance. This statement has wider epistemological implications. Human culture is defined by some cultural psychologists as self-reflexive, intentional, and self-conscious agency that is shared by all humans and that distinguishes humans from other species, including their closest primate relatives. There is, however, more and more evidence that chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, and other primates teach their offspring, have developed rituals and traditions, not only use tools but go with tools to particular places (e.g., for nut-cracking or fishing and keep the tools afterward), cooperate, and murder their own offspring as well as other conspecifics. Although quantitative and qualitative differences are substantial, culture in this sense cannot be claimed as being uniquely human (for a detailed discussion of this field, *see* Boesch, this volume).

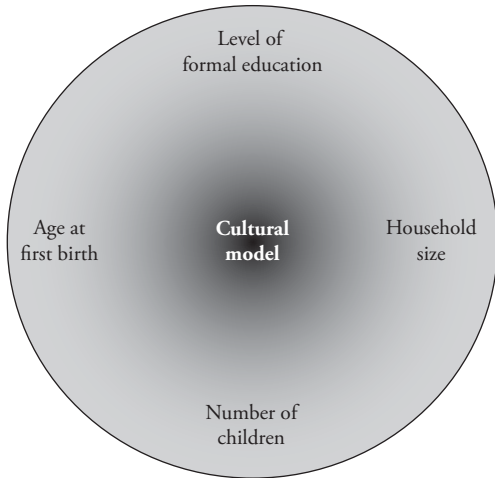
Therefore, the question is: Is it possible to systematically identify characteristics of groups that share particular cultural practices and meaning systems that differ from other groups? Here, we have to come back to the role of adaptation. With the model of psychocultural research, Beatrice and John Whiting (1975) proposed a conception linking human psychology, human culture, symbols, and artifacts directly to the eco-social environment, composed of physical parameters (like climate and geography),

history (including migrations), maintenance systems (including economic parameters), and settlement/family structure (like household composition and family type). This model, developed from a cultural psychological and anthropological perspective, has much in common with an evolutionary view on the human psychology that also relates human behavior and psychology to contextual demands of the environment. This closeness/coherence in perspective, however, is considered as incompatible by some cultural psychologists, because culture and biology are thought of contradictions—a view that rests on multiple theoretical and empirical misconceptions (*see* Boesch, this volume).

Based on the literature and our own research program, we propose to capture the environmental parameters as socio-demographic characteristics, as they can be understood as contingent on the physical characteristics of the environment as outlined in the Whiting model. We especially understand the level of formal education, age at first birth, number of children, and household size as forming particular cultural milieus. People sharing these characteristics are likely to share similar worldviews, norms, and values that are represented in particular cultural models. Cultural models are understood as overarching meaning systems that organize and coordinate different domains of life. We will discuss cultural models in more detail later (Keller, 2003, 2007).

From a traditional cross-cultural psychology understanding of culture (as characterized earlier) and from experimental thinking in general, this view is often criticized as confounding variables such as SES or education and culture. The argument, however, only holds true if we conceive of them as independent variables that can and should be manipulated with the assumption that their explanation of variance can be independently calculated. We argue, however, that they cannot be conceived of independent, because they inter-relate structurally and psychologically. The structural inter-relationship is expressed in statistics documenting that higher levels of formal education are correlated with later parenthood and less offspring, irrespective of the country or society. Psychologically, they together form a social milieu, a developmental niche, a particular learning environment. The conception is presented in Figure 6.1.

Gender is certainly another candidate that should be included in this conception. Gender studies have recently employed a similar strategy with the intersection analysis. Intersection analysis



**Figure 6.1** Cultural models as representation of socio-demographic variables.

is understood as the necessity to conjointly address gender, ethnicity, social class, health, age, language with respect to worldviews, daily practices as well as sexual orientations. It is considered as important to assess the simultaneity of effects and not separate or statistically control them (Krüger-Potratz, 2005).

This definition of the cultural environment makes countries or societies obsolete as units of analysis. Every country hosts multiple socio-demographic environments and, according to these criteria, multiple cultures. The consequences for research strategies in this understanding would imply selective sampling of individuals who share socio-demographic characteristics.

A related question here is whether the same differential variables have the same effect in different countries. That is, are individuals with higher levels of formal education more similar in psychological variables across different countries than individuals with higher and lower levels of formal education within the same country? These kinds of analyses would help to further specify the culture concept.

The challenge for the future of cross-cultural psychology is to adopt a differentiated view of culture along these lines and to define cultural groups more carefully—with the required conceptual background. The relationship between cultural and individual levels in cross-cultural research should be addressed from this conceptual perspective.

### **The Contents of Culture**

Another aspect that we consider to be crucial is to look at what are the particular *contents* of shared

behaviors and shared meanings that differentiate cultural groups. Historically there have been two extreme positions within cultural psychology: a complete neglect of content, referred to in the last paragraph, and the concentration on single case studies with all individual idiosyncrasies that some cultural psychologists share with cultural anthropologists. However, cross-cultural psychologists are interested in comparisons with regard to content of shared meanings and practices. Yet, comparisons are often made prematurely. As argued in the previous section, samples are seldom theoretically selected, but more or less a matter of convenience. Mainly social psychological studies have utilized questionnaires, assessed data sets from foreign locations wherever possible (a practice that especially criticized by indigenous approaches) without denying the role that local scholars have played. Many studies have compared only two samples, so that the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* has pursued for some time the policy—namely, that studies comparing two samples from two different backgrounds/cultures are not acceptable for publication, as the results could just reflect sample differences/similarities that do not pertain to cultural differences/similarities.

It is obvious that adequate translation and other questions of equivalence were crucial to these strategies. However, this resulted in a focus on cross-cultural methodology at the expense of theoretical/conceptual development. This may be one reason why the dimensions specifying cultural contents (power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance), when first introduced by Geert Hofstede in his 1980 book *Culture's Consequences—International Differences in Work Related Values* (second, extended edition 2001), received such an extraordinary attention. The dimension of individualism/collectivism especially dominated cross-cultural research for some decades. This dimension measures how individuals define themselves in relation to group memberships. In *individualist* cultures, individuals develop and display their unique personalities and select their social relationships and affiliations. In *collectivist* cultures, individuals are primarily defined and act as group members, like the family, a religious group, a workplace, and others. This dimension has been found to be related to countries' economies.

A similar, equally named dimension was proposed by Harry Triandis (e.g., Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985) as one of several cultural syndromes. *Cultural syndromes* consist of attitudes,

beliefs, norms, and values that are shared, for example, by people in a particular historical epoch or geographical area. The shared ideas are organized around themes—syndromes—and form subjective culture as a society’s “characteristic way of perceiving its social environment” (Triandis, 1972, p. viii).

Individualism and collectivism form one such syndrome. Triandis (1994) has suggested that individualism evolves in societies that are complex, like information societies and loose societies, (i.e., norm and values for correct behavior are not completely mandatory); collectivism accordingly emerges in societies that are both simple, like hunter and gatherers, and tight (i.e., normatively regulated). Triandis’ conception is psychologically much more complex than Hofstede’s concept; nevertheless it also represents a one-dimensional bipolar dimension.

Although individualism/collectivism has become an all-time citation star and has influenced decades of research, methodological and conceptual criticism has been raised right from the beginning as well. One of the major points of criticism was and still is the bipolar one-dimensional nature that is regarded as too simplistic, dividing the world into two cultural groups with nothing else (grand divide theory). Of course, it is not implied in the conception that there is nothing else beyond individualism/collectivism (not to forget that Hofstede had proposed 4 and later 5 [adding time perspective later] dimensions, and Triandis named at least 10 cultural syndromes).

Yet, the major assumption of one-dimensional bipolarity has been seriously challenged, because autonomy and relatedness, as the core concepts of these dimensions, can in fact co-exist in individuals as well as in cultures. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (1997, 2005) has made a strong case for this co-existence of autonomy and relatedness that she applied to families and selves. Also the conception of the independent and interdependent selves, which Markus and Kitayama proposed in a very influential paper in 1991, conceives of two constructs that are defined as independent from each other. One difference that is notable among individualism/collectivism, Kağıtçıbaşı’s model, and the Markus and Kitayama’s approach is the scope of reach. The cross-cultural conceptions of individualism/collectivism have been applied on a worldwide scale, where countries are ranked with respect to the distance to the individualism pole. Also, Kağıtçıbaşı’s four-field schema is basically a general worldwide model, although it was mainly developed with studies concerning

social change in Turkey. Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1998), on the other hand, restrict their model to the comparisons of U.S. Americans and East Asians—mainly Japanese—which is one reason why this approach is qualified as cultural instead of cross-cultural. Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) as well as Triandis related their models to socio-cultural context (societal and socio-demographic characteristics)—that is, they differentiated between social milieus and accordingly based their studies on participants from different socio-cultural background (SES, level of formal education, urban-rural distinction, etc.), whereas the individualism/collectivism and the conceptions of Markus and Kitayama refer to nationalities. Moreover, they base their studies on a specific socio-demographic group (IBM employees in Hofstede’s case, mainly university students in the case of Markus and Kitayama) and generalize these findings on a national level. It is interesting that the psychological core conception of individualism/collectivism and independence and interdependence have been proposed from these very differing approaches, as well as from cultural anthropology (Shweder & Bourne, 1984).

In this sense, it is commonly stated that individualism/independence is based on autonomous and separate agency that is self-contained, self-assured, and self-determined; others are perceived and defined in terms of individual wishes, desires, and intentions. Interdependence/collectivism is defined as prioritizing the needs and intentions of the (reference) group as prior to individual concerns. Relationships are modeled by roles and social expectations. Harmonious social relationships are defined as a mature way of being. The theoretical and methodological frameworks, in which these conceptions are embedded, nevertheless are very different.

### *Autonomy and Relatedness Reconsidered*

Based on the essence of these conceptions, we have proposed concentrating on the dimensions of autonomy and relatedness as the basic and organizing principles of broader cultural worldviews. Beyond stating that they are independent of each other, we define the relationships between them and differentiate different modes of autonomy and relatedness that are qualitatively distinct from each other as adaptations to different environmental demands.

We differentiate the following two modes of autonomy as universal capacities, albeit with different adaptational value in different environments. *Psychological autonomy* refers to mental processes,



based on reflective and self-reflective ways of being. It centers on the realization of personal desires, wishes, and intentions. Individual psychological autonomy can be defined as the self-centered feeling of having control and being in control of all available choices. This conception represents what is usually defined as autonomy or agency in the literature. It describes and is adapted to the Western middle-class lifestyle with high levels of formal education. From the first day of life, children are mirrored their feelings, wishes, and intentions and are supported to realize them. We have suggested a complementary facet of autonomy that focuses on actions and their responsible performance and control. *Action autonomy* represents the individual's capacity to perform actions and comprises the intention, the plan, and the performance of an action under the control of the acting individual. Action autonomy is a universal human capacity. However, the nature and timing of actions that are individually controlled varies across cultural contexts. Action autonomy is the preferred mode of autonomy for a cooperative lifestyle as, for example, in subsistence-based farming economy with low levels of formal education. Children are trained from early on to take responsible actions to support the family.

Relatedness can also have different faces. *Psychological relatedness* may mean self-selected relations between separate, self-contained individuals that can be defined and negotiated from the point of view of the individual agency. This conception of relatedness can be understood as in the service of psychological autonomy. Thus, psychological autonomy would be the leading principle for the lived conception of relatedness. *Hierarchical relatedness* is defined as a network of relationships, based on hierarchically structured roles that are mandatory life long. There is no room and also no wish for individually negotiating expectations and obligations related to (family) relationships (Keller, 2007; Keller & Otto, 2011). Hierarchical relatedness can be associated with action autonomy. In this case, hierarchical relatedness is the leading principle also for (action) autonomy.

These two models are conceived of as prototypes. Prototypes imply that the patterns can be found empirically in relatively pure modes. This does not exclude, however, variability across and between the prototypes. The prototypes as described here imply partly mutually exclusive views on processes and behavioral regulations. For example, mother-child symbiosis is regarded as a pathological condition

from the point of view of psychological autonomy but as the healthy way of development from a hierarchical relational perspective. This exclusivity, however, does not mean that the conceptions are one-dimensional, bipolar, and monolithic. It also does not imply, neither logically nor empirically, that autonomy and relatedness are the only relevant dimensions of human functioning.

Cultural stereotyping can be avoided when culture is defined in terms of socio-demographic profiles as we suggested earlier. The milieu of socio-demographic characteristics has to be complemented with the nature of economic activities. There is psychological and anthropological evidence supporting different worldviews of farmers and herders, fishers, or nomads living in the same ecological environment. The history of settlement patterns also has been demonstrated as influencing cultural conceptions of the self (Kitayama & Imada, 2010). Differentiated conceptions of contextual models will need to be defined. With Pervin and Cervone's (2010) definition of personality, we suggest that cross-cultural psychology deals with what all humans have in common, with what some humans have in common, and with what is particular to the individual.

Another challenge for cross-cultural psychology for the future will certainly be to deal with the content of culture in terms of autonomy and relatedness and to identify possible other dimensions, from a contextual perspective.

## Plurality of Methods

Cultural, cross-cultural, and indigenous psychologies together host an armamentarium of research strategies and methodologies. Traditionally cross-cultural psychology has been associated with quantitative methodology from experiment to survey, whereas many cultural as well as indigenous psychologies employ more qualitative approaches. Recently there has been a trend advocating mixed-methods approaches (e.g., special issue of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2009), thus linking back to the heritage of the psychocultural approaches of the Whittings and others. Whiting and Child started with statistical analyses of relationships in the dataset of the Human Research Area Files (Whiting & Child, 1953). Whiting and Pope Edwards (1988) analyzed "the mundane or typical patterns of interaction between frequent social partners" (p. 10) from quantitative data recorded with the use of systematic standardized observations, and

“these quantitative data enable the researcher to validate subjective impressions” (p. 10). However, this understanding of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methodology is not shared by many cultural psychologists.

The six-culture study itself represents a mixed-method research design (Whiting, 1963), where ethnographic information is compiled and portraits of individual life stages are drawn based on behavioral observations and interviews with qualitative data used to illustrate general patterns. As such, the different approaches thus use an impressive array of methodologies and research strategies, although individual scholars may have strong preferences as well as strong dislikes for particular methods.

The future challenge for cross-cultural psychology will be to develop more tolerance for diverse methodologies as well as more sophisticated designs and analysis methods from a mixed-methods perspective.

### **Introducing Development in Cross-Cultural Comparisons**

We have argued that the human psyche can be understood as result of adaptational processes to contextual demands. Therefore, cross-cultural differences in psychological functioning cannot be present from birth on—they need to develop in the particular context in which the baby is born. We have proposed to define development along these lines as the cultural solution of universal developmental tasks (Keller, 2007). There is an extensive literature in psychology on how to define developmental tasks. We propose a broad understanding in terms of topics or themes that have evolved during the history of humankind to solve adaptive problems. Therefore, their solution must be contingent upon the particular environmental conditions. This enables the development of contextual competence (Weisner, 2002). Developmental pathways are organized in coherent and meaningful sequences. The conceptions of autonomy and relatedness, as discussed earlier, provide such meaning structures in terms of developmental organizers. The socialization goal of psychological autonomy supports the early development of an independent self as expressed in contexts (e.g., babies sleep in their own beds), practices (e.g., child-centered dyadic social encounters), and interactional exchanges (e.g., contingent mirroring of infant signals). The socialization goals of hierarchical relatedness supports the early development of an interdependent self as expressed in

contexts (e.g., co-sleeping), practices (e.g., training motor development), and interactional exchanges (e.g., body contact and body carrying). Accordingly, children’s developmental achievements as well as developmental trajectories may differ in content, timing, and structure.

The particular solutions of earlier developmental tasks prepare pathways for the solution of later ones. However, these pathways are not deterministic in the sense that the early pattern allows only for one particular set of later consequences. It is obvious that along developmental pathways, a multiplicity of influences shape developmental outcomes. And the human plasticity allows for modification, compensation, and restructuring at any time of development. Nevertheless the development of continuity is easier than that of discontinuity, and most individuals experience coherence and consistency throughout their biographies.

This conception of development combines a causal sequence of influences with a co-constructive mode of development. Because experiences are individually constructed and appropriated, the active role of the developing individual and the contextual constraints and affordances form one system. The emergence of cultural phenotypes is crucial for understanding cultural/cross-cultural differences. Therefore, more emphasis on psychological development is necessary for the future of cross-cultural psychology.

### **Conclusion: Taking Culture Seriously and What It Implies**

Cross-cultural psychology, as any psychological discipline, is inevitably a cultural science, because any attempt to understand psychological phenomena needs to take into account the social cultural environment, ontogenetic history, and ancestral heritage. Cross-cultural psychology, on the other hand, is also inevitably a biological science, because any attempt to understand psychological phenomena needs to take into account the evolved predispositions and the behavioral constraints and affordances that evolved over the history of humankind. In the previous paragraphs, we have proposed reconceptualizing cross-cultural psychology on the basis of such a unified conception of culture and biology with a focus on the emergence of cross-cultural differences during developmental pathways with consideration of cultural content domains. Cross-cultural, cultural, and indigenous approaches can and should be meaningfully combined. This

will only be possible when scientists and researchers develop openness for other worldviews and particularly accept the equivalence of different worldviews for human functioning in different contexts.

This paradigm shift has tremendous implications also for the applied fields and social policy. Two examples should demonstrate the implications. Example 1 concerns policy programs that international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) or the United National Children's Fund (UNICEF) promote in poverty-stricken environments. The support of breastfeeding is a common focus of such programs. Breastfeeding is generally considered as a very important way to improve infants' health and development as the best source of nourishment for infants and young children. Adequate breastfeeding support for mothers and families could save many young lives.

The WHO, in line with other associations, recommends 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding. However, breastfeeding rates are not reaching the necessary timelines to be beneficial. Globally, less than 40% of infants under age 6 months are exclusively breastfed. Nevertheless women in very diverse environments (e.g., middle-class German mothers as well as Nso farmer mothers) agree that breastfeeding is the healthiest way of infant nutrition. However, the reasons that women from these two contexts consider are very different. For the Western middle-class mother who is on maternity leave, the breastfeeding situation is a time of exclusive mutual attention with abundant eye contact. For example, a mother from Los Angeles says in an interview that breastfeeding is "... a great time to do the bonding thing with your child, cause they stare in your eyes and you stare in their eyes." For the Nso farmer mother who has to continue the household chores and the farm work after delivery, it is important that she can do breastfeeding as a co-occurring activity. The following is an excerpt from an interview about breastfeeding with a Nso farmer woman: "At times she wanted to prepare something and the child was disturbing her, when she was already anxious to prepare something quickly, then she is selling potatoes and breastfeeding the child at the same time."

Programs to promote breastfeeding, however, do not account for these diverse contexts with the different needs. Breastfeeding is promoted with the Western middle-class philosophy as creating a special bond between mother and baby and fostering the exclusive dyadic interaction between the mother and child. UNICEF recommendations for

breastfeeding positions are all exclusive, face-to-face situations. Cultural environments like the Nso farmers practice multiple caregiving systems with less emphasis on special bonds between mother and child beyond the nurturing one. Therefore, programs often fail and do not succeed in raising breastfeeding rates, because they do not account for the cultural realities of the people whom they address. The important message is that there is no one best way to raise a child but contextually adaptive pathways.

Example 2 concerns the reality of migrants who shift from a rural farming background into the Western urban metropolis. Many migrants have internalized the cultural model of relatedness with its strong family connectedness based in hierarchy and obligations. The public life and the educational system, however, is organized according to the cultural model of autonomy, which is adaptive to Western middle-class families. Daycare and kindergarten treat the small child as an autonomous agent by providing multiple choices during the day and encouraging active verbal participation of children in the daily activities. Migrant parents often experience the curricula as a massive threat against their family cohesion and the core values and norms. Accordingly, they do not send their children to the educational institutions anymore, which otherwise would be very beneficial (e.g., in terms of second language acquisition as well as support of developmental domains that are considered as important in the host culture). Many misunderstandings are also pre-programmed in the Western middle-class expectation of active participation (educational partnership) of parents in the kindergarten, whereas many migrant parents expect a strict separation of responsibilities between family and institution—educational efforts and attainments are clearly not seen as the family's responsibility.

Daycare providers and other professionals profit enormously from learning to know other cultural models beyond their own. However, there is a step further to go. The often heard message, "Now, they are here, they have to do it our way," grasps it too short. Family values and norms are very deeply rooted in the personality and resistant to change, because they coincide with what is considered a good person. The confrontational method therefore is clearly prone to misachievement. Programs need to be developed from cultural knowledge to acceptance.

The wide-ranging implications also afford paradigm shifts of the culture free or better monocultural mainstream psychology. If culture is acknowledged at all in textbooks and handbooks of psychology, it is considered to provide variability. The argument that is put forward here is that the systematic influence of culture for human psychology needs to be fully introduced with a necessary paradigm shift (for a discussion of the reception of culture in psychology, see a special issue of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Lonner, Smith, van de Vijver, & Murdock, 2010). Cross-cultural psychology, including cultural and indigenous approaches, therefore has to become an essential ingredient of the psychological sciences. As we have said earlier, psychology cannot be based on the investigation of WEIRD people (Henrich et al., 2010) only but also needs to include Non-Western, Indigenous, Colored, Emic people (NICE). But NICE people are not one homogenous category, a contextually based careful description of samples that deliver study results is an unquestioned necessity.

### Future Directions

In the previous paragraphs, we have identified challenges for the future of cross-cultural psychology. First, we argue, that the careful conceptualization and definition of culture for empirical studies represents an area of neglect. We have proposed to abandon the strategy to define citizens of particular countries as cultural groups and to adopt a contextually based view of culture as representation of socio-demographic variables. This conception should be further developed, including the nature of economic activities that also inform patterns and structures of lifestyles. The relationship between cultural and individual level in cross-cultural research should be addressed from this conceptual perspective.

An integrated conception of culture and biology is an inevitable necessity for the future of cross-cultural psychology. We have proposed an integrated understanding of evolutionary approaches and cultural psychologies as the basis to explore similarities and differences in human functioning at a non-random basis.

We have also stated an amazing neglect of the consideration of the content of culture for a long time and an overly inclusive application of the conception of individualism/collectivism. However, the manifold and often justified criticism of individualism/collectivism should not supersede the fact the autonomy and relatedness are core themes of

humans that need to be negotiated from any individual in any culture. We have proposed to differentiate autonomy and relatedness along contextual demands. Nevertheless, the search for other possible panhuman themes should also be pursued.

Finally, the study of the emergence of cultural phenotypes is crucial for understanding cultural/cross-cultural differences. Therefore, more emphasis on psychological development is necessary for the future of cross-cultural psychology. All these conceptual challenges afford a pluralism of methodologies and methods that have been existing in the beginnings of cross-cultural psychology. Thus, the future also has to be linked to the roots.

These challenges, however, are not particular to cross-cultural/cultural psychology only. They address important dimensions that need to be addressed for all of psychological science. Behavior and mental representations emerge during ontogeny within particular cultural contexts. As we have argued in the introduction, we only have knowledge about the psychology of a very small part of the global population that is even unique in different respects in affluence, level of formal education, and related socio-demographic characteristics (Henrich et al., 2010). It has to be understood that this context is associated with one kind of psychology only. There is a tremendous task to master in the future to construct psychological knowledge in diverse contexts. The cross-cultural perspective can take the lead in establishing a psychological science that better represents humankind.

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# Archeology and the Study of Material Culture: Synergies With Cultural Psychology

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## Abstract

Human cognition does not rest upon individual minds alone but is distributed across persons, things, and time. Archeology, the discipline of things par excellence, has much to offer to researchers interested in cognitive processes. The material world is crucial in processes of enculturation and cultural transmission, in shaping daily experience and perceptions, and in orienting action. In this chapter, the concept of material culture is examined as it is commonly understood today in archeology and material culture studies. Furthermore, the diverse roles of material culture in relation to cognition are explored through specific examples from prehistoric, historic, and contemporary societies.

**Keywords:** material culture, material agency, distributed cognition, built environment, enculturation, archeological theory

## Psychology and Archeology

Archeology's links to psychology are stronger and more diverse than usually acknowledged, although the interest to establish such links has been mostly unidirectional so far: Since the mid-1980s, archeologists have been exploring the complex issue of mind and cognition from the material remains of the past—a daunting but certainly not impossible task. On the contrary, psychologists have not been interested in the lessons that might be obtained from archeology. They may think that because archeologists work with the material world, they are in a disadvantaged position to access the human mind. Also, they may perceive archeology as a field far removed from the theoretical debates that affect other sciences, such as anthropology or sociology, which intersect with psychology in several ways. As we will see, neither idea is really true.

The theoretical current known as cognitive or cognitive-processual archeology is responsible for the psychological turn in archeology, which has had

its greatest impact among those working in the earliest phases of the evolution of humankind (Renfrew & Zubrow, 1994; Renfrew & Morley, 2009). In fact, the concerns of cognitive archeologists have been basically centered on evolutionary matters—that is, the development of cognitive skills in human beings: When did abstract thought, aesthetics, or the use of material culture as external symbolic storage appear for the first time? The field more akin to cognitive archeology is not cultural but evolutionary psychology and cognitive science and, therefore, this approach will not be discussed here. However, also in this case, it has been archeologists who have approached cognitive and evolutionary psychology, rather than the other way round.

Another meeting point between archeologists and psychology (rather than psychologists) is learning and the configuration of motor skills: Which psychomotor changes have to occur so that an apprentice becomes proficient at making wheel-turned pots or a certain kind of flaked stone tool

(e.g., Roux & Corbetta, 1989; Stout, 2002)? Again, this is not a matter that has to do specifically with cultural psychology *per se* but with cognitive science (*but see* Boesch, 1993).

Beyond the evolution of cognitive skills, the truth is that at least since the early 1980s, archeologists and psychologists have been sharing more concerns than they may think: identity, personhood, and self (Hernando, 2002; Fowler, 2004), human and social agency (Robb & Dobres, 2000), emotion (Tarlow, 2000a), perception of the environment (Tilley, 1994; Ingold, 2000), memory (Jones, 2007), distributed cognition (Malafouris, 2004), and enculturation (Hodder & Cessford, 2004; Stark et al., 2008), to mention but a few.

### ***Can Archeology Be Useful for Cultural Psychologists?***

Perhaps surprisingly, there has been no attempt at dialogue between cultural psychology and archeology. This is despite the fact that archeology (the only science that has the methodological tools to study human beings from 2.5 million years ago to the present) can contribute to cultural psychology by increasing the number of cultures and cultural contexts at the disposal of the psychologist. Archeology's potential contribution to cultural psychology does not end there—rather, it starts there. [The gist of archeology lies in its being the science of material culture *par excellence*; the discipline of things (Olsen, 2003, p. 89), and material culture, as Latour (1991) said of technology, is society made durable. The main aim of cultural psychology is to understand how the mind is affected by culture. Traditionally, visions of culture as proposed by anthropologists have emphasized its immaterial side (ideology, institutions, myths, kinship) and, similarly, visions of psychological process as developing on a disembodied mind have predominated in psychology (Cole, 1998, p. 118). This disembodied image of culture and mind has come under attack during the last decade, and today many researchers agree in that human beings do not create and live culture in an ethereal, ideal void. Their lives and thoughts are inextricably entangled in a material world. As a matter of fact, almost everything in the cultural lives of human beings could be considered material culture, because there are very few—if any—activities that are not materially mediated in one way or the other—even singing or storytelling implies materiality: at the minimum, a technique of the body (Mauss, 1973).

Besides, the particular aim of cultural psychology is closer in one sense, at least, to archeology than to anthropology. According to Shweder and Sullivan (1993, p. 508) “Cultural psychology is the study of constituted or compiled experiences (what Geertz has called ‘experience-near’ concepts) in contrast to explicated experiences (‘experience distant’ concepts).” Material culture is all about constituted experiences: there is nothing closer to experience than materiality. In recent years, interest among cultural psychologists in material culture has increased (Valsiner, 2009, pp. 22–24), a fact that has to be related with an awareness of the importance of objects in culture. For Cole (1998, p. 144), artifacts, because of their simultaneous material and ideal nature, are the fundamental constituents of culture, which in turn is fundamental in shaping cognitive processes. It would be unfair to forget, however, that one of the first psychologists to point out the relevance of material culture—or tools—was Vygotsky himself. “The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge” (Vygotsky 1978, p. 25). Practical activity, for Vygotsky, was characterized by the use of material tools. Furthermore, he considered practical intelligence in children as prior to independent speech, given the existence of this practical intelligence in primates as well.

However, the difference between humans and apes is the capacity to make complex tools by the former, which implies a developed anticipatory cognition. I am not referring here to the use of non-modified tools (such as twigs or stones) among primates or to the debate on primate cultures (for this, *see* C. Boesch, Chapter 31) but to the making and use of secondary tools (such as retouched flakes). The first lithic industries of 2 to 2.5 million years ago, although apparently rough, imply a complex and elaborate thinking that goes well beyond the abilities of chimpanzees (*cf.* de la Torre, 2004). Interestingly, however, as Vygotsky already noted, this sophisticated practical intelligence exists before the appearance of speech. In this sense, it is worth noting that for archeologists, evolutionary biologists and philosophers alike, one of the defining characteristics of human beings is the capacity to make and use composite tools. Other elements, such as a developed speech and symbolic capacity, come later. However, Vygotsky was right at pointing at the



relevance of studying practical intelligence and the use of signs together, instead of as two separate phenomena. He did not just encourage the study of both signs and things as intertwined but considered them equally important: “[S]peech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function, directed toward the solution of a problem at hand” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25). The elaborate operations involved in the production of early stone tools are not possible without some process of signification that is absent in apes. These operations comprise two elements that according to Christopher Boesch (this volume) distinguish humans from primates: the persistence of cultural traits for extended periods of time (e.g., bifaces, used for more than a million years) and the presence of nonadaptive cultural traits: there is more than one way of making a lithic point—technical diversity here indicates a cultural logic that goes beyond pure adaptation.

Archeologists, who work with the material results of past human activity, are in a privileged position to explore practical intelligence. This is by no means restricted to the period before the appearance of speech, inasmuch as in *Homo sapiens* nonverbal behavior continues to play a paramount role. A final quote from Vygotsky leaves clear the importance he conceded to tools as an inextricable part of what is to be human: “The entire existence of an Australian aborigine depends on his boomerang, just as the entire existence of modern England depends on her machines” (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993, p. 74). Things make people.

In this line, my main concern in this chapter will be to show how materiality shapes the lives of human beings, mediates their relation with the world, directs their actions, triggers or inhibits feelings, educates them in the social environment, and participates in cognitive processes, such as memory and learning.

### **Material Culture, Materiality, Distributed Cognition**

Psychologist and neuroscientist Merlin Donald wrote: “[W]e cannot have a science of mind that disregards material culture as we cannot have an adequate science of material culture that leaves out cognition” (Donald, 1998, p. 186). This is widely acknowledged in archeology and material culture studies today. The question at the moment is not as much whether mind and materiality are related but how to envisage that relationship. This relationship is better perceived as symmetrical: we should avoid understanding either

mind or materiality as having the leading role. It is more an issue of subtle and ongoing adaptations between the two (Boesch, 1993).

Cognitive-processual archeologists, those who most explicitly draw on psychology and cognitive science in their work, have tended to view material culture as a form of “symbolic storage” (Renfrew & Scarre, 1998), following Donald’s concept of “exographic storage” (see below, **Memory and Material Culture**). Written texts and signs are well-known forms of exographic storage, but things can be used for coding information as well. They help us remember past events, historical episodes, or myths, sometimes in a very explicit way, such as the decorated sticks of the Maori that allowed them to remember long geneologies or the *churingas* used by Australian aborigines, wooden plaques encoding the history of a totem (Rodríguez Mayorgas, 2010, pp. 42–45). In other cases, the relation between artifacts and information is less similar to textual transmission. Artifacts can store and convey nonverbal information about economic and political status, age, gender, ethnicity, and personal identity (Wobst, 1977; Ames, 1984; Schiffer & Miller, 1999). Cognitive-processual archeologists have not been the only ones in exploring the capacity of things to transmit meaning. Actually, it was post-processual or interpretive archeologists who first drew attention to the fact that material culture is meaningfully constituted (Hodder, 1982, 1986) and, as such, can be decoded. Although cognitive-processual archeology relies on cognitive science, and interpretive archeology is based on hermeneutics and semiotics (Hodder, 1994; Preucel, 2006), the truth is that differences are not as great as one might think. In both cases, material culture is perceived as something external that is loaded with meaning and manipulated by human actors (or minds).

### ***Toward a Symmetrical Approach to Mind and Materiality***

Since the early 1980s, many archeologists and anthropologists have called attention to the importance of things in determining culture and have criticized the oblivion to which the material has been subjected (see an overview in Olsen, 2006). In recent years, some of them have insisted that objects are not just important—they have agency as well. They are not passive containers of culture. Thus, Gosden has noted that it is not necessarily the mind that imposes its form on material objects but very often just the opposite: things shape thoughts (Gosden, 2005, p. 196). Anthropologist Alfred Gell (1998) also

remarked that material objects—particularly art—have agency. Nevertheless, saying that artifacts have the capacity to affect people does not really imply a transformation of the ontological perspective on the relationship between mind and matter. As Knappett has pointed out, “in acknowledging that objects can be agents and agents can be objects, a dualism between objects and agents remains” (2002, p. 98). A more radical stance, and a real break with previous perspectives, came during the last decade with the debates on the limitations of Cartesian or more generally—modernist dualisms. Archeologists, like practitioners from other disciplines (e.g., Butler, 1993; Latour, 1993; Descola, 2005), have critically examined the divides established between present/past, individual/collective, subject/object, culture/nature, material/immaterial, and mind/body. Following the principle of ontological symmetry defended by Latour (1993), Law (1991), and Callon (1991) as well as other proponents of Actor-Network Theory in science and technology studies, some archeologists argue for a “symmetrical archeology” that considers things and people as fundamentally inseparable (Olsen, 2003, 2007; Shanks, 2007; Webmoor, 2007; Witmore, 2007). This is a radical change with regard to previous theories that espoused the primacy of human actors over things *and* the separation between humans and objects.

However, similar views have been defended by other scholars within cognitive science and cognitive archeology (Knappett, 2002, 2005; Knappett & Malafouris, 2008). Clark (2008, p. 13), for example, has insisted that we have to abandon the image of ourselves as disembodied, reasoning engines and goes as far as to suggest that “certain aspects of the external world . . . maybe so integral to our cognitive routines as to count as *part of the cognitive machinery* itself” (Clark, 2008, p. 15, author’s emphasis). In turn, Malafouris (2004, p. 57) has argued that human cognition is embodied, situated, extended, enacted, distributed, and mediated, as opposed to the ethereal and independent mind of earlier cognitive archeologists, which projected itself onto the material world. Like symmetrical archeologists, he considers that the relationship between the world and human cognition is one of “ontological inseparability.” To illustrate his point, Malafouris (2004, p. 59) resorts to the potter’s wheel: “the cognitive map of knowledge and memory may well be extended and distributed

in the neurons of the potter’s brain, the muscles of the potter’s body, the ‘affordances’ . . . of the potter’s wheel, the material properties of the clay, the morphological and typological prototypes of existing vessels as well as the general social context in which the activity occurs.”

The material turn of the last decade has made us more aware of the inseparability of people and things and the relevance of the material world in shaping our cultural and psychological experience. If cultural psychology is the study of “the way culture and psyche make each other up” (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993, p. 498), then taking the material side of culture seriously should be a must for cultural psychologists. In the following section, we will see which are the main characteristics of material culture as it is currently understood.

### Ten Points on Material Culture

**Material culture is used to think** in both an explicit and in an implicit way (Henare et al., 2007; Knappett, 2005). Cognitive processes are distributed among people and things. As cultures vary, so do the particular relations among individuals, groups, and objects in any particular culture. Although cognitive scientists often take into consideration technology alone and more specifically explicit cognitive technologies (such as computers or navigational devices; e.g., Hutchins, 1995; Dror & Harnad, 2008), cognitive processes are distributed also among other, less technically complex, things. If we bear in mind that for human beings, social orientation is as important as spatial orientation, we can consider, for example, that mausolea—which simultaneously help us remember, mourn, and know about social classes—are important navigational devices implied in social cognition. On the other hand, even from the point of view of spatial orientation, we do not have to think of extremely sophisticated machines: a broken branch that allows a hunter to find his way in the tropical forest is also a cognitive device. In this sense, Coman et al. (2009, p. 126) rightly consider that to understand the navigation of a blind person, a researcher must account for the mechanisms of the brain and the nervous system on the fingertips, but also “the nature of the cane—its length, rigidity, graspability, and so on.” Objects, then, are also involved in our cognition in an unconscious way in daily practice. We think through things even when we do not think about them. In fact, as Heidegger (2002, pp. 13–14) noted, it is precisely when we

do not think about things that the thingness of the thing is working best:

The equipmentality of equipment consists in its utility. But what about this utility itself? In understanding it do we already understand the equipmentality of equipment? In order for this to be so, must we not look out for the useful piece of equipment in its use? The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only then do they become what they are. They are all the more genuinely so the less the peasant woman thinks of her shoes while she is working, or even looks at them, or is aware of them in any way at all. This is how the shoes actually serve. It must be in this process of usage that the equipmentality of equipment actually confronts us.

The cognitive role of common artifacts is even more important in those societies that have no other means of transmitting information and preserving memory apart from oral communication (Kus & Raharijaona, 1990, p. 23).

As the example of the cane of a blind person shows, things are not something that merely interact with our minds and bodies. **Material culture is an inherent part of ourselves**, of our own physical existence. Consider bodily ornaments, clothing, body modifications, hairstyles, but also glasses, microscopes, or audiphones, who have become part of ourselves as sensory prostheses (Witmore, 2006, p. 281). It is not only our mind that is extended through things (Clark & Chalmers, 1998) but our entire body. We are material culture (Webmoor & Witmore, 2008) or, as Haraway (1991, pp. 149–181) has argued, cyborgs, “hybrids of machine and organism,” a mixture of technology and biology that blurs the distinction between nature and culture. This is not just the case of postmodern humans but of every hominid since at least 2.5 million years ago, when the first stone tools were made (Knappett, 2002, p. 98).

**We are material beings immersed in a material world.** We may say that we are in a “state of thrownness” (Heidegger’s *Geworfenheit*) in the material world, or even better, as Tim Ingold (2009, p. 5) eloquently puts it, we live “in the throwing,” as this is better described as a fluid process. The world, then, is not just a blank, neutral scenario for human dramas to unfold, a source of problem-specifying inputs (Clark, 2008, p. 16), or something to be fashioned by thoughts that emerge in a separate sphere of mental activity (Thomas, 1998, p. 155). It is something deeply enmeshed in our lives. The

active materiality of the world is fundamental for understanding the human being. As Ernst Boesch (1991, p. 334) has eloquently remarked:

“it is the permanence of things that provide individuals with a cadre permitting the building of over-situative action structures. Thereby, they provide the conditions for those constancies in I-world-relationships without which the construction of identity would be difficult to conceive.”

We cooperate actively in the making of the material world that surrounds us, but **making things makes ourselves** simultaneously. A potter is constituted through her making pots, a basket-maker through his making baskets. Making things affects sensorimotor skills (Boesch, 1993; Roux et al., 1995; Crown, 2001; Stout, 2002) and, more importantly, perceptions of oneself, society, and the world, as the teaching of technical processes incorporates social information and attitudes that are not strictly oriented to technical ends (Dobres, 2000; Wallaert-Pêtre, 2001).

Yet making artifacts is only part of the constitution of the self in relation to materiality. **Subjects are made through the use of things** as well (Miller, 1987), especially in those cultures where handicrafts have vanished and technological knowledge is socially very restricted—for example, in industrial and post-industrial societies. In the modern world, we construct our subjectivities through the consumption of fashion (Boesch, 1991, pp. 321–324; Roche, 1996), homes (Miller, 2001a), vehicles (Miller, 2001b), food, art, and many other things. Furthermore, the way we abandon and destroy material culture is also part-and-parcel of our identity (e.g., Marcoux 2001). Although destruction might be particularly characteristic of the modern world, it has always played a role in culture. The first agricultural communities of the Balkans destroyed their houses purposefully after a certain period, in what was in all probability a ritual cycle (Stevanovic, 1997, *see below*). The Malanggan of New Ireland (Küchler, 2002, *see below*) leave their elaborate funerary carvings to be slowly destroyed by the elements (as opposed to our emphasis on monumental preservation). This is related to conceptions of death, for sure, but also to a peculiar experience of what to be human is. It has recently been argued that different types of structural forgetting are specific to different social formations and that late modernity is characterized by massive oblivion based on superhuman speed, megacities, consumerism, and

perishable urban architecture (Connerton, 2009). In the same vein, it can be said that late modern subjects cannot be understood without their intimate relationship with the continual and massive destruction of things and the environment (González-Ruibal, 2008). One of the defining characteristics of the twentieth century has been the proliferation of artifacts purposefully designed to bring destruction on a large scale and aimed at civilians. The concept of the mass destruction of cities shaped a peculiar psychology in the industrialized world even before cities were actually destroyed by bombers. The abolition of time and space brought about by modernity created at the same time a hitherto unheard-of sensation of extreme vulnerability (everybody, everywhere can be annihilated), which was further spread by the nuclear menace of the Cold War (Escalona, 1982).

In sum, it is the whole life cycle of things and people (from birth to death) that is ineluctably intertwined, and this implies looking simultaneously at how people use (and discard) things, and how things use (and destroy) people. However, the relationship between consumption and destruction is more ambivalent than one may think. We have to bear in mind that the destruction of objects may turn out to be liberating: iconoclasm has often played a revolutionary role in the history of humankind. We only have to remember episodes such as Luddism (the destruction of machines by enraged workers in the early days of the Industrial Revolution) or the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Similarly, consumption can become alienating and create dependencies where there was none, a fact well known in situations of culture contact.

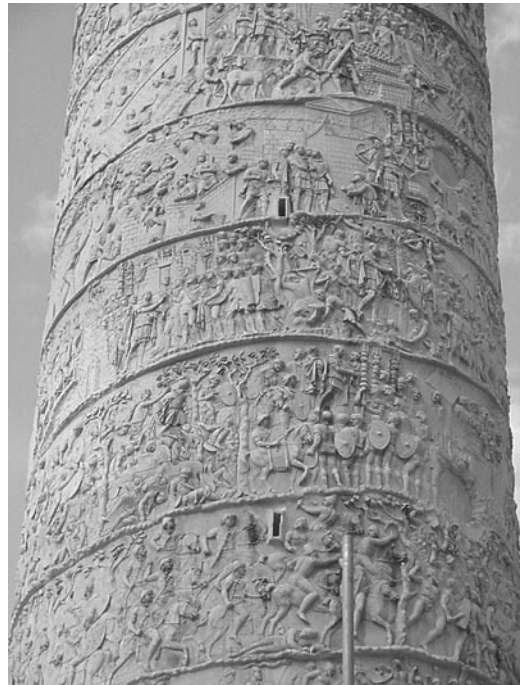
**Material culture has agency.** This is perhaps one of the most widely agreed tenets in current archeology and material culture studies (Gell, 1998; Olsen, 2003; Gosden, 2005; Knappet & Malafouris, 2008) but also among psychologists: This is what “active externalism” is all about—the capacity of the environment to act upon us (Clark & Chalmers, 1998, pp. 8–12). We could even argue that culture at large has agency thanks to material culture. “Culture, reminds Valsiner (2007, p. 255), regulates action ... It opens some possibilities for acting, thinking and feeling, while simultaneously closing others.” For its very physical nature, materiality is in a privileged position to regulate social and individual action. It promotes, inhibits, or sets the pace of certain actions and operational sequences. A particular kind of key, for example, can force us

to close a door in a way that no human actor ever could (Latour, 2000). A pot with a handle forces us to hold it in a particular way, and throwing a spear involves a different bodily gesture than using a bow and arrow. A mosque imposes a bodily behavior and a mental attitude. Wearing a toga and wearing trousers preclude and allow different sets of actions and prescribe a different bodily hexis. In sum, objects impose on us the necessity that is inscribed in them (Boltanski, 1990, p. 141). They order and orchestrate our behavior and, in doing so, they play the role that Durkheim recognized to supra-individual social norms inscribed in collective consciousness (*ibid.*).

Cognitive processes are not just distributed through people and things; they are also distributed through time (Cole & Engeström, 1997, p. 19). Past actions and events can condition the future actions and events. Yet time is embedded in things and **things have their own temporality**, which does not have to coincide with human time (Olivier, 2008). Actually, the temporality of things is entangled with human temporalities in manifold and complex ways. Things are made in the past and conceived for the future: in this way, they abolish the radical divide between past, present, and future (Witmore, 2006; González-Ruibal, 2006a). Therefore, the material environment has an outstanding capacity to exert an influence in people, long time after their creators have passed away (Cole & Engeström, 1997, p. 9). They continue to guide our actions and participate in our cognitive processes even when the original meanings of those artifacts have been deeply transformed—for example, the plan of a Roman city (Olivier, 2008). Something of the deep and more abstract meaning of things, however, may still work in the present in an unconscious manner. The complex ways in which temporality is weaved into the fabric of past objects has attracted the attention of scholars outside the discipline. The case of Sigmund Freud is well-known in the realm of psychology, but many others have found inspiration in ruins: Walter Benjamin, Alois Riegl, and Georg Simmel are three of the best-known examples of thinkers of ruination. It is the combination of a particular temporality with the blurring of nature and culture that has elicited more investigation (Simmel, 1959, p. 260; *see also* Hetzler, 1988). This simultaneous collapsing of nature and culture, present and past bewilders modernity but not necessarily other rationalities and time perspectives, where Cartesian boundaries are less clear or simply absent

(cf. Descola, 2005). Meaningfully, the perception of ruins is tightly linked to notions of landscape that developed in northern Europe after the sixteenth century (cf. Simmel, 2007). Our fascination with ruins speaks volumes, then, about the peculiarities of the Western mind in more than one respect. The “fascination of patina” (Simmel, 1959, p. 262), on the contrary, does not seem to be a Western prerogative, as Alain Schnapp (1996) has proved: The ancient Chinese, for example, already showed a keen interest in the ruins of their ancestors and valued ancient artifacts for their historical and aesthetic qualities. Ancient bronze vessels from the Shang Dynasty (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC) achieved extraordinary prizes among collectors and antiquarians, centuries before Western-style archaeology arrived to China.

Sometimes **material culture carries codified symbolic information** (Wobst, 1977; Schiffer, 1999), and it is often designed to be communicative and representational (Hodder, 1994, p. 395): for example, the choice of clothes, transmits information on ethnic (Wobst, 1977) or social status (Hodder, 1994, p. 395). Thus, we not only live immersed in a material world but also in a material world that is full of, even saturated with, meaning. The advantage of material meanings is that they are always at work. They do not normally need to be activated to transmit information (like a myth that has to be told or a story that has to be read from a book). Following the Peircean terminology (see Preucel, 2006, for an archaeological take on the subject), we can say that material culture can be iconic, indexical, or symbolic. A wedding ring is an example of a material symbol (Knappet, 2002, pp. 103–104), whose explicit meaning is conventional. Icons are another category of material signs that are clearly conceived to transmit coded information. Trajan’s column in the Roman Forum (Fig. 7.1.), for example, is to be read as a commemoration of a specific military victory (the conquest of Dacia, modern Romania, by the Roman army) and therefore has a well-structured and accessible iconographic program that combines images with written text. Very often, artifacts carry at the same time iconic and symbolic information: Trajan’s column does not just transmit an iconic message of military victory, it is also a metaphor (a symbol) of imperial power. And in some cases the indexical, symbolic, and iconic are combined. Consider World War I memorials that incorporate actual elements from the war (such as a rusty bomb shell), symbolic representations of the nation, and iconic representations of soldiers.



**Fig. 7.1** Trajan’s column in Rome. It depicts the conquest of Dacia (modern Romania) by Emperor Trajan between 101 and 106. Material culture here works like a text that can be read.

However, **most objects are not symbolic in the same way as a text**: The relationship between material culture and meaning is seldom completely conventional and arbitrary. Unlike verbal symbols, material ones bear a direct material relation to their referents (Beach, 1993). This is because most artifacts are actually better understood as indexes than as symbols (Knappet, 2002, p. 104; Jones, 2007, p. 19). An example of an index is the young breasts modeled in mud that the Gumuz women of Ethiopia use to decorate their granaries (Fig. 7.2). There is a relation of contiguity, typical of indexes, between the breasts (representing human fertility) and the granary (representing the fertility of the fields). Furthermore, this indexicality brings the whole body into play, blurring the distinction between human and non-human materiality: By modeling breasts on mud, Gumuz girls are extending the surface of their bodies beyond their anatomic limits. The meaning of material culture is not just produced by social convention but also through pragmatic understandings of the material world—the relationship between the breasts and the fertility of the fields is based on a real, indexical connection between two reproductive processes.



**Figure 7.2** Decoration of a Gumuz granary in western Ethiopia. An indexical sign that works in practice.

This is related to another point: the relationship between material culture and practice (Hodder, 1994, p. 396). Most of the time, **material culture works through the evocation of sets of practices** that are not discursively perceived and that, sometimes, cannot be put into words. A roof tile is not meant to consciously represent anything, to convey any explicit meaning (as Trajan's column or even the Gumuz granary). But this does not mean that they are not meaningful. They are enmeshed in cultural practices and systems of meanings that involve other artifacts, ideas, memories, bodily gestures, speech acts and built spaces: a kitchen knife may not have any powerful symbolic meaning attached, yet the (culturally mediated) associations it can bring to mind are many and varied. They are certainly not the same if the knife is in a kitchen, at an airport control, or flashing in a dark alley. As archaeologists insist, context is vital to understand things. Context and things together allow us to behave in practice. Material culture is therefore tightly related to practical knowledge that allows us to act in specific domains of action (Hodder, 1994, p. 398).

Starting from the concept of material culture outlined above, I will address now four main concerns of archeology and psychology where it is possible to see how the discipline of things can contribute to the project of cultural psychology: personhood, emotion, space, and memory.

### **Self and Personhood**

The last decade has witnessed an important debate in archeology concerning the idea of personhood in

prehistoric and historic times. For a long time, the issue of how persons are constituted as such was undertheorized in the discipline, as opposed to history and anthropology. The panorama started to change in the 1980s, with the import of postmodern interests in individual agency and identity, and by the 1990s many archeologists were looking for individuals in the past (e.g., Meskell, 1999). The post-processual take on personhood came under severe criticism in the early 2000s because of their anachronistic nature. Critics point out that by trying to find individual agents in other cultures, the highly individualized late capitalist person is being projected onto past societies, which are thus perceived as amalgamations of self-conscious individuals endowed with fluid and changeable identities in constant negotiation (Casella & Fowler, 2005). The interest in particular individual lives came along with the introduction of the post-modern politics of identity (age, class, race, gender, sex, nationality, ethnicity) in the discipline, which further fragmented prehistoric and historic identities along post-modern lines (Díaz-Andreu et al., 2005). Although post-processual archeology has been relevant in expanding the research agenda and in pointing out the relevance of identity and personhood, the approach has resulted in a transformation of all past societies into a sort of distorted mirror image of our own late modern existences.

Archeologists like Felipe Criado (2001) and Almudena Hernando (2002) were among the first to call for a more critical exploration of selfhood in the past, drawing upon anthropological and

historical theory. They emphasized the collective and relational nature of prehistoric concepts of personhood, an idea that was later independently developed in the Anglo-Saxon archeological tradition (Fowler, 2004). British archeologists relied on Melanesist anthropology—particularly in the work of Marilyn Strathern (1988)—to support their perspectives on prehistoric personhood. Strathern contends that the Melanesian person is not individual, but “dividual,” multiply constituted through relations with other persons. Besides being dividual, members of Melanesian societies are also partible. They are composed of different substances inherited from the parents or acquired through kinship and affinal relations. In certain contexts, such as marriage, ceremonial exchanges, and death, persons can be decomposed—they give away parts of their selves in the guise of pigs and other valuables. But the bodies themselves are conceived as decomposable, too: people can detach from parts of their own bodies as well as attach to themselves parts (or substances) of other peoples’ bodies. Relational identities have also been described as fractal and permeable (Fowler, 2004), as opposed to the bounded and indivisible self of modernity. Currently, there is a widespread belief in archeology that self-identity is either relational (most prehistoric societies), and suspiciously similar to the Melanesian self depicted by Strathern, or individual and well-bound (historical and, especially, modern Western societies). This dual schema reminds the independent/interdependent distinction proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) and is sometimes perceived in too radical terms. LiPuma (1998) considers that we have to take into account elements of individuality in the construction of the self among non-modern societies and, similarly, elements of relationality (or dividuality) in societies with highly individualized persons. For Hernando (2008, p. 68), both relational and individual identities have at least one thing in common: they are both fantasies, creations of the human mind whose aim is to neutralize the anxiety that would cause the true understanding of the powerlessness that defines our relation to the world. And what could be better to give an appearance of solidity to a fantasy than material culture?

Materiality is deeply involved in the construction of both relational and individual selves. Societies where relational forms of identity prevail tend to produce homogeneous objects and styles that underscore the shared identity and relations between members of the society, whereas individualistic

societies normally produce a proliferation of distinct artifacts and categories of artifacts to satisfy a myriad of tastes that are enmeshed in complex social strategies (Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, even in collective cultures, there are people that tend to develop more individuality than others. Ritual specialists in segmentary societies, for example, tend to use a very peculiar material culture and wear extravagant clothes and adornments (Devlet, 2001). We have to understand this not just as a mere symbol of status or a materialization of mythologies but also as an index of the more individualized self of the ritual specialists, which leads them to channel their need for differentiation through the use of artifacts. Actually, following a symmetrical approach, we could say that extraordinary objects and apparel are indistinguishable from the ritual specialist’s self: the shaman or diviner is a very particular cyborg within a society of more homogenous cyborgs. Similarly, even in highly individualized societies, there are material elements that reinforce the ties between different members of the community and therefore have a very important psychological role. In the case of late modern Western society, we can see this in the urban tribes that resort to the same clothing and items to create a sense of belonging among their members.

### *Relational Identities*

Relational identities were prevalent in the world at least until the sixteenth century AD. It was probably not before the twentieth century that the individual self came to dominate globally. Relational identities are characterized by a series of material markers, some of which explicitly encode information about the identity of a particular community, whereas others are of a rather unconscious nature. Among those objects that explicitly encode social information, we may consider bows and arrows (Wiessner, 1982; Pétrequin & Pétrequin, 1990). In many cultures, arrows have an assertive character—that is, they express personal identity, craftsmanship, and taste. However, they also convey, in a very explicit way, information about the identity of the group to which the person who made the arrows belongs. Thus, the Ye-Ineri, an ethnic group from Irian Jaya (New Guinea), make different arrows depending on age, function of the arrow (war or hunting), and personal ability. However, it is still possible to distinguish easily a bundle of arrows from the Ye-Ineri group and a bundle of arrows from the Tangma community. Whereas in a society

where independent selves prevail there are scarce limits to personal innovation, among the Ye-Ineri and Tangma, despite an apparent liberty, the limits are very well-demarcated. The boundaries for personal creativity are enforced in daily practice through moral sanctions and social disapproval that do not necessarily imply explicit verbal condemnation. A way of curtailing personal creativity in a society of interdependent self is not buying, exchanging, or accepting in ritualized occasions (or accepting grudgingly) those artifacts that clearly deviate from the norm.

Some artifacts and technical knowledge in societies of interdependent self are so crucial in promoting identity that they can be considered technologies of the self, following Foucault (1988), but rather than an individual self, they help create a collective self. Unlike items that bear explicit ethnic information (such as bows and arrows), technologies of the collective self are often unconscious or, at least, beyond verbal discourse. A good example is the technology of food consumption. This technology includes artifacts, body techniques, and operational sequences. Changes to the technology of food consumption often imply dramatic transformations in society and identity: Deetz (1996, pp. 86–87) has equated the evolution from communal vessels to individual dishes in North America

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the evolution of independent selves from collective ones—a phenomenon that has its correlates in the organization of domestic space and refuse disposal. The relevance of the technologies of food consumption for shaping a collective self is clearly visible among many Sub-Saharan communities. The case of the Komo is telling. They are a highly egalitarian small-scale society of slash-and-burn agriculturalists, who live in villages of less than 200 inhabitants in the Sudanese-Ethiopian borderland (Theis, 1995). As in other neighboring groups (James, 1988), community values are continuously enforced in daily life. One of the mechanisms for buttressing a communal identity is the working party: a family calls relatives and neighbors to lend a hand with the harvest or the building of a hut and, in compensation, provide food and beer. The artifacts and the body gestures employed in these rituals are essential for the perpetuation of relational selves (Fig. 7.3): Everybody forms a circle and drinks from the same big pot using straws, giving their backs to the outer world and their faces to neighbors and relatives (González-Ruibal et al., 2009, p. 60). A sense of solidarity is extraordinarily reinforced in this way.

Relational identities are also expressed in the way the dead are treated. It seems logical that if persons



**Figure 7.3** A group of Opuuo (a people closely related to the Komo), drink beer from a common pot in a working party (western Ethiopia).



are considered partible and decomposable, their bodies are too (Jones, 2005). Burials from Europe and the Near East during the Mesolithic (i.e., the period of the last hunter-gatherers before the emergence of agriculture in the Old World) often kept only disarticulated bones (Verjux, 2007), because the human remains were buried after a period of exposure to the elements or because the bones were dug up and reburied. These practices continued with the first agrarian communities in the period known as Neolithic (Thomas, 2000). Some egalitarian societies still practice, or practiced until recently, secondary burials. That is the case of the Uduk of Sudan (James, 1988), who used to dig out one or more of the bones of a recent tomb, anoint them with red ochre, and return them to the grave, a ceremony that was meaningfully called “Settling the Grave” (James, 1988, p. 131). The idea was to ensure that the spirit could make a complete and clean break from the body (*ibid.*, p. 127). The skull, in particular, tends to receive a differential treatment in many cultures. Modified and decorated skulls abounded during the late Mesolithic period in the Levant (Kuijt, 1996), and this practice is well-known from ethnographic contexts in areas like Melanesia (Zegwaard, 1959). Kuijt (1996) interprets skull removal and other mortuary practices (such as lack of grave goods) in the Near East as part of the strategies developed by complex hunter-gatherers and incipient agriculturalists to limit the accumulation of power and authority.

As people are perceived as inseparable from the collective in relational cultures, tombs are often collective. The skeletons of different people appear mingled together and sometimes it is difficult to refit individual bodies (Fowler, 2001). Sometimes, even animal bones appear mixed with human remains: this probably means the relational self included relations with non-humans as well (Descola, 2005). The treatment of the deceased was a very straightforward way of transmitting ideas of the self and community in the broad sense. There seems to have been a tendency among those societies where corpses and bones were manipulated not to hide away the event of death, as opposed to societies with only one death ritual. In fact, many of the rituals of excarnation, dismemberment, burial, and reburial of bones were attended by the entire group, and sometimes parts of the dead were ritually consumed (Conklin, 1995; Boulestin, 2009), which is the most powerful way of showing a sense of community.

### *Individual Identities*

The strong development of individuality in the West since the fifteenth century comes hand-in-hand with an extraordinary increase in the number and variety of artifacts through which new, diverse, and often conflictual selves were channeled and constituted: gardens (Leone, 1984), houses and headstones (Deetz, 1996), portraits (Burke, 1995), and even toothpicks (MacLean, 2009). Some of these items are used in a communicative manner to consciously display personal and social taste and status—that is, as symbols: clothes, silver, or chinaware (Goodwin, 1999; Schneider, 2006, pp. 206–207). In other cases, things become intrinsically related with the self in an unconscious manner—this is the case of toothbrushes and other items of personal hygiene and bodily care (Gaitán, 2005), as well as writing and reading materials (Hall, 2000, pp. 80–83). Both categories of artifacts are related in that they have to do with ideas of care (physical or psychical), and they are therefore crucial in fostering and cultivating the individual self. In this sense, they are technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988; Fowler, 2004, p. 13) but also “core objects,” as Boesch (1991, p. 333) has called them: “one which, by its usages and ritual connectedness, appears to be vital for the definition of a culture.” A particular technology of the self that has developed since the mid-sixteenth century in the context of the Counter-Reformation has been the material culture of bodily discipline. Whips, sticks, *cingula*, and cilices (Brandão & Nassaney, 2008) were aimed at purifying the self by mortifying the sinful body. Although cilices have been used since Antiquity, their success in early modernity has to be related to the progressive imposition of dualistic ideas that created a divide between mind and body—the first being equated with the self (and soul)—and the increasing importance of the individual person and individual salvation.

It would be wrong, however, to think that technologies of the individual self exist only in modernity or in evolved state societies, such as the Greek and Roman world examined by Foucault (1988). Technologies of bodily care that evince a strong awareness of the individual self have developed since the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC in Bronze Age Europe, when razors and mirrors, dress pins, and individualized weaponry became widespread among elites (Treherne, 1995). Those items were indispensable to constitute individual selves in the midst of rather homogeneous communities.

The difference with modernity is that technologies of the self and individualized material culture become extremely generalized, eventually cutting across social classes, race, and gender. In our globalized, late capitalist world, almost everybody wants to be unique. In fact, artifacts in modernity can be a powerful way of holding the self together in disruptive scenarios, such as civil conflicts, wars, and dictatorships. Artifacts may help to link one with his or her self prior to the traumatic experience (e.g., the handicrafts made by prisoners) (López Mazz, 2009, pp. 39–41) or to create a new self, which incorporates (and domesticates) the traumatic experience. This is the case of trench art, the artifacts produced by soldiers in World War I (Saunders, 2009).

To summarize, material culture is fundamental in constituting the self as relational or independent and the whole spectrum between one possibility and the other. A child belonging to a small-scale, egalitarian community will arrive to a homogenous world in which all artifacts look the same and private possessions are minimal—he will associate himself with sameness rather than difference. Through those artifacts (houses, pots, or cultivated fields), the child will learn to live in a society where relations among humans and non-humans are more important than individual persons. Furthermore, as the child grows, he will progressively use technologies of the collective self—that is, techniques, technical knowledge, and artifacts that make him relate to others and that will constitute his psychical existence as part of a communal body—for example, weapons and strategies used in communal hunting or spindles and songs in communal weaving ceremonies. In some cases, such as in many societies of hunter-gatherers, private possessions are reduced to almost nil. Everything has to be given away if someone asks for it (and vice versa: one is allowed to use almost everything from everybody). The boy who is born in a community of relational self will never see or make an iconic representation of himself, only idealized representations of Men, Women, Ancestors, Gods, and everything in between. By attending funerals where bodies are manipulated, carved up, buried, dug up, and reburied, he will learn to perceive his body as plastic and decomposable, a continuum in the mass of human and animal bodies that populate the world.

If we consider now a girl born in a late modern, highly individualistic society, we will see her exposed from her birth to a highly differentiated material world. She will learn to understand social and

group differences through artifacts, but she will also become aware of her own uniqueness as an individual through the use of particular objects and through the consumption choices that she will be compelled to make (Baudrillard, 1968, pp. 196–197): toys, clothes, books, cars, DVDs, web-blogs. From her earliest childhood, she will recognize herself in photographs. She will learn that her self is modifiable but not decomposable, both in its physicality, in its social attachments, and in its psychic qualities. She will read self-help books or philosophy, sculpt her body in the gym, or operate her breasts. Yet there is a limit to what an individual can become even in modern societies: prisons, reform schools, and asylums are institutions that model the deviated self through all kinds of material and immaterial tools (Foucault, 1975; Casella, 2007), which, again, are aimed at the individual person—individual cells, solitary confinement cells, psychological assistance.

### Emotion and Material Culture

Emotional experience is universal, but emotions are culturally variable, as anthropologists have abundantly demonstrated (Lutz & White, 1986; Tarlow, 2000a): cultural meanings, experiences, and values attached to emotions vary from society to society. According to Shweder:

To understand the emotional life of a person is to understand the types of feelings (anger, envy, fear, depersonalization, shame, joy, love, homesickness, and so on) felt by that person, the distribution and frequency of those feelings across time and context, the kind of situations that elicit them, the wishes and fantasies that occur with them and the action tendencies set off by them.

(1991, p. 242)

What can be the contribution of archeology to explain the emotional life of individuals and societies? We have to take into account that emotions are not always easily verbalized, especially overwhelming emotions—what Valsiner (2007, p. 312) calls “hyper-abstracted and over-generalized higher level total feelings.” Actually, feelings themselves cannot be observed, only indexes of them (gestures, facial movements, heartbeats) (Shweder, 1991, p. 242), and indexes are the raw material with which archeologists work. Besides, emotions are often triggered, oriented, or conditioned by the material world (Valsiner, 2008).

Emotion has figured prominently in recent archeological debates (Tarlow, 2000a). The basic

problem is how can we actually know what other peoples experienced in the past? Unlike ethnographers, archeologists rarely have the opportunity of an intersubjective experience—or “subjective pilgrimage,” as Valsiner (2007, p. 311) aptly puts it—with living people. In the case of historical archeology, this can be somehow mitigated through the use of texts (including personal diaries and letters). For illiterate societies, the problem we face might be deemed insurmountable. We are forced to make inferences based on analogies with similar societies documented ethnographically as well as on our own subjective experience. The latter has been the object of much discussion. Since Christopher Tilley’s seminal book, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994), the philosophical insights of phenomenology have been widely applied to prehistoric archeology, especially in the British Isles (Brück, 2005). Interest in past feelings has led, in some cases, to subjective excesses and to a trivialization of phenomenological theory (cf. critique in Olsen, 2006). However, most archeologists have avoided both the most objectivist and the most subjectivist positions, adopting nuanced perspectives. Therefore, there are those who, from a relativistic and constructivist stance, stress the enormous difficulty of approaching subjective experiences of people belonging to other cultures (Tarlow, 2000a; Brück, 2005), even if basic human similarities across cultures are acknowledged. On the other hand, there are those who emphasize our ability to connect with past senses of place through our own bodily experience (Tilley, 1994), although they accept that specific meanings and precise feelings mostly escape the archeologist.

Admittedly, access to particular emotions of other cultures from material remains alone is extremely difficult and always requires some sort of cultural translation. There is no true immediate experience of the past: in the case of prehistoric societies, we are dealing with people who had a wholly different cosmology and rationality, which deeply shaped their perceptions of the world (Thomas, 2004, pp. 216–217; Brück, 2005, pp. 54–55). Nevertheless, we can still have some access to past emotions without resorting to texts. On the one hand, the work of cultural psychologists has proved that most basic emotions (such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise) appear in most cultures, although they are expressed in very different ways (Heine, 2010). After all, there is a shared biological basis that explains human emotion. On the other hand, the physical engagement of the human body

with the material world is central to experience, and the materiality of the body offers some possibilities of experience and precludes others (Tilley, 1994). Thus, cold, heat, hunger, or pain—although conceived in different ways and endured to different degrees by different cultures—affect all human bodies, and these have limits as to what they can see and interact with from a certain topographical position. Also, the materiality of the landscape itself has not changed much in many cases: the physical environment interacts with physical human bodies in specific ways, irrespective of culture (Tilley, 2004).

The important point to bear in mind is that the emotions archeologists are better able to retrieve are those related to hyper-abstracted and overgeneralized feelings—the kind of feelings one has when entering a gothic cathedral, a megalithic tomb, or a prison cell. Instead of trying to discern in detail particular emotions, archeologists are at their best when they explore the material mechanisms that trigger those emotions in different cultural contexts. In which places was the greater investment made in material devices oriented toward affection? Which spaces were more emotionally charged? Those related to collective identity, political power, religion, punishment, individual achievement, life, death, liminal states? Which spaces displayed more varied devices for triggering sentiment?

If a place is emotionally invested to a high degree, it can help us know the importance of such place in society, as well as the activities related to that place—for example, tombs of children in the West are often overcharged with indexes of affection. It is difficult not to feel moved by some of these tombs displaying a variety of toys, teddy bears, letters, photographs and flowers. This is because children are not supposed to die in an industrialized society but also because childhood has been marked as a well-defined and valuable period of human life mostly in modernity (Ariès, 1987). On the contrary, in many pre-industrial societies, child tombs are very inconspicuous, and in some prehistoric cultures they were not even buried at all (Scott, 1999). However, prehistoric or ancient societies should not all necessarily show the same kind of emotional behavior, although some tendencies applied. In her study of the Egyptian village of Deir el-Medina (late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC), Meskell (1999) proposed that the death of children was experienced as a painful event, based on the elaborated burials of non-aristocratic children and on contemporary texts.

## EMOTIONAL FRAMING OF POLITICAL LIVES

Another case has to do with elements of affection in political life. Political celebrations tend to mobilize different kinds of emotions: power is sensuous and corporeal, and not just in premodern societies (Kus, 1989; Mbembe, 2000; Linke, 2006). As Tarlow (2000a, p. 719) reminds:

“Hegemony and authority in social contexts are constituted through such emotional experiences as awe, respect, fear, shame, and guilt, as well as familiarity and security.”

These emotional experiences are framed by material apparatuses. However, emotion in political contexts varies wildly from culture to culture. To use two opposite examples: Versailles was devised so as to arouse overwhelming feelings of superhuman grandeur, a fact that fits well with a divine conception of power. A place that is known by its address (*10 Downing Street*) on the contrary, is completely bereft of material devices to trigger emotion, although these may arise for different motivations. This speaks eloquently about the conception of power in contemporary liberal democratic societies.

### *Death and Emotion: Neolithic Europe and the Modern West*

Understanding emotion in context, then, helps us understand culture. In what follows, we will look at a place loaded with emotion—cemeteries—in two different cultural environments: Neolithic Western Europe and Euro-American modernity.

## NEOLITHIC EUROPE

Megalithic tombs were built all over Western Europe by early farmers during the period known as Neolithic (i.e., between the early fifth and early third millennia BC). They were the first monumental, collective tombs—the first monuments at all—in most places where they were built (Fig. 7.4). During the second millennium BC, monumental burials still existed in different places of Europe, such as southern Britain and southern Portugal, but they were erected for individual persons or particular powerful families. Megalithic tombs soon developed into a very complex architecture with immense possibilities to shape and direct emotion. Subtle changes in temperature, texture, darkness and light, sound, and visibility configured very particular experiences of community, death, afterlife, and the sacred. Also, the tomb itself was not the only important element for framing social experiences. Tombs were inserted in meaningful landscapes in which other monuments and natural features interacted to create a sense of place (Tilley, 1994). During the last decade, there have been many attempts to avoid intuitive approaches to Neolithic emotions. Archeologists try to provide contrasted accounts of the ways in which “hyper-abstracted and over-generalized feelings” were fostered and enhanced inside tombs and in megalithic landscapes. Regarding landscape, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) have been used to recover the way it was experienced in the past in a more objective manner (e.g., Criado & Villoch, 2000; Llobera, 2003; Wallace, 2007). GIS



**Figure 7.4** A megalithic tomb from Galicia (Spain) after excavation. Ritual activities took place around the mound, in front of the entrance and inside between 3800 BC and 2700 BC.

analyses allow making visible connections, which are unknown or known intuitively, between different monuments and natural features.

Megalithic tombs were open monuments in which rituals took place and where corpses were being buried, exhumed, and reburied in a regular basis. They are excellent examples of “scripted dramatic everyday life situations” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 250) that are crucial in the psychological development of human beings. Overwhelming feelings were achieved through different means: one is the art that covers part of the huge stones (Fig. 7.5). Unlike in the modern world, art was not a normal occurrence in the Neolithic. People did not live in an “ornamented world” (Valsiner, 2008) as we do. Thus, entering a profusely engraved tomb must have certainly been regarded as a liminal event, an entrance into another world—and it is precisely entrances and passages that are most often decorated (Bradley, 1989). Sensations were probably enhanced, at least in some cases, with the use of consciousness-altering substances, which interacted with the images to foster hallucinations and visions (Dronfield, 1995a, 1995b). The images—spirals, lozenges, arcs, meanders, and curves—are thought to be inspired in the visions themselves. Dronfield (1995b, p. 547) proved that Irish passage-tomb art is fundamentally “similar to (as opposed to merely resembling) arts derived from endogenous subjective vision.”

However, it is not strictly necessary to consider the use of drugs to explain the way the mind was altered inside the tomb. Songs, sounds, dancing,

speech, and movement could have been used to provoke an altered state of mind. The issue of sound has received significant attention. Watson and Keating (1999), for example, analyzed the particular sounds of a stone circle (a sort of sanctuary or shrine) and a passageway-type megalithic tomb. The authors of the research discovered that a single drum was capable of generating approximately 4 Hz to 5 Hz at between 120 decibels and 130 decibels inside a megalithic tomb, a level of exposure that could result in balance disturbance, pressure on the ears, speaking difficulties, vibration, drowsiness, and headaches. Also involved in enhancing experience and creating meaning was texture, which involved touching and therefore a bodily experience of the monument (Cummings, 2002). In this context, it is worth remembering, with Warnier the basic role of the skin in the ontogenesis of the human subject: “The psyche is constructed as an envelope by ‘anaclisis’ on the anatomical-physiological functions of the skin” (2006, p. 187). Here, anaclisis is understood as related to a process by which psychic experiences build on—or are propped against—bodily motions and emotions. Differences between smooth and rough surfaces in megaliths could have triggered different emotional responses and be imbued with different meanings. Finally, the textures of light must have been very important in the megalithic experience. Light is manipulated in many architectural traditions to orient emotional responses (Bille & Sorensen, 2007). Although similar effects to those of megaliths could have been previously achieved in natural spaces, such as caves, by hunter-gatherers



**Figure 7.5** A decorated slab from the megalithic tomb of Knowth in Ireland.

(Reznikoff & Dauvois, 1988; Waller, 1993), the difference is that megaliths were the first explicit attempt at creating and manipulating sensory conditions to affect the subject in an artificial way.

The relevance of megalithic tombs in the social lives of early agriculturalists should not be underestimated. As I have pointed out, these were regular arenas for social interaction (much more than modern cemeteries). The term *tomb* is misleading for us, as we divide the world of the dead and that of the living in a very clear-cut way and try to avoid any contact with the former. In addition, the megaliths were probably used if not by the whole community, at least by a large part of it, including children and adolescents. Although the most secluded parts of the tomb could have been accessed only by a few, the ceremonies in the necropolises were attended in all likelihood by the entire group. Watson and Keating (1999) proved that sounds made inside a megalithic tomb could be heard outside, emerging from the passage entrance. Megaliths, then, were an essential element in the emotional economy of the early European farmers. The rituals carried out inside and around the tombs were emotionally intense and involved the whole community: actually, they helped reinforce the sense of community—and *communitas* (Turner, 2002). The sensorial qualities of the megaliths enhanced the experience and channeled and amplified the emotions. The relation with the deceased and with the ancestors was very close: One literally entered the house of the dead and manipulated the bones of one's relatives.

#### THE MODERN WESTERN WORLD

Quite the opposite is the case of modern cemeteries. Despite cycles of ostentation and restraint in funerary ceremonies, the general trend in European and North American funerals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been toward the restriction of emotions. For the last hundred years, ostentation in tombs and funerals has been regarded in most Western societies as a sign of bad taste and low or marginal status (Cannon, 1994, p. 440; Parker-Pearson, 1982, pp. 104–107). This process has been explained on economic and social grounds—investments in status markers changing from funerary display to other realms to maintain class distinctions. However, there seems to be deeper reasons for this general trend toward more sober cemeteries and rituals: It seems that an excess of materiality in funerary ceremonies and tombs was unconsciously equated with an excess of

emotion. And with good reason—as we saw in the case of megaliths, a redundant, saturated material environment was fundamental in triggering and amplifying emotions.

One of the main differences between modern and pre-modern cemeteries is the prevalence of visual experience and visual codes in the former, in line with the enormous importance conferred to the sense of vision in modernity (Levin, 1993). Although hearing still plays a role (choirs, sermons, reading of religious texts), bodily senses are less prominent than in non-modern communities. Tombs (much less corpses) are not designed to be touched or to have a particular sound—and human remains do not smell. The experience of death is sober, clean, individual, and introspective. The suburban cemeteries that spread through northern Europe from the late eighteenth century onward—particularly the Anglo-American garden cemetery (Tarlow, 2000b)—played a prominent role in shaping the emotions of death as individually experienced. Garden cemeteries were located in pastoral locations. This was justified on hygienic grounds, but in fact, it was not only physical dirt and pollution that preoccupied urban reformers but also the moral and emotional cleanliness that the new cemeteries brought with them (Tarlow, 2000b, p. 227). The isolated tombs and the manicured landscape had a double effect (Fig. 7.6): On the one hand, they calmed down and sifted emotions, fostered introspection, and enabled self-reflective attitudes (just the opposite of emotionally loaded, collective megaliths). On the other hand, they permitted the experience of emotions (even the more violent ones that one could not restrain) without being seen by many people, a situation of relative intimacy that could hardly be achieved in overcrowded city churchyards.

Although similar trends toward suburban, hygienic cemeteries have existed in southern Europe from the mid-eighteenth century (Calatrava, 1991), there are important national differences. Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are much more individual-oriented than Mediterranean ones. In the United Kingdom, the United States, and other places with a strong Protestant tradition, tombs are individual and situated wide apart in vast cemeteries. On the contrary, in Spain and other Mediterranean countries, tombs are often cramped together around churches, often in multi-niche structures (Tarlow, 2000b, p. 222)—a translation to the material world of a more relational identity within a culture of the



**Figure 7.6** Victorian cemetery in Glasgow: isolated monuments to the individual self.



**Figure 7.7** Between the individual and the relational self: a cemetery in Galicia (Spain).

individual self (Fig. 7.7). Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are spaces for melancholic, individual feelings. Mediterranean necropolises are more appropriate for open, collective emotions and expressions of family and neighborhood solidarity. According to Tarlow,

An appreciation of Protestant virtues of simplicity and nature was a central part of British identity in the nineteenth century. In their own understandings, the Protestant nations were distinguished from their overblown Catholic neighbours by an authenticity of unmediated, pure moral feeling. (2000b, p. 224)

However, the more interdependent Catholics would interpret this as aloofness and individualistic behavior.

Finally, another element that can be enlightening as to the relation among self, emotion, and death in societies of independent self is the issue of memorials. In modern cemeteries, it is the performative act of reading the name of the deceased on a tombstone—an individual act—that provokes the most powerful feelings. Significantly, one of the most successful war memorials ever built is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991), in which reading is absolutely essential for unleashing intense

feelings. Its success lies in two facts: it commemorates individual lives (the entire monument is a list of names), and it abolishes the difference between past and present (by uttering the name of the dead, people are able to evoke a strong sense of presence). This fits better the modern self than collective, abstract memorials, as those built after World War I. Whereas in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the focus is on the individual, in World War I memorials the focus is on collective sacrifice (Winter, 1995, pp. 78–116). Unlike other monuments, and because of the controversial and divisive character of the war, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was actually explicitly designed so as to avoid collective messages and to evoke instead “feelings, thoughts, and emotions’ of a variant and private nature” (Wagner-Pacifiçi & Schwartz, 1991, p. 393). In short, the Washington memorial can be considered the quintessential monument to the dead in highly individualized late modern societies. However, what the memorial achieves in the short term, it loses in the *longue durée*, a fact that is also eloquent of modern identity: after a few generations, it will fail to trigger intense emotions, when the names of the individual dead fall into oblivion (Wagner-Pacifiçi & Schwartz, 1991, pp. 417–418). This is in opposition to the megalithic chambers, where the bones of the remotest ancestors and the newcomers to the tomb were mingled together. Every ceremony held in the megalith was an intense, emotional experience. Individuals did not matter—it was the always-regenerated, cyclical self of the community that mattered. The Vietnam War Memorial will fail to evoke presence in less than a century. The megaliths evoked it for millennia.

## Space and Order

The agency of material culture as a framework over our actions is nowhere more obvious than in the built environment (Parker Pearson & Richards, 1994): it orients everyday life by offering certain spaces for programmed action, while closing other possibilities (Dovey, 1999, p. 11). Walls, rooms, doors, and decorations act as “semiotic blockers” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 68) that regulate the semiotic hierarchies of the dialogical self. The agency of buildings is clearly seen, for example, when we enter a library and immediately start to speak in a low voice (Donley-Reid, 1990, p. 116). It is not only the verbal messages (signs of “Silence” or the librarian’s command) that make us lower the volume of our voice. It is the material environment as

a whole that is forcing us to adopt a certain attitude: the quality of light, the books, the curtains and shelves, the texture of the walls and floors. Houses, in particular, are a critical element in every culture and are endowed with an especially powerful agency. They intimately shape our behavior and experience of the world beginning in our childhood; they give us ontological security by creating predictability and routinization (Giddens, 1984); they replicate the cosmos (Preston Blier, 1987); help us know our place in society (Donley-Reid, 1987); and guide affection (Bachelard, 1964). They even shape our bodily memory: “The house where we are born,” writes Bachelard (1964, p. 32), “is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits.” Another important consequence, in psychological terms, of the built environment, is its capacity to affect our modes of spatial reasoning. It seems obvious that the perception of space cannot be the same among a group of slash-and-burn agriculturalists who live in single-celled huts separated wide apart and among people living in square, multiroomed houses in a cramped city. Kent (1990) has demonstrated that structures become more segmented as social organization becomes more complex and hierarchical. Segmentation of the space increases in parallel to conceptions of intimacy, individualism, political power, religion, and, more generally, with the development of modes of rationality that tend to fragment, divide, and sort out the world in specific categories. All these transformations in space and the self are particularly visible in modernity (Deetz, 1996).

I will review here two cases that exemplify well how domestic space is deeply inscribed in persons’ minds and bodies: the Swahili house of the Eastern African coast and the Bertha house of Ethiopia. They are not, properly speaking, archeological cases: the first is an ethno-historical study and the second an ethnographic one, but research was carried out in both cases by archeologists with archeological methodologies and questions in mind.

### *The Swahili House: Hierarchical Order*

The Swahili house is a perfect example of how social values are materialized in space and hence internalized through daily interaction with the built environment by those who use it. The Swahili live in the coast of Eastern Africa, from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique, and they are a mixture of native Africans and Arab merchants, who traded



in this area since the eighth century AD (Horton & Middleton, 2000). Their hybrid culture takes elements from the indigenous cultures and the foreign traders. Swahili houses of the patrician group (*waungwana*) had a rectangular layout and two floors, as opposed to the circular huts that prevailed in Eastern Africa. Also, unlike traditional houses in the region, they were substantially built in coral, lasted several generations, and were richly adorned with elaborate geometrical carvings. The possession of long residence in a single place (*ustaarabu*) was considered to be a moral quality inherent to being Swahili—and different from the local “barbarians” (Horton & Middleton, 2000, p. 179). For a start, then, living in a coral house made their *waungwana* owners feel different (and superior) from the surrounding African communities and Swahili commoners. But it also made them anxious: They were in a minority position in relation to both the African and Islamic worlds and to disenfranchised communities (slaves). The solidarity between the *waungwana* and their fear of the outside was materially expressed in the bridges and internal passageways that connected the patricians’ houses and allowed the Swahili to avoid the street and present a united front toward strangers (Donley-Reid, 1982, p. 65). It is logical that this anxiety was also expressed through rituals related to the boundaries of the house (Donley-Reid, 1987, p. 189) and an obsession with purity. The house, besieged by the polluted city, was the locus of purity par excellence, but this had to be continuously maintained through cleansing, whitewashing, prayer, and ritual observance (Horton & Middleton, 2000, p. 183). Purity was a quintessential moral quality of women, too, who were strongly linked to the house (as in other Islamic societies). Women shared other moral qualities with the house, such as shame and beauty (*ibid.*). In a sense, the materiality of the house determined the woman’s personhood and identity. Inside the Swahili house, the female mind, body, and spatial order were bound together.

The house was not the residence of the *waungwana* only. Female slaves (*madada*) and concubines shared the home with their masters. The built space was loaded with explicit and implicit meanings, and it was used in daily practice to show everybody his or her place within the house and within society at large. Thus, the lower story—where the slaves lived and slept on the floor on mats—had unplastered and undecorated walls. Slaves were considered unclean and therefore did not need any devices to

protect them (Donley-Reid, 1982, p. 66). The dirtiest and less valued part of the house, the kitchen, was also located in the lower floor. The masters lived in the richly decorated upper story and slept in beds. Within this story, polluting activities (such as sexual intercourse, childbearing, and cleaning of corpses) took place in the most secluded room of the house, the *ndani*, which was the most lavishly decorated part of the house as well (Donley-Reid, 1987, pp. 187–188). Valsiner (2008, p. 69) notes that the meaning of decoration is often linked with the notion of nonfunctional or excessive kind of decoration. This certainly applies to the baroquely ornamented *ndani*—an index of a strong fear of pollution.

The different qualities of the materials employed in the construction of the house; the difference in textures, decorations, and furniture; and the differential location of the masters’ and servants’ rooms all helped to make people internalize through daily practice the social order of the Swahili world. In addition, some ceremonies made social order even clearer and more redundant for those who inhabited the house. The ritual *kutolewande* took place 40 days after the birth of a free-born child (Donley-Reid, 1982, p. 70). The baby was then carried around the house, from the *ndani*, where he or she was born, to the rest of the rooms in what could be considered a prototypical “social guidance drama” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 233). The mother, the female relatives, and the slaves accompanied the baby in his or her first tour of the social world that he or she will inhabit. The child was shown the rooms, their function, the artifacts, and furniture associated to each room as well as the people who use them. The tour ended in the entrance door where, if the baby was a girl, she was told that the outside belonged to men only. That will be the limit of her world. Naturally, the ritual was only symbolic for the child, but it helped emphasize in a powerful way the social order that was reproduced in practice by the household members every day. It also marked the beginning of the slow and long process of enculturation for the child.

### ***The Bertha House: Order Without Hierarchy***

The Swahili are a deeply hierarchical society and with a complex state religion. The case of the Bertha (González-Ruibal, 2006b), who live in western Ethiopia and eastern Sudan, is quite different. The Bertha are Muslim, too, but their concern with

pollution and purity is very different—and less pressing. They are a rather egalitarian community, with little social differentiation. Like the Swahili, the Bertha are a hybrid people as well, heavily influenced by the Islamic Sudan. The equivalent of Swahili patricians in Bertha land was the Watawit, the traditional ruling class, a mixture of Arab merchants and local women. However, the indigenous element has always had an overwhelming weight among the Bertha and an egalitarian ethos tended to curtail the most visible manifestations of power. The order of domestic space among the Bertha has little to do with the anxieties of the Swahili. However, the Bertha house is also a structuring structure and a faithful representation of the cosmos.

The house itself is much simpler, from an architectural point of view, than the Swahili mansions. Although there are three different types of houses (González-Ruibal, 2006b, pp. 383–384), they all share some features, such as a circular layout, bamboo walls, and thatched roofs. Externally, they are very recognizable, even from afar, because of their particular rooftop (*shimbir*), crowned with four long and thin poles. The rooftop and the long stick planted near the house to protect it against the evil spirits of thunder are symbols of the Bertha identity. They have an “emblemic” use—that is “they transmit a clear message to a define target population about conscious affiliation or identity” (Wiessner, 1983, p. 257). However, the most important material elements

that sustain the Bertha’s identity are neither explicit nor representational.

Despite their regional variations, all Bertha houses follow a similar spatial logic, that is deeply imprinted into the Bertha’s mind and that regulates their cultural behavior and their practical understanding of the world (González-Ruibal, 2006b, pp. 392–397). As in other vernacular African traditions (Preston Blier, 1987), the Bertha house is anthropomorphic: the roof (*alu*) is the head of the house; the space indoors, the stomach (*iyu*); the entrance, the mouth (*ndu*); the poles flanking the entrance, the eyes (*are*, which also means “face”); the rest of the poles are the feet (*khu*); and the rear part of the house, the back (*gundi*). This perception of the house as a human body has far-reaching consequences, because it means that the regionalization of the body (Giddens, 1984, p. 124) is transferred to the domestic space, with all its implicit meanings and connotations. Like the human body, the house is divided into two main parts: the front and the back (Fig. 7.8).

The front is where all human communication and relations take place: it is the area of the sight (*are*, eyes) and the speech (*ndu* means both mouth and language in Bertha). It is also the place of knowledge (*are p’adiya*, lit. “eye strong,” means “wise”). In front of the house, men gather to drink coffee early in the morning, women chat and care for the small children, men weave baskets and bamboo mats, and women make pottery. Rituals and ceremonies also occur in the frontal space: Islamic praying,

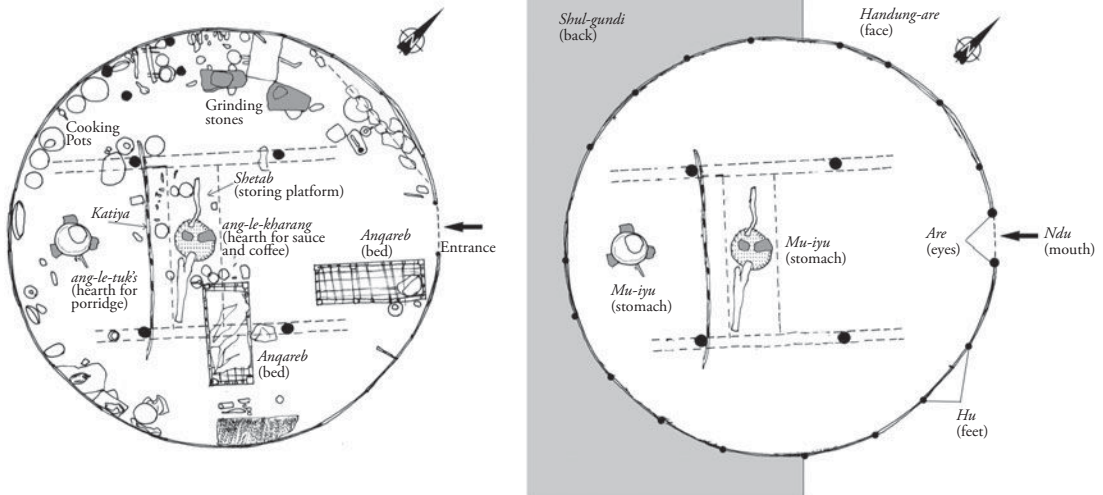


Figure 7.8 The Bertha house: a structuring structure. (Adapted with permission from González-Ruibal, 2006b.)

rainmaking activities, traditional sacrifices, wedding rites, beer drinking in working parties, and so forth. The space is kept clean by women, who sweep the floor at least twice a day. The rear of the house, on the contrary, is a space devoid of activities, people, and artifacts. It is the place of death and dirt, where rubbish is thrown away, where small children were traditionally buried, menstruating women urinate, and rituals related to the exorcism of evil spirits take place. The back of the house is never swept. The same front-back organization is replicated indoors, with clean, social activities taking place in the frontal area (such as sleeping, entertaining guests, and making coffee) and dirty ones in the rear area (such as brewing beer and cooking fermented food).

For the Bertha, then, as for the Swahili, ordering the domestic space is not an abstract activity that can be verbalized and rationalized in an explicit way. It basically works in practice. Practical logic enables the organization of “all thoughts, perceptions and actions by means of a few generative principles, which are closely interrelated and constitute a practically integrated whole” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 86). It has often been said that the organization of space among egalitarian, small-scale societies is much more flexible and less scripted than among hierarchical ones. Yet even egalitarian societies live in a material world that precludes certain actions in certain spaces and favors others. Under the apparent chaos and disorder of the Bertha house lays a powerful order that is no less strict—even if it has fewer rules—than the one enforced by the Swahili house. A Bertha woman would never, ever, make pots behind her house. The relation between back space, dirt and death is heavily imprinted in her mind from her earlier childhood, even if she cannot render those relations explicit in speech.

Both the Swahili and the Bertha house, then, allow knowing the order of the world for those who inhabit them. Furthermore, both houses are concerned with purity and pollution. The difference is that the logic of the Swahili house—as a hierarchical society—is basically concerned with contamination caused by the violation of the socio-political order (masters and slaves, locals and foreigners), whereas the central theme in the Bertha house—as an egalitarian community—is pollution brought about by disturbances in the cosmological order (life and dead, good and evil, society and the Other).

In sum, built space is crucial in the psychological development of human beings within any particular culture. People—and especially political

visionaries—instinctively know that. It is not by chance that social engineering has always aimed at changing architecture for changing people’s minds. This was the case with Soviet buildings: Buchli (1999) studied the evolution of the Narkomfin building in Moscow, an attempt at achieving the communalization of daily life by eliminating petit bourgeois domesticity. Nonetheless, other attempts at transforming ways of thinking and behaving through space can be counter-hegemonic. That was the case with the architecture of the Pueblo Indians after the 1680 revolt and the utopian communities of the first half of the nineteenth century in New England, studied by Preucel (2006). After the Pueblo revolt, the Cochiti leaders of the rebellion founded villages endowed with a double plaza that encoded the cosmological and social principles of the Cochiti worldview, so as to fix and make effective in practice the revitalization discourse, which was critical with the exploitative system of the Spanish empire. Similarly, the followers of Transcendentalism who founded utopian communities relied heavily on architecture to create a new social order—and a new individual—that stood against incipient industrial capitalism and its dehumanizing practices. Culture, according to Shweder and Miller (1993, p. 512) is “that subset of possible or available meanings, which by virtue of enculturation . . . has so given shape to the psychological processes of individuals in a society that those meanings have become, for those individuals, indistinguishable from experience itself.” The built space, in any society, goes a long way in achieving that seamless conflation of meaning and lived experience.

## Memory and Material Culture

With the rise of cognitive archeology in the 1980s emerged the interest for material culture as a form of memory container. Renfrew (1998), one of the main proponents of the paradigm, argued that the appearance of the first agrarian societies (ca. 9500 BC in the Near East) coincided with a new cognitive phase in the development of the human mind, characterized by external symbolic storage employing material culture. This phase (the Neolithic in archeological terms) would lie between two periods previously described by Donald (1991): the linguistic and mythic culture of the early *Homo sapiens* and the theoretic culture of literate societies. The materials put to mnemonic uses varied with the development of agrarian societies. Probably, the earliest containers of memory were houses, especially in

the Near East (Hodder & Cessford, 2004) and the Balkans (Borič, 2003). In Western Europe, tombs became the focus of collective memory (Edmonds, 1999), later to be replaced by artifacts that were ritually deposited in public ceremonies (Bradley, 1990). In places like Mesoamerica and North America, cultic spaces materialized collective remembrance among early farmers and complex hunter-gatherers (e.g., Shady Solís et al., 2000; Pauketat & Alt, 2003). More generally, the diversification of material culture with the Neolithic and the appearance of new supports to convey messages (such as pottery, textiles, and architecture) and the generalization of old ones (sculpture and painting) certainly favored the storage of memory. The semiotic world of the first agriculturalists, then, was very different from that of the hunter-gatherers, with its limited amount of human-made symbolic containers. Some of the mnemonic devices developed by early agrarian and sedentary societies developed through time to such an extent so as to evolve into writing; this is the case of the Mesopotamian tablets of the late fourth millennium BC (Rodríguez Mayorgas, 2010, pp. 97–103). Other mnemonic devices were very complex but did not become proper writing systems, such as the Inca knotted strings (Cole, 1998, p. 168; Rodríguez Mayorgas, 2010, pp. 104–107).

#### BEYOND EXTERNAL STORAGE

The idea of material culture as a form of mnemonic external storage has been under attack from different quarters, including some cognitive archeologists. Malafouris, for example, considers the computational model of cognition (based on a process of encoding–storage–retrieval) does not adequately explain the mnemonic role of objects (*also* Thomas [1998], from an interpretive perspective). Artifacts, writes Malafouris (2004, p. 57), “remind you, sometimes even force you to remember, without including the content of what precisely is to be remembered,” unlike texts or information contained in a hard disk. The most serious objection to the theory of external symbolic storage is that it does not truly consider a dialogical self. It envisions culture (and cognition) as something that takes places in the head and that is projected into a passive world (*see* above **Material Culture, Materiality, Cognition**). Recently, archeologists have been more interested in how places and things are suffused with memory and the effect that this has on people (Van Dyke & Alcock, 2003; Jones, 2007) rather than in the way particular objects or monuments are explicitly

codified in order to store specific memories. This is related to the growing interest in the social sciences on collective memory. It is now widely accepted that memory is not something exclusively individual but socially shared (Connerton, 1989), as Halbwachs (1994 [1925]) proposed more than 80 years ago. In fact, the archeological record preserves more instances of social remembrance, from monuments to fossilized daily routines, than personal (or group) mnemonic devices. This turning away from the notion of symbolic storage is also related to a wider awareness of the peculiar mnemonic nature of things, as opposed to texts. Things are ontologically closer to what Connerton (1989, pp. 72–73) calls incorporating practices than to inscribing ones. Inscribing practices are devices for storing and retrieving information (books, computers, sound tapes). Incorporating practices imply the intentional or unintentional transmission of information primordially through bodily posture, which is, in turn, tightly interwoven with technology and artifacts (Mauss, 1973).

Andrew Clark (2008, p. 14) comments that certain Alzheimer’s sufferers maintain an unexpected high level of normal, independent functioning. Their success is explained by the use they make of diverse external aids such as labels, memory books, diaries, and leaving important objects in open view. This is, for Clark, just an extreme example of the normal use of external aids (computers, compasses, maps). The author, however, like other psychologists and cognitive scientists (Beach, 1993; Klumb, 2001), focuses on explicit and conscious cognitive uses of material culture, those that are closer to the idea of things as external symbolic storage. Yet we are not capable of orienting ourselves just when we use a map, read a history book, or write a laundry list. We live in a material environment that is saturated of social meanings and memory traces. Even if we do not want to remember, artifacts force us. This is because, as Boesch has noted:

our objectual surroundings establish and environment of meanings, often delicate and intimate, expressing itself even in unreflected banalities ... the lavender sachet in the lingerie drawer, symbolising, *without us realising* it, the blending of opposing principles, such as the enclosed space and the open air, the civilised and the natural, the daily and the unusual.

(1991, p. 331, my emphasis)

This is why we throw away our ex-lover's possessions, despite not being mnemonic aids proper and never intended to be (in the way a grocery list or a knot in the handkerchief are). The lover's possessions are indexes that remind us of his or her presence, as the lavender sachet brings out memories of nature and openness. The things Clark mentions in his example are (with the exception of the objects put in a visible place) symbols; but material culture, as we have already seen, works more often as an index (Jones, 2007, pp. 22–26). There lies the power of things: They keep reminding us of other things, people, places, and events to which they are associated, whether we want to or not. If we scale up and go from personal cases to society at large, we can get an idea of the important role that materiality plays in shaping collective remembrance, which is in turn crucial for shaping our present (and future) behavior. This mnemonic and prospective power of things is well-exemplified in the following examples. As in previous sections, I will resort to both ancient and modern cultures.

### ***Keeping History Cold: Materiality and Memory in Prehistoric Societies***

Çatalhöyük, in modern Turkey, is one of the most important early agrarian villages studied by archeologists (Hodder, 2006). In its main phase of occupation, around the seventh millennium BC, it could have hosted up to 8,000 individuals. The village had many mud huts, tightly packed together, with no streets or plazas; people entered their houses from the roof. According to Hodder and Cessford, in Çatalhöyük,

instead of social rules being imposed by centralized authorities manipulating public rituals ... the reproduction of dominant groups (elders or lineage heads) was intimately tied to the construction of bodily routines that were repeated in daily house practices over days, months, years, decades, centuries, and even millennia.  
(2004, p. 22)

One of these practices was the replastering of walls, which was carried out annually and for up to a hundred years before the house was completely rebuilt (carefully following the old plan). Other repetitive activities, such as sweeping and plastering certain floors or burying people under them, were important in the processes of enculturation through practice but also in perpetuating in time meaningful, ancestral ways of doing things. Hodder and

Cessford (2004, p. 31) have argued that daily practice and memory were inseparable in Çatalhöyük, because social regulations were not simply imposed but constructed through habituation practices, which, in a nonliterate society, play the same role as writing in the construction of social memory. Connerton (1989) has explored this duality through the concepts of inscribing and incorporating practices. The second are particularly characteristic of nonliterate peoples. Although Connerton referred basically to bodily gestures and performances, we have to include here the use and manipulation of artifacts as well as the artifacts (including architecture) that shape bodily practices. The fact that houses follow exactly the same plan for hundreds of years proves their fundamental role in preserving collective memory. It also reveals the prospective qualities of material culture, as technical decisions taken at a certain point in time were still having an effect on the regulation of society and community life 2,000 years later. Sometimes even specific iconic decorations (such as depictions of bulls) were repeated through several phases spanning hundreds of years (Hodder & Cessford, 2004, p. 35), a phenomenon that guarantees the long-term transmission of mythological knowledge. Furthermore, in Çatalhöyük there are some houses whose mnemonic role seems to be more prominent than in others: They have long sequences of occupation, elaborate decorations, and many burials. They were formerly interpreted as shrines and today as houses of powerful lineages (Hodder, 2006). At any rate, they epitomize the need for preserving memory that is present in every other house and reveal the link that existed between memory and power.

The logic of Çatalhöyük is present in other Neolithic communities in Europe and the Near East. A compelling example is that of the so-called "Linear Pottery Culture" (LPC), which represents the expansion of early farmers from Hungary to eastern France between 5500 BC and 5000 BC. Despite its vast territory, the LPC is extremely homogeneous in house form, burial practices, and pottery decoration. Jones (2007, pp. 93–105) considers that this homogeneity is related to specific memory practices, which are again clear in the domestic sphere. The long rectangular houses had their doorways oriented toward the previous area of settlement (the LPC people expanded from Hungary toward France), as if remembering their origins, and they preserved the original layout for centuries—"a kind of mythological archetype"

(Jones, 2007, p. 103). These material practices, in Jones' opinion, provided a way of coping with new environments. Cultural memory enabled people to move forward while remaining attached to the past (Jones, 2007, p. 100). I would argue that the memory practices of Çatalhöyük and the LPC are best understood as mechanisms to “keep history cold.” Assmann (2001, p. 35) suggests that in all societies, there are devices whose purpose is to maintain the “cyclical time of regeneration.” In egalitarian, non-literate communities, mechanisms of regeneration prevail, in opposition to what Assman calls the “loci of history,” which account for events and change. The latter are to be found in some state societies, where transformation is perceived as positive—especially in modernity after the fifteenth century.

### ***Destruction As Memory Practice***

Material memory is not necessarily based on constructive processes. Destruction can be a positive way of maintaining memories (Rowlands, 1993), provided that it takes place in a dramatic, ritualized setting and is regularly repeated. A good example is the destruction by fire of Neolithic mud houses in the Balkans (Stevanovic 1997). Every few years, houses were destroyed and then built anew following the previous layout, in what can be considered an act of cyclical regeneration. Another case of social remembrance through destruction is the *malanggan*. The people of New Ireland make very elaborate funerary sculptures (called *malanggan*) that take months to be finished and require great skills. The ritual itself lasts a few hours, and after that, the wooden sculptures are left at the mercy of the wind and rain in ritual areas (Küchler, 2002). Memory is thus deposited in the technical cycle as a whole, which includes the creation of the statue and use but also its abandonment and eventual disappearance. Rowlands (1993, p. 149) has described other contexts in which the destruction of material culture serves to remember, such as the deposits of bronze objects that were ritually buried in Europe during the Late Bronze Age (1200–800 BC) or the famous potlatch of the Kwakiutl Indians of the British Columbia, in which large amounts of commodities were not only given away by wealthy patrons but also burnt and destroyed. The ceremonies in which artifacts are destroyed, buried, or abandoned are, in all cases mentioned, dramatic enough to be deeply impressed into collective memory.

However, destruction can also be an effective way of erasing memory. As we saw in the section of

space and order, people are often instinctively aware of the agency of material culture in shaping social life. They also know that things transmit memory and that with memory comes certain moral values and cultural predispositions—hence, the widespread phenomenon of *damnatio memoriae* since Antiquity. The idea is to cut short forever not just a particular remembrance but also the possibilities of repetition, because it is repetition (Assmann's “time of regeneration”) that makes the past always present. Thus, the destruction of *malanggan*, potlatch commodities or bronze axes was not actually aimed at putting an end to something (those particular things) but to regenerate something else (society or the cosmos). It is the cycle of production and destruction that maintains memory in those contexts. The problem is when destruction itself becomes an end—that is, when the central point is to obliterate a cultural world and start a new one *ex nihilo*. The annihilating thrust implies a radical change in the notion of temporality, from a cyclical time to a linear one, with millennial or teleological connotations. It is not by chance that revolutionary programs based on destruction often imply the emergence of linear notions of time (or even the very notion of time): that is the case with Christianity (Cullmann, 1964, pp. 51–60) and modernity. Significantly, the French Revolution and Fascist Italy simultaneously inaugurated new calendars and tried to raze previous cultural landscapes (Zerubavel, 1977; Bosworth, 2005, p. 201). The purpose of destruction is to obliterate the old material civilization and the old ways of thinking embedded in it.

This is exactly what is happening in the more traditional parts of Spain under the impact of modernity. In Galicia, in particular, the destruction of the traditional material environment has acquired enormous proportions (González-Ruibal, 2005). This results from the traumatic character of the process of modernization in the region: hundreds of thousands of peasants were forced to emigrate to other European countries and the Americas in search of jobs. During their stay abroad, Galicians were exposed to a radically different material culture in places like New York and Buenos Aires. In a strange and often hostile social environment, their remembrance of their birthplace was heavily tinged with nostalgia and affection; a highly idealized ancestral homeland emerged from their daydreaming.

This ideal image suffered a hard reality check when they returned to Galicia from the late 1970s onward. The idealization process was reversed on

arrival and the birthplace began to be characterized in negative terms, as a backward, oppressive locale—the source of all moral and material miseries that forced people to emigrate. Yet it was not enough with destroying in the mind the memory of the cozy traditional home. The entire cultural landscape had to be shattered and replaced by a new one, free of the social and mental constrictions that characterized the premodern environment. Using Sigmund Freud’s terminology, we can say that what the Galicians suffered was not a process of mourning caused by the disappearance of something that had been loved, but melancholia, marked by ambivalence toward the object (loved and hated at the same time):

Just as mourning impels the ego to renounce the object by declaring its death ... each individual battle of ambivalence loosens the fixation of the libido upon the object by devaluing, disparaging and, so to speak, even killing it.

(Freud, 2006, p. 324)

Devaluing and even killing the object that summoned traumatic memories was what the Galicians did. They engaged in a rage of destruction of the old material world: from plows to houses (Fig. 7.9).



**Figure 7.9** A traumatic breakage with a relational identity: forgetting the past in a Galician village.

The new material culture exemplifies the change from a culture where a relational self prevailed and where memory was communally built and transmitted within the community to a society of independent selves, where individual memories—successful biographies—try to impose themselves in the cultural landscape. Mechanisms to shape and regulate the relational self and preserve memory (traditional clothes, agricultural implements for collective work, vernacular houses) were replaced by monuments to the individual self, material memories of personal triumphs (expensive cars, luxurious modernist houses). Nevertheless, the relationship with the past, as in every melancholic process, is ambivalent. Traditional artifacts are often not destroyed but just left to decay. Something of the old love prevails and haunts the former peasants.

The Galician case is only an extreme example of the forms of oblivion that are embedded in late modern materiality. For Connerton (2009), late modernity is characterized by a particular regime of forgetting that is enforced in everyday life through the built environment. The scale of human settlement, the production of speed, and the destruction of the urban fabric generate a particular “cultural amnesia” (Connerton 2009, p. 99). Whereas medieval and early modern cities used to have conspicuous landmarks that created an effect of spatial cohesion and places of gathering that fostered social cohesion, new cities are formless, segregated spaces and, therefore, unmemorable and unsocial. Besides, the continuous refashioning of the built environment prevents any possible social recollection of shared places. We might say that supermodern cities fail to transmit memory, but we may as well argue that they succeed in creating forgetfulness: Connerton (2009, p. 125) makes the point that the production of oblivion is intrinsic of the political economy of late capitalism. Cultural amnesia is not produced by accident but by a necessity of the system—so that we forget where things come from (González-Ruibal & Hernando, 2010). The question that emerges from the study of material memory practices in late modernity is: How does living in a post-mnemonic culture affect human cognition?

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Archeology works with more cultural variation than any other social science, because archeological methods can be used to understand all prehistoric, historic, and contemporary societies from

the beginning of humankind to the present. The possibilities for cultural comparison are almost infinite, and differences often emerge when contrasting opposite contexts. However, archeologists agree that working with the past is just one of the defining characteristics of their discipline. The other, and perhaps more important, is its focus on materiality. In this chapter, I have tried to show the great relevance that material culture has in shaping our perceptions and experiences of the world. Material things are a crucial component of the “extended mind” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998), and this fact is enjoying increasing recognition by psychologists and cognitive scientists. As we have seen, Cole (1998, p. 144) argues that things are the quintessential constituents of culture because of their twofold character, simultaneously material and ideal. Here, I have argued that a third dimension of things has to be taken into account to understand their relevance in shaping the social mind: temporality. Things from the past have a continuing effect in the future. Our experiences are framed by an inherited material environment, sometimes hundreds or even thousands of years old. From this point of view, archeology is doubly pertinent, because—unlike other disciplines engaged in the study of things—it deals both with materiality and with time. For cultural psychologists and archeologists, it should not be difficult to find a common ground. After all, they are interested in similar phenomena as mediated by culture. The development and constitution of the self in relation to society, the social shaping of emotions, the way the built environment affects human experience, and the material frame of memory practices are the four themes that I have chosen to explore in this chapter because of their meaningful and manifold ramifications.

Cultural psychology could benefit from studying things with an archeological sensibility—that is, with an understanding of the agency of material culture, its inseparability from human beings, and its temporality. Some new lines of research for an archeologically inspired cultural psychology that takes things seriously could be the following:

**1. The interactions between human psychological processes and material culture beyond cognitive technologies and explicit symbolical objects.** Psychologists interested in material culture have often focused on explicit cognitive or mnemonic technologies and artifacts—maps, computers, GPS, compasses, and so forth. Here, I have tried to show that many

other types of cultural objects are involved in both social and spatial orientation and are, therefore, worth of study by psychologists. In fact, other categories of cultural objects, such as houses or cars, have recently been taken into account by cultural psychologists (Valsiner, 2008, p. 23). Their point in common is that they are artifacts explicitly inscribed with meaning. The focus is in people openly making statements with objects. Although those studies are certainly an important and exciting line of research, it would be interesting to look at other kinds of artifacts that are less obviously loaded with meaning. This implies a turn from explicit to implicit meanings, from the symbolic and iconic to the indexical. To make better sense of the indexical, of unconscious traces and practical behavior, psychologists have to span their range of research and include things that do not seem too relevant or meaningful at first sight, things that are overlooked or taken for granted by human actors. Archeologists know well that every single object counts, no matter how humble.

**2. Systems of artifacts involved in psychological processes.** Things cannot be understood in isolation or out of context: archeologists and anthropologists of technology know that we have to explore entire material inventories and their structural relations (Baudrillard, 1968; Lemonnier, 1992; González-Ruibal, 2006a). As signs are only meaningful in relation to other signs, artifacts are only meaningful in relation to other artifacts (including the human body). Thus, cars have to be explored in relation to urban space and houses but also in relation to late modern technologies of the self, such as web-blogs and cloth, and cloth, in turn, has to be understood as related to furniture and cell phones. Real things have also to be confronted with virtual things and with the products of the cultural and moral imagination. How do artifacts that are explicitly encoded with meaning and artifacts that work in practice relate to each other? How do they interact to frame daily experience?

**3. The temporality of things.** People are born to a material milieu that they have not created but that deeply affects their being. The psychological development of individuals takes place in a cultural landscape saturated of meaningful memory cues, some of them extremely old, some very recent. Does the human mind develop differently in heavily material and conservative



historical environments and in landscapes where memory is swept away every generation or not materialized in the first place? How do different memory practices and temporalities of things affect the way people perceive themselves, society and the world? Thus, whereas Europeans live in cultural landscapes that have grown through accretion of diverse material pasts, the materiality of which is considered important for the present (at least since early modern times), the Buddhist tradition tends to regenerate the past by destroying or altering its materiality, which is not valued, and by rebuilding it anew (Byrne, 1995). Also, how do the different layers of time have an effect on people? The issue of time is inextricable from memory: What is the role of material culture in creating and reconfiguring habit, cognitive, and personal memory (Connerton, 2009, pp. 139–141)? What is the relation between open commemorative practices and unconscious mnemonic traces?

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PART

3

## Positions in the Field

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Cor Baerveldt and Theo Verheggen

**Abstract**

Enactivism is an emerging perspective both in cognitive science and in cultural psychology. Whereas the enactive approach in general has focused on sense-making as an embodied and situated activity, enactive cultural psychology emphasizes the expressive and dynamically enacted nature of cultural meaning. This chapter first situates enactivism within a tradition of expressivist thinking that has historical roots both in radical Enlightenment thought and Romantic reactions against the rationalization of human nature. It then offers a view of our human biology that can be reconciled with an account of meaning as irreducibly normative. By emphasizing the consensual rather than the supposedly shared nature of meaningful conduct, enactivism avoids some of the classical pitfalls in thinking about culture. In the conclusion a genetic enactive psychology will be presented, which understands sense-making not as a mediated activity but as a competence acquired through cultural training and personal stylization.

**Keywords:** enactivism, expression, consensual coordination, emotion, normativity, cultural training

*Enactivism* is an emerging perspective in cognitive science proposed most explicitly by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) as an alternative to representational theories of cognition. As a perspective in cultural psychology, it was first proposed by Baerveldt and Verheggen (1999) as a way to give an account of consensually orchestrated personal conduct, without evoking culture as an already established meaningful order. Both enactive cognitive science and enactive cultural psychology are characterized by a focus on *sense-making* as a situated, embodied activity.

Like cultural psychology itself, enactivism has roots that predate psychology in its modern academic form. Cultural psychology and its historical precursors have been associated with expressivist streams with roots grounded particularly in German idealism, through the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich

Hegel (1770–1831), Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) (see Jahoda, 1993; Diriwächter, 2004). But cultural psychology can also be seen as more broadly connected to secularizing tendencies in Western cultural history going back to Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and running through the work of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). The Enlightenment in its different forms spurred a strong call for cultural pluralism and an emphasis on a broad ideal of education. Particularly in Germany, both ideas were strongly linked to that of the unity of a people in terms of a cultural tradition. Informed by both Enlightenment ideas and Romantic reactions against the rationalization of human nature, the psychologist Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) and his brother-in-law, the



philologist Hajim Steinthal (1823–1899), followed in the footsteps of Herder, Herbart, and von Humboldt and proposed the new discipline of *Völkerpsychologie* (Eckhardt, 1997; Diriwächter, 2004). The new discipline concerned itself with spiritual and mental (*geistige*) processes not so much at the level of the individual but at the level of cultural communities. Central was the idea of a people (Volk) as unified not by biological heritage but by common language, taste, poetry, and customs. Of particular interest to our own argument is the way Lazarus and Steinthal already saw psychology as a third science, situated between the natural sciences and historical disciplines (Diriwächter, 2004, p. 90). As such, their *Völkerpsychologie* rejected reductively biologicistic or organismic understandings of the individual, stating instead that individuals inherently emerge within a network of communally enacted meanings and linguistic practice. In contrast with the newly emerging hermeneutic disciplines, however, *Völkerpsychologie* remained committed to giving lawful accounts of psychological processes (Eckhardt, 1997; Diriwächter, 2004). Although in hindsight fundamental questions can be asked about the success of Lazarus and Steinthal's new program, with the notable exception of Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, the possibility of a genetic psychology situated between the biological and the human sciences still remains scarcely explored.

### ***Enactivism and radical Enlightenment***

Enactivism aims at giving an account of situated meaningful action that remains connected both to biology and to the hermeneutic and phenomenological studies of experience. Enactivism in the form that will be presented here is most closely related to the work of the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who have attempted to offer a radically new understanding of life and knowledge. However, to see the historical connections between their program and that of the expressivist tradition that informed early cultural theory and cultural psychology, we need to see it as part of a particular “radical” tradition in Western Enlightenment thinking that can be traced at least to Spinoza. Although it advances the central tenets of a secular, deterministic, and hence fully scientific worldview, this strain of thought has also provided a radical—but somewhat forgotten—alternative to reductionist forms of rationalism. It can potentially serve as a basis for a form of cultural and historical thinking that

is fundamentally different from the social-political thought that follows, for example, from the writings of Locke, Hume, Hobbes, and Montesquieu (for an extensive discussion of Spinoza's historical role in the “radical Enlightenment,” see Israel, 2001).

Particularly interesting for our discussion here is the way Spinoza already understands perception: not as the result of the impact of external stimuli but as a consequence of the way the perceiver is *disposed* to the world. “The human mind is adapted to the perception of many things, and its aptitude increases in proportion to the number of ways in which its body can be disposed” (Spinoza, 1677[2001], p. 62). The Latin *disponere* means “to arrange,” or to put in order. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle uses both the Greek *diathesis* (from *dia* + *thithenai* to set), which refers to dispositions in a more general sense, and *hexis* (translated in Latin as *habitus*), which refers specifically to deeper and more active dispositions like the ones involved in moral character. Already for Aristotle such dispositions are deeply embodied and cannot just be passed on by simple instruction. Instead, a *hexis* is acquired by the cultivation of our “natural” tendencies by repeated action.

Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones. (...) In a word, then, like activities produce like dispositions. Hence we must give our activities a certain quality, because it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions.

(Aristotle, 2004, p. 92)

The notion of “disposition” that derives from Aristotle and was passed on through the Scholastic tradition to such diverse thinkers as Spinoza, Herder, Wittgenstein, and Bourdieu implies a particular understanding of determinism that is highly relevant for an enactive cultural psychology and strongly at odds with the causal assumptions of mainstream cognitive and representationalist accounts of perception. This understanding of determinism is crucially related to what could now be called “organizational autonomy,” a concept that—with all its biological connotations—is central to enactive thought. Interestingly, Spinoza already claims that “a composite individual can be affected in many ways and yet retain its nature,” as long as “the bodies composing

the individual continue and reciprocally communicate their motions in the same manner as before” (ibid., p. 61). The link, in perception and action, between determinism and autonomy characterizes enactive thought from Spinoza, through Vico and Herder, to Bateson, Maturana, and Varela. We find it as well in the work of Vygotsky (see below), for whom Spinoza was an important source of inspiration.

### *Johann Gottfried Herder and Expression in Psychology*

With regard to enactive cultural psychology’s historical precedents, next to Spinoza the work of Herder is particularly relevant. Herder was a central figure in the neo-Spinozist movement that swept through Germany in the late eighteenth century. Where it proved hard for Enlightenment thinkers to radically break with a providential understanding of history, Herder stands out as a thinker who attempted to reconcile, on the one hand, a secular and empirical understanding of history and the differences between cultures with, on the other hand, a general cognitive understanding of the “powers of the soul” as an embodied meaning giving capacity (Herder, 1778/2002b). Taylor (1995) credits Herder for standing at the beginning of an expressivist understanding of language and mind that is in contrast with the designative or representational understanding still dominating psychology and cognitive science.

It is remarkable that Herder’s understanding of language does not only resemble the account given by Maturana, which we will discuss later, but that in a way strikingly similar to Maturana, he already connects it to what can be considered an early version of the idea of the self-referentiality and operational closure of the nervous system (Herder, 1778b/2002; see also Fischer, 1997). Herder speaks of the soul as an “organic but self-referential being that acts according to its own laws of mental connections” (Herder, 1989, p. 182, op cit. Fischer, 1997, p. 307).<sup>1</sup> Rather than understanding perception as merely the result of an imprint of the external world on our senses that reaches the brain mechanically, Herder speaks of sensual activity as the way the soul “imagines” an outer object and of the image beheld by the soul as “a phenomenon that is constructed by the soul itself upon the instigation of the senses” (ibid.). Herder (1778/2002b) frequently uses the word “irritation” (*Reiz*) in a way similar to Maturana’s use of the term “perturbation” (see below). He also insists that the active power of the soul is not merely innate but

largely learned, or acquired as a consequence of our socialization. Although the nervous system is equipped with “sympathetic abilities” and a general capacity for emotionality, the structure of human reason is essentially the structure of language (Fischer, 1997).

Herder also already presented a holistic conception of culture wherein culture is neither a mere aggregate, nor a homogenous unity, but the dynamic product of reciprocal relations between its constituent parts or individual actors—each an autonomous whole in its own right—which are not mechanically activated by external forces but by their own source of energy. In culture, moreover, the parts that constitute the whole through their interconnections are characterized by *self-generated* activity, indeed not unlike the Leibnizian monads, with the important understanding that for Herder those monads are not wholly self-contained (for a more extensive discussion, see Barnard, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Like Maturana, Herder recognizes that the notion of *operational closure* or *self-generated activity* does not preclude, but rather qualifies the idea of social interaction. Thus, despite what could be considered an organismic view of culture, human reason and meaning are for Herder always historically and culturally bound. Herder was one of the first to see the need to link advances in historical methods to advances in psychology, particularly by connecting what he called the *Zeitgeist* (the particular “spirit” or style of thinking and feeling of an age) to insight into human motivation (Barnard, 2003, p. 108). Herder may also be the first to have made room for a psychology situated between the explanatory methods of the natural sciences and the “*Verstehende*” methods of the human sciences.

Through nineteenth century German *Völkerpsychologie*, this idea would come to have a profound influence on Wundt (1900–1920), who particularly in his later work expressed his belief in “a distinct methodological approach to analyze and explain the ‘psychic processes that are bound, in virtue of their genetic and developmental conditions, to spiritual communities [*geistige Gemeinschaften*]’” (Kim, 2006). As Danziger (2001) notes, for Wundt, “mental or cultural communities were not formed through deliberate decision making but through spontaneous forms of interaction at a pre-rational level” (p. 87). Wundt was interested in cultural domains of behavior insofar as these domains are governed by psychological laws of development, rather than by contingent historical conditions. Where the second

half of the nineteenth century would see a battle between biologically or racially oriented understandings of the unity of a people on the one hand and cultural-historical orientations (represented by Herder and *Völkerpsychologie*) on the other, leading to the gradual demise of the latter, Wundt still saw the possibility of formulating genetic psychological laws—not at the level of micro-functional or physiological processes, but at the level of cultural expression (e.g., Wundt, 1897/1902, p. 23). According to Wundt, the expressive features of consciousness lie beyond the scope of experimental research but require genetic-historical research of the mind and its creations.

### ***Cultural Psychology and the Wrong Enlightenment***

In the historical link between cultural psychology and the idea of expression lies the main inspiration of enactive cultural psychology but also the point of contention between enactive and representational understandings of culture. We claim that early historical attempts to link culture and psyche were largely based on the idea of *expression* and not on that of representation. The word *representation* (French: *représentation*, German: *Vorstellung*) functions prominently in the work of early cultural theorists like Durkheim, Wundt, and the *Völkerpsychologen*. However, whereas in the French and German language, the concept clearly has an expressive or presentational connotation, this sense gets largely lost if it is mistakenly translated as *representation* in the English language and appropriated by a psychology dominated by cognitivism and mentalism. For Durkheim, for example, the word representation referred not only to the conceptual depiction of reality but more even to a *dramatic enactment* of the meaning and unity of societal life (Verheggen, 1996).

Even social psychologists who claim to offer a more psychological understanding of Durkheim's *représentations collective* (e.g., Moscovici, 1988) have typically only taken up the more conceptual, representational understanding and ignored the expressive one. Consequently, they miss a crucial opportunity to propose a psychology of cultural life and remain, instead, caught up in the study of “lay representations” of life or of the dissemination of scientific representations into everyday discourse. Spinoza, Vico, Herder, German *Völkerpsychologie*, and Wundt all offer a primarily expressivist understanding of mind, culture and life, which is fundamentally at

odds with the representationalism of the Cartesian tradition. We maintain that recovering an inherently social and cultural psychology remains impossible as long as the links with representationalism and Cartesian mentalism are not radically severed. Enactive cultural psychology, as we will argue, is an attempt to draw out the psychological implications of an ontological understanding of life and meaning that remains radically nonrepresentational.

### **The Enactive Program**

Although the word enactivism was introduced by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) to denote a particular paradigm in cognitive science, it has its roots in the program of a biology of cognition initially proposed by Maturana (1970, 1975, 1988a, 1988b) and further developed by Maturana and Varela (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1987; *see also* Varela, 1979, 1981). The enactive approach as presented by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch can be seen both as an attempt to reconcile the study of cognition with the systematic examination of human experience and as an effort to offer a radical alternative to representational accounts of cognition that divorce cognition from embodied action. Although we sympathize with the general tenets of the enactive program thus conceived, our own interest has been in the possibility of an enactive *cultural* psychology (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999; Baerveldt, Verheggen, & Voestermans, 2001; Baerveldt & Voestermans, 2005, Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2001, 2007). As we hope to demonstrate in this chapter, a radically cultural enactivism requires more than an account of human experience that builds up from biological autonomy to society and culture. It requires us to acknowledge the irreducible normativity of everyday life and of even our most personal actions and expressions. For humans, to perceive and to act is to perceive and act in a way that always remains sensitive to normative (hence social) correction: we can be “right” or “wrong” about what we see or do in ways that cannot be accounted for merely in terms of the constraints imposed on us by our physiology.

To develop an account of this irreducible normativity, which still remains biologically possible and does not lose itself in subjective idealism, we draw from Maturana's work on language and sociality (particularly Maturana, 1978a, 1978b; Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 1996). Maturana has occasionally talked about the idea of cognition as the *bringing forth* rather than the representation of a

world, a notion that has made some of his interpreters call him a “bring forthist” and not, for example, a constructivist (Proulx, 2008). Both the notion of “enactment” and that of “bringing forth” are meant to orient the audience to “knowing” as an ontological category, and it is this ontological understanding of knowing that we take up in our program for an enactive cultural psychology. Hence, when we use the term *enactivism* to refer to our own work, we use it in a sense that takes it out of the confines of a more narrowly conceived cognitive science program and into the realm of cultural expressions of reality.

### ***Enactivism and a Humanized Biology***

Maturana and Varela’s thinking is complex and wide-ranging but has been discussed in great detail elsewhere (for a concise summary of their own thinking, *see* particularly Maturana & Varela, 1980). In this section, we will expound some of the formal underpinnings of their work and draw out implications for psychological understanding. While briefly touching on Maturana and Varela’s biological understanding of “life” in general, we will discuss in more detail their biological understanding of cognition and social interaction and its possible implications for the psychological understanding of behavior, action, and expression. We are interested in cultural psychology at the cross-section with biology, but contrary to the mainstream in Western rational thought, we believe that the irreducibly normative nature of culturally shaped conduct cannot be understood in reductionist biological terms. Yet, rather than pursuing a human psychology cut off entirely from its biological roots, we maintain that the psychology of human behavior can in principle be reconciled with a properly “humanized” biology (Voestermans & Baerveldt, 2001).

Far from proposing some kind of anthropomorphic projection onto our pre-given biological nature, what we have in mind here is the recognition that any attempt to describe and explain human behavior necessarily sets out from the pre-reflective, practical understanding of that behavior within the cultural normative realm. For example, to call a certain action “walking,” or “writing,” or “conversing” is to already identify it in light of a practical cultural understanding, without which the very notion of behavior or action is meaningless. Therefore, what is to be explained, biologically or psychologically, is in some sense always already understood and distinguished within the coherences of our normative practices. If a hermeneutic explication of

those normative practices is to be reconciled with our biological nature, we first need to ask the question what, biologically speaking, makes us human. And this, in turn, brings us back to the question what constitutes a biological account. Indeed, any account of ourselves and of what makes us human stands within a fundamental circularity. This circularity cannot simply be dismissed in the name of a science that privileges linear logic but needs to be acknowledged as indispensable to the aim of understanding itself. For Maturana, the question of our humanity is crucially related to us being able to ask such questions and to account for ourselves and our actions by constituting a metadomain of distinctions that allows us to operate as “observers.” Human beings are biological entities, but they are simultaneously the kinds of creatures that are partly constituted by their own self-understanding (Taylor, 1985; Hacking, 1995; Martin & Sugarman, 2001). The question, therefore, becomes: How is self-understanding biologically possible? Only after the biology of understanding and self-understanding has been formally laid out will we be able to address the outlines of an enactive cultural psychology.

### **The Formal Roots of Enactivism**

Although their collaborative work is most often associated with the theory of autopoiesis and is even called “autopoietic theory,” Maturana and Varela’s thinking can in large part be seen as a series of implications following from two related concepts. The first is the idea of *structural determination* and concerns the issue of what it means to give a rational or scientific account of the behavior of any kind of natural system. The second is the concept of *self-reference* and *closure*, as expressed in the *organizational closure* of living systems and more particularly in the *operational closure* of the nervous system. Together, the concepts of structural determination and self-reference/closure lead to radical implications for our understanding of living systems, intelligent behavior (cognition), and social action.

Maturana and Varela are biologists and their work is often linked to advances in biological systems theory and cybernetics, as represented by the work of Warren McCulloch, Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, Gregory Bateson, and Heinz von Foerster. However, enactive cultural psychology is not just an elaboration of biological systems theory but a radical attempt to rethink psychological and social thought in light of a non-reductionist ontology that potentially allows us to think of the

irreducibly normative and historical character of human conduct, yet without cutting off humanity from the rest of the natural world. Laying out the basis of such an attempt requires us to rethink some of our basic understandings concerning cause, determinism, and human agency.

### **Structural Determinism**

Any system that is observed as a composite unity—that is, an entity composed of parts—is distinguished as such in terms of its structure. *Structural determinism* refers to the principle that for any natural system, it is the structure of the system itself that determines its behavior and the changes it can undergo. Although natural systems obviously undergo structural changes as a consequence of interaction with an environment, those interactions with an environment can only trigger the system's behaviors and changes, but they cannot bring them about. To use a simple example from the biological world, a honeybee may be able to navigate using the ultraviolet light of the sun, whereas a human being lacks this particular spectral sensitivity. This is so because the structure and organization of the bee's compound eyes is different from the retinal structure of human eyes. Although the "trigger" (e.g., the multispectral light of the sun) can be seen by an observer as in both cases the same, this trigger does not determine the structural changes in the respective systems.

Maturana and Varela distinguish the *structure* of a system from its *organization*. Where organization is understood as the *relations* between components of the system that constitute the system's class identity (eggs, rocks), its structure is defined as the actual material embodiment of that organization (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Maturana, 1988a, 1988b). Consequently, a system's structure can change while its class identity remains the same, as long as the system maintains the network of relations between components that specify its defining organization. In Maturana's words, "a particular composite unity conserves its class identity only as long as its structure realizes in it the organization that defines its class identity" (Maturana, 1988b, pp. 6, iv). For example, putting an object on a table will create a series of specific structural changes in the table, but the table will remain a table as long as it maintains the network of relations that specify it—in the eye of an observer—as a table. As long as the table maintains its integrity or class identity, the perturbations it undergoes can be seen as

*compensable*, thus specifying the system's range of possible interactions without disintegration. In other words, the structure of a system at any given moment in time determines what entities and events in its medium it can interact with, as well as the way it will behave in each of those interactions.

It is important to realize that on Maturana's account, structure is not a static entity. On the contrary, the structure of a system necessarily alters with every interaction it undergoes. Its organization, however, remains constant as long as the system maintains the integrity of its own constitutive internal relations. As a general term for the range of possible interactions in which a system can engage, Maturana uses the word *domain*. Hence, a system's domain of possible interactions is determined by its own structure, whereas the domain of interactions in which it can enter without disintegration is constrained by its defining organization (see Maturana, 1988a, 1988b).

The principle of structural determinism leads to one of the central explanatory constructs in enactive theory with regard to the interaction between different systems: that of *structural coupling*. Because natural systems are determined by their own structure and not by anything outside of them, interaction between different systems cannot be mutually instructive. Instead, two (or more) systems can engage in a history of recurrent interactions by mutually triggering (not determining) structural changes in each other. Such a history of interlocked conduct means that the systems mutually select congruent paths of structural change in each other, leading to structural congruence: as long as the systems in interaction maintain their own defining organization, they change together, in practical agreement. On an enactive account, structural determinism and structural coupling are precisely what constitutes a system as a historical system. The system's *ontogeny* is its history of structural transformations—that is, the course of its structural coupling with its environment and with other structurally determined systems. The result of the structural coupling of a system with its environment is called *ontogenic adaptation* (Maturana & Guilloff, 1980, p. 140) and the result of the structural coupling between two or more organisms is called a *consensual domain* (ibid., p. 141). An example of ontogenic adaptation in the everyday cultural realm is wearing a pair of shoes: in a history of recurring and recursive interactions, our feet and our shoes change together, such that the degree of congruence between them increases and

we experience our shoes as becoming more comfortable (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004, pp. 83–84). Other examples are playing a musical instrument or using a fountain pen.

Similarly, we also become mutually adapted to others in a history of consensually coordinated action. A consensual domain is a historical domain that requires continuous structural changes in all systems involved. Again it is crucial to realize that although we may speak of mutual “influences” those influences are not instructive. For example, I can say that I am influenced by my mother or by a certain historical author, but as becomes particularly clear in the case of the latter, this influence is not one that runs in a causal line from the author to me but precisely the other way around, from my affective and intellectual dispositions to the author. I read the author because I am interested, and my reading is not a receiving of information but a dwelling in the style of the author, as Merleau-Ponty (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1964) has frequently stated. This is what makes my relation to the author a historical one.

Because the behavior of the systems establishing a consensual domain is *structurally* coupled, once a consensual domain is established, each member of the coupling can (in principle) be replaced by a system that is equivalent with respect to the structural features involved in the coupling (Maturana, 1978a). This is crucial for an understanding of culture and language, which rely on the structural or dispositional equivalence of their participants for their maintenance and historical continuation. Speakers of a particular language can (in principle) understand each other, and members of a culture are (in principle) able to make sense of each other’s expressions. Consensual domains are both determined by the respective structures of the coupled organisms and by the history of their recurrent interactions. Yet, they are neither shared representations nor are they mediated by anything external to the history of interlocked conduct between the organisms involved. We will return to this after we have dealt more explicitly with the problem of cognition and language.

Before we move on to the particular characteristics of living systems (organisms) and sense-making systems, let us make a few intermediate comments. The above remarks about structural determinism apply to *all* systems that can be rationally understood and not just to living systems, although only living systems can *actively* adapt to

an environment and establish consensual domains. Maturana presents a general outlook on science, which, although explicitly mechanistic, is also holistic and non-reductionist. Maturana’s use of the word *mechanistic* differs principally from that of reductionist Newtonian science and makes use of the etymological roots of the words “mechanism” and “machine” as referring to a *structured whole* (Greek: *mēkhanē*) rather than *partes extra partes* only connected by external forces. Science, according to Maturana, can only deal with structure-determined systems, and any explanation of the changes a system undergoes should be one in terms of the system’s own structure and not in terms of the external forces that impinge on it (Maturana, 1988a, pp. 36–37). Whether a table collapses under the weight put on it is determined by the structural properties of the table and not by the objective weight as measured by an external observer. Hence, to understand Maturana’s strong insistence that science can only give *mechanistic* explanations, it is extremely important to see that his understanding of this term is fundamentally at odds with the conventional use.

Consequently, Maturana has been explicit in his rejection of the standard notion of causality and causal relations in scientific explanations:

(...) the notion of causality is a notion that pertains only to the domain of descriptions, and as such it is relevant only in the metadomain in which the observer makes his commentaries and cannot be deemed to be operative in the phenomenal domain, the object of the description.

(Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. xviii)

The notion of structural determinism allows Maturana and Varela to maintain that their account is fully deterministic or mechanistic, yet to escape at the same time the reductionist implications of a Newtonian worldview in which the behavior of bodies is seen as entirely determined by *external* causes and impacts, or the dualism of Descartes in which the movement of bodies can be caused by a mind that remains ontologically entirely external to it.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, their work also shows a close resemblance to that of Gregory Bateson, who, while remaining within a thoroughly naturalistic framework as well, spoke of the biosphere as a complex dynamical system, characterized by circular chains of determination and possessing all the defining properties of “mind”<sup>4</sup> (Bateson, 1979).

## ***The Organizational Closure of Living Systems***

Maturana's general orientation with regard to science made him realize that an adequate characterization of living systems could not be one in terms of referential (e.g., functional or semantic) relations specified by an observer within a metadomain of description. Maturana's early work with others on the visual system of the frog (e.g., Maturana, Lettvin, McCulloch, & Pitts, 1960) already convinced him of the need for a novel understanding of perception that was not based on the idea of information abstraction from sensory data and that did not rely on some notion of representation.<sup>5</sup> He became aware that to that end he would have to characterize perception and cognition as biological phenomena, which in turn required him to reflect on the fundamental nature of any biological phenomenon. Maturana wrote later that the key insight came to him when he realized that the questions "What is cognition?" and "What is a living system?" were essentially the same (in Maturana & Varela, 1980). Given the principle of structural determinism, he realized that an adequate answer to this question could only be one in terms of the particular *structure* and *organization* that distinguished living systems from non-living systems. With Francisco Varela, he proposed a formal definition of "autopoietic systems," introducing a term that has since come to be a cornerstone of his work and that of Varela on biological autonomy (e.g., Varela, 1979), the biology of language and social systems (Maturana, 1978a, 1980), the biology of cognition (e.g., Maturana & Varela, 1980), enactive cognitive science (Varela, Thomson, & Rosch, 1991,<sup>6</sup> Thompson, 2007), and the biology of love (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 1996, 2008).

Maturana and Varela (1980; *see also* Maturana, 1978b; Varela, 1979) have defined an autopoietic system as a system that is organized as a network of relations between components that (1) through their interactions, recursively regenerate and realize the network—components and relations between components—that produces them, and (2) constitute the system as a unity distinguished from its background. Autopoietic systems can therefore be considered as *homeostatic* systems that keep their own organization invariant while going through continuous structural change (Maturana, 1975, p. 318). Autopoietic systems are *autonomous* in the sense that they are distinguished from a background by their own operations and they are *organizationally*

*closed* in the sense that "(...) their organization is a circular network of interactions rather than a tree of hierarchical processes" (Varela & Goguen, 1978, p. 292). In addition, an autopoietic system *produces* its own components (e.g., molecules, cells) and its own boundary with its medium. In the operations of an autopoietic system, everything has to be subordinated to its autopoiesis, or it disintegrates (Maturana, 1978, p. 33).

Maturana and Varela are careful in the use of formal terms like *autonomy* and *organizational closure* to avoid the confusion that often results from a less rigorous use. For example, their point is emphatically *not* that autopoietic systems exist independently from interaction with a medium, as self-enclosed entities that can only confront other such self-enclosed beings without hope of any meaningful contact. Rather, it is that living systems can only be defined *as* living systems in terms of their closed organization—the relations between components that remain invariant through structural changes—and not in terms of their interactions with anything outside of them. Organizational closure and self-production determine the relations and interactions in which a living system as a unit can engage without disintegrating, and hence those relations and interactions with a medium<sup>7</sup> cannot specify the system as a living system. Indeed, for Maturana and Varela, the notion of autopoiesis serves as a formal minimal definition of a living system, with the understanding that living systems are autopoietic systems realized within a physical space. But autopoiesis also serves as a formal minimal definition of a cognitive system, because an autopoietic system is essentially a system that "acts" effectively with regard to its own self-maintenance, regardless of whether it is endowed with any particular cognitive architecture, like a nervous system, and regardless of whether its behavior appears as meaningful to an external observer. Defining cognition as *effective action* dispels the need to introduce representation or some other class of mediational entities between the cognizer's world and the cognizer's actions. Thus, the concept of autopoiesis entails at the same time an ontological and an epistemological claim: to live is to know and to know is to live.

## ***The Operational Closure of the Nervous System***

A structurally determined system can be seen to operate in two non-intersecting phenomenal domains: the domain of its internally realized states

and the domain of its interactions as a unity with its environment. The human body, for example, can both be seen as a micro-operational system in terms of its physiology and as an expressive behavioral system in terms of its interactions with a natural or cultural medium. However, although these domains are operationally non-intersecting, they are nonetheless orthogonally interdependent or coupled, through the system's particular history as both a *composite unity* with a differentiated internal structure and a *simple unity* (the organism as a whole) interacting with its environment (Maturana, 1988b, **Section 6.3**). In humans, this history or ontogeny involves a process of cultural training, and below we will return in detail to the implications of Maturana and Varela's understanding for an understanding of cultural training.

The domain of structural states and the domain of interactions cannot be reduced to one another. For example, we cannot explain actual behavior in the relational domain in terms of the internal operations of the nervous system nor can we explain what happens in the nervous system in terms of the objective stimuli or sense data to which an organism is presumably exposed. That we can nonetheless make general statements about the relation between brain and behavior is a consequence of the way the sensory and motor surfaces of the human organism—as a consequence of its evolution—are mapped onto the topology of the brain. Because the organism's sensors and effectors operate in a dual way, both in the domain of interactions of the organism and as part of the closed relational dynamics of the nervous system, the two domains intersect *structurally*, although they remain *operationally* separate (see particularly Maturana, 1988b; **Section 7.6**). This is the reason that the relation between those two domains cannot be understood in causal terms but only in historical terms.

Cognition as such does not inherently rely on a nervous system, then, but a nervous system dramatically expands an organism's domain of possible interactions, both by expanding the space of its possible internal states and by allowing it to interact with its own internal states. To illustrate the former, we could use the analogy of our pulmonary system. Just like the progressively subdividing system of bronchi, bronchioles, and alveoli dramatically extends the effective surface of  $\text{CO}_2/\text{O}_2$  exchange, so does the infinitely more differentiated internal structure of our nervous system extend the effective sensory and motor surfaces that allow us to interact with a

world. But, in addition to that, the nervous system is also a dynamic self-referential system that constantly interacts with its own self-generated internal states (Maturana, in Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. 13). Although Maturana and Varela explicitly reject the language of input and output with regard to the operations of the nervous system, we could stretch the language a bit and say that in a sense the brain is the main source of its own input.

As a consequence of the brain's internal coherence and self-referential activity, activities in an organism's sensory surfaces cannot be seen as straightforward signals from which the nervous system somehow extracts information about the outside world. Rather, such activity serves merely as a *modulation* of the complex internal dynamics of the nervous system itself. Maturana and Varela claim that the brain does not function like an input/output machine but as an *operationally closed* system, yet structurally participating in the organization of the organism as a whole. The brain is organized as a network of reciprocally related subnetworks, which continuously maintains certain invariant patterns of sensory-motor correlations. Consequently, it gives rise to behavior of the organism as a whole within a delimited space or relational topology. An organism without a nervous system may interact with its medium in a physical or chemical way, but it cannot make the *relations* holding *between* physical events part of its domain of interactions (Maturana, in Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. 13). Possessing a nervous system means that an organism can be *disposed* to the world in a greatly expanded variety of ways and can therefore *perceive* the world in an equally large number of ways.

Note that in the vast majority of cases, activity in the sensory surfaces of the nervous system is brought about by the organism's own motions in the broad sense of that word. For a living system, moving around in the world and perceiving the world are inseparably entwined. In light of that, it is impossible to speak of perception as simply the result of neutral sensory stimuli emitted by a perceiver-independent world.

“(...) the overall concern of an enactive approach to perception is not to determine how some perceiver-independent world is to be recovered; it is rather, to determine the common principles of lawful linkages between sensory and motor systems that explain how action can be perceptually guided in a perceiver-dependent world.”

(Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1999, p. 173)



Similarly, O'Regan and Noë (2001) present their *sensory motor contingency theory* of perception as an enactive theory and claim that perception needs to be understood not in terms of sensory input but in terms of the dynamic interdependence of sensory stimulation and embodied activity.

On all those accounts the particular nature of a perceptual experience cannot just be derived from an objective account of the reality perceived. What appears from the perspective of an external observer as the world outside of the organism is, seen from an operational perspective, only an a modulation of experiences that arise as a consequence of the self-organizing properties of the nervous system. According to Varela (1984) the mechanisms that are involved in self-organizing behavior of this kind are inherently hermeneutic. Operationally closed systems do not adapt to the properties of a prefixed world but *bring forth* or *enact* a world as a domain of significance with respect to the maintenance of the organism's systemic integrity. Operationally closed systems live in a phenomenal domain that remains closed to the external epistemic eye.

### ***Consensual Coordination and "Common" Sense***

As we indicated above, the notion of operational closure does not prohibit social interaction but rather qualifies our understanding of it. On an enactive account, interaction cannot be instructive and social interaction can only be interaction between operationally closed systems—that is, structurally determined systems capable of actively engaging the world. This does not imply that the social can be reduced to properties of individual cognitive systems. As argued, the domain of internal relations of the nervous system and the relational domain of social interaction are non-intersecting and non-reducible. Rather, it does imply that systems in social interaction are always mutual *interpreters* of each other's actions. Precisely because they can neither have access to each other's experience nor determine the content of each other's experience, they have to express themselves and make sense of each other's expressions *consensually*, yet each within their own cognitive or experiential domain. Indeed, expression in social interaction is *con*-sensual, but without experience, strictly speaking, being shared. The necessity to maintain cognitive integrity requires mutual attunement rather than mutual instruction or mutually imposed regulation. Hence, social interaction involves "agreement in action"—to borrow

a Wittgensteinian notion—but not propositional agreement or equal mental content. We will come back to this point later in this chapter.

In everyday life, we respond to each other's actions and expressions in terms of what we take them to mean. Meaning in this sense is not prefixed in the expressions themselves—as messages to be decoded—but grasped in a practical, situated way. One of the main points of contention in the discussion between enactivist and representational understandings of culture concerns the issue of what allows such embedded interpretations to be mutually meaningful. Precisely in answering this question, proponents of a representational or mediational cultural psychology see the need to evoke culture as a system of already meaningful representations or semiotic devices. Obviously *culture* can be studied as a symbolic system or as the history of objectified expressions. However, problems emerge when culture as an objectified semiotic system is first epistemically *cut off* from the dynamic consensual coordinations of action by which meaning is continuously produced in the first place and then only subsequently used to *explain* sense-making practices in everyday life.

Although there is clearly a place for the hermeneutic study of historical objectifications (e.g., in art, in technology, in established cultural rituals), it makes epistemologically and psychologically no sense to explain everyday sense-making as mediated by culturally available semiotic tools or to understand socialization as a process of internalizing objectified cultural meaning. Notions like "internalization" and "externalization," which since Berger and Luckmann's seminal text have come to be commonplace in the social sciences (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), often present a superficial dialectics and mistakenly put mind and culture in external causal relation to each other.<sup>8</sup> The notion of operational closure is meant to prevent us from this epistemic smuggling that occurs when sense-making is explained on the basis of sense already made. It allows us to focus more clearly on the activity of sense-making itself, as a consensual coordination of actions between human agents, who remain as such experientially autonomous. From an enactive perspective, the practical intelligence involved in grasping embedded meaning, or "sense," requires no mediation but only our ability to act within a consensual domain.

It is particularly the notion of operational closure that has been criticized by advocates of a cultural

psychology that emphasizes openness, social interaction, and the possibility of sharing a semiotic cultural system. Unfortunately such critiques have often been based on misreadings and conjectures triggered by the word “closure.” For example, Kreppner (1999) accuses enactivism to be a new kind of monadology, in which fully self-enclosed individuals are considered to operate blindly within a system of pre-established harmony, but he is thus confusing the notion of closure as a formal operational term with that of closedness and the impossibility of interaction.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Chryssides et al. (2009) consistently mistake operationally closed systems in social interaction for self-contained individuals, although the literature on enactivism and autopoiesis makes abundantly clear that self-conscious individuals can only arise in the relational domain of language (Maturana, 1978a, 1988a, 1988b; Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999). As we have adamantly pointed out elsewhere (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999; Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2001, 2007), the central concept in enactive cultural psychology is that of the *consensual coordination of actions*, but such a consensual coordination cannot be adequately understood without the notions of structural determinism and operational closure. Before we move on to the enactive understanding of language and normativity, let us be clear once more that Maturana and Varela deliberately and consistently speak of closure in the operational or mathematical sense of *recursivity* and not of interactional closedness (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Obviously, the formal need for any autopoietic system to maintain its own defining organization and to distinguish itself as a unity from its background requires it to maintain a dynamic relation with its medium. But as our discussion above shows, such a dynamic relation cannot be understood in terms of mutually instructive interaction or shared mental content. It can only be understood as a consensual coordination of actions.

### ***Autopoiesis, Purpose, and Intentionality***

The theory of autopoiesis as discussed until now presents a minimal account of meaning or significance in the biological realm. If it is to contribute to a psychological account of culture, however, then we will need to find a connection between the minimal signification implied in the organization of the living and sense-making as a culturally embedded normative practice. Normativity in the realm of everyday conduct involves implicit standards for

the correctness and appropriateness of actions and expressions. As Wittgenstein (1956/1978, 1980), probably more than anyone else, has extensively demonstrated, such standards for correctness require *normative stage setting*, which can be provided only by regular community practices and not by isolated organisms or individuals. The normativity of practices and of personal action/expression embedded within such practices is at the heart of any genuinely cultural psychology.

Historically, the study of human behavior has been caught up in unproductive oppositions between those who understand human behavior as part of the natural world and those who see it as an expression of something that is uniquely and distinctively human. Varela (1991) has expressed the hope that the notion of autopoiesis may help to overcome the fruitless opposition, originating in nineteenth century biology, between mechanist/reductionist viewpoints on the one hand and holist/vitalist on the other. If that be the case, it may also have implications for psychology, which itself has been divided between a largely mechanist biology on the one hand and the more holistic humanities on the other. Fundamentally rethinking the relation between the component elements of a living system and its organization as a whole has historically been at the heart of several attempts to think of human physiology as involving a precarious part/whole dialectics (e.g. Plessner, 1928/1975; Goldstein, 1935/1995; Von Weizsäcker, 1940/1995; Buytendijk, 1965/1974; Polanyi, 1958; Merleau-Ponty, 1942/1963, 1945/1962; Bateson, 1972, 1979).<sup>10</sup> Important in all these accounts is the idea that somehow even in the basic physiological operations of a living system, the organization that specifies the organism as a whole is already implied. The radical implication, still to be rigorously elaborated, is that in a crucial sense our own physiology is already a characteristically human physiology.

Buytendijk (1974) expressed the need for an “anthropological physiology,” centrally concerned with the body as expression of sense and Merleau-Ponty (1942/1963) spoke of “le corps sujet,” the body subject, as an ambiguous unity of subjectivity and anonymity and always exceeding “le corps objectif,” the objective body as conceived by an observer. Attempts to humanize our physiology have (in principle) different implications for the relation between body and culture than accounts deriving from a reductionist physiology that is grounded in a causalistic ontology. They require us to admit

“meaning” and “significance” in their fully human sense as part of the natural world, yet without implying biological reductionism. The relation between the body as organism and the body as expression of sense is at the heart of enactive thinking, but, as we will see, this relation can be interpreted in different ways, depending on how “organism” and “sense” are understood

Enactivism, as conceived by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), is an attempt to connect the body as an organizational whole to the body as lived experience. Varela, in the final years of his life, came to see autopoiesis as a way to give a formal naturalistic grounding to Kant’s idea (in the *Critique of Judgment*) of the organism as a “natural purpose” (Weber & Varela, 2002; Thompson, 2004). Kant already linked this idea to that of self-organization but, according to Thompson, only lacked the formal language of self-reference we possess now. From the perspective of a radically cultural enactivism, however, what is still lacking in Kant is not so much the mathematics of self-reference and nonlinear dynamics but an adequate account of the *historical* dimension of sense and purpose. This is a critique already voiced by Wilhelm Dilthey, who argued that although life encompasses both the organic and the mental, the values and purposes that inhere in it could only be fully understood in their temporal or historical fulfillment (Dilthey, 2002, p. 249).

Whereas Varela and Thompson in their subsequent work—and despite their earlier critique—increasingly came to link the idea of biological sense-making to Husserl’s phenomenological idea of intentionality (e.g., Varela, 1999; Thompson, 2007), we remain critical of attempts to move too quickly from the operational domain to consciousness and intentionality, without fully acknowledging the inherent embeddedness of human conduct in normative cultural practice. Even in his later work, Husserl arrived at culture only secondarily, through the philosophy of transcendental consciousness, whereas on the cultural account that we are proposing here, the intentional relation of human actors to their world is inherently a normative one: meaning, sense, purpose, and intentionality are ever so many words for actions that remain sensitive to the possibility of getting it wrong. For example, the meaning of a word like “honor” is not derived from honor as an ideal object in a self-sufficient consciousness but stands in relation to the countless cultural performances that can properly be called honorable or dishonorable. Even a Husserl who is stretched and

bent to fit the study of the life-world is unsuited to address the life-world as normatively structured.

Attempts in contemporary cognitive science to naturalize a Husserlian phenomenology still rooted within the philosophy of consciousness (e.g., Petitot, Varela, Pachoud, & Roy, 1999) may in fact come dangerously close to a sophisticated form of representationalism, as Dreyfus already argued almost three decades ago (Dreyfus, 1982). Thompson (2007) admits that their initial dismissal of Husserl in the 1991 book was inspired by Dreyfus’ depiction of Husserl as a proto-cognitivist, and he expresses his current belief that enactivism can be reconciled with a sophisticated reading of Husserl’s later work. As cultural psychologists, we are interested in meaning in a normative sense; hence, we remain skeptical of attempts to derive an understanding of normative conduct from a philosophy of consciousness or biologically grounded intentionality. Following Dreyfus in this regard, we maintain that enactive psychology and cognitive science may be better served by breaking more radically with the philosophy of consciousness and by following Heidegger, Dewey, and Wittgenstein in asking about the intelligibility, unity, and order of public normative conduct rather than private experience (Dreyfus, 1982, pp. 26–27). Like Dreyfus, we are interested in connecting the idea of normative practice to that of skillful coping at a psychological level. If human conduct is irreducibly normative, then we cannot work our way up to it from a theory of intentionality grounded in the individual organism.

Although autopoiesis may (in principle) provide a basic naturalized understanding of purpose and intentionality in the biological realm, it can as such not deal with the normativity of intention and purpose in the human cultural realm. Thus, the problem of intentionality and natural teleology brings us back to the problem of culture and the meaning or sense of historically situated action. Indeed the notions of sense and purpose are, as Thompson acknowledges, emergent relational properties and do not belong to the organization of autopoietic systems proper. On our account, they are indeed irreducibly normative notions that cannot simply be derived from the natural teleology of individual organisms. Instead, they require a historical understanding that nonetheless fully recognizes the particular organization of our closed human physiology. This brings us to the crucial issue of how embodied human beings enter the domain of language and culture and how our natural teleology becomes

attuned to a historical normative world. Given the principles of structural determinism and organizational closure, we cannot suddenly bring in a meaningful cultural order from the outside, as it were, or introduce language as a semiotic system that makes shared cultural meaning possible. The question is not “How does culture enter the human mind?” or “How is culture transmitted into and transformed within the individual?”, as Kreppner (1999, p. 209) suggests, but *How does a particular coordination of our actions historically give rise to both “mind” and “culture”?* An account of human conduct as irreducibly normative need not be at odds with the recognition of the biological roots of cognition. Thus we return to the issue of the relation between human physiology and human normative conduct and ask how, to paraphrase Herder, “die Natur dem Geist halbwegs entgegenkommt” ([how] nature meets spirit halfway).

### *Living in Language*

The role of language is crucial in the way enactive cultural psychology understands the entwinement of personal conduct with the normative order of culture. However, on the formal grounds we just spelled out, language itself cannot be understood as a superpersonal structure detached from lived embodied practice. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, language never fully breaks the bond with the lived significance of bodily perception and expression, and in living speech there is no separation between what is expressed and the manner in which it is expressed. For Merleau-Ponty (1964), language’s meaning is therefore always indirect, ambiguous, and allusive, just as for Maturana, it is connotative or implicative before it can be denotative. Although it may be possible to conceive of other generative domains of expression (e.g. dance, ritual, music, visual art), we could say that language constitutes at least a paradigm case for irreducibly normative expression. As such it must be connected both to our biology and to our history of consensual coordinations with each other.

In Maturana’s earlier writings (e.g., Maturana, 1978a, 1978b, 1980), language as a biological phenomenon is considered a direct consequence of the ability of our nervous system to recursively interact with its own states.<sup>11</sup> Language as a relational phenomenon, however, arises in the domain of human’s consensually coordinated action. As discussed above, interaction between structurally determined and operationally closed systems cannot be based

on information transfer or mutually instructive behaviors. Yet, such systems can become structurally coupled, and through a history of interlocked conduct, a *consensual domain* can be established. Given the structural plasticity of the nervous system and the fact that all of its states are internally generated, the nervous system can recursively interact with the states generated in it through consensual interaction, thus allowing for a consensual coordination of a consensual coordination of actions. According to Maturana, the consequence of such a recursive consensual coordination of actions is language or “*languageing*.”

Again, it is important to maintain clean epistemological accounting and to avoid phenomenal reductionism. Although operationally speaking language becomes possible because both internally and externally generated perturbations of the nervous system<sup>12</sup> map in the same phenomenal domain of relations of relative nervous activity (Maturana, 1978a, pp. 48–49), language as such exists only in the relational domain:

... [L]anguage is a biological phenomenon because it results from the operations of human beings as living systems, but it takes place in the domain of the co-ordinations of actions of the participants, and not in their physiology or neurophysiology. Languageing and physiology take place in different and non-intersecting phenomenal domains.

(Maturana, 1988a, p. 45)

Language has become a central focus in Maturana’s work, particularly from the late 1980s—arguably even more than autopoiesis. Whitaker (2003) has pointed out that there is also a shift in Maturana’s work on language itself, from an early focus on the “mechanics” of language as rooted in operations of structurally determined systems in consensual coordination (Maturana, 1978a) to a focus, in later work, on the orienting role of language in everyday consensual practice (Maturana, 1988a).

Although Maturana’s account of language does not principally change and remains grounded in the biology of cognition, his later focus on the *social* role of language seems to make it more adaptable for attempts to develop the enactive framework in a socio-cultural direction. Indeed, whereas Varela and Thompson are interested in the implications of the biology of cognition for enactive cognitive science, we have drawn particularly from Maturana’s understanding of language in an attempt to develop the general outlines of an enactive cultural psychology

(Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999; Baerveldt, Verheggen, & Voestermans, 2001; Baerveldt & Voestermans, 2005; Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2007).

Although a focus on language as a social or relational phenomenon may seem to fit well with discursive and semiotic approaches to culture, we have been careful to avoid the problem of phenomenal reductionism, as displayed particularly in approaches that give regulatory or semiotic status to cultural models, representations, and mediational tools (Wertsch, 1985, 2007; Valsiner, 1998; Holland & Quinn, 1987; D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Moscovici, 1988, 1998; Farr, 1996, 1998; Marková, 1996, 2008) as well as discursive approaches that reject naturalism yet take the constitutive and illocutionary power of language for granted (Gergen, 1999; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). The implication of Maturana's account is that language cannot primarily be a semiotic system and that words and signs cannot be properly conceived of as tools for the control of actions, or mere rhetorical resources, but need to be accounted for in terms of culturally coordinated practices and acquired bodily dispositions. Culture as a symbolic or semiotic system does not explain consensual practice but requires explanation in terms of the historically coordinated practices that give rise to it (Maturana & Verden-Zöller, 1996; Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999).

### *Language as Orienting Behavior*

Because interaction cannot be instructive or informative, enactivism conceives of communication as *orienting behavior*. Systems in communication do not transmit information to one another through a discrete communication channel but mutually orient each other within their respective cognitive domains (Maturana & Varela, 1980, p. 57). We live in language, but when language is used to communicate, the partners in the communication recursively coordinate their actions in a manner that orients them each within their own cognitive domain (Maturana, 1978). Those cognitive domains remain operationally separate but become structurally coupled in a history of mutually triggering behavior. Again, it is important to see that the notion of mutual "triggering" does not imply that no genuine communication occurs. On the contrary, it is a formal way of indicating that genuine communication within a linguistic domain requires some kind of embodied "attunement" and that the partners in communication can neither read each

other's mind nor simply put the right ideas in each other's mind.

Conceiving of language as orienting behavior fits well with social pragmatic approaches to language as a way to establish joint attention and *grammar* as a way to perspectively orient one another with regard to the objects of joint attention (e.g. Tomasello, 1999). The idea of grammar as an orienting device has been well-demonstrated by Bamberg (2001), who showed that in producing either an "anger narrative" or a "sadness narrative," 9-year-old children have typically learned to use grammatical features like transitivity and active/passive constructions to orient an audience with regard to discourse purposes like blame or empathy. Orienting behavior does not produce specific effects in the other—we can't *make* others empathize with us—but relies for its success on the capacity and willingness of the other to respond in a way that remains sensitive to the cooperative domain of interaction. Viewed from an enactive perspective, such orienting behavior is part of a consensual dance in which neither partner controls the behavior of the other, but both continuously adjust to one another to establish and maintain common ground for the duration of the interaction. Linguistic behavior is orienting behavior and although the notion of orientation may seem to have some similarity to that of regulation and co-regulation in semiotic and mediational approaches to culture and language (e.g., Fogel, 1993; Valsiner, 1998), it avoids the implication of those concepts that instructive interaction is possible. Of course the notion of language as orientation is not incompatible with genetic approaches to *semiosis* or sense-making as such, as we will discuss later on. But reconciling a genetic cultural psychology on more Vygotskian grounds with the enactive framework will require a reorientation from the language of mediation and control to that of coordination, orientation, and style.

### *Language and Emotion*

Whereas in his earlier work on language Maturana is particularly interested in the way language gives rise to observers as well as to objects as the products of recursive consensual coordinations of actions that conceal their own origin, he became in his later work predominantly interested in the role of *emotions*. As dynamical dispositions for action, emotions specify the relational domain in which human beings operate. Maturana maintains

that phylogenetically, our humanity did not arise directly as a consequence of our possession of language or rational thought but as a consequence of a particular configuration of emotion—particularly emotions related to intimacy—that made consensual behavior possible (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 1996). Rational thought as such is a consequence of us living in language, but the particular domain of rational behavior in which we operate at any given moment in time (e.g., making love, or engaging in an academic argument) is specified by our emotions (Maturana, 1997). In the flow of our emotions, we continuously move from one kind or class of relational behaviors to another (*ibid.*). As we go through an ongoing flow of emotions in our everyday lives, emotion and language braid together in what Maturana calls *conversations*, and the transgenerational conservation of living in conversations is what he calls *culture*:

In these circumstances, a culture is a closed network of conversations which is learned as well as conserved by the children that live in it. Accordingly, the worlds that we live as human beings arise through our living in conversations as particular domains of consensual coordinations of coordinations of consensual behaviors and emotions  
(Maturana, 1997)

Hence, where we saw earlier that the enactive cognitive science proposed by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch moves in the direction of a transcendental grounding of consciousness and intentionality in the natural purpose of the organism, Maturana's ideas about the entwinement of body, emotion, and language seem to point in the direction of a more immanent grounding of our ways of being disposed to the world. Elsewhere (Baerveldt & Voestermans, 2005), we discussed the entwinement of embodied normativity and affectivity in terms of the *normative structure* of our human reality. We argued that normativity is indeed inherently embodied and affective in nature, just like our emotions and bodily dispositions are inherently normative. Understanding that language occurs in two structurally coupled but non-reducible phenomenal domains and that linguistic behavior is always embodied and entwined with emotion opens the way to a genetic understanding of cultural normativity through the acquisition of durable bodily dispositions and normative skills. We will return to this below.

## Normativity, Training, and Style

Our insertion into a cultural-historical order takes place not through the internalization of cultural models or social representations nor by taking up already meaningful semiotic devices. Rather, our socialization into the ways of a culture involves a *historical process of continuous attunement to consensually orchestrated community practices*. Or, to use a different metaphor here, we are not like containers, each possessing, among other things, the shared ideational resources of our culture; we are like threads, intricately interwoven with the fabric of communal life, yet each maintaining our own unique individuality.<sup>13</sup> Enactive cultural psychology aims at a genetic psychological understanding of the “warp and weft” of personal lives in community.

### *The Pivotal Role of Cultural Training*

As argued above, we are agents capable of being *affected* by the world, and the way we can be affected is determined not by anything outside of us but by the way we are *disposed* to the world. Those dispositions involve themselves an intricate entwinement or braiding of language and emotion in the body, and this entwinement makes both our life-world and our psychological competences irreducibly normative. A central question for an enactive cultural psychology, therefore, concerns the particular history of *training* by which normative dispositions are acquired. We use the word training here very much in the Wittgensteinian sense of the word (*see* Wittgenstein, 1956/1978, 1958/1974). In contrast with representations, normative dispositions can be understood neither as states of mind, nor as states of the body. As Wittgenstein's analyses have convincingly demonstrated, skills and dispositions are dynamic and can only be demonstrated in practice—that is, in the public realm where they are susceptible to normative correction. As such, they are not merely externalizations of knowledge that we must first possess internally.

Charles Taylor (1995) has argued that the expressions of linguistic agents take place within a realm of irreducible rightness, where the appropriateness of expressions is not merely a matter of their pragmatic effect in a social situation. For example, the words “I am sorry” may be the right words to use regardless of whether they are successful in restoring the contact between us (pp. 104–106). The cultural realm of jokes, requests, apologies, offenses, and so forth is irreducibly normative, but also inescapably ambiguous, as, for example,

the question “Is this a joke or an offense?” can be resolved neither by appealing to a prefixed reality nor on the basis of representational knowledge. As Aristotle already saw, normative action requires *practical* understanding, and this practical understanding is dispositional rather than propositional. It is acquired as personal knowledge or understanding and cannot simply be passed on or internalized. It requires repetitive practice and personal training. To master a skill, one has to practice that which is to be mastered.

Training on Wittgenstein’s account is a history of trials or attempts in a context of normative correction. Indeed, like in Vygotsky’s genetic account, for Wittgenstein, cultural training initially relies on the guidance of those already more competent than the novice learner. For Wittgenstein, the crucial moment in entering the normative realm lies not primarily in the use of signs but in the nature of the training process itself, which fixes and constrains our ways of acting in such a way that we become bound to the *normativity* of cultural practices (for a comparison of Wittgenstein and Vygotsky in this regard, see Williams, 1999, pp 188 ff.). We could say that through training we develop a practical feel for the situated and dynamically enfolding normativity of particular cultural practices. To return to our metaphor above, training is precisely the way in which we are woven into the normative fabric of society.

Wittgenstein recognized that the irreducible normativity of cultural practice is nonetheless a genetic accomplishment on the level of individual actors. In Wittgenstein’s terms, the behavior of the novice may conform to a rule (in the sense that in the eye of an observer it fits certain patterns), but it is not yet genuine rule following (in the sense that the actor recognizes the normativity of these patterns). Indeed, not unlike the way Vygotsky sees a crucial qualitative change in a child’s development from pseudo-concepts to genuine concepts (see van der Veer & Valsiner 1991, pp. 264–265), so does concept formation on Wittgenstein’s account require a qualitative change from mere conformity to the rules implied in the concept to acting with a sense of the necessity of those rules. In enactive terms, this qualitative change can be seen as a move from mere repetition or regularity, as facilitated by the training situation, to participation in a domain of recursive consensual coordinations of actions that allows one to grasp that regularity. What is acquired in this process is what in the enactive paradigm

is typically called an embodied skill and what Wittgenstein calls a technique, rather than a set of rules: “[O]nly through a technique can we *grasp* a regularity” (Wittgenstein, 1956/1978, VI.2). In the case of concept formation, the crucial implication is that concepts can principally not be detached from techniques of application and hence neither from their mode of acquisition. Our understanding of a concept is inherently a genetic one. One does not simply possess a concept, but one demonstrates (L. *de-* + *monstrare* to show) conceptual understanding by showing that one can go on in practice. For Wittgenstein, as for enactivism, *to know is to show* and it is in this sense that the performances both of the novice and of the cultural master can never be truly internal; they remain bounded to public criteria and normative correction.

### ***Training and Normative Competence***

Situated normativity involves an intricate relationship between unreflective skillful action, perception, and emotion, and according to Wittgenstein, this relationship is forged by cultural training and participation in communal customs (Rietveld, 2008). On an enactive account, the transition to normative understanding is marked not by the use of tools or signs as such. Rather, it is marked by the unreflective ability of actors to recognize their own behavioral or expressive response to the expressive conduct of others at different times as in some sense the same. Normative judgments are recursive judgments of sameness in our own expressive responses. They are neither possible by virtue of some kind of introspection, nor as a consequence of conscious reflection, but rather because of the way those responses are embedded in community practices. Crucial in such recognition is the social nature of normative understanding. There is nothing in individual instances of behavior that can serve as objective standard for recognizing similar instances. For example, there are no objective standards for what constitutes a joke or an offense. To say it slightly differently: If recognition of sameness in behaviors or expressions would merely be based on the cognitive powers of isolated individuals, any behavior could be made out to be the same or different as any other behavior, at an individual’s whim, so to say (Williams, 1999, pp. 174–175). Therefore, required for recognitions of sameness are communal standards or constraints that facilitate normative correction; one has to be able to say/recognize: this is not how you (properly) use a table/pen/hammer,

this is not a (proper) joke/request/apology, or this is not the proper word for that, and so forth.

Normative distinctions require that the agent making them is capable of recursively recognizing coherences and regularities in her/his own (re) actions.

On Wittgenstein's account, the standards for the recognition of sameness cannot be provided by mere regularities in individual behavior over time; rather, those standards can only be provided by regularities in community practices. As we argued above, even perceptual features of objects are not just stimulus features (e.g., we don't *perceive* the wavelength of light falling on the retina); they are consensual distinctions in the sense described above. On an enactive account, we cannot just impose conceptual categories onto our perceptual understanding of the world; rather, in conceptual understanding, we recursively distinguish our own generic and differential response to the entities we first distinguish within a domain of regularities or coherences in forms of life—a consensual domain. Normative (e.g., linguistic or conceptual) distinctions are necessarily second (or higher)-order distinctions—that is, consensual distinctions of consensual distinctions. Therefore, normative sameness relies on regularities in consensually coordinated actions and what is recursively recognized as the same is not the objective stimulus features of pregiven entities or events but one's own repeated behavioral response to certain events or situations as part of regular or repeated community responses. Things (tables, hammers, jokes, offenses) are the same because we are recursively (but not necessarily reflectively) aware that we *typically* respond to them in similar ways and that this is the way we ought to respond to them under normal circumstances.

Take a simple concept like “table.” The concept of table is not merely an abstraction of the stimulus features of all (or many) particular tables. We don't arrive at it through inductive extrapolation, like Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin (1965) have proposed, but through a certain repetition in our practices. Tables are tables by virtue of the practices we have organized around them. The concept “table” can therefore only be a recursive consensual coordination of those practices. In everyday life, we use tables to sit around, to put things on and to eat from. Those consensual practices are not prescribed by any particular rule, but they are the dynamical consequences of a history of consensually coordinated actions. The concept of table arises when we

are able to recognize sameness or regularities in our consensual uses of tables, such that particular uses come to have normative status. This is when we can say: “This is (not) how you use a table,” or “This is (not) really a table.” No particular table is inherently a standard or exemplar for tables in general. A table can only acquire this particular normative status by its place within a particular cultural practice.

In practice, there is always a possibility that a table is used in a nonconventional way (e.g., to slide down a hillside, to block a door) or that something else than a “standard” table (e.g., an orange crate, a glass plate hanging on four cables from the ceiling) is used as one. However, nonstandard uses and deviations can be recognized as such not because we have a fixed concept of things like tables but because we have regular, common, or normal uses for them within our everyday practices. This means that concepts and normative uses must be rooted in historical regularities—that is, in the practical harmonious agreements over time of a community of people. We can only have a concept of table if there is a regular and largely harmonious use of tables—that is, a *custom* concerning tables. Moreover, what is true for a concept like “table” is even more evident in the case of concepts for intangible entities like “honor” and “motherhood.” The concept and normativity of honor and motherhood cannot be an abstraction from anything that is given to us in terms of mere stimulus features. Instead, the concepts of honor and motherhood can only arise against the background of historical practices that are recursively recognized and idealized in a way that allows both for normative correction and creative stylization.

Hence, our response to entities like tables, or jokes, or offenses is never fixed. On the contrary, in our cultural training we gain a certain expressive freedom, not—as some have argued—by the mediational use of signs but by acting within a domain of recursive consensual coordinations of actions that allows signs to have meaning in the first place. Such recursive consensual coordinations involve both skillful conformity with normative community practice and coherent deformations or stylizations of those practices (Baerveldt, 2007, 2009). Herein lies the difference between a linguistic or normative agent and a nonlinguistic animal like a dog. Behaviorally speaking, a dog could be conditioned to respond in a predictable way to a signpost, but this would not yet imply that it has a conceptual or normative understanding of the signpost. The dog has no awareness of getting it right or wrong.



Taylor (1985, p. 228) has noted that historically the role of the awareness of the normativity of our expressions is what distinguishes Herder's expressivist account of language from Condillac's more designative understanding. Herder (1772/2002a) uses the word *Besonnenheit*, which typically gets translated in English in terms of "reflection."<sup>14</sup> But as argued above, this *Besonnenheit* is not a cognitive power of isolated individuals; it is the hallmark of operating within the irreducibly normative realm of language.

In his introduction to the 1962 English translation of Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* Jerome Bruner credits Vygotsky for being the true architect of the "Second Signal System," proposed initially by Pavlov, "that provides the means whereby man creates a mediator between himself and the world of physical stimulation so that he can react in terms of his own symbolic conception of reality" (Bruner, 1962, p. x). As Bruner explained 20 years later, the notion of the Second Signal System captures the distinction between stimuli that act directly on the nervous system (the First Signal System) and those that are *mediated* by language and concepts (the Second) (Bruner, 2004, p. 10). As we discussed above, on the enactive view, there are no stimuli that can act either directly or in a mediated way on the nervous system. Instead, in humans, a recursive consensual coordination of actions facilitates the normative stage setting that is required for the use of signs, tools, and concepts. The proper genetic question is therefore not primarily how we take up culturally available signs but how we acquire the embodied dispositions that allow us to act competently within human consensual domains and language.

## Culture and Belief

Now that we have discussed the idea of the normativity of culture as involving an intricate entwinement of linguistic behavior and emotion, established through cultural training, are we in a position to confront some of the problems that plague a cultural psychology still caught up in a mentalist framework? Cultural psychology, in many of its incarnations, is often seen as an attempt to overcome Cartesian dualism and self-contained individualism by introducing the idea of the inherently social nature of knowledge and understanding. Yet, at the heart of such attempts remains often a more insidious form of Cartesianism that remains mentalist in its orientation and that maintains a fatal gap between knowledge and being. Philosophers like

Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty have most cogently critiqued the insidious Cartesianism at the heart of our understanding. Critical to the program of an enactive cultural psychology is whether their critique holds up against the enactive view we have presented.

## *Representation and the Problem of Normative Sameness*

Any ideational account of culture, or any account of culture as involving an orchestration of people's beliefs, has to deal with the problem of normative sameness of beliefs—that is, the issue of how the people constituting a historical community seem to have certain beliefs in common. The need to understand the sameness of beliefs in normative terms follows from some of the fundamental problems with the mentalism of a standard cognitive account. On a mentalist account, beliefs are essentially mental representations, which implies that the problem of sameness can be tackled only in terms of the referential relation involved in such representations, either to states of affairs in the real world or—as in Husserl's phenomenology—to ideal objects in the mind. It is well-known that Wittgenstein spent the best part of his later life to contest this referential view of mind, and we will only briefly deal with it here. Earlier we evoked Wittgenstein in support of the enactive paradigm and the dispositional understanding of cultural learning we are proposing here. Now we will address the implications of Wittgenstein's analysis for an understanding of normative sameness and confront the enactive/dispositional view of culture with attempts to understand culture in terms of socially shared representations. The main issue to be addressed in this section is whether introducing the idea of shared or social representations can salvage the representational view or whether social representation theory remains essentially caught up in Cartesian mentalism. We hope this discussion may cast further light on the difference between a representational and a dispositional or enactive account of normative sameness.

## *Social Representations*

Following Wittgenstein in this regard, on an enactive account, what is required to anchor referential or representational relations are not mental capacities but regular uses, or practical—as opposed to merely propositional—community agreement in the uses of words, symbols, or signs. Meaning or sense has an irreducibly normative dimension,

and standards of correctness can only exist as part of community practices. This effectively dispels the need to evoke mental representations, but of interest to the possibility of a genuinely social and cultural psychology is the issue of whether a more systemic notion of representations and common beliefs can escape the implications of Cartesian mentalism. Advocates of a *social representation* approach to psychology (e.g., Moscovici, 1988, 1998; Farr, 1996, 1998; Markova, 1996, 2008) have attempted to offer such a systemic understanding, using what they consider to be a social, rather than merely mental, understanding of representation.

From an enactive perspective, we have elsewhere critiqued some of the basic epistemological assumptions underlying social representation theory and similar theories relying on a notion of shared cultural knowledge (Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2001, 2007). Even purportedly systemic theories of the intrinsically social in psychology often remain surreptitiously committed to a form of mentalism, by conceiving of the social in psychology as shared representations, schemata, cultural models, and so forth. For example, Farr (1998) presents what he calls a “minimal definition” of a social representation: “A representation is social if it is, or has been, in two or more minds” (p. 291)—thus implying that before they are *social*, representations can be in just one mind. Nonetheless, social representation theorists have often been careful to distinguish themselves from an overly mentalist social psychology, stating, for example, that social representations involve actions as much as thought (Chryssides et al., 2009), that they involve both conscious and unconscious accounts of meaning (Daanen, 2009) and that they are dynamic rather than static (Markova, 2008). Still, Markova maintains “that representations are modalities of *knowledge* and their *functions* are to shape activities, communication and to create reality” (p. 474, our emphasis).

In all these cases, the sharedness of the representation is supposed to rescue it from mentalism, but it is precisely in the way an epistemic notion of knowledge is prioritized as “shaping” activity and “creating” reality that the Cartesian schema is essentially maintained. On the Cartesian account, meaningful order does not inhere in life but can only be imposed through knowledge. Indeed, social representation theory first limits its social account to lay *knowledge of life* and then mistakenly identifies this knowledge as that what orders life, rather than identifying the consensual practices by which

everyday life becomes orderly in the first place. When social representation theorists speak, after Moscovici, of the anchoring and objectification of knowledge, they again describe the way in which objective reality is generated by a process in which conscious *knowledge* recedes into the background of taken-for-granted, common sense knowledge. Their dialectics is similar to that of Berger and Luckmann (1967) sociology of knowledge but entirely misses the Wittgensteinian critique that points to the necessity of the *practical* normative stage setting or consensual practice that is required for anything to count as knowledge.

A more radically cultural psychology can take its cues from Wittgenstein but also, for example, Heidegger by prioritizing cultural practice over shared knowledge and conscious deliberation. For Wittgenstein, like for Heidegger, understanding is only exhibited in our doings, and as such it is misleading, even, to talk about background intelligibility as mere common sense *knowledge*. Rather, in both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, we find the idea of a total coordination of our background *practices* that generates, as it were, a total style of being, or form of life, in light of which particular things can show up for us as meaningful. Understanding the primary way in which we are bound to such a total normative world cannot rely merely on a theory of common sense knowledge. It requires an account of how practical activities become consensually coordinated and ritualized and how participants to cultural practices acquire the dispositions to act as a matter of course, with right, but without requiring justification, to paraphrase Wittgenstein.

### ***Normativity and the Holomorphic Principle***

The problems with a social representation approach become particularly clear when we confront the enactive approach with what we consider to be one of the most sophisticated attempts of social representation theorists to deal with the problem of the normativity of practices. Wagner and Hayes (2005) claim, “If meaningful practice is to be established for the social whole, (the group), one has to assume that its parts (the individual members) share a representation which contains the essential aspects of the entire situation, that is, the entire group” (p. 278). Such *holomorphic* social representations are seen by them as conditions for meaningful social practice in the sense that they allow social actors to “meaningfully correlate their actions” rather than to be at the mercy of blind “trial and error and erratic

experience.” However, how those representations acquire their semiotic and regulatory power in the first place remains unclear in their account. For example, what makes it possible for the members of a community to understand those representations in the *same* way, if indeed social representations are precisely supposed to make common understanding possible? Moreover, how does one know that one’s own representation of the total social situation is indeed the same as that of others within the community? If social representations are supposed to do explanatory work here, the argument is essentially tautological.

Advocates of sharedness and openness have rightfully argued that a psychology of ideational processes cannot be a psychology of isolated individuals. Enactive cultural psychology, too, considers fully-fledged cultural competence to exist in the relational or normative domain. As we discussed earlier, the enactive argument for operational closure has often been misunderstood as an argument for self-contained individualism or, worse, an argument for a form of reductionism that attempts to derive the properties of culture entirely from the properties of individual cognitive agents. However, as we have just argued, the problem of reductive individualism is a consequence not of recognizing the operational integrity of cognitive agents but of endowing those agents with internal mental properties like beliefs and assuming that culture as a collective system must somehow imply a mechanism for the *sharing* of beliefs.

If, in Cartesian fashion, the problem of a common world is conceived of as that of the relation of inner cognitive schemata to an independently existing world or to the cognitive schemata of others, the notion of sharedness appears to be the only way to restore common reality. Indeed, on the surface it seems that social representation theory offers a way to break out of self-contained individualism and Cartesian dualism, by opening up the mind to the possibility of shared mental content. But it is precisely the language of mental content—and not that of operational closure—that inevitably leads back to mentalism and self-contained individualism, as it is unable to adequately conceive of the normativity of ideational activity. Sharedness cannot really be a solution here. As we have argued elsewhere (Verheggen & BaerVELdt, 2007), it is the makeshift solution that remains after we have already mistakenly started our account of culture, or our common world, from the idea of mental content. Now it

turns out that not enactivist but precisely mental and social representationalist accounts of culture are essentially prefixed harmony models. They presuppose the commonalities in human understandings for which they allege to account.

Shared representation cannot underlie agreement in action, because such agreement requires both the kind of dynamical stage-setting itself facilitated by histories of consensually coordinated conduct *and* the mastery by social actors of specific semiotic competencies; competencies that, as we saw, can only be acquired by a history of training. Therefore, to remain consistent, we have to reverse the epistemic and ontological priorities by assuming that social representation is not a condition for, but a consequence of, the social-normative nature of practices. Seen in this light, the holomorphic principle is reflected in the idea of the irreducible normativity of human action and expression. Individual actions and expressions make sense only against the background of the totality of a world that in its communal and historical character is irreducibly normative. Such a totality cannot be one that is conceptually grasped or shared; it must be *implied* in the way we already live and *expressed* as a whole in an entire style of being.

Rather than representational knowledge, *cultural competence is a stylization of a total way of life, a way of simultaneously grasping the world and one’s own way of being in the world.* For example, learning to become a man in a world governed by honor requires not just the accumulation of cultural knowledge of honor but the acquisition of a general way of going about in the world—for example, by particular displays of masculinity and sexual prowess, verbal mastery in the realm of competition with other men, demonstrating proper respect with regard to superiors, showing control over the women in one’s household, and demonstrating trustworthiness and honesty with regard to equals and hospitality with regard to guests (e.g., Bourdieu, 1979; Gilmore, 1987). All of those virtues belong to an integral world, which relies for its consensual enactment on a largely implicit sense or practical understanding of the game by its participants. This practical sense, acquired through an ongoing process of cultural training, allows them to express the right things at the right time in the right proportion (Bourdieu, 1990). With Heidegger, radically cultural enactivism holds that such grasping or understanding of an entire world necessarily precedes and embraces cognition in a more narrow—merely epistemic—sense

of that world. This makes stylized cultural competence an ontological category rather than a merely epistemic one. As we argued before, this is the general ontological understanding of “knowing” within the enactive program, which makes *knowing* effectively indistinguishable from *believing* and *being* (Baerveldt & Voestermans, 2005).<sup>xv</sup>

### ***Enactivism and the Need for a Genetic Psychology***

Enactive cultural psychology is concerned with the normative dispositions—expressive skills and styles—that make us competent cultural practitioners. The crucial implication of an enactive view is that such normative dispositions cannot be understood as internalized rules, norms, or representations. There is nothing in the individuated human organism that could be recognized as normative, because normativity essentially belongs to the social domain and is inherently bound to public, or consensually enacted, standards. However, becoming a participant to a cultural community requires that our natural affective responsiveness must be brought into accordance with structured community practices. Because the demand for clean epistemological bookkeeping prohibits phenomenal reductionism, we cannot smuggle cultural normativity into an operational account of what happens in the human organism. This also precludes any straightforward account of socialization as the internalization of cultural rules. Strictly speaking, normative skills or dispositions exist neither purely in the relational or expressive domain, nor in the operational domain, but express how those domains become *structurally coupled* through a history of cultural training, so that they move in the same direction, so to speak. Hence, although we can indeed give either a relational account of social practices or an operational account of the self-referential operations of the nervous system, psychology has the possibility to insert itself, as it were, between these two accounts, not by way of phenomenal reductionism but by way of a *genetic* account of the manner in which cultural competence and normative style are acquired and enacted. Rather than being limited to either the study of cultural variation in neural processes (e.g., Chiao & Ambadi, 2007) or to the hermeneutic explication of the normativity implicit in our historical practices (as in the tradition of Dilthey’s historical hermeneutics, *see* Dilthey, 1977), cultural psychology can play a unique and critical role in understanding the genetic principles involved in

becoming a competent moral agent—that is, a person within a normative world.

### **Future Directions**

Enactive cultural psychology is centrally concerned with the dynamic consensual coordination of actions by which meaning and sense are continuously enacted or produced. One of the most important implications to follow from a radically enactive cultural psychology involves the need to resist the common tendency to attribute causal power to culture and to use it in an explanatory account of our coordinated actions. The appeal to a non-differentiated and abstract notion of culture is characteristic of so-called “cross-cultural approaches” in psychology, even where they have recently come to be called “cultural psychology” (e.g., Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Whereas cross-cultural psychology is mainly interested in finding psychological universals through cross-cultural comparison, the label “cultural psychology” is typically used to indicate a field of psychological study that is more concerned with the ways cultural values, belief systems, and practices shape psychological processes. Unfortunately, cultural psychology thus conceived remains too often committed to an abstract notion of culture and fails to adequately describe the genetic and dynamic processes by which people become competent participants to their cultures. Therefore, enactive cultural psychology allies itself with other genetic psychological approaches to culture but is in turn careful to avoid accounts that assign causal or semiotic power to culture apart from the way cultural meaning is continuously enacted by its participants. Cultural normativity is embodied and consensually enacted. In conclusion we want to briefly point out three possible directions for the genetic psychological study of embodied normativity, involving what we call *conversation*, *ritualization*, and *stylization*. Our proposal here is not meant to be exhaustive; we merely want to point out some directions that may help us to go beyond a cultural psychology for which a mere appeal to culture holds explanatory power.

Language is at the center of most socio-cultural approaches in psychology and in this sense our enactive approach is no exception. Although we already discussed the implication of an enactive approach for an understanding of linguistic development and concept formation, a direction to be further developed concerns the microgenetic role of conversation in everyday life. As argued above, language is embodied and the normativity of conversational

interaction involves a braiding of emotion and language as we move through the consensual domains we ourselves help to constitute. This means that language cannot primarily be rhetorical or propositional. Where discursive approaches like those of Edwards and Potter (1992) mainly attend to issues of accountability and the anticipation of counter descriptions, an enactive approach would see such issues as premised against a background of consensual and largely harmonious practice. The vast majority of conversation is necessarily participatory and consensual, and although words like “I love you,” “I’m sorry,” and “Look how beautiful” may take on strategical utility, it requires a rather cynical outlook on language to claim that this strategical use is all there is to language. Still, enactive cultural psychology remains sympathetic toward the fine-grained analysis afforded by conversation analytical techniques, precisely because such techniques allow us to render visible the ways in which consensual reality is actively maintained.

Ritualization is another way in which consensual reality comes to have normative force without it having to rely in advance on a common semiotic system. Genetically speaking, ritualization is a process that can take place in different genetic domains. For example, the idea of language as a consensual coordination of a consensual coordination of actions fits quite well with both evolutionary and historical accounts of language as emerging out of gestural forms of communication through a process of ritualization (e.g., Armstrong & Wilcox, 2007). Of particular interest to an enactive cultural psychology, however, is the study of the ritualizations of everyday life. With its focus on more explicitly linguistic forms of conduct, cultural psychology so far has generally overlooked the ontogenetic role of ritual in the enactment of consensual reality. For example, how does a gift come to seal a friendship, how may going out for a coffee come to communicate sexual interest, and how does paying the bill after dinner establish social dominance; such questions require an account in terms of ritual rather than discursive “aboutisms.” Ritualization is a natural consequence of the repetitive and recursive character of human social practices. Thus, the ritualization of everyday life may give rise to countless gestures and signs whose meanings remain largely tied to the particular domains in which they arise.

The study of everyday rituals and their formation may help to re-orient a cultural psychology that now often remains biased by confusing culturally

orchestrated conduct with mere conventionality or commonalities in behavior.

A final direction for psychological research we want to point at here follows from the implication of an enactive approach that the generic normativity of culture can only be taken up by its participants by being personally expressed. Genuine expressive form, according to Merleau-Ponty (1964), never merely represents a given norm but always expresses a coherent deformation of the norm and potentially the birth of a new norm. Enactive cultural psychology invites us to move away from an account of culture as an already established normative system and toward an account of culture as an ongoing stylization of a normativity that remains, so to speak, without positive terms. On the enactive account we have presented here, the fabric of culturally orchestrated everyday life is considered to be inherently consensual and normative. Yet, each expression, or each enactment of cultural normativity, is at the same time a unique stylization of that normativity. For example, whereas all cultures may be characterized by implicit and explicit norms for the expression of masculinity and femininity, such norms are not just given and passed on; rather, each individual agent takes up and enacts those norms in a personally stylistic way. Seen in this light, culture itself is never a fixed norm. It is a style—an ongoing deformation of deformations—that allows for an almost infinite variety of recognizably meaningful expressions. A society that becomes increasingly multicultural and multiform is a particularly fertile ground for stylization. Therefore, enactive cultural psychology is not interested in culture as a fixed conventional system; rather, it asks how human agents acquire expressive or stylistic freedom by becoming masters of their own culture.

## Notes

1. The original reference is to Herder, J. G. (1989). “Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit.” In: M. Bollacher (Ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder: Werke, Vol. 6*. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag; translation by Fischer, 1997.

2. Deleuze (1993) has shown that Leibniz’s monadology can be interpreted in a way that shows it as organized around the idea of *expression*. According to Deleuze, Leibniz—just like Spinoza—relies on the idea of expression to overcome the fundamental problems inherent in Cartesianism. Viewed this way, even Leibniz appears hardly as the spokesman for self-contained individualism that some such as Kreppner (1999), make him out to be (see below).

3. From their particular understanding of structural determinism it also follows that determinism does not imply predictability. Predictability is a notion that pertains only to the

cognitive domain of an observer and has no value in the domain of structural and organizational relations that determine the system under observation. Moreover, because an observer, as a system operating within the natural world, is herself a structurally determined system, it follows, first, that an observer can only attempt to predict the behavior of other structurally determined systems with whom s/he interacts and, second, that therefore the structural features that the observer can distinguish in the system whose behavior is to be predicted are limited by the structure of the observer him- or herself.

4. Bateson is generally recognized as one of the fathers of enactive thinking, and his thinking, too, has been compared to Spinoza's (e.g., see Charlton, 2008). In an attempt to radically break with Cartesian dualism, Bateson specified six criteria for mind: (1) A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components; (2) The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference; (3) Mental process requires collateral energy; (4) Mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination; (5) In mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e., coded versions) of the difference which preceded them; and (6) The description and classification of these processes of transformation discloses a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena. Although, Bateson uses the language of energy and information rather than that of structure determinism, he comes to conclusions about the systemic character of life and mind quite similar to those of Maturana.

5. In his introduction to *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Maturana (in Maturana & Varela, 1980, pp. xiv–xv) writes that the language used in their original work on the frog's visual system was still steeped in the traditional epistemology of information pick-up and computation. In his studies on color perception in subsequent years, Maturana came to the realization that many different visual configurations can give rise to similar color experiences. Therefore, to connect invariances of nervous activity to the perception of color, rather than attempting to correlate the activity in the retina with external physical stimuli, he realized he would have to correlate the activity in the nervous system as internally determined with the color experience of the subject. Although Maturana does not use the term, his crucial realization was that the color space of an observer is *enacted* by the dynamic activity of the nervous system itself and not determined by the external world, which plays only a *triggering* role in the phenomenon of perception.

6. In fact, the word "autopoiesis" itself is not used in *The Embodied Mind*, although Varela, Thompson, and Rosch speak in more general terms about the autonomy of living and cognitive systems (see also below). Thompson (2007) discusses it in detail, however, in his more recent book.

7. Maturana and Varela use the term *medium* to refer to the space in which the organism realizes itself. The term is not similar with "environment," which refers to the surrounding context as discerned by an observer. For the existence of the organism as a structure-determined system, it is necessary to maintain its structural coupling with its medium—that is, to preserve structural complementarity between its own structure and that of its medium (Maturana, 1988b, section xiii).

8. Vygotsky and activity theorists like Leontiev have used the word *appropriation* (Russian: *privoenie*, German: *Aneignung*), which, as Valsiner (1998) notes, in the Russian language carries a two-sided connotation. Valsiner points out that appropriation is always an active, co-constructive process, yet insists—with Leontiev—that this process only exists because of an inner/

outer contrast. Valsiner's own view is that collective culture and personal culture are connected by a cyclical process of internalization and externalization or, in Vygotsky's terms, between personal sense and interpersonal meaning. This perspective allows him to understand the genetic process by which self-regulation emerges (for an extensive discussion, see Valsiner, 1998, pp 100 ff.). From our own perspective, however, both inner and outer are modalities of expression, and as such we consider the notion of cultural appropriation to be more properly interpreted in light of Spinoza's monism. Indeed, Vygotsky (1987) understands the inner and the outer on a *developmental continuum* and not as ontologically different substances or pseudo-locations (see also Berducci, 2004). We propose an enactive or expressivist alternative to the internalization/externalization thesis in the idea of "style" (see below) and leave open, here, the issue of whether this perspective can be reconciled with Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology.

9. Kreppner also simplifies Leibniz's idea of pre-established harmony, which for good reason would later prove to be extremely fruitful for von Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt*.

10. Most of these authors were profoundly influenced by Gestalt psychology in its various incarnations, and their thinking prefigures in many ways that of present-day enactive thinkers. For example, the German physician and physiologist Viktor von Weizsäcker (1886–1957), whose work is now all but forgotten, spoke extensively about the *Gestaltkreis* as both a dynamic unity of perception and movement and a coherency of perceiving subject and world (see von Weizsäcker, 1940/1996). Particularly in the tradition of Goethe's expressivist *Lebensphilosophie*, the German-speaking world gave rise to various forms of holistic thinking with regard to life, which predate more recent ideas of self-regulation and biological autonomy. For example, in the early 1900s, we see Hans Driesch's idea of *organischen Regulationen* and Jakob von Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt und Innenwelt* of animals. Then, in response to the perceived atomism of his predecessor Wilhelm Wundt, Friedrich Krueger gave rise to the Leipzig school of *Ganzheitspsychologie*, later continued by Friedrich Sander in the idea of *Aktualgenese*. Around the same time we find in the Berlin tradition of *Gestaltpsychologie* Köhler's idea of *spontane Selbstgliederung* and *Selbstregulation*. Unfortunately, few of these ideas seem to have been preserved for posterity (for a more detailed discussion, see Ash, 1991; Valsiner, 1998; Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000).

11. Maturana claims that operationally speaking, language became possible when, as a consequence of having subjected acting and interacting in the domain of pure relations to the process of evolution, humans developed the ability to interact not only with physical events but also with their own internal states (Maturana, in Maturana & Varela, 1980).

12. From the perspective of the nervous system itself, there is no internal or external, and the terms refer here merely to whether—on the account of an observer—the sensory surfaces of the organism are involved in those perturbations.

13. Our use of the metaphor should not be confused with that of Cole (1992), who speaks of a mutual interweaving of person and culture. In Cole's view, culture and cognition are mutually constitutive, but we believe this way of putting it is based on a category mistake. Rather, we speak of culture as a historical process of ongoing consensual coordinations of action.

14. Forster, in his translations of Herder's *Philosophical Writings* (Herder, 2002), translates the two key terms *Besinnung* and *Besonnenheit* as *taking-awareness* and *awareness*, respectively,

and points out that Besonnenheit is for Herder a precondition of Besinnung (p. 82, note 33; on this point, *see also* Barnhard, 2003, p. 115, note 25).

15. Of course, given the inherent normativity of believing, beliefs can still be held to standards of adequacy but not by evoking a pre-given world. As Spinoza has argued, all experience is a matter of being affected in a certain way, and for him the crucial distinction is between affects that are adequately understood and affects that are not adequately understood. According to Spinoza, whether an affect is adequately understood does not depend on independent truth conditions, but on our ability to articulate the genetic links that show the cause of our affects to lie within our own nature.

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# Positioning Theory: Moral Dimensions of Social-Cultural Psychology

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## Abstract

A fundamental way in which cultures differ is in the taken-for-granted systems of rights and duties implicit in the way lived storylines unfold in everyday social episodes. Positioning Theory developed as a method of analysis aimed at revealing the storylines and implicit (sometimes explicit) ascriptions and resistances to ascriptions of rights and duties to perform actions expressing social acts appropriate to the situations recognized by participants in a strip of life. Analysis reveals a mutual determining of the meanings of social actions as acts, lived storylines unfolding and local distributions of rights and duties so to act. The concept of “positioning” has taken on two main senses in these studies—as the attributes of a person or group relevant to positioning and, in the other sense, as an attribution of rights and duties. The extensive literature of positioning theory includes studies ranging over great differences of scale from the intrapositioning in which a person engages in private moral reflections through positioning issues between the members of a small group of people in intimate interaction, up to the positioning discourses of the protagonists of nation-states or religious communities.

**Keywords:** position, positioning, moral order, rights, duties, storylines, social representations.

To appreciate the place of Positioning Theory in cultural/discursive psychology, a glance at the recent history of psychology will be helpful. There are two paradigms for psychology that still confront one another, especially in the United States. The mainstream among psychologists in the United States still depends on a tacit presumption that psychology is a causal science and that the proper methods are modeled on the experimental procedures of a rather narrow part of physics. The rise of alternative conceptions of psychology, as a study of patterns of meaning making and incorporating attention to moral orders, in Western Europe (particularly France, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia) with reflections of these ideas in Asia and Australasia, presents an expanding global consensus on the human sciences. Smedslund (2009) has developed a brilliant summary of the

contrast between the failed project of experimental psychology and the growing successes of the discursive/analytical approach.

## The Old and New Paradigms

According to the Old Paradigm, the task of psychology is to find the causes of behavior, although behaviorism as a primitive version of this paradigm has been abandoned in name and to a lesser extent in practice. Much research in social psychology, psychology of the emotions, cognitive psychology, and so on is still based on the manipulation of dependent and independent variables, abstracted from real-life episodes, the results analyzed using statistical measures on the relative numbers of instances of each behavioral type emitted by the subjects.

According to the New Paradigm exemplified in such developments as cultural and discursive psychology, the task of psychology is to find convenient representations of bodies of knowledge that are required for the accomplishments of the intentions, plans, and projects of human agents. According to this paradigm, psychological phenomena are sequences of meanings of thoughts, actions, feelings, perceptions, and so on, ordered according to norms, standards of correctness that may be only local. New Paradigm research projects must conform to two methodological principles:

Do not abstract phenomena of psychological interest from real-life episodes to such a degree that the original meaning is lost.

Do not eliminate persons from the analysis since the topic of investigation is the work of active embodied knowledgeable agents attempting to bring their projects to fruition.

Positioning Theory is one of the ways that New Paradigm psychology has developed both in theory and in method. The emphasis on local meanings and on local and labile moral orders of rights and duties to act and to believe links Positioning Theory very closely to cultural psychology. Indeed, it would be appropriate to see it as a part of the program of the study of psychology as a cultural phenomenon.

### ***The Second Cognitive Revolution***

The New Paradigm approach came in part from the realization that many instances of cognitive processes, such as remembering and deciding, are not located in individuals but often exist only in a network of symbolically mediated interactions between the members of a group. Perhaps cognition is primarily interpersonal and only secondarily and derivatively intrapersonal. The center of primary cognition shifts from the individual to the local group, such as family, peers, research team, and so on. This had been anticipated by L. S. Vygotsky (*see van der Veer, 2011*). It is worth reproducing the famous aphorism in which he, echoing Pierre Janet, applies this insight to an outline of the core process of human development.

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapychological). This applies equally to voluntary

attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.

(*Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57*)

In the context of social psychology according to the Old Paradigm, social phenomena were to be analyzed as if they were the result of individuals responding to extra personal stimuli inducing dispositions to behave in certain ways and bringing about corresponding dispositions and responses in the relevant others. Then, these dispositions were activated by local stimulus conditions. Tajfel's studies of prejudice (Tajfel, 1981) treated it as a state induced in an individual, a belief or an attitude or some such, rather than a feature of a matrix of social practices. Rather than trying to identify causes and effects as the core explanatory devices in accounting for human actions, according to the principles of the second cognitive revolution, we should look for narrative conventions—storylines immanent in the discourse practices in which psychological phenomena actually exist.

It is worth noting that the priority given to public collective process over private personal cognition in the work of Vygotsky and Wittgenstein has been the topic of a long running debate among philosophers. Neo-subjectivists—particularly those who follow the lead of J. R. Fodor (1976)—have argued that the entire domain of psychology is comprehended by mental states and the causal relations between them. Language is made possible by an inherent “language of thought” reproduced in each human individual rather than as the most advanced form of the practices of social communication. In a recent article reviewing the debate Hans-Johann Glock has demonstrated the flaws in neo-subjectivism by showing that the requirement that a concept can be shared among several people cannot be met by any theory that depends on the type/token distinction, as does Fodor's. Concepts as mental particulars would be tokens of concepts as abstract types. If it is concept as type that is shared, this would require the shared concept to be abstract. However, shared concepts appear concretely in the actual discourses among human beings, focused on common topics (Glock, 2009). Cultural and discursive psychologists need not be troubled by the fear that at some deeply theoretical level, their enterprise has been undermined by an argument that purports to locate everything mental “in the mind!”

## Abilities and Skills and the Conditions Under Which We Employ Them

The rules for the use of skill and ability concepts presume that the concept of a skill includes an intentionality component, tacit or explicit. Skills and abilities are realized in activities that are directed toward some end or outcome, even if the action to accomplish the end has become habitual. Moreover, activities that realize skills and abilities are subject to assessments of success, propriety, correctness, and quality. This means that associated with any cluster of skill and ability concepts, such as those involved in musical performance or sawing wood, are one or more normative systems, involving extrapersonal, social-historical and other collective considerations.

When we come to use skill and ability concepts to explain some strip of human behavior, a three-level cognitive structure is required.

### *The Abilities Progression*

A psychologist observes a person, X, doing something, and interprets this strip of activity as the carrying out of a task—say, helping an aged person, Y, out of a chair. What should we ascribe to the actor on the basis of this observation? Presuming the task has been successfully accomplished, we can say that X has demonstrated that he or she has the ability to do it. Here is a two-level format—the behavioral sequence is the phenomenon and the ascribed skill is basis of an explanation—although more would be required, including whatever it was that set the whole process in motion. However, we then notice that Y is not a bit grateful for the assistance—he/she indeed is rather cross. To understand this, we need to insert a level between behavior and ability: the moral level. Has X been accorded the right to do this? Perhaps X is a paid caregiver and believes he or she has the duty to assist the old person to rise. Here, we have a clash of tacit beliefs—X’s beliefs about duty with Y’s beliefs about rights.

In summary, we have the following layout:

X can do Z	X has an ability
X may/may not do Z	X has or lacks some position
X does Z	X is an agent

A project may fail at any one of these stages. A person may have planned some activity but lacks the skills to carry it off. Even equipped with the necessary skills and relevant knowledge, a person may not be authorized to carry out the project in question. Introducing the moral dimension through the attention that must be paid to beliefs about rights

and duties to act opens up another dimension, that of the responsibility of the actor and of the group in which the action occurs. With responsibility goes the role of praise and blame.

### BEYOND THE NOTIONS OF CAUSALITY

When a person behaves in a certain way in a particular social and material environment, he or she and also they can be held responsible for what has been done—that is, the actors must be treated as agents. It follows that social psychology must include moral concepts in its explanatory armory. It cannot be based on hypothetical causality.

In the remainder of the chapter, I take the concepts of “ability” and “agency” for granted without further analysis. The focus will be on the implications of adopting the concept of “position” as a generic concept covering assignments of rights and duties to act and to know or believe at the core of social psychological explanations. Position displaces concepts such as “balance” (Heider, 1958), “dissonance” (Festinger, 1957) and “social comparison” (Tajfel, 1981). These outmoded concepts are embedded in a theory of social psychology that focuses on hypotheses of essentially passive and automatic personal cognitive processes that ignore the social origin and active efficacy of people as joint constructors of social and psychological reality.

### Positioning in Relation to Social Psychology *Outlines of Positioning Theory*

In all human interactions, there are asymmetries in the resources for social action that are available to each individual in concrete circumstances. Earlier theories that were sensitive to the importance of moral norms presumed that differences in moral standing as actors were to be explained by identifying the kinds of social acts that were available to individuals as members of groups or professions and so on—the domain of role theory. This was far too primitive and coarse-grained to deal with real-life social episodes. Positioning Theory is based on the principle that not everyone involved in a social episode has equal access to rights and duties to perform particular kinds of meaningful actions at *that moment* and with *those people*. In many interesting cases, the rights and duties determine who can use a certain discourse mode—for example, issuing orders, giving grades, remembering a past event. A cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations, and duties is called a “position.”

Positions are related both to the storylines realized in the unfolding of episodes and to the acts that are the meanings of the intentional actions of the people who take part. If a man and a woman are living out a nurse–patient storyline, then the man’s expressions of concern are readable as commiseration rather than condescension.

We can explain differences in the availability of rights and duties to act in certain ways for a person in a certain situation by reference to the social and personal attributes of that person in that situation. For example, who is positioned with the right and perhaps even the duty to switch off a life support system of someone declared to be brain dead? The assignment of such a right can be a matter for debate and conflict, in short of a discursive social process, that takes account of the social and even physical attributes of the people who claim that right. There is no role of life closer (Grattan, 2008, pp. 113–145).

Positions importantly determine the way people have access to cultural resources. For an example of claims for rights of access and denial of rights of access, contemporary life offers that of women in Saudi Arabia who not only do not have a right to drive cars but do not have right of access even to knowledge of car management. This predicament can be expressed in terms of positions—in this case, rather long-term ones. In such examples, position comes close to an earlier concept: role. But in any individual Saudi family, real life will involve the negotiation of positions. Some women may learn to drive in secret.

We will be concerned with the details of the ethno-methods of distributing rights and duties among individual people, confirming existing position distributions, and/or changing an existing distribution of rights and duties, and so on. An important feature of positioning procedures is the use of estimates of personal character in making such assignments. In the early days of Positioning Theory, the two current senses of a position were in use but not clearly distinguished (e.g., Davies & Harre, 1990). The word was used to refer to personal, historical, social, and cultural attributes of a person, as these were overtly ascribed by some pattern of discursive acts. It was also used to refer to a cluster of beliefs, some implicit and some explicit, as to the rights and duties proper to a person who was taken to have the ascribed attributes, or at least claimed to have them.

The connection between positioning in the first sense and positioning in the second sense is close

because positioning someone as incompetent relative to other members is a familiar device to take away the right to carry out some task. The importance of this duality shows up in discussions of a person’s character and history as an essential part of the Congressional Hearings for appointments to the Executive or the Supreme Court in the United States. A study by Gilbert and Mulkey (1982, pp. 383–408) showed how rights to be believed can be manipulated by rival teams of researchers in debates about the acceptability of conflicting research results. The role of character assassination in such debates can be seen in terms of Positioning Theory as a way of deleting the right of the claims of a certain research team to be believed. In Classical Positioning Theory, these discursive procedures are identified as pre-positioning, on the basis of which moral assignments are made—that is, actual acts of positioning proper.

### *Alternatives to Position*

Erving Goffman (1981, p. 128) introduced the term *footing* to refer to one sort of positioning process. He noticed that it was sometimes necessary for a person to deliberately establish a place in a conversation from which to be heard as a legitimate speaker. Such a move, if tacitly accepted by the group into whose conversation the outsider wishes to intrude, allows the new member of the group the right to be heard. Establishing that right is positioning oneself with respect to the others. However, Goffman does not present the rights aspect of footing in such an overt way. It is “the alignment we take to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance.”

The concept of “voice” is well-established in sociolinguistics. Voice refers to a pseudo-person whose utterances are marked with the social location from which one is speaking. Torode’s study of the relation between speech patterns and social order in school classrooms (Torode, 1977, pp. 87–97) uses the idea of transcendent and mundane voices, speaking as a member of an external authority and speaking as a member of the local group. As he worked out this analysis, the voices were positioned in the sense of this chapter—that is, the relevant rights and duties of speaker and listeners relative to the social location of voice were tacitly understood and conceded by speakers and listeners alike. Only Brian Torode himself could make the implicit explicit. He showed that rights to reply to and challenge commands

were tightly restricted in conversations in which the teacher adopted the transcendental voice, the “we” of authority, not the “we” of the persons present on the occasion. Those who adopted the mundane voice of a member of the group of persons in the classroom, choosing the pronouns “I” and “you,” had greater difficulty in establishing and maintaining authority. The pupils took for granted their right to challenge the orders of the teacher because in an egalitarian group rights are equally distributed.

### ***Positioning as Pre-Positioning and Positioning as the Assignment of Rights and Duties***

Classical Positioning Theory appeared in feminist writings in the 1980s. The first explicit formulation of the concept of position to refer to both implicit and explicit beliefs that people display in their intimate social practices was a Davies and Harré (1990) study of a two-member exchange, rich in social nuances. Positioning beliefs were immanent in the speech acts people were required, forbidden, or entitled to perform, according to local tacit conventions. Positioning Theory referred to the study of the discursive processes by which people were ascribed, took up, refused, contested, and so on—the rights and duties they found themselves with in the local social world. The point was always a moral one. The aim was to highlight practices that inhibited certain groups of people from performing certain sorts of acts. Given that selves were produced in local discursive practices, these tacit restrictions were of considerable moment. Of course, there were no restrictions literally. However, in the light of the spread of a different array of practices, one can express the sense of possibilities unfulfilled in such expressions as “restrictions.” At that time and in those publications, there was a persistent ambiguity in the use of the concept of positioning, discussed above. On the one hand, it meant ascribing a characterological attribute or revealing biographical incident to someone that was germane to the assignment of positions in the other sense, rights and duties.

Something like the former sense of position and positioning appears in Bamberg’s use of the concept of position (Bamberg, 2008). Positioning from this point of view is a discursive procedure for the ascription of an *attribute* to someone. To avoid any ambiguity between the two related senses, in most Positioning Theory studies, such as Moghaddam, Harré, and Lee (2009), Bamberg’s

sense of positioning is referred to as pre-positioning, a distinction needed to keep the difference between the discursive processes by which rights and duties are assigned or resisted and the grounds that are available to justify these assignments or resistances should they be challenged.

### **THE PROBLEM OF RULE**

In a recent paper critical of Classical Positioning Theory, Bamberg (2008) makes use of an understanding of the role of the concept of “rule” in social psychology that is explicitly rejected by positioning theorists. Positioning Theory depends on taking Wittgenstein’s (1953) account of orderly human activity in terms of rule following (in PI, pp. 138–242) as emphasizing its normative character which could be signaled by the metaphor of ‘rule following’. Potter and Wetherell (1987) took the same line in a challenge to a literalist use of ‘rule’, by some social psychologists. Positioning Theory is *not* a procedure “to extract from discourse the sets of rules that people use” (Bamberg, 2008). To say so confuses rules as instructions, which indeed people do use to get things done—usually technical tasks, with rules as a term of art for psychologists and others in their writings to express in legible and shareable form their intuitions as to the implicit norms immanent in the orderly practices of a form of life. This distinction was firmly insisted on by Garfinkel and was the basis of his technique for eliciting overt formulations of tacit rules. He contrived to have people deliberately act in a manner that would have broken the hypothetical rule and recorded the ways that people marked the infraction. Only if they did was one entitled to claim that there had been a normative practice. Grammarians publish sets of rules to present the norms implicit in the orderly practices of one’s mother tongue. They are not “extracting from discourse the rules that people use.” Native speakers do not *use* these rules!

The general tenor of a very interesting recent paper by Korobov and Bamberg (in press) is to resist another fundamental idea that position theorists share with the social representation school of social psychology (see Markova, 2011). It is the idea that to account for the stability of patterns of action, one must postulate repertoires of positions and storylines immanent in a culture that are represented in the bodies of shared social knowledge distributed as social representations among the members of a group. This idea does not undermine the uniqueness of every human act. In the absence of

a body of shared linguistic knowledge, there could be no speaking or writing—but this does not show that speaking and writing cannot be both original and intelligible. The same holds for social action as the living out of storylines indigenous to a culture and the processes of distributing positions and understanding utterances as speech acts. Although we mobilize such items as beliefs and rules to get things done, we do not *construct* them *ab initio* on this or that occasion. Yet the way they are realized may be quite distinctive and unique to a particular occasion. The issue is not whether certain storylines exist as discursive resources, but how they do. They are very rarely the result of following sets of instructions!

### Positions and Positioning

Taken abstractly, a position is a cluster of beliefs with respect to the rights and duties of the members of a group of people to act in certain ways. These belief clusters may be tacit, existing only as immanent features of unchallenged patterns of action. They may be explicitly formulated as rules and conventions. Because positions are ephemeral compared with roles the focus of research interest must include the social/cognitive processes by which positions are established. This dynamics is positioning—that is, processes by which rights and duties are assigned, ascribed, or appropriated and resisted, rejected, or repudiated. The upshot of acts of positioning is a pattern of explicit and implicit beliefs, held by individuals and among the relevant group in which the action is going on.

As a process, positioning may proceed through a sequence of phases. For example, the ascription of rights and duties may be consequential on a preliminary phase in which the moral character, intellectual or practical competence, biography, and so on, of a person, a group or even a category of persons are ascribed, sometimes on the basis of explicit evidence. As suggested above it will be convenient to call this discursive process “pre-positioning.” In the second phase, explicitly or implicitly, these ascriptions are used as grounds for the distribution or deletion and withdrawal of rights and duties. These moves are accomplished by second order social acts, sometimes overt but sometimes immanent in the form of unfolding social episodes. At the meta-level, those who claim the right or duty to distribute and redistribute positions must be positioned so to do. This opens up another research dimension. By

what discursive processes is this accomplished on a particular occasion?

Positioning Theory is as much a matter of the social processes for the assignments of duties as it is of assignment of rights. Nevertheless, in the feminist input into Positioning Theory from Hollway (1981), Davies and Harré (1990), and others, rights had pre-eminence. Women had a plethora of duties and a minimum of rights in those bad old days. To keep track of all this, we need to have a conceptual analysis of the concepts of “right” and “duty,” with some sense of the historical transformations of these concepts in actual applications in the management of social order.

### THE POSITIONING TRIANGLE

The position a person occupies at any moment in an evolving strip of life is determined in part by the storyline that is realized in the unfolding episode. If the storyline is “nurse and patient,” then within this action schema there are positions such as a “right to be given care” and a “duty to provide care.” People taking part in an episode that they are interpreting in terms of this storyline can be expected to act in accordance with their then-and-there beliefs as to their positions as implicit in the local moral order. Moreover, the actions of the people who are living out such an episode are made sense as the result of the intersection of two clusters of beliefs: what storyline is unfolding and what positions are thereby available to the actors. A third component of a positioning analysis can be picked out as the social meanings to which the actors are orienting in what they do then and there. In short, we have a triangle, with the three vertices occupied by positions, storylines, and act interpretations. The constituents of the three vertices mutually determine one another. If any one changes—for example, by a successful challenge to the distribution of rights and duties—then all three change. Change the distribution of rights and duties and the storyline that has been realized thus far may be transformed. At the same time, the meanings of what has been said and done by the actors are also transformed. The future relations between the actors and the subsequent form taken by the unfolding strip of life will be different after changes in any three components of the positioning triangle.

I turn now to a more detailed exposition of the constituents of the three vertices: acts, positions, and storylines.

## THE FIRST CORNER OF THE POSITIONING TRIANGLE: RIGHTS AND DUTIES

The basic structure of the interconnected conceptual pattern of the concepts of rights and duties goes something like this:

Rights: My rights are what you (or they) must do for me.

Duties: My duties are what I must do for you (or them).

These definitions are couched in terms of social necessities. But from whence comes the “must?” The basic structure of personal attributes that underlies the way rights and duties emerge and are related depends on a simple distinction between a person’s (or a group’s powers) and the vulnerabilities of another person or group of persons. In all human relations, there is a possibility of an imbalance between the powers of some people and vulnerabilities of others. The genesis of rights and duties on particular occasions and among specific people or groups of people goes according to the following patterns:

If I (we) have a vulnerability that you (they) have the power to remedy, then you have a duty to remedy my vulnerability and I have a right to be the recipient of the exercise of that power.

A right–duty pair emerges from this reasoning and frames possible actions. These future actions are only possibilities, because whether or not the actions that would fulfill the rights–duties pattern actually occur depends on other features of a concrete situation such as the risks to the actors, the conscientiousness of the powerful, and the skill of the recipients in presenting their needs and so on.

### *The Symmetry Presumption*

In our time and place, our moral universe is built around a general presumption that for every duty there is a right and for every right a duty. The seemingly *a priori* claims to rights, enshrined in various charters and constitutions, are a modern and (for the most part) English and French innovation from the seventeenth century. The Founding Fathers of the United States quickly added a Bill of Rights to the Constitution, but they overlooked a Bill of Duties. Jefferson’s “life, liberty, and the pursuit of property” (revised by Hamilton to the pursuit of happiness) was a detailing of rights. The U.N. Human Rights charter is not matched by a charter

of Human Duties. Why? Because they can be taken for granted? Surely not.

Even in the twentieth century, the symmetry principles are not universally acknowledged, even in those countries where talk of rights is ubiquitous. On the other hand, my upbringing was old fashioned Protestant, in which only duties figured. I still find it almost impossible to claim or activate my rights, if any.

In fact, rights are generally taken to be prior to duties. People tend to think about their rights and then look for a source of dutiful response from someone else. By the 1960s, John F. Kennedy could find it necessary to remind Americans that they should take heed of what they could do for their country—a duty concept.

Everyone can find some way in which he, she, or they are vulnerable, hence engendering a right in search of a duty. “They should do something about it.” The “should” is normative and hence marks the formulation of a duty, however vaguely. It has often been remarked (apropos for example of health needs) that rights can expand seemingly without end—this is one way we can understand the origins of the client society. In the absence of a duty code, the courts have taken on a new role, in which claims to rights are adjudicated and duties prescribed by identifying who are to be the relevant dutiful.

The fact that there are societies that recognize only duties and have very weak notions of rights shows that the symmetry presumption is not a conceptual truth. There are historical examples of social systems that seem to involve complex hierarchical patterns of reciprocal duties with no explicit formulations of rights. For example, the feudal systems in fourteenth-century England and France seem to have been based on formal recognition of a vassal’s duties to the lord and the lord’s duties to the vassal. We misread Magna Carta if we take it to be a medieval Bill of Rights. King John failed in his duties to his vassals, who forced him to acknowledge that he had certain duties to them. These duties were formally set out in oaths of fealty (Critchley, 1978). The reciprocal *duty* pattern of these oaths of allegiance as fealty is very clear. Similarly, the Shogunate in Japan and the cult of bushido among the Samurai who maintained an orderly society seems to have been a predominately duty-based system. Everyone in a hierarchy of dutiful relationships was a vassal ultimately of the Shogun himself (Nitobe, 1969, Ch. IX).



In contemporary life, there is much talk of duties to the environment, in which people are positioned in sometimes quite specific ways. Duties to the environment are necessarily asymmetrical. Trees have vulnerabilities, so we who have power over nature have duties with respect to them, but trees have no rights. They are not agents, so we cannot call on them to do anything to remedy our vulnerabilities, such as climate change. Trees are instruments, not agents.

Philosophers have introduced the concept of supererogatory duty (Raz, 1975). This is a felt demand on the basis of a personal conviction that something *should* be done. In taking on a supererogatory duty, the moral force is felt only by the individual who feels committed to that duty. Such a duty has no legal or even customary force. Again philosophers have noticed that informal or supererogatory duties, when felt by a number of individuals (particularly if one or more these people are socially influential), evolve into formal obligations. Not so long ago individuals positioned themselves as having a duty not to smoke in the vicinity of other people. In the intervening era, some people felt that they had a duty to protest against smoking by others. Now this duty is enshrined in law. We have a reciprocal right to clean air.

Nevertheless there is a strong contemporary emphasis on the distribution of and claims to rights. Given the various and variable relations between duties and rights depending on culture, history, topic, and so on, positions may turn out to be very complex. If someone demands a right based on a supererogatory duty, how is such a claim to be enforced? How does positioning work in a social order that is exclusively or almost exclusively duty-based? There has not yet been any substantial research into this question. Duty-based moral orders are rare in our time. Their connection with honor moralities has been sketched but not taken up as a major research project.

### *The Second Corner of the Positioning Triangle: Actions and Acts*

Cultural and discursive psychology both depend on a distinction between taking a behavioral performance as an intended action by a human agent and the meaning that the agent and others involved give to that behavior. We can usefully adapt two vernacular terms to mark this distinction. An action is a meaningful, intended performance (speech or gesture), whereas an act is the social meaning of

an action. Both levels can be revised and contested subsequently. An actor may claim that what he or she did was not an action, that it was not intended. Even if the intention to do something is not contested, an actor may claim that the meaning or social force of the action was not as it had been supposed. A cough might be an automatic reaction to blockage of the airway, but it can be deliberately used as a warning.

Positioning Theory has been applied, for the most part, to verbal interactions, to episodes unfolding as conversations. Positioning theorists can help themselves to J. L. Austin's well-known distinction between the forces of speech actions. A speech act, such as congratulating someone, appears as the illocutionary force of the speech action, saying "Well done!"; however, the material and social consequences of the speech action being understood in that way, given that meaning, is the perlocutionary force of the speech action. Compare "*In* saying 'Stand back, I warn you!' with "*By* saying 'Stand back, I'll save you!'"

In this presentation, we will rely on common sense (folk) categories for acts. Gestures will be treated within the same analytical framework. For purpose of positioning analysis, a strip of life will be taken to be sequences of overlaying and imbricated acts borne by actions that were intended by the actors.

### *The Third Corner of the Positioning Triangle: Storylines*

The basic principle of Positioning Theory as an application of discursive psychology is simply that strips of life unfold according to local narrative conventions, some explicit, some implicit. Explicit storylines are exemplified in the unfolding of ceremonies, in the formats of rule-bound games, in the procedures in courts of law. The positions are predetermined, and there are procedures by which they come to be occupied by specific actors. Something more is needed for implicit storylines. Narratological analysis can reveal them. The study of storylines is a branch of narratology. It depends on the principle that strips of life are usually lived stories for which told stories already exist. The same story can be expressed in different media, words, film, plays, and life; in the contexts of everyday life, there is rarely any explicit recourse to plot or scenario. This is the domain of narratology proper, the study of the storylines realized in improvised episodes.

Some distinctions are in order. Explicit storylines must be distinguished from chronicles (proaeretic principles), which simply describe a time sequence of events. In Russian narratology, this appears, roughly, as the distinction between “fabula” and “sjuzhet.” For narrative, we need a plot and cast of characters. Both are limited in scope and variety.

There are two analytical schemes that prove useful. The analytical categories of Griemas (1990) are presented as six actants. These are Seeker, Object sought, Sender (of the Seeker), Receiver (of the object sought), Helper, Opponent. The scheme proposed by Kenneth Burke (1945) and picked up by Erving Goffman (1959) involves a Pentad. The five elements are Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose. According to Burke we should attend to the Ratios, the way these elements need to be used in analytically in pairs.

Just as was the case with position and positioning so, too, the important concept of storyline appeared in early positioning theory studies with two meanings. On the one hand, it was used to describe the unfolding of the structure of an episode in terms of a familiar story—for example, “Beauty and the Beast” or one of Vladimir Propp’s folktale action sequences in accordance with his 36 action categories. (Propp, 1968). This was the sense of narrative in the writings of Jerome Bruner (1990). A *story* is told by a social psychologist as a representation of the act sequences. On the other hand it was used to refer to stories told by social actors, perhaps as accounting moves to make a lived storyline intelligible and warrantable. Although positioning theorists have drawn concepts from Agirdas Greimas for the analysis of lived storylines, the examples he presents in his (1990) book are analyses of told stories.

### ***Positioning Theory: Worked Examples***

Here are two worked examples to show how putting together the three vertices of the positioning triangle reveals the dynamics of the play of rights and duties in the unfurling of a complex episode.

#### **EXAMPLE I: INTRAPERSONAL POSITIONING**

In the case discussed in this section, the person displaying Multiple Personality Syndrome (MPS) offers two storylines to the therapist (Beran & Unoka, 2004, pp. 151–161). There is the story of herself as Elsa and the story of herself as Marian. These storylines are tied in with primary acts of character pre-positioning that supports claims of positioning each persona as having rights to be

heard as authentic independent voices. The psychiatrist attempts to meld the two story lines into one as a single autobiography. In so doing, a single personality is restored or recreated. In the classical study of MPS, Morton Prince’s record of the discourses in which Christine and Sally Beauchamp appeared as presentations of the same human being, the therapy was grammatical. Prince insisted that Miss Beauchamp refrain from talking of her life events in terms of three pronouns—“I,” “you,” and “she”—Everything she reported must be tied to “I”. In this way he hoped to recreate a single autobiographical storyline.

Autobiography can be viewed as a device for positioning oneself in the act of presenting a self-narrative. An autobiography is not a chronicle because it is not only a history but also a manifestation of personhood. Every normal human being has a repertoire of autobiographies, each freely accessible from every other. This is not the case with the storytelling of someone presenting Multiple Personality Syndrome.

A narratological analysis of MPS can be set out in formal schema as an analytical tool for the study of the problems of a patient, P.

1. P tells two distinct autobiographies, A1 and A2, which are not freely accessible one from the other.
2. Each autobiography displays a distinctive set of personal qualities, including knowledge of past events.
3. When living out A1, events relevant to A2 are not accessible, and when living out A2, events relevant to A1 are not accessible.
4. Each A1, A2, and so forth, establishes a position.

Beran and Unoka (2004), like Prince, use pronouns as persona and position indicators. Their analysis displays two persona positions presented sequentially.

Elsa positions herself as an authoritative witness of the past having the right to be heard and believed. Her narrative’s original past tense changes to present tense as she retells the story of the trial of the man who raped her.

Marian is evoked by Elsa when Elsa is asked to tell the story again, as one who is trying to stop Elsa telling the tale. This is a positioning move, as Marian is resisting Elsa’s self-positioning as one who has a right to tell the story and to be believed.

The therapist induces Elsa to talk as Marian, explaining why the story should not be told. In this telling Elsa is referred to in the third person, and Marian adopts the first person, positioning herself as authoritative—that is, having the right to be believed. Then the therapist induces Elsa to tell the story as Elsa in the first person. In this way, the therapist makes both stories available, the telling and the resistance to the telling. In the new situation, Elsa is able to explicate the significance of the second voice. Marian is the name of her husband's mistress with whom she had a quarrel.

#### EXAMPLE 2: INTERPERSONAL POSITIONING

The recent public political debates in the run-up to the recent American Presidential election provide a rich field of material for study. To illustrate how ascribing and persisting positioning moves works in a two-person discursive interaction, we will look at an excerpt from the Primary debates between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, selected from a comprehensive analysis of all four encounters (Harré & Rossetti, 2010). The issue in positioning theory terms boils down to this: “Do I (Barack or Hillary) have the right to stand as a candidate for a macro-positioning exercise, the general election, which will give me the right to rule?” (Harre & Rossetti, 2010).

This example is taken from *CNN Democratic Candidates Compassion Forum* (April 13, 2008). Both Obama and Clinton introduce autobiographical material as pre-positioning moves. The chain of inferences runs from an autobiographical snippet through a claim for competence or experience to a self-ascription of the right to be the Democratic candidate to achieve the ultimate ascription of a position in the formal ceremony on the White House Law—the right to rule. We need not follow every step of this progression—the first two moves are enough to show how the pre-positioning works and how Obama's moves undercut Clinton's self-positioning.

In response to the charge that he criticizes people for “clinging to their religion,” Obama responds with the following:

“I am a devout Christian . . . I started my work working with churches in the shadow of steel plants that had closed on the south side of Chicago, [I claim] that nobody in a presidential campaign on the Democratic side in recent memory has done more to reach out to the church and talk about what are our obligations religiously . . .”

Here, Obama is making a reactive pre-positioning, responding to an implicit positioning move that would entail his not having the right to rule in a predominantly Christian country.

More telling, because it is more intimate, is Obama's claim to a special attribute, the ability to bring people together. To claim this, he offers the following:

“but what I look at as the trajectory of my life because, you know, I was raised by a single mom. My father left when I was two and I was raised by my mother and my grandparents. . . . what was most important in my life was learning to take responsibility not only for my own actions, but how I can bring people together to actually have an impact on the world.”

(Obama, 2009; ABC News, February 26, 2009)

This snippet serves to rebut the “all words but no deeds” accusation that Clinton had made about him.

Responding to a neutral query, Clinton makes a pre-emptive pre-positioning move by introducing an autobiographical snippet:

“You know, I have, ever since I was a little girl, felt the presence of God in my life. And it has been a gift of grace that has for me, been incredibly sustaining. But, really, ever since I was a child, I have felt the enveloping support and love of God and I have had the experience on many, many occasions where I felt like the holy spirit was there with me as I made a journey.”

(*CNN Democratic Candidates Compassion Forum*, April 13, 2008)

As the debate unfolds, the negative consequences of this pre-positioning move become apparent. This introduces an unfortunate image of the privileged child “born with silver spoon in her mouth,” whose conscience calls for her to act as Lady Bountiful. Obama's call to duty does not come from a kind of contingent condescension but from being positioned, in the descriptive sense, as “one of us.”

#### EXAMPLE 3: GROUP POSITIONING VIA PROTAGONISTS

A conflict of this nature may take two main forms.

- The antagonists may share a story but by adopting contrary positions use that storyline to express and so to nourish a conflict.
- The antagonists may have adopted irreconcilable storylines that are such that two

positioning triads exist, and there is no discursive bridge from one to the other.

I shall illustrate both possibilities in some detail, with an analysis of the positions, storylines, and speech acts through which a seemingly irresolvable conflict between Georgetown University (GU) and the surrounding residential Georgetown Community (GC) was nourished and sustained (Slocum & Harre, 2003, pp. 110–118). Although there is a long history to this dispute, the most recent eruption of this “town-gown” conflict was instigated when GU put in a request to the District of Columbia to be permitted to increase its student enrollment in a proposed “campus plan.” An acrimonious conflict between the University and certain people in the neighboring GC began. This dispute appears, at first sight, to be chaotic, with the ground shifting in almost every encounter. Positioning Theory provides an analysis that shows that the strips of life interwoven in the stream of encounters are orderly.

There is a question of scale in any analysis where the discourses are public. Are we disputing about the role of universities in the management of student behavior? Are we disputing about exactly how many new student places Georgetown should create?

We need to know who/what groups are presented in the narratives as the main actors in the conflict. These are the beings who will be adopting and defending positions or are themselves being positioned by others. Are they individual people, voices, protagonists, and so on?

The next step consists of a detailed analysis of people’s perceptions of the conflict. The point is not to reveal what really happened but to analyze an episode to reveal one or more possible narrative forms to which speakers oriented in the course of these encounters. There is a further step in these discursive encounters in which, in commenting on the positionings of others in the debate, some of those involved take a step back and adopt a position with respect to the positionings already accomplished—the right to comment on first-order positioning triads. Some people even believe that they have a duty to do so. Thus, an analysis of the meta-positioning discourse is also required.

Finally, we should be able to discern who does and does not possess positioning power and the basis on which this power allocated. We can gain insight as to what role differences in positioning power play in the conflict. This may reveal why some of the storylines are more dominant (although not necessarily more pervasive) than others.

Six main storylines can be distinguished in the documents in which the discourse that revolved around the Georgetown town/gown conflict was carried on. Some of the storylines were challenged by dissenting opinions that were a direct negation of the storyline. Other readers would, no doubt, discern other storylines. A strip of human life is indefinitely complex—it would be a huge mistake to claim that one’s analysis was exclusive and complete!

#### *Storylines With Which Georgetown Community case Is Expressed*

1. *The Students as Savages Storyline:* Students are ravaging and violating the affluent and prestigious Georgetown neighborhood, spoken for by GC.

2. *The Aggressive University Storyline:* GU is encroaching upon the Georgetown neighborhood’s territory. GU is arrogant and hypocritical in that it cares only for its students and neglects the interests of the community.

3. *The Parent/Children Storyline:* GU is a negligent parent, and the students are unruly children.

The first and third storylines are sometimes woven together in some of the actual discourses of the activists on the community side. Although the second and third storylines are apparently contradictory, they are sometimes to be found intermingled in the discourse of one individual.

#### *Storylines With Which the Georgetown University Case Is Expressed*

4. *The Malicious Residents Storyline:* Neighborhood activists are hostile extremists who discriminate against students. They are jealous of the students and wish them harm. They are hindering GU development.

5. *The Benevolent University Storyline:* GU has been responsible and cooperative. Its students are responsible members of the community, and, in general, they are idealists and leaders.

6. *The Historical Rights Storyline:* GU and its students were here first—namely, since 1789!

The disputes, disagreements that fuel the conflict are, we contend, *maintained and made orderly and attractive by virtue of the storylines with which the dispute is expressed.*

In the dominant discourse of the GC activists, storylines 1 and 3, the Students as Savages and GU as Neglectful Parent are embedded within a

broader set of discursive conventions we label “The American Dream.” Coming to live in Georgetown is the ultimate realization of the American Dream. The story is not supposed to end with the hero surrounded by drunken, dirty, and noisy savages. In this storyline, rights (including the right to position others) are acquired to the extent that one pays taxes, owns property, and steps into the dramaturgy of the American Dream. Indeed, one so positioned also acquires the duty to “do something about ‘the destruction of the proper ending to this storyline.’” The activists’ speech acts are to be classified, from their positions, as protests, displays of righteous indignation, doing one’s duty by society, reprimands to the unruly, and so on.

In the discourses of GU, the GC activists are positioned as devoid of rights to interfere with the progression of the university’s development—particularly with the campus plan. An anonymous administrator positions herself as spokesperson for the institution as having the duty and the right to take on lower order positions rights and duties as partner and neighbor to the surrounding community, engendering, ideally, reciprocal position in the GC discourse. Accordingly, the failure of the community to accept this benevolent positioning is culpable. Positioned as rejected suitor, GU has the right to issue utterances that have the illocutionary force of rebuke, chastisement, and accusation. In rejecting the positionings of GU, GC activists appear in this storyline as morally defective—for example, stubborn and uncooperative.

Just as the generic storyline of the American Dream underlies the specific storylines of Students as Savages and the University as Neglectful Parent, underlying the storylines of both the activists’ and the University administration’s seemingly antithetical narratives is another generic storyline, the almost universal “Students are Children and the University is their Parent.” The dispute is maintained by GC pre-positioning the University as Neglectful Parent and the University pre-positioning itself as Responsible Parent, thus fixing the distribution of positions vis-à-vis the actions appropriate to each side. The position in which the University has been put involves both rights (*in loco parentis*) and duties to manage the students’ behavior. At the same time, that generic or pre-positioning puts the students into the specific position of ones without civil rights (e.g., to drink in bars), and as having the duty of obedience to the University.

### *The Psychological Status of the Relevant Bodies of Knowledge*

A great deal of local knowledge is required to act unhesitatingly and successfully in the various contexts that require positioning of oneself and others. However, it seems more natural to use the word “belief” for the cognitive resources drawn on in the ways I have described.

There are two ways that beliefs can be related to locally meaningful actions: A belief may be transcendent to an action that is held independently of the actual occasion of the action, perhaps even able to be expressed in propositional form, as a principle or rule. However, a belief may be immanent in the action—a feature of the social context of the flow of activities by the people involved in a life episode that exists as a customary practice. The background beliefs that shape positioning activities can be of either kind.

Positioning analysis of an episode can present both kinds of belief as explicit formulations. The fact that research results must be expressed in propositional form to be read and understood by other people should not tempt us to overlook the important distinction between beliefs that are immanent in patterns of action and those that are held by individuals as bodies of knowledge. Studies in the framework of *Réprésentations Sociales* (Farr & Moscovici, 1987) also display this duality in the way that the sources of social order are supposed to exist. A social representation can exist as a body of knowledge, but it can also exist as a social practice or custom that has no other existence than in the repeated actions of the members of the social group. The problem of how similarity of repetitions without a cognitive schema is accomplished is not easy to solve. Even successive imitation would require short-term memory. As Greimas (1990, p. 13) puts the point: “All doing presupposes a knowing-how-to-do . . . Thus, to discourse, which is a manifestation of a doing, there corresponds the subject of discourse [not what it is about but who produces it], a subject endowed with discursive competence.”

An important qualification of the ideas of social representations in Positioning Theory, and where it differs from Moscovici’s original Durkheimian concept, concerns the way that in many cases of public activities by a group of people, the totality of the knowledge required for the locally correct performance of an episode with positions properly distributed, the representation is distributed among the actors—some having this part, others having

other components of the total performance. The whole only comes into existence in the course of a symbolically mediated mass event. However, not everyone on the scene is positioned with the right or the duty to perform a certain element of the total action. Just think of the distributed social representation and the complex patterns of positioning among the singers, musicians, stage hands, and so on, in the performance of an opera.

However, in either case the repetition of discursive practices and the stability of storylines need to be accounted for. Social representations as bodies of knowledge shared among the members of a community have this stabilizing function. In Bamberg's previously quoted paper (2008), the paradox that takes the heart out of the Potter et al. attempt at a treatment of psychology without cognition is the use of the English language by these authors. They take for granted that there is a body of linguistic knowledge shared by their readers that enables their texts to be understood. Grammars and lexicons are shared and relatively permanent cognitive resources are necessary conditions for the possibility of their own discursive projects.

### **Positioning in Relation to Knowledge and Belief**

In the first section of this chapter, positioning analysis was used to amplify the depth of the analysis of the sources of particular social actions, in relation to the way rights and duties are assigned to the people engaged in a certain social episode. However, of equal importance is the way rights and duties are implicated in what we can know or believe. Rights and duties are also involved in how we deal with ignorance. In philosophical terms, we could call this phenomenon "epistemic positioning." There are important questions about how rights to know something are distributed and contested, how duties to remedy ignorance are imposed, and so on.

We start with the commonplace observation that people are praised and blamed for what they believe, know and don't know, forget, and are ignorant of. To take a prominent contemporary issue, journalists are often blamed for acquiring knowledge of the lives of prominent people in ways that we believe they should not have used. The evaluations expressed in such opinions tell us we are in moral territory. Once again, as in the management of social action, the key moral concepts are rights and duties. The research domain that opens up is the identification and study of the social and cognitive

processes by means of which rights and duties are distributed among people with respect to acquiring knowledge of certain matters, having beliefs about political and religious matters, being ignorant of the rules of proper behavior in this or that situation, and so on.

### ***Duties in Relation to Knowledge, Belief, and Ignorance***

Positioning processes with respect to ignorance and knowledge come to the fore most often in cases where people are held culpable for not remedying the one and for acquiring the other. People have a duty to acquaint themselves with the well-publicized dangers of swimming off certain beaches. The proper duties of paparazzi do not include the use of telescopic lenses to photograph famous people sunbathing. Turning to positioning with respect to belief there are two psychological phenomena in play here. There is belief as a disposition, and there is believing as an act. Are there certain beliefs that someone has a duty to hold? Is believing in something a duty that someone has to fulfill? Sometimes the positioning of a person or persons is content-targeted. For example, with respect to religious matters, people who are members of a certain faith or denomination are reminded forcefully of their duty to believe the tenets of that faith. In a more low-key way, a similar kind of duty seems to be implicit in science, where an experimental demonstration is not just supportive of a factual claim but engages the moral order of the scientific community. Whereas the experimenter has a duty to be competent and truthful, the onlooker has a duty to believe.

Sometimes the positioning is source-targeted. Van Woudenberg (2009, p. 50) cites examples of the positioning of doctors as having a duty to believe what their patients tell them. On the other hand, lay people are positioned as having a duty to believe what experts tell them. There are innumerable examples of such acts of positioning in discussions of what we should believe about global warming. The same holds in religious contexts. The congregation has a faith-relative duty to believe what the priest or mullah or shaman tells them.

Even a cursory survey of positionings with respect to belief reveals the presence of long-running and often acrimonious conflicts over how rights and duties are distributed. So far as I know, this matter has received very little attention from cultural and discursive psychologists.

Considering the demands of “duty to know” and its complementary demand, “duty to remedy ignorance,” there is rarely much conflict. Some of these duties are fixed in law, but some are supererogatory. The reprimand “You should have known (found out about) so and so” is commonplace in family circles and no doubt elsewhere. Again this looks like a likely area for systematic research.

The duty to acquire knowledge is a reflection of the duty to remedy ignorance. Thus what it is said that a person is ignorant of defines the dutiful task of remedy. Among the domains of knowledge where ignorance pre-positions someone with the duty to remedy the lack are social and legal rules. How far acquiring current etiquette is a matter for discussion, but learning the Highway Code in the United Kingdom and being able to display knowledge of it is a requirement for obtaining a driver’s license. The legal principle that ignorance is no excuse is routinely overruled in many cases—and here, again, is a field for positioning research. How is the positioning of someone as having a certain duty revised? In everyday life, there is much discussion of duties to acquire everyday arts in the context of some people calling on others as having the duty to perform minor technical jobs. For example, some people declare that everyone has a duty to learn how to restore a circuit breaker. Men are said to have a duty to be competent in baby care, and so on. The discursive practices by which these positioning acts are accomplished is another field for research. Positioning students as having a duty to learn as a fulfillment of a duty to know is the foundation of the grading system in a major discursive practice in educational institutions.

None of these positionings seem to attract serious controversy. There is a huge difference between the contestability and the accusations of irrationality between positionings in relation to these everyday practices and criticisms of fundamentalism and the making of hasty scientific claims—for example, in the case of cold fusion.

### ***Rights in Relation to Belief, Knowledge and Ignorance***

In the case of the right to believe, positioning practices serve to roughly distinguish liberal from authoritarian societies. This topic also introduces the idea of a mode of positioning that links rights to permissions. Positioned as having a right to something is more or less equivalent to being given permission to engage with it.

The promulgation of officially imposed epistemic positions opens a new dimension of positioning discourses. Everyone is positioned by the central positioning act, in contrast to most positing studies to date that are concerned with very local and ephemeral positionings. The authorities position everyone in an authoritarian religious society with the duty to believe the tenets of the established religion or political philosophy. The logic of the duty/right relation entails that there is no right to disbelieve.

In the absence of a right to disbelieve, the way is open for the punishment of those who do. In forced conversion, members of a community position themselves as having both the right and the duty to demand that others change their beliefs. There have been numerous studies of the psychological processes by which this apparently paradoxical transformation is accomplished. Spontaneous conversion is outside the domain of positioning processes. The Positioning Theory research question concerns the discursive processes by which someone becomes convinced of the moral basis of proselytizing.

Rights to know are severely restricted in most societies, sometimes more by law than by custom. In many cases, positioning claims by journalists eventually reach the courts, where the doctrine of the public good is used to override the rights of individuals to privacy. In Positioning Theory terms, this amounts to the denial of the existence of a position of the right to know everything about a person.

More complex psychologically are duties to remember in relation to rights to forget. One may be positioned as having a duty to forget a minor injury that one has suffered at the hands of someone else. However, rights to forget are more tendentious. For example, political activists dispute the implicit self-positionings that sustain the amnesias that occur in the historical recollections of whole nations on the grounds that we do not have the right to forget such evils as the Holocaust and the Killing Fields.

Finally, there are rights to ignorance. A physician may position a patient as having a right not to know his or her medical condition on the grounds that such knowledge might have a deleterious effect on the patient’s general health. Disputes do occur over this matter. A patient may demand to be told, regardless of how distressing the knowledge may prove to be. The doctor’s duty of care overrides the duty to inform the patient of his or her situation.

Many epistemic rights and duties were implicit until recent legislation in the form of information laws opened up rights that were not hitherto

recognized and codified those that were. This should prove a rich field for Positioning Theory research. What effect has the British Freedom of Information Act had on people's beliefs about their positions, and what storylines have been used to resist disclosures? These are questions of immediate public interest and are hardly touched on in formal research projects.

Research should enable social psychologists to catalogue some of the procedures by which epistemic positioning is accomplished. In particular, there is the question of the pre-positioning personal characteristics, histories of abilities that support positioning a person or persons as having duties and rights in respect of knowledge, belief, and ignorance. For example, one cannot be positioned as having a duty to disclose knowledge one does not have. One cannot have a right to knowledge that would be used to harm someone else. For example, information on how to make explosives and construct bombs ought not to be published on the Internet, on the Positioning Theory grounds that people do not have the right to know.

### Reflexivity of Positioning

Psychology is, in large part, a cluster of discursive practices. There are the activities of experimenters and their subjects as co-participants in the social events called "experiments." Results must be written up according to certain conventions, subject to meta-discursive activities of the peer review and so on. Positioning as a discursive practice is as much a part of the activities of those who practice psychology as a science as administering questionnaires and publishing articles and books. The practices of the sciences are embedded in long-standing conventions of the distribution of rights and duties among the participants. Even so apparently obvious a step as the inserting of a statistically analyzed table of results at the end of an article in a mainstream journal plays its part in pre-positioning the author as one with a right to be believed. Duties of care are presupposed everywhere.

### Future Perspectives

The place of Positioning Theory as a research program within the general field of cultural psychology is evident when we consider the importance of social representations of local moral orders in the management of specific cases as a discursive practice. The examples introduced above as illustrations of the power of positioning analyses are grounded in a background of common features to all the social

representations of moral orders implicit in the cases analyzed. These are roughly the features of a kind of generalized Judeo-Christian moral order from which local orders can be derived when we consider the overt formulation of a working body of shared knowledge as system of 'rules'. Many interesting contemporary examples of positioning discourses and their consequences in the lived storylines of participants arise within an implicit background of honor moralities. This matter deserves extended treatment, but it is worth noting briefly how different honor moralities are from the deontic and utilitarian moral systems usually studied by moral philosophers. Contemporary virtue morality comes closer in that issues of honor are often linked to local notions of virtue. This shows up very clearly in courtroom proceedings in murder trials where the victim is often a relative, regretfully often a sister or daughter of the accused. "She dishonored our family—therefore, we had a duty to kill her." The rights of the men of the family vis-à-vis honor are implicit in the law that the members of the community subscribe to (Harré, 1983, pp. 240–242).

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Carl Ratner

**Abstract**

This chapter explains macro-cultural psychology as a psychological theory and discipline. It conceptualizes psychological phenomena as part of macro-cultural factors—social institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts. Specifically, macro-cultural psychology explains how psychological phenomena originate in macro-cultural factors, embody their features, represent macro-cultural factors, solidify and sustain macro-cultural factors, and are objectified in them. The chapter presents examples of these points with regard to emotions, adolescence, mental illness, agency, sensory processes, and self-concept. Macro-cultural psychology is shown to be a coherent general psychological theory that encompasses biological processes and individual variations within macro-cultural cornerstones, in logically consistent ways. The theory draws on the pioneering work of Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev.

**Keywords:** macro-culture, interpersonal interactions, social structure, mental illness, agency, emotions, adolescence, Vygotsky, sensory processes

The central tenet of macro-cultural psychology is that psychological phenomena are elements, or parts, of macro-cultural factors. Macro-cultural factors are social institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts. They are the broad, enduring cornerstones of social life. As such, macro-cultural factors are crucial to our survival and fulfillment. Human psychology is intrinsic to this scenario. Psychology evolved to plan and implement macro-cultural phenomena, thereby enhancing our survival and fulfillment. Psychology is the motivation, perception, emotions, self-concept, reasoning, and memory of cultural behavior that forms artifacts, concepts, and institutions. The discipline of macro-cultural psychology explores the cultural origins, locus, characteristics, and function of psychological phenomena. The term *macro-cultural psychology* may be traced to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. He enumerates a set of social contexts

(levels, layers) from the micro, interpersonal level, to broader levels, some of which are indirectly experienced—such as children being affected by parents' working conditions, as these affect parents' interactions with children. The broadest level, which forms the framework of parameters for all the other narrower levels, is the macro-social structure:

[T]he complex of nested, interconnected systems is viewed as a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture. Such generalized patterns are referred to as macrosystems, within a given society or social group, the structure and substance of micro-, meso-, and exosystems tend to be similar, as if they were constructed from the same master model.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8; Ratner, 1991, pp. 172–178)

The macro-level is the core of, and key to, all the layers and factors in a society. “Public policy is a part of the macro system determining the specific properties of exo-, meso-, and microsystems that occur at the level of everyday life and steer the course of behavior and development” (ibid., p. 9).

Cultural psychology was originally conceived as macro-cultural psychology. This emphasis was maintained by Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal in their journal *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* [Journal of Cultural Psychology and Linguistics], which was inaugurated in 1860. It seems that the term *Völkerpsychologie* was coined by Wilhelm Humboldt at the turn of the nineteenth century (see also Diriwächter, 2011). It was continued by Wundt, who believed that macro-cultural factors are more conducive sites for psychological research and analysis than variable individual consciousness:

Speech, myths and customs constitute a series of closely related subjects which are of great importance to general psychology for the reason that the relatively permanent character of speech, myths, and customs renders it relatively easy to recognize clearly through them certain psychical processes, and to carry out through them certain psychological analyses. Such recognition of general processes and such analyses are much easier here than in the case of transient compounds of individual consciousness. (cited in Ferrari et al., 2010, p. 97)

Studying psychical processes in macro-cultural factors is also advantageous for understanding cultural components and features of psychology.

Macro-cultural psychology utilizes these understandings of psychology in culture and culture in psychology to conduct empirical research on the cultural psychology of individuals. The macro aspect of culture and cultural psychology was also emphasized by psychological anthropologists such as Shweder in the 1980s. However, it was displaced by more personal and interpersonal notions of culture. I have worked to expand the original macro emphasis of cultural psychologists. Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev developed the most interesting, original, thorough, and central principles of macro-cultural psychology. Vygotsky said, “Higher mental functions [are] the product of the historical development of humanity” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 34, my emphasis).

Once we acknowledge the historical character of verbal thought, we must consider it subject to all

the premises of historical materialism, which are valid for any historical phenomenon in human society. It is only to be expected that on this level the development of behavior will be governed essentially by the general laws of the historical development of human society.

(Vygotsky 1986, pp. 94–95)

Likewise,

Already in primitive societies . . . the entire psychological makeup of individuals can be seen to depend directly on the development, the degree of development of the production forces, and on the structure of that social group to which the individual belongs . . . Both of these factors, whose intrinsic interdependence has been established by the theory of historical materialism, are the decisive factors of the whole psychology of primitive man.

(Vygotsky, 1994b, p. 176)

A.N. Leontiev (1977) further explains this perspective in his article “Activity and Consciousness” (available online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/leontev/works/1977/leon1977.htm>) in his book *Problems of Dialectical Materialism*: “Despite all its diversity, all its special features, the activity [Tätigkeit] of the human individual is a system that obeys the system of relations of society. Outside these relations human activity does not exist. How it exists is determined by the forms and means of material and spiritual communication that are generated by the development of production and that cannot be realised except in the activity of specific individuals. It stands to reason that the activity of every individual depends on his place in society, on his conditions of life.” For instance, Leontiev speaks of “the objective contradictions of commodity production, which generates a contradiction between concrete and abstract labour and leads to the alienation of human activity” (ibid.).

Leontiev goes on to say that activity is fostered by social labor: “Historically, the appearance in activity of goal-oriented action processes was the result of the emergence of a society based on labour.” Activity is not a natural impulse of human beings that originates within the individual. Leontiev adds a historical note that “The method of scientific analysis of the generation and functioning of human consciousness – social and individual – was discovered by Marx.”

Of course, internal conscious activity is reciprocally the subjectivity that animates external activity. “the phenomena of consciousness constitute a *real*

element in the motion of activity” (ibid.) Therefore, both arise and function interdependently. The point is that internal subjectivity activity does not arise on its own (“first”) but only under the stimulus of external social activity. “Once we acknowledge the common structure of external, practical activity and internal, mental activity we can understand the exchange of elements that constantly takes place between them, we can understand that certain mental actions may become part of the structure of direct practical, material activity and, conversely, external-motor operations may serve the performance of mental action in the structure of purely cognitive activity” (ibid.).

Leontiev provides an important discussion of personal meanings in relation to social activity and collective representations. He acknowledges personal meanings as an idiosyncratic sense of the complex of experiences that comprise one’s personal life. “Whereas external sensuousness associates objective meanings with the reality of the objective world in the subject’s consciousness, the personal meaning associates them with the reality of his own life in this world, with its motivations. It is the personal meaning that gives human consciousness its partiality.” However, personal meanings about one’s own life are not free inventions. They interpret personal life in social terms, through social values and concepts. Individuals draw upon society in order to interpret the specificity of their personal lives: “In contrast to society the individual has no special language of his own with meanings that he has evolved himself. His comprehension of reality can take place only by means of the “ready-made” meanings he assimilates from without – the knowledge, concepts, and views he receives through intercourse, in the various forms of individual and mass communication. This is what makes it possible to introduce into his consciousness or even impose upon that consciousness distorted or fantastic notions and ideas, including those that have no basis in his real, practical life experience.” Social meanings are so powerful that they distort people’s lived experiences. This is obvious today as oppressed people routinely define their problems in terms of conservative social ideology that mystifies the sources and solutions of their lived problems. I have termed this the psychology of oppression (Ratner, 2011d).

Indeed, societies struggle to structure personal meanings so as to steer people toward a political position. Various political interests struggle mightily to capture people’s personal meanings to their side so

that people will interpret their personal experiences in ways that support the political position: “this transformation of personal meanings into adequate (or more adequate) objective meanings shows that this occurs in the context of the struggle for people’s consciousness that is waged in society.” This struggle is evident in American media stations.

Social structuring of personal meanings is not always successful and complete. Discrepancies erupt. “There is no disappearance (nor could there be) of the constantly proliferating discrepancy between personal meanings which carry the intentionality, the partiality of the subject’s consciousness, and the *objective meanings*, which though ‘indifferent’ to them *are the sole means by which personal meanings can be expressed*. This is why the internal movement of the developed system of the individual’s consciousness is full of dramatic moments. These moments are created by personal meanings that cannot “express themselves” in adequate objective meanings, meanings that have been deprived of their basis in life and therefore, sometimes agonisingly, discredit themselves in the consciousness of the subject” (ibid., my emphasis).

For instance, despite the active efforts of banks and right wing media to blame American individuals for the Great Recession that began in 2008 (by accusing them of borrowing credit that they could not afford), many people realize that they were often the victim of financial fraud on the part of financial institutions. However, these breakthroughs are few and far between.

Leontiev concludes this important article with a key statement that distinguishes macro cultural psychology from mainstream psychology: “although a scientific psychology must never lose sight of man’s inner world, the study of this inner world cannot be divorced from a study of his activity and does not constitute any special trend of scientific psychological investigation.”

This sentiment gives an entirely new meaning to psychological phenomena. They are rooted in historical forces such as government policy, wars, immigration, mode of production, technology, art, industrialization, nuclear family, religious beliefs. Psychological phenomena are subjective aspects of these cultural-historical phenomena; psychology is not a realm of its own, independent of these.

In an unpublished paper written in 1929, entitled “Concrete Psychology”—a term he took from the French Marxist philosopher-psychologist Georges Politzer—Vygotsky said, “We derive individual

functions from forms of collective life. Development proceeds not toward socialization, but toward *individualization* of social functions (transformation of social functions into psychological functions)” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 61). I shall demonstrate that the original social forms that generate psychological functions are macro cultural factors.

Of course, history is made by people; however, when we speak of historical activity we refer to individuals acting, often social leaders and spokespeople (government officials, business leaders, leaders of community organizations), operating at the macro-cultural level to shape social policy and community opinion through cultural media such as legislation, news reports, magazine articles, and art forms. History does not refer to personal history or individuals expressing some personal inclination of their own.

A central tenet of macro-cultural psychology is that macro-cultural factors generate abstract and concrete features of psychology. Macro-cultural factors have abstract features that generate abstract features of psychology; and macro-cultural factors have concrete features that generate concrete features of psychology. Examples of abstract psychological features are: “people think, remember, have self-concepts, use language” and “people remember and think in symbols.” These are what mainstream psychologists generally study. They study memory, perception, emotions, language acquisition, and mental illness. They are rarely interested in concrete forms of these, such as an individualistic self, romantic love, contextual memory, ancient Greek sexuality, and Victorian maternal love. Even when mainstream psychologists do address culturally concrete forms of psychology, they typically misconstrue them as abstract, universal, natural forms.

Examples of abstract features of macro-cultural factors are: macro-cultural factors are socially organized and involve symbolic communication; macro-cultural factors involve positions of leadership; and schools are organized into different grades, and they measure students’ learning. These features are abstract because they are indefinite and lack any specific substance. The mere fact that cultural factors are socially organized leaves open what kind of organization it is. Similarly, grades could be determined and measured by various criteria. Similarly, the fact that society has positions of leadership is abstract because leadership could take many forms. We would expect that these abstract features of

macro-cultural factors generate the abstract features of psychology we just mentioned.

Examples of concrete features of macro-cultural factors are: leadership in society X is dominated by the feudal aristocracy, or learning is measured by paper-and-pencil tests of rote memory. We would expect these concrete features of macro-cultural factors to generate correspondingly concrete features of psychology.

Macro-cultural psychologists would trace “symbolic thinking” (in general) to abstract social interaction and communication. We would trace specific forms of symbolic thinking (e.g., deductive logic) to particular features of macro-cultural factors. For example, Goldman (1992, pp. 15, 17, 18, 83) examines the potential impact of the commodity form on consciousness by looking at advertising that transforms our meaning systems as well as our desires into commodities. Goldman examines the effects on consciousness of “the commodity-sign,” which is a commoditized kind of symbol, a sign that misrepresents products by associating them with false and irrelevant situations (e.g., cigarettes with nature, deodorant with popularity, cereal with a star athlete). The commodity-sign is a new kind of symbol that is specifically organized by Capital to serve its interest of stimulating sales and profit. Capitalism is built into the commodity-sign and into our meaning systems. This takes the form of building misrepresentation into the commodity-sign. Because humans think in symbols (an abstract characteristic of thinking), if symbols are commodified, then our concrete thinking is that we think in commodity-signs. Commodity-signs structure consciousness in concrete ways, such as accepting false associations and appearances as true, generating strong emotional desires for mundane products, stimulating impulsive action (consumerism), and defining human events (social popularity, good motherhood, happy children, love) in terms of consumer products. Improving (demystifying) consciousness therefore requires critiquing and altering the commodity-sign that mystifies consciousness.

If consciousness/agency is mystified by commodity-signs, then it can only be demystified by critiquing and altering commodity-signs. This requires a specific social analysis of the cultural mediational means that people use to understand things. Consciousness cannot demystify itself by an abstract cognitive act (e.g., “try to be more open to information”), which ignores the concrete capitalist

form that symbols have. Concrete cultural problems cannot be solved by abstract acts.

In this example, we see that abstract and concrete aspects of psychology stem from abstract and concrete aspects of macro-cultural factors. The abstract and concrete are interdependent and call for each other. When we examine abstract aspects of cultural factors and psychology, we are led to examine their concrete features that fill them out. Conversely, when we examine concrete aspects, we are led to identify abstractions. For example, when we examine why concrete commodity-signs affect consciousness, the answer lies in the abstraction that “thinking occurs in symbols.”

Macro-cultural psychology is a comprehensive theory that explains both abstract and concrete aspects of human psychology as resulting from and residing in macro-cultural factors. We dispute the contention that natural processes generate abstract features of psychology whereas only concrete features are generated by cultural factors; this would dichotomize psychology into two distinct and antithetical orders of reality with different mechanisms and processes.

Let us examine how abstract and concrete features of macro-cultural factors generate correspondingly abstract and concrete features of psychology.

### ***Macro-cultural Factors Generate Abstract Features of Psychology***

Burke and Ornstein (1995) explain that tools, cooperation, and communication in general—not any particular form of these—spurred general human advances in thinking rather than any particular kind of thinking. Hunting in groups requires “the ability to plan, communicate, and cooperate. These communicative abilities ... laid down the mental matrix necessary for thought and reason, language and culture” (p. 11).

To cut a tool demands a set of operations carried out in a specific order. The instructions for tool making might have been serial sounds specifying the sequence of physical manipulation necessary to make the tool. So it might be that the first noises accompanying the ‘grammar’ of sequential tool making might have also laid down the basics of the grammar of language, because grammar is based on sounds that only make sense (as do successful tool-making actions) if they are done in the correct sequence. The tool and the sentence would be one and the same thing. As the tools refined and

proliferated, so did the signs and sounds that described them and their manufacture.”

(p. 22)

Burke and Ornstein are speaking about “thought” and “grammar” in general, not the grammar of a particular language. The authors observe how food production changed human social organization and psychology. Food cultivation allowed a relatively great deal of food to be produced in a small area, compared with hunting and gathering, which required large areas. This allowed for larger populations to live in concentrated areas, allowing for communities. “Where it had once taken 15 square miles to support a hunter-gatherer, a settler now needed only three” (p. 38).

### **PRODUCING NATURE STIMULATES CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL, AGENCY, SELF**

In addition, cultivating food entailed artificially duplicating nature. Seeds or roots were collected and artificially planted, instead of growing naturally from plants. Nature was divided into elements (seeds, roots) and then duplicated by human action. This led to a stupendous breakthrough in consciousness. Consciousness came to represent nature and redesign it according to human purpose. According to this analysis, thinking was generated by rudimentary agricultural production. The artificial duplication of nature in production generated a corresponding artificial duplication of nature in thought. Economic production generated thought (pp. 39–40). This is why symbolic consciousness, expressed in artistic representations of things, developed during the rise of agriculture in the Neolithic Revolution 10,000 years ago (Ratner, 2006).

Of course, this development was dialectical, not linear. Rudimentary, accidental/spontaneous collecting and planting of a few seeds generated rudimentary representational thinking of seeds as representing plants. This advance of thinking led to more deliberate understanding of seeds and to more careful gathering and planting them. This stimulated more advanced thinking, and so on.

Humans’ reproducing nature led to another breakthrough in consciousness—namely, will or agency. In reproducing nature, humans made nature happen (made plants grow), and this expanded their agency and sense of self.

Social interaction that mediates responses to objects also provides the differentiation of individual from nature that is vital to forming a distinguishable self. Social mediation also generates the

cognitive mediation of behavior through planning, deliberating, and imagining. All of these activity-generated psychological functions and self then furthered the activity of reproducing nature.

Nature was no longer received as it stood. It was reorganized by humans. This marked the break of humans from natural existence. Tools greatly expanded humans' ability to rearrange nature. "Tools released the tool-users forever from the slow development of natural processes. Now tools could supplant biological evolution as the main source of change" (Burke & Ornstein, 1995, p. 10).<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, the more humans could artificially reproduce the world according to their own needs, the more deeply they understood the world as it exists. The development of human subjectivity entailed a development of objectivity. Conversely, animals' natural existence, submerged in nature and following its cycles and dictates, results in limited, superficial consciousness of the world.

#### **SOCIAL COOPERATION/COORDINATION STIMULATES THOUGHT, WILL, AGENCY, PURPOSE**

Thinking was another psychological capacity that was fostered by social cooperation and communication. Social cooperation spurred communication that spurred symbolic meaning that spurred symbolic thinking. Let us examine each of these three steps.

1. Social cooperation requires precise communication about the social activity. This makes social interchange the object of communication; communication is a social act that involves sharing of information to further social coordination. This social act and social objective is what makes human language distinctive from animal utterances. Animal utterances are essentially automatic individual expressions of feeling. A fearful animal involuntarily shrieks. This individual expression may coincidentally alert other conspecific individuals to the danger, however, the shriek is not essentially a social act directed at other individuals for the purpose of engaging in a social activity that unities them. The absence of these social features distinguishes animal calls from human language.

2. Language needs to be precise, complex, organized, and symbolic about particular objects and social interchanges to pass specific information to other members. Linguistic symbols must contain information in symbolic form that can be

transported back and forth among interlocutors. The social interchange of information requires that it be encoded in a vessel of transportation. This is language. Animals that lack this social interchange of information never develop a linguistic system for encoding and transmitting it. Animal communication is primarily animated by one individual's reaction to an object—for example, a predator. In contrast, human language is primarily animated by social interchange—that is, the desire to share information with other humans to decide how to collectively deal with objects.

Human language is part of humans' social mediation of their reaction to objects. We do not react immediately and individually to things. We react to things by engaging in a social process. We utilize the collective strength of a social group as the basis of reacting. This involves sharing information about objects with which we are dealing before we act. Language serves this purpose of facilitating social mediation of our responses to objects. This is why language is primarily directed toward social interchange, it is not primarily a direct expression of an individual encounter with an object, as animal sounds are.

The social purpose of language is what stimulates it to be a symbolic vessel (representative) of information. The need for such a vessel is to convey information to others to mediate their reactions to nature, it is not to encode information for one's individual, immediate use. Mere encoding of objects is not the basis of symbols and language. It is the social transmission of information that is the basis of language that takes the form of encoding objects in symbols. Symbolization is a cognitive means to achieve a social end. Symbolization is a socially inspired, socially required, and socially informed cognitive process.

3. As many scholars have observed, social symbols that constitute language become the means of thought. Thought rests upon language, which rests upon social cooperation and coordination. Thought is thus a product of social activity. The social communicative basis of thought is reflected in the etymology of "conscious." It is derived from Latin *conscious*, meaning having joint or common knowledge with another person.

Because culture offers such enormous advantages over individual behavior governed by natural mechanisms, all psychological functions such as intentionality, will, self, agency, purpose, understanding, and interpretation developed primarily to effect social

activity. Psychological functions did not develop as individual functions to facilitate individual reactions to objects.

Will, purpose, and agency only exist where the actor can construct or produce behavior. This situation is characteristic of society. Society is humanly constructed; it is not natural. People have wide latitude in the kind of society they can construct. It can be cooperative or competitive, frugal or profligate (speculative), monogamous or polygamous, gender equal or unequal, autocratic or democratic, structured into classes or relatively egalitarian, militaristic or pacifistic, sexually permissive or sexually punitive, permissive child-rearing or strict child-rearing, education through apprenticeship or formal teaching in schools, religious or atheistic, state religion or secular state. This latitude of choice (which is not equivalent to free, capricious, or random choice) is fertile ground for developing will and purpose.

Animals that graze on naturally occurring grass do not, and cannot, construct/produce their conditions; they find them ready-made and are beholden to them. When grass is plentiful, the animal is well-fed; when grass is scarce the animal is hungry. The animal cannot do anything about its life conditions. It lacks will and purpose because it is a natural creature that passively endures its natural environment and is governed by automatic, involuntary, natural processes suitable to natural existence. Natural determinants of behavior are inversely related to agency, will, self, and purpose.

Burke and Ornstein are correct to identify rudimentary acts on nature (such as gathering and planting seeds) as contributing to the sense of producing and the capacity to produce. However, the opportunities for this kind of production were undoubtedly few and far between, given the independence of natural processes from man. Far more conducive to regular, sustained construction was social organization. That is why I theorize that social construction was the primary impetus to the human capacity to produce and to develop will and purpose.

#### **THE CULTURAL BASIS AND CHARACTER OF EMOTIONS**

Vygotsky emphasized that cultural factors and cultural operating mechanisms elevate and expand consciousness beyond animal consciousness. Human consciousness is more active and agentic because it has a cultural operating mechanism that deals with

complex, vast, dynamic cultural stimuli. Culture is the most complex, changeable, abstract, symbolized environment, and it requires complex, modulated, flexible, willful subjectivity to envision, maintain, and process these features of culture.

For example, when students are anxious about an impending test, the students' anxiety is based on an understanding of the educational system's rule that test scores are indicators of intelligence and that future opportunities in education and work depend on high test scores. Test anxiety is thus based on understanding of social systems and future possibilities: "There's a good chance that the admissions committee of Harvard would like my GPA four years from now."

Emotions cannot be based on a simple, immediate, animalistic sensitivity to physical colors and odors. Such simple, natural, animalistic processes are designed to deal with relatively simple, circumscribed, stable, overt, physical stimuli. As such, they cannot rise to the level of macro-cultural emotions we have been describing. A fundamentally new and different kind of emotionology and operating mechanism must exist for emotions to be appropriate to complex, variable, symbolic cultural environments and factors.

To love a country is not simply a matter of associating an animalistic emotion of pleasure to "country." Loving a country requires a different kind of love than an animal is capable of experiencing. Loving a country is loving a general abstraction that has no physical sensory attributes. With human emotion, it is not simply the object that is different from animal stimuli; the quality of love that relates to this different kind of object is also different from what animals experience. The form or quality of love adjusts to the form and quality of the object being loved. If the object of love is a massive abstraction like Russia, the love for that object is abstract. Macro-cultural factors generate distinctive psychological attributes that are geared to the macro-cultural level.

These macro attributes of psychology extend to micro level stimuli and to natural stimuli such as physical sounds, smells, and colors. For example, we become afraid of an animal in the woods because we utilize the macro-properties of emotions that originated on the macro-level to deal with macro-cultural factors. We become afraid of the bear because we recognize it to be "a bear," not simply a form of a certain size, color, and odor. The physical features trigger conceptual knowledge and



this is the basis of our emotion. Physical features do not directly generate our emotions. They are mediated by cultural knowledge of the physical features.

We utilize our conceptual knowledge of bears to construe it as dangerous. We do not simply become afraid because of its size or gestures. If we didn't believe it to be dangerous, or if we had a gun with which we could kill it if necessary, then we would not fear the bear. Our emotion depends on abstract, conceptual cultural knowledge about things ("bears are dangerous," "this gun will kill the bear"), which is required by cultural life. Animal fear is not generated by this process or operating mechanism. It is a different kind of fear from what humans experience.

The emotions we employ in face-to-face interactions similarly originate at the macro-level. Anger and guilt are based on ethical and legal values of macro-culture. If Jill injures John by mistake, then John would typically understand this and not become angry. But if Jill deliberately injures him, then he legitimately becomes incensed. The reason is that anger is triggered by the ethical and legal principle that deliberate, willful injury is wrong. Western legal principle distinguishes between willful and accidental injury, condones different responses to them, and dispenses different punishments for them. Anger is a legally sanctioned reaction to deliberate harm but not to accidental or incidental injury. (If John did become angry at an unintentional injury, this would be a sign that he lacked the social competence to assess whether a particular injury to him was intentionally or unintentionally caused by Jill—which is the cultural-legal criterion for experiencing anger). Research shows that cultures devoid of the concept of personal responsibility experience little anger. Injury is attributed to fate or accident, and it generates frustration and annoyance but not anger at a person (Ratner, 1991, pp. 77–78; 2006, pp. 106–107).

Interpersonal guilt similarly rests upon a cultural-legal criterion that one is directly responsible for an injury. If someone feels guilty after unintentionally inflicting harm, then other people will console her by saying, "Don't feel guilty, it wasn't your fault, you couldn't have helped it." They help alter her emotion of guilt by explaining that the social basis for it—namely, personal responsibility—did not exist. This revised social understanding of her action lessens her emotional feeling of guilt.

## **THE DARWINIAN BASIS OF MACRO-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

My argument for macro-cultural psychology is Darwinian—new environments require new behavioral mechanisms and anatomical features. When psychologists attempt to reduce human psychology to animal mechanisms, they are violating this Darwinian principle. They postulate similar behavioral mechanisms in radically distinct environments. They are ignoring the fact that the human cultural environment is qualitatively different from animal physical environments and therefore requires distinctive behavioral mechanisms and anatomical features.

Gordon explained the distinctive, emergent macro-cultural character of psychology with respect to emotions:

Social life produces emergent dimensions of emotion that resist reduction to properties inherent in the human organism . . . Socially emergent dimensions of emotion transcend psychological and physiological levels of analysis in terms of (1) origin, (2) temporal framework, (3) structure, and (4) change.

(Gordon, 1981, p. 562)

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA MAINTAIN/SOLIDIFY CULTURE**

Returning to our macro-cultural psychological analysis of test anxiety in school, we observe that it not only reflects an understanding of the educational system—it reciprocally reinforces the system. It motivates students to adhere to the system's requirements to study material that social authorities mandate. This is an important way in which psychology is cultural. It can only direct individuals to culturally appropriate behavior if it is infused with cultural content. Anxiety must be generated by a culturally formed concern for test scores if it is to direct students to learn material that is on tests.

Intelligence is similarly socially defined by test scores so that it motivates students to study test material to demonstrate their intelligence.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA ARE SOCIALLY SHARED AND DISTRIBUTED**

Because culturally formed emotions (and other psychological processes) sustain social systems, they must be socially shared among masses of people to generate mass participation in the culture. If culturally formed psychological processes were limited to a few individuals, or if they were shot through with

idiosyncratic meanings, then they would lose their ability to promote culturally appropriate action necessary to sustain the social system.

Although each person's experience of emotion has idiosyncratic features, culture shapes the occasion, meaning, and expression of affective experience. Love, pity, indignation, and other sentiments are socially shared patterns of feeling, gesture, and meaning.

(Gordon, 1981, p. 563)

Oyserman and Markus (1998, pp. 123, 109, 107) explain why this must be true.

Although individuals are highly active in the process of self-making, the materials available for writing one's own story are a function of our public and shared notions of personhood. American accounts of the self, for example, involve a set of culture-confirming ideas and images of success, competence, ability, and the need to "feel good." The public representations of selfhood that characterize a given sociocultural niche function as common denominators—they provide the primary structure of the selves of those who live within these contexts. These shared ideas produce necessary, although often unseen, commonalities in the selves of people within a given context. Although making a self appears to be an individual and individualizing pursuit, it is also a collective and collectivizing one. From a societal perspective, self-construction is too important to be left as a personal project. Social integration and the social order require that individuals of a given group have reasonably similar answers to the "who am I" and "where do I belong" questions.

These remarks apply equally to all psychological phenomena. From a societal perspective, motivation, emotions, perception, reasoning, and memory are too important to be left as personal projects. They must all be congruent with macro-factors to ensure the endurance of these factors.

The social sharing of psychology is qualified by the heterogeneity of cultural factors. Cultural factors are neither homogeneous singly or collectively. Any one factor is heterogeneous, and there are differences among them as well. This heterogeneity of macro-cultural factors introduces heterogeneity into psychology as well.

Education, for example, is only functional for a select strata of the population for whom intellectual competencies are required. For the masses of people for whom intellectual competencies are not

demand, educational success is not useful. Society does not encourage them to acquire the educational psychology of worrying about tests and studying hard to pass them. Of course, official propaganda proclaims that all students should try as hard as they can to score well. But this is pure rhetoric that pretends that the social system is open to all applicants. In fact, it is not, and it has no room to accommodate the masses of people who would ideally like to go on for higher education and high-skilled jobs. Consequently, the social system implicitly discourages masses of students from acquiring the cultural psychology that would animate their demands for higher education and high-skilled jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, educators do not acknowledge their role in discouraging (cooling-out) students from studying hard and experiencing test anxiety. They pretend that this failure is the students' own disinterest, rather than the system's. This is a classic case of blaming the victim. Macro-cultural psychology corrects this distortion by exposing the cultural basis of the psychology of people who are frozen out of the upper levels of the social hierarchy.

### ***Macro-cultural Factors Generate Concrete Features of Psychology***

Macro-cultural factors generate concrete features of psychology just as they generate abstract psychological features. This is a Darwinian argument. Darwin's environmentalism was specific regarding physical features such as particular kinds of food and predators with specific characteristics that selected for specific anatomical traits of species. Social environments of humans are equally specific, and their characteristics must be enumerated to understand particular psychological characteristics. To remain tied to cultural abstractions would be as inadequate as if Darwin had referred to environments as "composed of living matter" without enumerating specific forms and features.

Situating psychological phenomena in macro-cultural factors enables us to transition easily from abstract features to concrete ones, for both are present in the same locus of macro-cultural factors. This avoids the common problem of remaining stuck in abstractions and ignoring concrete culture and concrete psychology.

In our case of emotions, our analysis of abstract features of macro-cultural factors leads to asking additional questions about their concrete features that foster concrete aspects of emotions. We can move from abstractions about success in school

affecting future social positions and therefore generating text anxiety to inquiring into the competitive structure of grades and future educational and occupational opportunities and the differential rewards that accrue to them, which place great pressure on test scores and augment test anxiety for those students striving for the opportunities. We can inquire into a school's specific policies, requirements, pedagogy, differential treatment of students of different classes and gender, budget, quality of physical infrastructure, bureaucracy, and decision-making process.

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Historian Peter Stearns (1989) describes concrete historical aspects of emotions. He talks about three styles of emotional control—during the American colonial era, Victorian era, and late twentieth century. These are broadly shared cultural patterns of emotional regulation that were instigated by social leaders to facilitate new macro-cultural factors. For example, as the modern capitalistic system uprooted community structures and their corresponding religious values, the family unity and individual privacy were emphasized, and they combined to push for the creation of internalized emotional standards that would not depend on outsiders' judgment or enforcement (pp. 236, 248). The twentieth century push for new emotionology was spearheaded by leaders of the Protestant middle class in the United States who were social pioneers of new macro-cultural factors. The new, internally regulated emotionology was also spearheaded by American industrial psychologists and other personnel authorities in the 1920s, who launched a new effort to limit anger expressed in the workplace and to develop appropriate mechanisms to accomplish this end ... Secretarial training also shifted toward insistence on firm emotional control. Foremen were taught that anger control was a key part of their jobs, and by the 1940s, an array of retraining programs attempted to inculcate the lesson that smooth human relations constituted an end in itself, not a random, personal uprising. To achieve the new goals of anger control, a series of strategies were devised ... They involved a ventilationist tactic when anger boiled up: Have an aggrieved worker repeat his angry complaint several times, so that the emotion would wear off and be replaced, hopefully, by an embarrassed willingness to drop the whole affair (p. 243).

Workplace anger drew attention after a period of rising labor unrest; suppression had obvious

social control functions [to subordinate workers to capitalists] ... Middle class personnel specialists like Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo were truly appalled by the amount of open anger they found among workers. They therefore amended their own original agendas to build in explicit attempts to banish anger from the workplace (pp. 248–249).

These macro-cultural requirements, features, and functions of emotional regulation were then incorporated into family emotionology by the 1940s. Parents were urged by specialists and authors to employ ventilationist techniques with their children. "Let children talk it out, label it, but in the process defuse the whole emotion. Gone was the idea that anger could be disciplined but channeled" (p. 243).

Stearns' description reveals that emotional regulation was a social issue; it was publicly discussed and organized by social leaders of macro-cultural factors to facilitate those factors. It was not a spontaneous, personal expression; it did not originate in the interpersonal domain of the family. It occurred at a particular historical time for historical reasons. It was a necessary subjectivity for particular cultural-historical activities.

By the 1930s and 1940s, alterations in business climate that stressed bureaucratic or sales skills over entrepreneurship placed a growing premium on the kind of emotional control that could assure smooth personal relationships outside (as well, at least ideally, within) the home (p. 251).

This research on the style of emotional regulation demonstrates that, as Vygotsky and Luria said, the form and mechanisms of psychological phenomena are historically shaped as much as the content is.

### CONCRETE CULTURAL FEATURES OF EMOTIONS: MOTHER LOVE

The cultural-historical organization of the content of maternal love is a fascinating example of macro-cultural psychology. Lewis (1989, p. 210) explains that the idealization of mother's love (in the United States) was brewed in the same cauldron as Revolutionary political thought ... The Revolutionary brew was seasoned by a variety of ingredients—republicanism, liberalism, evangelical Protestantism, and sensationalist psychology, and just as each of these strands of thought would contribute to political thought, so too would they affect the conceptualization of family roles. The late-eighteenth century revolt against patriarchy

dethroned both fathers and kings; and it said that citizens in a society, like members of a family, should be bound together by affection rather than duty. The Revolution . . . made of affection a political virtue. This is a pregnant statement because it shows how psychology is brewed in cultural-historical-political factors and also supports them, thus being a political phenomenon. Affection was additionally political in that it tended to appreciate women's gender role, which emphasized affection. Valuing a psychological element that is organized by a social role validates the social role.

The cultural-historical organization of mother's love was a cultural prop for the entire social structure that included separate gender spheres. "The 19<sup>th</sup> century's description of woman's nature and role derived from seemingly incontrovertible assumptions about the nature of a mother's love" (Lewis, 1989, p. 209). Psychology is thus a cultural linchpin. Psychology is a subjective cultural factor or the subjective side of cultural factors.

Plant (2010) deepens this description of the cultural-historical nature of maternal love. She explains how it dramatically changed—not simply that it changed—over the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. She demonstrates that this psychological change was necessary to the development of capitalism and how capitalism worked to adapt maternal love to its changing practices. Her book traces the repudiation of (nineteenth century, Victorian) moral motherhood and the rise of a new maternal ideal that both reflected and facilitated White, middle-class women's gradual incorporation into the political and economic order as individuals rather than as wives and mothers. It argues that the interwar period witnessed the emergence of an antimaternalist critique that ultimately helped to discredit four long-standing precepts that had defined late Victorian motherhood: the belief that the mother/homemaker role was a full-time, life-long role, incompatible with the demands of wage earning; the notion that motherhood was not simply a private, familial role, but also the foundation of female citizenship; the conviction that mothers should bind their children (especially their boys) to the home with "silver cords" of love to ensure their proper moral development; and the assumption that motherhood involved immense physical suffering and self-sacrifice. Of course, such ideas have not entirely lost currency in American culture today. In the early twentieth century, however, most middle-class Americans shared a conception of motherhood

based on these principles; by the 1960s, most did not. Instead, motherhood came to be conceived as a deeply fulfilling but fundamentally private experience and a single (thought central) component of a more multifaceted self (pp. 2–3).

Plant's statement reveals how the psychology of motherhood is vital to a social order of family relations, work, and politics. Traditional motherhood, and maternal love, anchored an entire social order in Victorian times. Traditional psychology of motherhood and maternal love ensconced women in the home, away from work and politics, and it tied their children to them and to restrictive moral codes. This is a crucial point about the cultural function of psychology. The sentiment that maternal love is the purest and deepest sacrifice known to mankind is not a simple, natural, circumscribed emotion; it is fraught with political origins and repercussions. It implies that women have no other social function beyond raising children. Women are to sacrifice themselves for the good of the country to rear model citizens. The notion that maternal love was sentimental also objectified psychologically women's exclusion from the masculine realm of calculated rationality. The notion that mothers were pure and were the watchdogs of moral purity similarly reflected and reinforced their exclusion from the materialistic, political, commercial "impure," "immoral" world. Every psychological element of Victorian maternal love compounded middle class women's domestic role and their exclusion from public positions of political and economic power.

Culture is objectified in psychological attributes just as psychology is objectified in cultural artifacts, concepts, and institutions. Culture is objectified in psychological attributes because these attributes are designed to accomplish cultural purposes.

Because psychology is a cultural linchpin, a new modern form of motherhood and maternal love was necessary for anchoring and facilitating a new social order in which women worked and purchased products outside the home, and in which children had to be free to cope with demands of free market jobs, consumerism, and politics. Traditional psychology of motherhood had to be undone if mothers and children were to participate in the burgeoning consumer capitalism. Attacking or defending it is a political act that has political repercussions (*see* Susman, 1979, for similar cultural changes in personality).

Traditional motherhood-maternal love was undone by the social demands of consumer

capitalism and also by its spokespeople, who explicitly attacked it and urged more consumer capitalist-friendly forms. “The demystification of mother love should be seen as part of a much broader transformation of gender ideology and sexual relations” (p. 8). “The sheer pervasiveness of consumer culture, its increasingly blatant commercialization . . . led many to view . . . sentimentalism in increasingly alarmist terms” (p. 43). Sentimentalism was an obstacle to the expansion of the materialistic, commercialized free market.

The most severe critics of American motherhood were not conservatives but liberals (p. 5). “Initially, the attacks on American motherhood emanated primarily from psychological professionals and the cultural avant-garde. By the 1940s, however, anti-maternalism had gone mainstream” (p. 8). In addition, the Office of War Information began urging cultural producers (of media) to support its Woman power campaign which sought to draw women into the workforce (p. 41). As a result of all this, “The New Woman who demanded a career, the vote, and even sexual satisfaction directly challenged accepted notions of female nature” (p. 9).

Between World War I and World War II, momism was attacked as emasculating the nation, rather than upholding its moral fiber. Sentimental maternal love was denounced as unnatural and unhealthy for mother and child. Motherhood was shifted to a private relationship between individuals rather than a cultural duty. This accorded with the expansion of the individualistic free market and consumerism. The doting mother was chastised as interfering with the individual development of children. Maternal attachment was rejected as narcissistic; it should be controlled and displaced by a love that encouraged children’s independence and emotional separation (p. 88). New emotional norms (feeling rules) were promulgated. “Wherever young couples looked—in popular magazines, Hollywood films, or professional literature—they found their desires for autonomy validated and their ambivalence and antagonism toward their parents, especially their mothers, legitimized” (p. 109). Maternal morality was condemned as restrictive of individual’s freedom—as it was on the economic marketplace. “Experts in the 1940s and 1950s repeatedly condemned ‘self-sacrificing’ mothers who concentrated all of their energies on their children” (p. 115). Mothers were urged to diversify their energies and activities as they participated in the economy and politics. Abandoning maternal self-sacrifice was

tantamount to abandoning the Victorian middle class gender role! “The decline of the iconic mother [and sentimental maternal love] reflected a fundamental transformation of the gendered structure of American political culture” (p. 56). The mother was redefined as just another individual rather than possessing distinctive capabilities outside the hustle and bustle of commercial society. “No longer a sacred calling and duty, motherhood and homemaking came to be construed as an emotionally fulfilling ‘job’—one that would ultimately end” (p. 116).

A fascinating corollary to the change in women’s maternal role and psychology of love was the change in the conception and experience of childbirth. The traditional Victorian conception and experience was one of intense, irremediable pain and suffering. This incarnated and expressed (and reinforced) the feminine social psychology of frailty, sacrifice, pitiable, and in need of condolence and protection. Women were supposed to be sickly in daily life and in childbirth. A pale complexion was regarded as beautiful because it objectified this social psychology.

“By the late 1930s, a growing number of obstetricians, writers, and mothers themselves had begun to challenge this view of childbirth by depicting it as a wholly normal and natural event” (p. 119). The new dictum was that pregnancy should be as normal for a woman as wage-earning is. “The normalization of childbirth in the 1940s and 1950s helped to fuel, but was also fueled by, the broad cultural shifts this book has traced” (p. 119). This is a keen statement of the dialectical role that psychology plays in culture. “For motherhood to be truly modernized, with the emphasis shifted from self-sacrifice toward self-realization, childbirth itself had to be transformed from a dangerous and dreaded ordeal into an exhilarating experience” (p. 120). Even the term for childbirth—labor—lost its earlier meaning of travail (pain, strenuous, self-sacrificing effort) and became a nondescript term. The association of frailty with middle class status changed to sensuous experience representing middle class status for women (pp. 121–122). Culture was objectified in new psychological attributes that functioned to maintain that culture.

As childbirth was reconceptualized away from suffering and sacrifice, and in need of chivalrous male protection, it came to be regarded as enjoyable and normal for the individual mother. And most interesting is that this reconceptualization of childbirth (in line with new social roles) led to a real change in the experience of childbirth. Childbirth

was experienced as less painful than before. Of course, it was physically uncomfortable; however, as cognitive theories of emotion explain, the discomfort was modulated by the sense of individual prowess and agency and physical satisfaction of the mother—just as athletes minimize discomfort of injury as they concentrate on the importance of the game. Childbirth was no longer regarded as a complicated, sacrificial, mystical experience. This altered the sensation of childbirth. Middle-class mothers endorsed the normal easy childbirth associated with peasant women who were known to resume work immediately after birth. The French obstetrician Fernand Lamaze popularized the sense of natural childbirth.

Now the woman who suffered least—who thrived during pregnancy and experienced little if any pain during childbirth and its aftermath—came to be deemed most worthy of that increasingly coveted adjective, “feminine.”

(p. 145)

Plant’s analysis reveals that maternal love was a product of historical forces, as Vygotsky stated. Modern maternal love was fostered by modern capitalist social institutions in combination with cultural concepts that were articulated by social leaders (experts, professionals, government policies, business and community leaders). Changing opportunities and requirements of social institutions generated a sense of new maternal love among the middle class that was articulated by social leaders.

This pincer movement was exemplified in the writing of Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). “By giving voice to the inchoate frustrations of countless middle-class women, Friedan helped to spark the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 147). In other words, the institutional pressures such as economic needs for women to work and consume products generated popular inchoate frustrations and desires for a new social psychology including maternal love. Friedan articulated these and congealed them into an outlook and a cultural psychology. Women embraced this perspective and utilized it as their “mediational means” for dealing with contemporary events and relationships and their own self-concept.<sup>3</sup>

This kind of macro-cultural psychological analysis illuminates the cultural origins of psychology, and it importantly illuminates the cultural limits to psychology—for example, in consumer capitalism or Victorian domesticity. It enables us to evaluate

the liberatory potential of psychology/behavior so that we do not idealize psychology/behavior as more transcendent of society than it actually is. We apply a macro-cultural psychological critique to the psychology of people as well as to psychological doctrines that articulate this psychology.

The macro-cultural psychology of maternal love can be summarized in the following principles of macro-cultural psychology (a full list of the principles will be compiled after additional examples):

1. Abstract aspects of maternal love are rooted in macro-cultural factors such as social institutions and cultural concepts. Maternal love for children is a cultural phenomenon just as love for a country is, or just as fear of failing a school test is. Mother love involves concern for the child as a social being, with moral character, appropriate social skills for succeeding in society, even an attractive physique and health. Mother love includes a view of the child’s future and preparing her for it. All of these aspects of maternal love involve conscious thought, planning, reason. Maternal love is not natural; it is not analogous to a mother dog nuzzling her puppies, whose protective sense involves none of these concerns, mental processes, and activities.

2. The abstract aspects of maternal love are concretized by concrete aspects of macro-cultural factors. The cultural psychology of maternal love is necessary to a social system. It generates socially appropriate behavior. Psychology is an active element of society; it is not a passive byproduct. Maternal love generated social relations.

3. A social system strives to organize a culturally appropriate form of maternal love to sustain itself. Failure to organize this kind of sentiment would undermine the social system. New social opportunities and requirements for new skills generate the incentive for new psychological competencies in parents and children. In addition, spokesmen of the society explicitly attack traditional cultural forms of maternal love to discredit them and move people to adopt new cultural forms. These exhortations fall on receptive ears because people felt the need for new competencies from changing opportunities and requirements of macro-cultural factors.

4. Within the social structure that organizes the concrete psychology of maternal love, the dominant cultural factor is the political economy. The capitalist political economy is commodity production. Commoditization and commercialization were dominant influences on Western maternal love.

5. Maternal love is a complex of cultural-psychological elements that share common features while being distinct. The complex is a unity of differences, as Hegel said. Each feature contributes its distinctive character to the complex. Each feature also expresses/represents/refracts the entire complex of motherhood through its own distinctive position. For example, Victorian, middle-class childbirth possessed the distinctive psychology of suffering that crystallized other aspects—sentimental, dutiful, frail, accepting, needy—and added to them.

6. Psychology (e.g., maternal love) is formed on the macro-cultural level for macro-cultural purposes, it is objectified in macro-cultural factors, it objectifies culture, it supports culture, it is socialized by macro-cultural factors, it represents a social position within society, it represents membership within society, and it gains access to social positions.

The manner in which maternal love incarnates, and expresses macro-cultural factors may be depicted as in Figure 10.1.

7. Maternal love was not formed as a personal invention to express personal desires. On the contrary, the personal desire and quality of maternal love was fostered by macro-cultural factors.

8. Personal variations in the quality of maternal love are internal to the culturally circumscribed parameters. They must not violate these

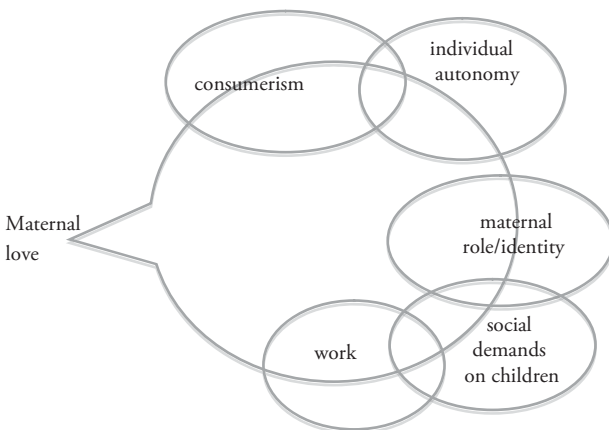
parameters or the cultural quality of maternal love will be subverted, and this would undermine the social structure that requires an appropriate maternal love to generate appropriate social behavior.

9. Psychological phenomena such as sensations of childbirth depend on cultural concepts. They are higher social mental functions, as Vygotsky said. The pain of childbirth incarnated, crystallized, and objectified the social psychology (role) of motherhood in sensory experience. The feeling state is only apprehended through a cultural-hermeneutical analysis that elucidates the social psychology (role) that it expresses.

We are concerned to demonstrate that macro-cultural psychology is a general psychological theory that explains all psychological phenomena. The example of maternal love represents how all psychological phenomena originate in macro-cultural factors, embody these factors, are objectified in them, objectify/represent them, and also sustain macro-cultural factors. To demonstrate the general applicability of macro-cultural psychology, it will be helpful to present a few additional examples of psychological phenomena.

#### ADOLESCENCE

Condon (1987, pp. 7–8) explains how changes in technology and social institutions among the Inuit Eskimos fostered adolescence and adolescent psychology. In traditional times, before Euro-Canadian



**Figure 10.1** Cultural Constitution (Determinations) of Maternal Love

contact, the transition from childhood to adulthood was rapid and unaccompanied by a prolonged period of adolescence. The harsh arctic climate and scarcity of resources forced children to quickly acquire adult skills for survival. They did so in the isolated nuclear family, which was dispersed over a wide area with little interfamilial contact. Interactions with parents far outweighed in importance interactions with peers. This complex of factors precluded an adolescent social and psychological stage in between childhood and adulthood.

In the modern period, interlocking technological and institutional changes have dramatically changed the progression of Inuit life stages. Increased economic prosperity and security allow parents to earn a living without the contribution of their children. This allows children to attend school rather than work. In addition, the population is concentrated into settlements, which enables children to form a peer culture. This peer culture adopted many of the styles portrayed on television, which became affordable with the new standard of living. These interlocking factors place children in a separate social position from their parents, which was impossible earlier. They contribute to the elaboration of a stage of life now referred to as the “teenage” years.

This description reveals how adolescence was formed by interrelated changes in institutions, artifacts, and physical demography of the population. Adolescence is a social role, a social stage of life, a social space, and a social psychology. It does not originate inside individuals from intra-organismic processes—whether natural or personal. Adolescence is a complex cultural phenomenon that includes social positions, social organization, technology, and psychology. The psychological element is part of the macro-cultural complex. It is qualitatively distinguishable from concentrated population settlements, economic prosperity, and attending school, and it can be studied as a distinctive element and promoted as such. We can reasonably talk about the psychology of adolescence and understand the subjective experience as such; it is not eliminable or reducible to the other cultural elements. In fact, we must talk about it to have a complete picture of adolescence. However, it is always an element of the macro-cultural complex on which it depends (originates), which it expresses, represents, embodies, and supports. The subjectivity of adolescence cannot exist without the objective conditions. Psychological dispositions would be impossible without the social

position, as Bourdieu emphasizes. It is the macro-cultural complex that drives adolescence, creates the space for it, fosters it, demands it, is its telos, and forms its attributes.

#### SELF

The modern Western self is a historical product that was spawned by economic changes in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These changes entailed activities that increased the reliance on personal judgment, initiative, and responsibility. Businessmen made business decisions on their own to maximize their own profit. They did not follow traditional community business practices, consult with community members, or act for the benefit of the community. An individualistic self was therefore built into the economic changes.

The culture of modern individualism emerged most prominently and pervasively in England in the century leading to the English Revolution. It began with the rise of a Puritan opposition in the 1560s . . . Its constituents were the product of profound changes in the English economy. During that century, the privatization of agricultural holdings and the emergence of a national market had stimulated widespread commercialization with incentives for specialized production, technological improvements, and a consolidation of holdings. The increasing role of individual initiative, business acumen, and responsibility for success in this new market economy generated a rising group of enterprising rural gentry, yeomen, and artisans . . . The dependence of fortune on an individual’s own actions increased the reliance on personal judgment and initiative (Block, cited in Ratner, 2006a, pp. 82–83; cf. Ratner, 2002, pp. 41–42).

This description highlights the continuity between macro-culture and psychology. The economic revolution consisted of economic privatization that entailed and necessitated individual initiative and responsibility. The individual self was an integral part of the capitalist economic revolution. Capitalist business required an individualistic self that took individual initiative and responsibility for actions. Capitalism and individualism went hand-in-hand: macro-culture and psychology. They were two sides of the same coin; they were continuous with each other, on the same plane, indispensable for each other.

Within this spiral, capitalist development was the leading element. This is what businessmen



sought to achieve. Individualistic self was the subjectivity necessary to implement capitalism. The self was functional for capitalism; it did not arise on its own, in a vacuum. Businessmen did not one day just decide to develop a new form of self. They did so to realize a socio-economic objective. Incipient capitalist development was the stimulus and *telos* of the individualistic self. It also provided the constituents of the self, its concrete qualities. (The individualistic self is not an abstraction, as cross-cultural psychologists construe it Ratner, 2012c.) Reciprocally, the individualistic self provided the subjectivity to develop capitalist businesses. For subjectivity (e.g., the self) to implement capitalist business practices, it had to adjust itself to them and take their form. The dialectical opposite of consciousness's forming capitalism is that it conformed to the needs of capitalism.

These points are true for all psychological phenomena. Psychology evolved as the behavioral mechanism for constructing and maintaining macro-cultural factors. Culture was the stimulus and *telos* of psychology, and both the general and specific properties of culture provided the constituents of psychological phenomena.

#### AGENCY

Because cultural issues underlie psychology and behavior, agency is actually social agency. One's ability to affect one's own behavior and that of others is socially determined by the institutional structure of society. This structure mediates agency and augments or restricts it. Agency is formed by and in macro-cultural factors; it is not an attribute of an individual who freely exercises it. This must be true for agency to engage in culturally appropriate behavior, which is necessary for cultural maintenance. This point is demonstrated by considering the agency of a corporate manager and an employee in a capitalist firm.

The manager has enormous power to realize her goals and to affect her employees and the community at large. This power stems from the institutional structure of the corporation and its relation to other institutions. The manager has the power to summarily terminate the employment of her employees. They, in turn, must obediently leave the premises when she orders them to. If they do not, the police will forcibly remove them. Both behaviors are mediated by the legal structure of the institution. The manager's power to terminate employees is not a personal power based on personal qualities. If she walked up to employees as an individual, not as a

manager, and told them to leave the premises at once, they would laugh at her. Her power to dismiss them is a legal, institutional power. Anyone who occupied the manager's position, or role, would have the same power by virtue of the position, not their individuality.<sup>4</sup>

The workers' response is also determined by the legal structure of the institution. Their agency is reduced by the institutional structure (in proportion to the degree to which the manager's agency is augmented by it). This is a function of the organization of the institution. It is not a function of leadership in general.

A different institutional structure would elicit different kinds of agency from both manager and workers. The manager and workers would jointly discuss management-proposed layoff plans and investment plans in a worker-owned cooperative.

The corporate manager's agency extends far beyond her employees in her firm. It affects the education of children she has never met. This effect results from the institutional structure of society: Education is funded by tax revenue, which is taken from wages, which depend on corporate hiring policies, which depend on investment strategies.

The corporate manager does not directly affect your education by interacting with you (or with tax collectors, or policy makers) personally, as one individual to another individual. Rather, she affects your education through the network of social institutions that are linked to her corporation. It is the institutional connection between wages, taxes, educational budgets, training and hiring of teachers, and building of schools that gives her business action the ability to affect your education, and the education of millions of students (*see* Ratner, 2006, p. 60).

She could never have such vast effect over so many students individually. She could never meet and influence so many students on an interpersonal basis. As an individual, she would have no power to make you attend a school with many resources and small classes, or a poor school with few resources and large classes. But she can make your school, and many schools, rich or poor, good or bad, through her wage and investment policy as corporate manager. Her agency is far greater through impersonal institutional connections than it is through personal, individual connections.

Similarly, middle class people have more powerful agency than poor people because of the intellectual and social capital they have acquired through their class position. It is naive to believe that every

individual has agency in an equivalent form without specifying its cultural organization.

Nor does agency have any intrinsic capacity to understand, resist, and transform unfulfilling conditions and behaviors. Agency can take any number of forms. Nazis and slave owners had agency. Prisoners do also. Agency does not necessarily lead any of these individuals to transcend their conditions and behavior (Ratner, 2009). Agency has cultural origins, characteristics, mechanisms, and function just as all psychology does. Agency only becomes truly fulfilled when it pointedly adopts a critical cultural perspective and works to transform the macro-cultural factors that oppress people. Agency only becomes fulfilled and critical through the social standpoint it adopts. It is not critical and fulfilling in and of itself. Agency does have the ability to reflect on behavior and conditions; however, this is an abstract ability that must be concretized by specific social analysis and action.<sup>4</sup>

#### **SENSORY PROCESSES: OLFACTION**

Chiang explains how our sense of smell is organized by cultural and political factors. Her account dovetails our earlier discussion of pain associated with childbirth. “Odors are invested with cultural values and employed by societies as a means of and model for defining and interacting with the world” (Chiang, 2008, p. 407). The perception and evaluation of odors is part of culture, expresses culture, and is a window into culture. The smells to which we are sensitive, and the sensory quality of smells, depend on the social practices they are associated with. “In deciding what smelled good and what smelled bad, people were making decisions about what activities and people they valued” (ibid.). The natural smell did not determine the value assigned to it. For example, smells associated with racial and ethnic minorities and the working class—the smells of their bodies, homes, and labor—were evaluated negatively because these activities and their actors were socially disparaged. Wealthy people surrounded themselves with different odors (e.g., perfumes) to distinguish themselves socially. Perfumed scents were perceived as pleasant because of their social association—just as bodily appearances were infused with cultural significances that determined their attractiveness. “The social and material dimensions of odors became inseparable” (ibid.). Odor became a proxy of social standing. “Zoning laws in contemporary Western cities have created ‘domains of smell’ that separate industrial

and residential areas and their respective scents” (ibid.).

Indeed, because most smells were subject to interpretation, they were incredibly malleable and could be used to advance several agendas, whether concerning the social makeup of a community or the development of its natural environment. Using their noses, Americans thus developed an alternative way of understanding the world and of wielding power, one that responded quickly to variable circumstances and emotions.  
(ibid.)

Olfaction, perception in general, and psychology in general, is a proxy for culture, represents culture, and promulgates/reinforces culture.

Interestingly, third world cities such as Bangkok have developed different categories of odors to signify different social values/distinctions. Thais developed an “olfactory dualism” in which the public stench of refuse was not bothersome, but body odors were. This reflected the personalistic nature of Thai society that required the utmost cleanliness of individuals.

A complete cultural psychology of olfaction must emphasize that individuals invest odors with cultural meanings that define odors as pleasant or unpleasant, refined or gross. This cultural content (significance) of olfaction is one source of evaluating a group of people who are associated with a particular odor. However, people are unaware of this acculturating of odor. People erroneously assume that their perception of smell is natural and that the reason they dislike an odor and the people and activities associated with it is natural, not cultural. People thus reify their psychology—their perception—as natural and use it to explain their social behavior—for example, individuals justify their abhorrence of manual labor and laborers as having a natural basis in olfaction (“Of course I loathe them, they smell so foul”).<sup>5</sup>

Macro-cultural psychology negates the reification of psychology and social categories by explaining that cultural practices, status, and values define the physical odor and the social activities and actors who partake of an odor. It is not the case that odors have naturally unpleasant qualities that define people who emit them. Naturalistic conceptions of psychology generate naturalistic, reified conceptions of social distinctions, whereas cultural conceptions of psychology generate cultural, changeable conceptions of society.

## MENTAL ILLNESS

Forms (symptoms) of mental illness are cultural phenomena (Ratner & El-Badwi, 2011). Consider the remarkable parallel between Kraepelin's description of schizophrenia (dementia praecox) and T.S. Eliot's description of modern society. Kraepelin defined schizophrenia as "a loss of inner unity of intellect, emotion, and volition"; T.S. Eliot diagnosed the modern condition as a widening rift between thought and emotion, intellect and sensation, and a general failure to achieve unity of sensibility" (Sass, 1992, p. 357). It could not be coincidental that the inner, psychological loss of unity and the outer, social rift arouse simultaneously. The "modern condition" clearly fosters psychological disintegration. The psychological and the social are continuous with one another on the same plane. Psychologists and psychiatrists try to break the unitary plane and place psychology and society in separate realms. The unity (homology) of psychological disturbance and social relations is seen in historical accounts of mental illness. (Sass, 1992, p. 362).

The feeling of personal worthlessness (i.e., the "inferiority complex") is a historical construct of recent origin. Previously, individuals felt a sense of sinfulness but not personal inadequacy. The notion of personal worthlessness only arose during the past century, evidently reflecting a rising individualistic concern over personal inadequacy that is bred by intense competition (Ratner, 1991, p. 270). This is a momentous fact for macro-cultural psychology. For it says that even a sense of personal worthlessness is a historical construct, not a personal one. If anything seems to qualify as a personal construct it is the haunting sense that one is worthless. Yet the possibility of this feeling is itself historical. Although people have always suffered misfortune and defeat, the psychological response to this, and interpretation of it, as blaming oneself and feeling worthless is historically cultivated.

Another pathological symptom, the schizophrenic divided self, only emerged in the late nineteenth century in conjunction with multiple, disjunctive social roles. Although earlier views recognized distinct functions or components of self such as soul and body, these all revolved around one self. The nineteenth century marked a new conception of different selves or personalities within one individual. This was reflected in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). This cultural-historical fragmentation is recapitulated in the symptomatology of mental disorder. As one patient said,

It is as if something is thrown in me, bursts me asunder. Why do I divide myself in different pieces? I feel that I am without poise, that my personality is melting and that my ego disappears and that I do not exist anymore. Everything pulls me apart. The skin is the only possible means of keeping the different pieces together. There is no connection between the different parts of my body.

(Sass, 1992, p. 15)

The symptoms of schizophrenia—withdrawal, highly idiosyncratic and abstract patterns of thinking, and a preoccupation with hidden meanings—bear unmistakable congruence with the broad social relations and concepts of capitalism (such as individualism, privacy, privatized meaning). Sass (pp. 369–371) explains it well:

Consider the emphasis on disengagement and self-consciousness that was fostered by the ideas of philosophers like Descartes, Locke, and Kant (as well as by patterns of socialization in daily life) . . . This turned modern human beings away from the search for an objective external order, enjoining us instead to turn inward and become aware of our own activity . . . to take charge of constructing our own representation of the world . . . Central to these tendencies is a pervasive detachment, a disengagement that demands that we stop simply living in the body or within our traditions and habits, and by making them objects for us, subject them to radical scrutiny and remaking.

Related currents, more closely associated with romanticism and its aftermath, have tended to glorify the inner self, by implying that human fulfillment lies in discovering one's own uniqueness and recognizing the central role of one's own subjectivity. (It is only with romanticism that autobiographies come to be filled with forms of self-reflection focused on the drama and idiosyncrasies of one's own inner life . . .)

If schizoids and schizophrenics, like other human beings, are subject to the influences of their social milieu, it is not hard to see how a number of their core traits (the asocial turning inward, the lack of spontaneity, the detachment from emotions, the hyperabstractness, the anxious deliberation and cognitive slippage, and the exquisitely vulnerable sense of self-esteem, for example) might be exaggerations of tendencies fostered by this civilization . . .

[This is why] what evidence there is suggests that schizophrenic illness did not even appear, at least in any significant quantity, before the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth . . .

Caratonia was not described until after 1850. Even more telling is the absence or extreme rarity of descriptions of clear instances of individual cases of schizophrenia, at least of the chronic, autistic form, in either medical books or general literature prior to the nineteenth century. The first clinical descriptions are those of Haslam and Pinel in 1809; the first literary descriptions that definitely qualify are those of the main characters in George Buccaneer's story "Lenz" and Honore de Balzac's "Louis Lambert," both written in the 1830s—and this despite the fact that easily recognizable descriptions of all other major mental diseases, including affective psychoses, can be found in ancient as well as Renaissance and eighteenth century texts. Many writers in the eighteenth century made systematic attempts to describe the known forms of mental illness, which resulted in works like Pinel's diagnostic system (1901). But despite the striking clinical picture that schizophrenia presents (at least in its acute and florid forms), one can find no account of it in these or any earlier works. (ibid., pp. 364–365). Even Eugen Bleuler, who coined the term schizophrenia in 1908, described a "specific type of alteration of thinking, feeling, and relation to the external world which appears nowhere else in this particular fashion." (ibid., p. 14)

Sass (1992, p. 10) explores "one of the great ironies of modern thought: the madness of schizophrenia—so often imagined as being antithetical to the modern malaise, even as offering a potential escape from its dilemmas of hyperconsciousness and self-control—may, in fact be an extreme manifestation of what is in essence a very similar condition."

Sass explains the methodology necessary to elucidate the congruence between macro-culture and psychological symptoms:

A comprehensive model of the social origin both of schizophrenia and of the modernist sensibility would need to go beyond this discussion of abstract ideas and mentality and to acknowledge as well how each of these conditions is intricately with the modern social order—with patterns of political and bureaucratic organization, family structures, economic practices, and technological developments of modernity. The most influential descriptions of these aspects of modernity come from the founding fathers of sociology: Karl Marx—on the alienating consequences of certain economic structures and relationships; Max Weber—on the growing rationalization, technologization, secularization,

and bureaucratization of modern life; and Emile Durkheim—on the juggernaut of industrialization and the growing reflectiveness that cause traditional values to lose their quasi-natural status. (ibid., p. 371)

### *Mental Illness and Capitalism*

Foucault describes the structural congruence between symptoms of mental illness and the alienated, exploitive character of capitalism. He debunks the idea that mental illness is a separate realm from society. In fact, the phenomenological sense of separateness and delusion that many patients experience is caused by and recapitulates the alienation, self-obfuscation, and contradictions of capitalism. It is not caused by a deficit in consciousness itself. "It is not because one is ill that one is alienated, but insofar as one is alienated that one is ill" (Foucault, 1987, p. xxvi).

It would be absurd to say that the sick man machinizes his world because he projects a schizophrenic world in which he is lost . . . In fact, when man remains alienated from what takes place in his language, when he cannot recognize any human, living signification in the productions of his activity, when economic and social determinations place constraints upon him and he is unable to feel at home in this world, he lives in a culture that makes a pathological form like schizophrenia possible . . . *Only the real conflict of the conditions of existence may serve as a structural model for the paradoxes of the schizophrenic world.*

To sum up, it might be said that the psychological dimensions of mental illness cannot, without recourse to sophistry, be regarded as autonomous . . . In fact, *it is only in history that one can discover the sole concrete apriori from which mental illness draws . . . its necessary figures.* (Foucault, 1987, pp. 83–85, my emphasis)

In sum, although individuals construct morbid symptoms, their construction is shaped by macro-cultural factors and it is made from cultural factors. Detachment, skepticism, subjectivism, and other psychological mechanisms of mental illness were objective constructs objectified on the macro-cultural level by novelists and philosophers. They were not spontaneously constructed by mental patients. This is an important tenet of macro-cultural psychology, that psychological constructs are macro-level constructs that are widely known in a population. These are the mediational means that

individuals draw on as their psychological mechanisms for dealing with stress and other social factors. Of course, not all individuals draw on the same cultural tools; however, they draw on some cultural tool for their psychological operations. This makes these operations cultural.

Macro-factors generate mental illness by exerting specific stressors and stresses on people—for example, alienation, detachment, insecurity of unemployment, and competition (which were not prevalent in other societies)—and unique models for coping with these stresses—for example, fragmentation, skepticism, detachment, subjectivism. This two-pronged cultural influence can be diagrammed as in Figure 10.2.

### Biological Explanations of Mental Illness

The fact that mental illness is generated by cultural pressures such as alienation, oppression, and social contradictions and utilizes cultural concepts such as detachment, skepticism, and subjectivism as its operating mechanism makes mental illness a cultural phenomenon that is not reducible to biochemical processes. The latter cannot determine/generate the symptoms of mental illness because they are not sensitive to the cultural stressors Sass and Foucault enumerated, nor are they capable of generating culturally specific symptoms such as detachment, depression, schizophrenia.

An operating mechanism is required in humans that is sensitive to social stress and generates cultural-psychological symptoms to it. Biological processes must be invested with cultural sensitivity before they can detect and respond to complex, symbolic cultural events. Biology must be raised to the cultural level, it must be acculturated, to process cultural events and behavior. Biology, *per se*

(e.g., the biochemistry of testosterone or a neurotransmitter), does not naturally have the ability to detect, understand, and respond to cultural events in a predefined manner (see Joseph & Ratner, 2012). The operating mechanism of mental illness is no more a simple, automatic, biological response to stress than maternal love is a simple, automatic, biological response to color, odor, and size of physical stimuli.

### Demographic Variations in Mental Illness

The fact that not everyone in a culture becomes mentally ill does not negate the fact that mental illness is cultural. Society—especially modern society—is complex and diverse, and not everyone in it is exposed to the same stressors in the same degree. The fact that some people escape it simply means that they occupy more sheltered social positions. People who are exposed to stressors intensely and extensively will suffer more illness than those exposed in lesser degrees. Detailed research has proven that mental illness is monotonically related to the number of social stressors encountered (Ratner, 1991, Chapter 6). This is why mental illness is over-represented in the lower classes where stressors are greater.

What is remarkable about the cultural content and historical specificity of forms of mental illness is that they exist among people in the depths of despair and disorientation. One might expect estranged, confused, anxious, isolated individuals to strike out with random, idiosyncratic responses that lack social significance and commonality. However, the fact is that the victims draw on cultural models (values, concepts, practices) as their mediational means for coping with adversity. Even in their misery and confusion, they display social sensitivity to, and social dependence on, macro-cultural factors to guide their psychological reactions. This is why there is social coherence to mental illness in particular historical epochs. Our epoch has schizophrenia, eating disorders, and hyperactivity that other eras lacked. Conversely, the Victorian era had thousands of cases of hysteria that disappeared today because the cultural-historical stressors, stresses, and coping mechanisms have changed.

North American and European symptoms of disturbance rest on Protestant values of individualism, self-control, rationalism, activism, and introspection. Catholic societies that value communalism, fateful acceptance of destiny, and higher authority

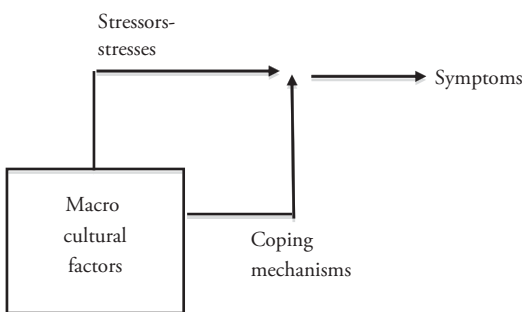


Figure 10.2 Two-Pronged Cultural Shaping of Mental Illness

manifest quite different symptomology. Whereas American patients tend toward active symptomatology with ideational distortion and elaboration, Catholic Latin patients tend toward passive symptomatology with a suspension of cognitive effort. Americans tend toward obsessional thoughts, intellectualization, guilt, and self-blame, whereas Latinos suffer more somatic complaints, sleeplessness, and obesity. Americans are more lonely and suspicious than Latinos, whereas Latinos are more dependent (Ratner, 1991, pp. 268–278; see Marsella & Yamada, 2007 for cultural variations in mental illness).

Anorexia and bulimia manifest demographic variations. These implicate cultural stressors, stresses, and coping skills in the disorders. A demographic analysis reveals that 90% of anorexics are women. In addition, these eating disorders become prevalent among non-Western women to the extent that non-Western countries adopt capitalistic social relations. Eating disorders have increased sixfold in the past 25 years in Japan with increasing industrialization, urbanization, and the fraying of traditional family forms following World War II. Additional macro-cultural factors that spurred eating disorders include middle-class gender roles for Japanese women and slim body ideals of beauty.<sup>6</sup>

Anorexia is rare on the Caribbean island of Curacao. The few cases that exist are confined to well-educated, high-income women of light skin, who have lived abroad. No cases of anorexia are found among the majority Black population. Macro-cultural psychology accounts for this demographic fact. Curacao women who become anorexic are middle class, light-skinned individuals. As such they adopt light-skinned, Western, middle class ideals of thinness. This class significance of slimness is what accounts for the “tyranny of slenderness” in modern society. Achieving the thin body that represents middle-class status (as a collective representation) is a means to gaining middle class identity. Black, lower class women have no hope of entering the middle class so they do not strive to adopt its proxies such as slim body form. Body image and eating disorders to achieve it are objective, objectified, objectifying cultural means (coping strategies) to achieve cultural objectives under particular cultural stressors and stresses (cf. Ratner, 2002, pp. 39–40, 49–50; Ratner, 2006, pp. 100–101).

### *The Normativity of Non-Normal Psychology*

Non-normative psychology is actually normative because its causes, constituents, meanings, social

consequences, and demographics are cultural. Individuals utilize cultural means to cope with cultural stressors even in non-normative manners. Individual activity does not make mental illness an individual creation. Its causes and constituents are cultural. Unhappy individuals did not spontaneously invent the thin body image as an ideal for feeling successful; they appropriated it from the macro-cultural level where it (recognizably, commonly) represented middle-class identity and success.

Jackson (1993, p. 212) explained this well:

Our subjectivities, including that aspect of them we understand as our emotions, are shaped by social and cultural processes and structures, but are not simply passively accepted by us. We actively participate in working ourselves into structures, and this, in part, explains the strength of our subjection to them. We create for ourselves a sense of what emotions are, of what being in love is. We do this by participating in sets of meanings constructed, interpreted, propagated, and deployed throughout our culture, through learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self. We make sense of feelings and relationships in terms of love because a set of discourses around love pre-exists us as individuals and through these we have learnt what love means.

### *Mainstream Psychology versus Macro-Cultural Psychology Regarding Mental Illness*

Psychologists and psychiatrists are insensitive to these social origins, mechanisms, characteristics, and functions of mental illness.

In North America, especially in the United States, the discussion of social factors in the development of psychotic disorders has changed profoundly over the last 40 years. Whereas macro-social factors (such as migration and poverty) were once the subject of study and discussion, they have fallen from prominence and have given way to a preoccupation with micro-social issues; the social environment has been reduced to the clinic, and research efforts have focused on how clinicians diagnose psychosis in minority populations (Jarvis, 2007, p. 291).

### *Macro-Culture and Micro-Family in Mental Illness*

A great deal of mental illness occurs in destructive family interactions (Ratner & Badwi, 2011). However, these are precipitated by broader macro-stresses that Sass and Foucault enumerated. Indeed, this point is the crux of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological

model, which situates micro-level interactions within the sphere of macro-processes. Bronfenbrenner terms microlevel interactions as *proximal processes*, which are reflections of distal macro-cultural processes, as moonlight reflects sunlight. Shared, unifying macro-cultural factors explain why so many families in a country are so dysfunctional as to produce mental illness in their children. A purely family analysis cannot explain varying prevalence and forms of dysfunction in different societies.

Micro, proximal processes cannot be the primary source of mental illness that is historically specific and variable. Individual, separate interactions cannot explain the cultural coherence and similarity that it manifests. The millions of families in one country that generate particular forms of mental illness in their children do not coordinate with each other to produce similar stresses and coping mechanisms. The similarity in symptoms across millions of separate patients must be explained by broader cultural similarities at the macro-level. These radiate down to micro-level family interactions and unify them with shared characteristics.

Mental illness testifies to an important principle of macro-cultural psychology: seemingly personal, marginal psychological reactions are actually macro-level phenomena.

### ***Interpersonal Behavior and Macro-Cultural Psychology***

The case of mental illness demonstrates that individual, interpersonal psychological phenomena are uncannily shaped by macro-cultural factors and reflect their politics, despite the fact that the phenomena are not directly controlled by social leaders. Other personal acts are equally socially distributed *psychographics*. A striking example is the fact that Australia's homicide rate is around 1 per 100,000 population, whereas the U.S. homicide rate is around 6 per 100,000, or six times higher. Clearly, central macro-cultural factors are at work in shaping individual decisions to kill each other (and themselves in suicides).

Similarly, the quality of children's interpersonal relationships (with peers and family members) varies enormously among countries with different macro-cultural factors. A compilation of measures by the United Nations, which includes single-parent households, number of times the family eats together per week, talks together, and how kind and helpful peers are to children among OECD countries, found Italy to have the best interpersonal

relations (score of 115), whereas the United States and United Kingdom had the lowest score of 80. Only 40% of German 15-year-olds spend time chatting with their parents several times a week, whereas 90% of Hungarian children do so. Only 60% of Finnish 15-year-olds eat the main meal with their parents several times a week, in contrast to 93% of Italians. Other personal eating habits are equally structured by society. Whereas 80% of Portuguese 11- to 15-year-olds eat breakfast every school day, only 46% of American children do. Where 25% of American 13- to 15-year-olds report being overweight, only 6% of Polish peers do. (UNICEF, *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, Innocenti Report Card 7, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2007). Demographic distribution of personal behaviors demonstrates that they are shaped by cultural factors; they are not purely personal choices. Purely personal choices and idiosyncratic behavior would not manifest systematic group differences.

Obviously, the majority of German children did not spontaneously (i.e., personally) decide to forego chatting with their parents. Nor did this new norm arise through sequences of interpersonal dialogues among children across Germany. Broad macro-factors, which German children do not control or even understand, structured their lives, aspirations, values, expectations, and practices impersonally, in ways that interfered with family chatting. (This kind of impersonal structuring-socializing of individual psychology by macro-cultural factors is an important topic in macro-cultural psychology.)

An important macro-cultural factor in this regard is consumerism. Consumer capitalism presses children—through numerous macro-cultural pressures, stimuli, inducements, affordances, and models—to separate from restrictive parental authority to be “free” to accept consumer pressures for impulsive shopping. (We saw that this pressure was important in loosening the bonds of maternal love for one's children.) Tight-knit families, including those that eat and chat together, keep the child within the sphere of parental authority and resist the pull of consumerism. Such behaviors on a wide social scale are only possible where consumer capitalism is weak.

Cook documents the commodification of childhood by consumer capitalism and how it pressures and requires freedom from family restraints. It is not useful to think of children—or persons generally—along the lines posed by neoclassical economic

thought, as initially independent, encapsulated beings who confront an equally identifiable “market sphere” and who thereby make discrete choices within it or become merely socialized into it. Consumption has become a necessary and indispensable context—although not sufficient in itself—in which the person’s self develops because commerce produces most of the material world with which a child comes into contact . . . It is around consumption and display—in the interaction with the material world—that personhood and agency tend to crystallize (Cook, 2004, p. 145). Cook explains that psychology is built into macro-cultural factors—for example, individualism is built into the free market—and that psychology crystallizes around the characteristics of macro-cultural factors—for example, personhood embodies the material of consumer capitalism.

### ***Macro-Cultural Psychology Is a Unitary, Consistent, Parsimonious, Comprehensive Psychological Theory***

The foregoing discussion of macro-cultural psychology can be summarized in the following theoretical principles (which are more complete than the selected principles I listed in summarizing Plant’s historical analysis of maternal love).

#### **PRINCIPLES OF MACRO-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

1. Macro-culture and psychology are mutually constitutive and interdependent—two forms of the same distinctive human order. Psychology energizes cultural factors and it dialectically acquires their cultural features.

2. Within this spiral of culture and psychology, macro-cultural factors are dominant. They are the impetus of psychological formation, and they organize the form and content of psychological phenomena.

3. Psychological phenomena are formed in macro-cultural practices on the macro-cultural level to serve macro-cultural purposes.

4. Psychological phenomena are public, objective, objectified cultural phenomena; collective representations.

5. Public, objective, objectified psychological phenomena serve as templates/scripts for

- a. acquiring psychology
- b. expressing psychology.

Psychological phenomena are thus objectified, objective, objectifying cultural phenomena.

6. Psychological phenomena embody features of macro-cultural factors as their constituent operating mechanisms and content. This is true for abstract and concrete features of psychological phenomena. Abstract features of psychology embody abstract features of macro-cultural factors; concrete features of psychology embody concrete features of culture. Macro-cultural psychology parsimoniously explains abstract and concrete aspects of psychology.

7. Macro-cultural factors are political, formed through political struggle, and impart their politics to psychological phenomena.

8. Psychological phenomena recapitulate the politics of macro-cultural factors in the subjectivity of individuals. Psychological phenomena animate politically appropriate behavior. Psychological phenomena are objectives of political struggle. Groups struggle over concepts of self, masculinity, childhood, motherhood, sexual freedom, rote memory in school, and conceptions of mental illness.

9. Psychological phenomena are cultural means (cultural capital) for achieving cultural objectives/success by individuals.

10. Psychology is a cultural state of being, a cultural state of mind, a cultural identity, and membership. Psychology objectifies culture—for example, sentimental maternal love objectifies Victorian culture and women’s domestic position, whereas modern maternal love objectifies women’s roles as workers and consumers in the free market; just as the recent sexual revolution among Chinese urban young women objectifies their changing work and family roles.

11. The fact that psychology is cultural and political—that is, reflects the cultural-political features of macro-cultural factors—does not mean that people’s psychology understands the cultural politics of macro-cultural factors. Typically, the cultural politics of macro-cultural factors mystifies these factors—to prevent people from critically evaluating and transforming them—and this mystification is recapitulated in psychological phenomena. The individualistic self is a primary example of a fictitious ideology that is recapitulated in fictitious self-understanding of people as independent of society, masters of their own action, and governed by individual mechanisms such as genes. Reincarnation is another fictitious cultural concept that mystifies people about the real origins of their personality and social position.



People's cultural psychology may be a stunted, mystified psychology that I call the psychology of oppression. It can only be comprehended as such by adopting an external, critical perspective on the social origins, characteristics, and function of psychological phenomena (Ratner, 2011b).

12. Psychological phenomena are macro-cultural factors. They represent and solidify cultural factors through animating culturally appropriate behavior. Historian Warren Susman (1979, pp. 212–213) shows how personality is a macro-cultural factor in the sense that it characterizes and represents a society: "One of the things that makes the modern world 'modern' is the development of consciousness of self . . . Consciousness itself became a key word in the 17<sup>th</sup> century . . . It is striking to see the interest as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century in what was called 'character.'" These psychological phenomena were clearly cultural features.

Psychological phenomena solidify cultural coherence through culturally structured, shared subjectivity. Psychology binds individuals to culture through imparting cultural features of consciousness/subjectivity.

13. Psychology is embodied in macro-cultural factors, is transmitted, and is socialized by them. As Oyserman and Lee (2008, p. 331) put it, "one of the ways in which meaning is organized in context is through the meaning provided by salient and accessible culture and that once a particular cultural focus is cued, it is likely to carry with it relevant goals, motives, actions, ways of interpreting information, and processing strategies."

Clothing, for example, socializes sexuality. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007, studied the ways that artifacts such as clothing *sexualize* girls—i.e., make them sexual and structure their sexuality in particular forms (sexualization is a form of making subjectivity, or subjectification in Foucault's term). Goodin, et al. (2011) looked at sexualizing clothing available to preteen girls as a possible socializing influence that may contribute to the development of self-objectification in preteen girls. Sexualizing clothing was defined as clothing that revealed or emphasized a sexualized body part, had characteristics associated with sexiness, and/or had sexually suggestive writing. E.g. Abercrombie thong underwear in children's sizes with "wink wink" and "eye candy" printed

across the front. Or Abercrombie's "cute butt sweatpants" and "skinny" jeans that are "fitted with a little stretch for a sexy look to give you the perfect butt"

"We propose that sexualizing girls' clothing is an important socializing agent in which the social role of the objectified female is perhaps innocuously presented, 'put onto' girls, associated with popularity and 'coolness,' and then eventually endorsed by the girls themselves. Clothing can function as both a contributor to and a sign of the process by which some girls begin to think and evaluate themselves according to a narrow, sexualized model of feminine attractiveness" (ibid, p. 10). Evidence for this is the fact that Girls as young as age six are critical of their bodies, expressing body dissatisfaction and interest in dieting.

Girls define themselves in terms of the macro cultural factor, they do not define the macro cultural factor in terms of their "own" idiosyncratic desires. This conforms to Vygotsky's and Leontiev's conception that individual psychology depends upon social psychology.

An additional example of macro cultural factors containing, expressing, and socializing cultural psychological meanings is reported by (Shepherd, 2011, p. 129).

participants who had been shown a video of black Americans in a park had less negative associations with blacks than did participants who had been shown a video of black Americans in a gang-related context. They had similar results when blacks were shown in a sequence with a church as opposed to in a sequence with a city street. The traditional interpretation of these results is that contextual cues activate automatic stereotypes, which are assumed to be stable and unrelated to context. In this version, local context perturbs stable associations; the representation of the target is the same but the context within which the target is located varies, thus shaping activation. We could also read these results as evidence of how the types of associations (both the content and the emotional valence, positive or negative) individuals have with a member of a particular social group depend on the particular context or set of cues and there is no baseline representation of a social group apart from the context. [Thus, no fixed meaning that people have to minorities, e.g.] The meaning of a social group member is given through interaction with the context. Concepts of place (park, church, and street) carry sets of relevant

associations that alter the cognitive associations of the perceiver.

14. These aspects of cultural psychology comprise a general psychological theory—macro-cultural psychology—that explains all psychological phenomena.

15. Macro-cultural psychology is an ideal type of the main parameters of human psychology. Individual and group variations/transformations issue from this framework.

16. The discipline of psychology is a macro-cultural factor that represents and solidifies cultural factors. Vygotsky (1933/1994) spoke of bourgeois psychology, the psychology of fascism, and Soviet psychology to express this.

17. Although approaches to psychology reflect and reinforce macro-cultural factors, they do not necessarily understand these factors or psychological phenomena (just as psychological phenomena do not necessarily understand their own cultural characteristics, origins, and function—as stated in 11 above). Approaches to psychology are often unscientific and ideological and overlook and obscure important aspects of human psychology. Not all approaches are equally scientific and penetrating. Epistemological relativism and pluralism are false concepts.

For example, Vygotsky regarded bourgeois academic psychology as bogged down in a profound crisis: “the profound crisis which has afflicted bourgeois psychology during the past few decades . . . a process of degeneration and decay which had previously been woven into [its] general fabric” (Vygotsky, 1994a, p. 327). In other words, bourgeois academic psychology reflects and reinforces bourgeois society (as the name implies), yet it fails to scientifically understand bourgeois society and the psychology of its people. Psychology is in crisis precisely because it reflects and reinforces the mystifications of capitalism! One of the primary mystifications of capitalism is to deny its coercive affect on human behavior and to pretend that individuals are free to construct their own behavior. This prevents recognizing the social elements of capitalism that organize behavior/psychology. Recapitulating this mystification prevents bourgeois psychology from comprehending the psychology of people, which is, in fact, organized by capitalist social relations. (Bourgeois psychology reinforces capitalism by insulating it from criticism as a social system and attributing problems to individual deficiencies.)

Academic psychology can only become scientific if it ceases to reflect and reinforce capitalism and instead adopts an external critical perspective on capitalism—an anti-capitalist perspective. Then it can free itself of the mystifications inherent in bourgeois society and it can recognize the cultural character of psychological phenomena.

Vygotsky goes so far as to identify the errors of bourgeois (academic) psychology as the basis of fascist (academic) psychology that took root in Nazi Germany:

It would be naïve to think that these absurd structures [of fascist Psychology] are in no way connected with the general crisis occurring in bourgeois psychology and that bourgeois psychology is in no way responsible for these constructions . . . Essentially, Jaensch’s system [of Nazi psychology] is built on the same methodological foundations as all the rest of bourgeois psychology. It represents an integration of idealism and mechanism . . . In the majority of psychological schools these elements, unknown to the authors themselves, are intertwined with one another . . .

Sociology is completely left out of Jaensch’s system. It is only race and blood which immediately determine the structure of personality and through it politics as well. Here too, all that Jaensch has done is to push to the extreme and treat with cynical bluntness that which is already part of the very foundation of bourgeois scientific research.

(*ibid.*, p. 334)

Vygotsky counterpoised Soviet psychology to bourgeois psychology and fascist psychology in terms of their scientific merit and the political interests they represent. The latter two approaches are scientifically dubious and politically conservative. In contrast, Vygotsky argues that Soviet Marxist psychology is scientifically superior to the other two approaches, and it also represents the political struggle for humanity against the forces of reaction that are bolstered by bourgeois and fascist psychology (*ibid.*, p. 335). Social scientific adequacy depends on adopting a progressive political standpoint. Similarly, social scientific inadequacy and political conservatism go hand-in-hand. In this way, social science is thoroughly political.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE THEORETICAL CHARACTER OF MACRO-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Macro-cultural psychology is not simply an acknowledgement of cultural influences on

psychology. It explains the nature of psychological phenomena, their origins, constituents, mechanisms, characteristics, loci, and function. Macro-cultural psychology explains psychology as a cultural phenomenon. Macro-cultural psychology explains why and how psychology is cultural. Macro-cultural psychology develops methodology for evaluating and refining this perspective—that is, for identifying the extent to which macro-cultural factors are the origins, constituents, mechanisms, characteristics, loci, and function of psychology.

Macro-cultural psychology takes macro-level forms and processes of psychological phenomena as the basis (i.e., prototype) of human psychology. Rather than these cultural forms and processes being extensions of simpler, natural, universal, or personal ones, the cultural forms are the basic, primary, original prototypes that are the basis of intrapersonal and interpersonal psychological expressions.

For example, the prototype of human emotions is macro-level emotions such as love for one's country, anger at injustice, love of art, national shame, dejection about political trends, resentment of a rival country's technical superiority, fear of economic depression, and admiration for a form of government. These emotions, informed by consciousness of abstract phenomena, are the basis of our personal love for our spouses, children, and pets. They are also the basis of our fear of bears in the woods.

Macro-cultural psychology is a Copernican shift in our understanding of psychology. Whereas mainstream psychology explains culture in terms of the individual adults in terms of childhood experiences, the human in terms of animal processes, the large in terms of the small, the complex in terms of the simple, and the extrinsic (culture) in terms of the internal (mind, biology), macro-cultural psychology explains the small, the simple, the individual, the child, and the internal in terms of stimulation and organization by the large, the complex, the adult, and the extrinsic (culture).

Macro-cultural psychology utilizes its tenets as the foundation of a comprehensive, coherent, general psychological theory that explains, describes, and predicts all psychological phenomena. In addition, macro-cultural psychology incorporates biological and personal processes into its rubric in a principled, logically consistent fashion. It does not simply add macro-cultural principles to independent biological and personal processes. This kind of algorithmic addition of factors or variables is characteristic of interactionist models. Macro-cultural

psychology is not an interactionist model. It is a unified, integrated model in which all elements are modified so as to be congruent with macro-cultural factors. Macro-cultural factors are the dominant element because they are the cornerstones of society, which is the basis of our civilization, humanity, and consciousness.

Because mainstream psychology and psychiatry oppose this view and regard psychology as heavily determined by biological processes, we must explain how the latter are, in fact, subsumed within macro-cultural psychology.

#### **NATURAL, BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES AND CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA**

Being a public, socially constructed phenomenon at the macro-cultural level for cultural purposes, and possessing cultural features and mechanisms, psychology cannot logically be simultaneously governed by natural, biological processes.

Of course, psychology involves and includes natural, biological processes, such as neuronal and hormonal activity, just as it involves breathing air. However, just as breathing air is merely a precondition of psychology that plays no specific determining role in the form, content, origins, locus, mechanisms, and function of psychology, so other natural biological processes play no specific determining role either. Their role is analogous to that of breathing. Without breathing, hormones, and the brain, psychological activity would cease; however, with them it is only potentiated, not determined.

Vygotsky and Luria have cleverly argued that biology changes its role in behavior from animals to humans. It does determine animal behavior in natural environments; however, biology changes to a potentiating, energizing function with regard to human social behavior. This is only logical, and it is Darwinian, for we have seen that the fundamental principle of Darwinism is that organismic behavior is a function of environment. Culture is a radically different environment from nature; therefore, cultural behavior and its mechanisms must be radically different from natural behavioral mechanisms of animals. Vygotsky and Luria (1993, p. 170) have explained this important point as follows: “[B]ehavior becomes social and cultural not only in its contents [i.e., what we think about] but also in its mechanisms, in its means . . . A huge inventory of psychological mechanisms—skills, forms of behavior, cultural signs and devices—has evolved in the process of cultural development.”

“Higher mental functions are not simply a continuation of elementary functions and are not their mechanical combination, but a qualitatively new formation that develops according to completely special laws and is subject to completely different patterns.” “Thus, it is difficult to expect that evolution of higher mental functions would proceed parallel to the development of the brain.” (Vygotsky, 1998, pp. 34, 36)

Vygotsky and Luria make the important point that elementary natural processes operate in different ways from cultural conscious processes. This is why the former cannot govern the latter. They cannot even serve as the basis of the latter.

Elementary natural processes are actually inimical to cultural conscious processes. Elementary natural processes are automatic, mechanical, involuntary, physical processes; they possess natural properties that directly impel behavior. Natural processes, for example, operate in hummingbirds to automatically impel them to fly toward red-colored flowers; or they impel male dogs to involuntarily and mechanically mount and mate with a female dog who emits a particular scent during her fertile period. Hummingbirds and dogs do not think about what they are doing, they cannot control it, they cannot plan it or imagine it, or remember (re-live) it in specific detail; they do not appreciate the object of their behavior, as a human male appreciates his sexual partner or appreciates a beautiful sunset or painting. This is why elementary natural processes cannot determine psychology in the way that they determine behavior of birds and dogs.

It is oxymoronic to claim that intelligence is biologically determined because biologically determined behavior has the form of mechanical, automatic, simple acts such as a hummingbird flying toward a red flower. This sort of behavior is not intelligent. It is the antithesis of thoughtful, insightful intelligence. To claim that intelligence is biologically determined, even in part, is to ignore the nature of intelligence and the nature of biologically determined behavior.

Psychobiologists claim that biology determines “part of” intelligence through increasing the speed of neuronal conductivity, or the complexity of dendritic branching. However, this is unintelligible. Intelligence is a matter of profoundly understanding relationships and underlying causes and implications of things. It is a matter of insight and knowledge. It has nothing to do with the speed of conducting

neural impulses. Einstein was not a great physicist because his neurons worked quickly. That did not contribute to his knowledge and insight. And dendritic complexity is well-known to be the result of experience, not its cause. No biological reductionism of intelligence to physical processes as determinants adequately explains intelligence.

Altering and subsuming biological processes to fit within the unitary framework of macro-cultural psychological theory preserves the essentially cultural character of psychology by subordinating all other elements to it. Natural, biological processes are rendered congruent with culture and supportive of culture. They are eliminated as countervailing forces with their own determining mechanisms that could challenge and weaken (through interacting with) culture and mitigate its influence. Interactionism is pluralistic in that it postulates diverse factors/variables that each contribute a certain independent percentage of “variance” to the resultant psychology. Interactionism thus weakens the influence of each factor by countering different factors. For example, intelligence or personality are said to be X% culturally based and Y% biologically based. Whatever percentage is attributed to biology is subtracted from cultural influence. This denies the essential cultural nature of psychology. It reduces culture to just another aspect of psychology. Biological determinism or reductionism is *not* compatible with cultural organization of psychology.

Interactionism is factually wrong (cf. Ratner, 1998, 2004, 2006, 2011a), and it is also illogical because it juxtaposes incompatible mechanisms. Contemporary maternal love, for example, cannot be socially constructed amid fierce political struggle to serve cultural purposes and social positions and simultaneously be mechanically, involuntarily impelled by biochemical properties of hormones. This is obvious from the fact that Victorian women possessed the same biochemical hormones as modern women, yet their quality and experience of maternal love were qualitatively different. Hormones are certainly involved in both kinds of maternal love but only as energizing mechanisms of behavior, thoughts, feelings, and experiences whose content is culturally determined and variable. It is illogical to claim that 40% of the quality of contemporary maternal love is biological—that is, biologically determined. None of it is biologically *determined*. Biology has lost its determining function in human behavior, which is only “natural” given the unique cultural environment in which people live that calls for socially constructed, designed, voluntary,

changeable behavior. Culture determines the form, content, and conditions of behavior. In contrast, the form, content, and conditions of animal behavior are determined by natural, biochemical elements. There is no way that these two discrepant mechanisms could jointly determine the features of psychological phenomena. Elementary, natural mechanisms would *impede* the development of psychological features because natural mechanisms are antithetical to cultural-psychological mechanisms and features. The only way that biological processes can participate with cultural processes is for them to bequeath their determining properties over behavior to culture and for biological processes to recede into the background as a general potentiating substratum of behavior.

Vygotsky put it thus:

The struggle for existence and natural selection, the two driving forces of biological evolution within the animal world, lose their decisive importance as soon as we pass on to the historical development of man. New laws, which regulate the course of human history and which cover the entire process of the material and mental development of human society, now take their place.

(1994b, p. 175)

Personal expression and communication are similarly derivative functions of macro-cultural emotions. The latter are capable of explaining the former because broader, more complex phenomena can explain smaller, simpler ones. The converse is not possible. Simple, natural, physical, or personal processes do not have the scope (e.g., the great abstraction and depth of knowledge) to generate emotions that are necessary to initiate, sustain, and reform broad macro-cultural factors such as country.

### **Conclusion: Restoring the Macro-Cultural Basis and Character of Psychology**

Because psychology is part of macro-cultural factors—and is a macro-cultural factor in that it objectifies, represents, and consolidates culture—it must be comprehended by “zooming out” from the individual and family to the social system.

Unfortunately, most of psychological science has been devoted to “zooming in” on the individual and marginalizing the cultural complex of which he is a part (see Michaels, 2008, for political examples of this problem). Vygotsky (1994/1933, p. 334) decried this in the strongest terms: “Another mistake . . . which is, essentially, inherent in a greater or

lesser degree in all flaws of bourgeois psychology is the rejection of the social nature of man.”

Zinchenko (1984, p. 73) also acknowledges the overlooking of cultural psychology as a profound error: “The exclusion of the real process of the subject’s life, of the activity that relates him to objective reality, is the underlying cause of all misinterpretations of the nature of consciousness. This is the basis of both mechanistic and idealistic misunderstandings of consciousness.”

Moscovici (2001, pp. 109–110) explained this error as follows:

Society has its own structure, which is not definable in terms of the characteristics of individuals; this structure is determined by the processes of production and consumption, by rituals, symbols, institutions, and dynamics that cannot be derived from the laws of other systems. When the “social” is studied in terms of the presence of other individuals it is not really the fundamental characteristics of the system that are explored but rather one of its subsystems—the subsystem of interindividual relationships. The kind of social psychology that emerges from this approach is a “private” social psychology which does not include within its scope the distinctiveness of most of the genuine collective phenomena. It can therefore be argued that . . . social psychology has not been truly concerned either with social behavior as a product of society or with behavior in society . . . For these reasons it is ambiguous to maintain that social behavior is currently the real object of our science.

This avoidance of concrete social behavior—whether intentional or not—impedes the scientific development of psychology as a science. It also renders psychological science politically impotent as a force for social critique and change and for psychological enrichment. For the academic discipline of psychology to become scientific and to improve the social environment in ways that will enrich psychological functions and social relations, it must elucidate the macro-cultural origins, characteristics, mechanisms, and function of psychological phenomena. This is what macro-cultural psychology aims to do (Ratner, 2006, 2008, 2011a,b, 2012a,b).

### **Future Directions**

Elucidating the general features of macro-culture. Elucidating the dominant factors, marginal factors, the structural organization of macro-cultural factors in general.

Elucidating specific features of culture, such as the particular principles that govern macro-cultural factors in a particular society (e.g., how capitalist economic relations permeate educational institutions, the media, social science, religion, entertainment, and news reporting). Elucidating the politics of who controls macro-cultural factors and for what interests (e.g., is the society dominated by an aristocracy, capitalist leaders, a political party—the Communist Party?) Is the social structure egalitarian and cooperative or pyramidal; autocratic or autocratic?

Researching ways that psychological phenomena embody abstract and concrete features of macro-cultural factors.

Researching whether psychological phenomena transcend macro-cultural factors. What other kinds of factors do they reflect?

Identifying positive and negative psychological effects of the specific features of macro-cultural factors.

Identifying how positive effects be enhanced and negative effects diminished. What changes in macro-cultural factors are necessary to accomplish these changes?

What is the actual (concrete) power/agency that individuals have to control their social institutions in particular social systems?

Researching the extent to which people comprehend the macro-cultural factors that form their social relations and psychology?

Researching ways that macro-cultural factors organize psychological phenomena—which is different from interpersonal influence/socialization.

Developing methodology to answer these questions. How can we study the concrete features of macro-cultural factors and their psychological correlates? The same for abstract features.

Identifying ways that people with a given cultural psychology can critically evaluate it and the macro-cultural factors that shape it.

## Notes

1. Human artifacts eliminate any short-term natural balance humans have with nature. (Our population is not immediately dependent on what nature naturally provides us.) We must learn the limits of how much we can distress nature and still survive. We must plan and regulate our use of nature because we are not immediately consumed by our excesses as animals are. (For example, animal overpopulation quickly results in starvation to restore natural population levels.)

2. Community colleges in the United States were structured to perform this cultural function, as Brint and Karabel (1987, p. 11) document in a brilliant historical study.

The United States was, after all, a class-stratified society, and there was something potentially threatening to the established order about organizing the educational system so as to arouse high hopes, only to shatter them later. At the same time, however, the political costs of turning back the popular demand for expanded schooling were prohibitive in a nation placing so much stress on equality of opportunity. What vocationalism promised to do was to resolve this dilemma by, on the one hand, accepting the democratic pressure from below to provide access to new levels of education while, on the other hand, differentiating the curriculum to accommodate the realities of the economic division of labor. The aspirations of the masses for upward mobility through education would not, advocates of vocationalization claimed, thereby be dashed; instead, they would be rechanneled in more “realistic” directions.

3. Because Friedan articulated frustrations and desires that had been stimulated by consumer capitalism, her feminist agenda was not radical. It opposed traditional social roles for women, however, only to support consumer capitalist roles. For example, Friedan emphasized that women’s work should be paid in accordance with market commodification of labor, and she condemned volunteer work for the community. And Friedan did so implicitly without acknowledging that her feminist agenda of women’s social psychology, social relations, and social activity derived from and reinforced consumer capitalism. Consequently, “Friedan’s fans conceptualized motherhood in highly individualistic terms [of personal happiness, self-fulfillment, and involvement in work], drawing few if any connections between their maternal responsibilities and the broader social and political world” (Plant, 2009, p. 161). Friedan’s critique focused on attacking traditional psychology/behavior of women—for example, sexual passivity, limited career ambitions, and identity crises (which she called the feminine mystique)—and urging new forms of behavior/psychology without an analysis of the political economic basis of either. “Friedan portrayed [traditional] American mothers as parasitical and pathological . . . She blamed them for the mental problems of WW II servicemen, the difficulties of children suffering from severe mental illnesses like autism and schizophrenia, and ‘the homosexuality that is spreading like a murky fog over the American scene’ (p. 147). This is hardly a radical social critique.

Friedan insisted that “the feminine mystique was a mental construct and as such something women could change with equally powerful ideas. Friedan argued that women could discover the answers in themselves and not through religious, economic, political, or social change. If they had the wrong ideas, all they needed was the right ones, which her book provided” (Horowitz, 1998, p. 221).

Friedan did not articulate a critique of consumer capitalism that was necessary for women to achieve a truly more democratic, cooperative, humane social structure, social relations, and social psychology. Friedan’s work “promotes solutions (advanced education and self-realization) that tended to be feasible only for middle-class and upper-middle-class women” (Plant, 2010, p. 150). Years later, Friedan did help to found the National Organization for Women, which worked to pass the Equal Rights Amendment; however, this was primarily a middle class movement to enable middle class women to join mainstream society (a la Condoleezza Rice and Margaret Thatcher), not to transform its structure (cf Michaels, 2008).

Horowitz keenly observes how far Friedan's middle class feminism departed from her earlier political work and class analysis. From her studies in psychology at Smith College and Berkeley under left-wingers such as Tolman, James Gibson, Koffka, Erikson, and also Lewin in Iowa, she was inspired to join labor struggles, anti-fascist, and anti-capitalist struggles during the 1930s and 1940s. Yet her feminism incorporated none of this political class analysis. "In opposition to all that she knew as a labor journalist, she apparently believed that America had become a middle-class society ... The way Friedan minimized race [and class] as a factor in women's history and in contemporary society is striking" (Horowitz, 1998, p. 211).

"In addition, she ignored the efforts of working-class and Popular Front (left-wing) feminists in labor unions and in the Congress of American Women [to advance the political movement for the feminist agenda]" (Horowitz, 1998, p. 213). She made it seem that feminism was made by and for middle class women, and could be independent of broader political struggles for change in the class structure.

Friedan even denied the political origins of her own social consciousness. She claimed that she came to political consciousness out of a disillusionment with her life as a suburban housewife (Horowitz, 1998, pp. 2, 237 ff.). Horowitz's external analysis of her life and work confirms an important point that self-presentation in narratives cannot be accepted at face value in social scientific research (Ratner, 2002, Chapter 4).

4. With agency being socially constituted, it cannot necessarily be held responsible for its actions. Under conditions of oppression, alienation, and mystification, where people's agency is organized by social forces beyond their control and awareness, people cannot be held responsible for their behavior. (This is recognized in American law.) Responsibility presupposes awareness of, and control over, the factors that organize behavior. To hold people responsible for their behavior under conditions of oppression, alienation, and mystification is to insidiously divorce behavior from social conditions. It implies that people can control their behavior regardless of conditions. Holding people responsible for behavior, they do not comprehend or control is also to blame the victim of external forces. To blame people for being poor when they are deprived of work by corporate investment decisions is clearly to blame the victim. To blame consumers for borrowing credit and consuming many products is also to blame the victim. And to blame students for maintaining segregated social groups when they are recapitulating broad cultural segregation in housing, schooling, and employment is to blame the victim.

Responsibility for behavior is cultural just as agency and all psychology are. Responsibility must be achieved just as genuine agency and fulfilling psychology must be achieved through creating cultural conditions that enable them. They are not abstract, natural universals independent of concrete culture. People will only be responsible for their behavior when they live in genuinely democratic institutions which they can control. This is the same condition that enables genuine agency and fulfilling psychology.

5. This kind of reification is the essence of religion as well. People invent a concept of god(s) but they pretend that it was god who invented them and guides their behavior.

6. Most women do not achieve the slender ideal. This generates enormous anxiety and self-deprecation. By 8 years of age, 40% of American girls wish to be thinner than they are, and this percentage doubles in only 3 years, as 79% of 11-year-old girls wish to be thinner than they are. This testifies to the power that social ideals have over individual psychology, and the difficulty of renouncing them. Most women who are dissatisfied with their weight are

objectively of normal weight (75% of the women) or even underweight (30% of the women) according to health charts.

The reason for the failure to achieve slimness is that the ideal is contradicted by another aspect of consumer capitalism, the constant stimulating of consumption to increase sales and profit. One form this takes is the stimulating of constant food consumption, especially profitable, processed, addictive food such as junk food. This culminates in obesity among one-third of the American population. The clash of competing cultural pressures and collective representations generates intra-psychic struggle over which one to pursue.

Achieving the cultural ideal of slimness requires controlling oneself to abstain from the opposite culture pressure to constantly consume. This is why anorexics report intense struggles to control and renounce their urge to eat. Contradictory cultural pressures generate the need to control and renounce one in favor of the other. External pressures make control and renunciation central issues in anorexia. This is often portrayed as a struggle between good and evil, mind and body, purity and contamination. However, these meta-physical notions mask the cultural clash of slenderness versus consumption that is rooted in consumer capitalism.

7. Vygotsky says that capitalism not only impedes the development of scientific psychology, it also impedes the development of fulfilling psychological phenomena of people: "the source of the degradation of the personality [lies] in the capitalist form of manufacturing" (Vygotsky, 1994b, p. 180). Vygotsky links psychological fulfillment to social change in his 1930 essay, "The Socialist Alteration [Transformation] of Man." He says the contradictions of capitalist political economy are "being resolved by the socialist revolution ... Alongside this process, a change in the human personality and an alteration of man himself must inevitably take place" (Vygotsky, 1994b, p. 181).

Here, we see that Vygotsky explains personal degradation and degeneration of academic psychology in the same terms. Capitalism is the root of both, and socialism is necessary for scientific psychology and for fulfilling psychological phenomena. Psychological fulfillment and psychological science both depend upon critique and transformation of society. The converse is also true as scientific psychology and psychological change contribute to social critique and transformation. Psychological fulfillment, psychological science, and progressive political change are interdependent and inseparable.

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PART 4

Semiosis in Culture and  
Psychology

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# Social Life of the Sign: Sense-Making in Society

Sergio Salvatore

## Abstract

This work intends to provide a conceptualization of the power of signs to produce the sense of reality of the world to which they refer. To this end, a dynamic field model of sense-making is proposed that is based on the central idea of the *bivalence of meaning*—the meaning of X entails what is being interpreted by the meaning-maker (the *in presentia meaning*) but also the whole gestalt working as conditional context that sets the stage for the interpretability of the sign (the *in absentia meaning*). In metaphorical terms, the latter can be considered the “semiotic silicone”—as it allows the closure of the Gestalt grounding any interpretation. This model is meant to deepen the understanding of how sense-making works as well as establish the link between semiosis and social life.

**Keywords:** sense-making, sign, semiotic field theory, presentification

“I am a European!” This statement—often made—seems clear, but it is not. Identifying with a country—or even a conglomerate of countries—patriotic identity is a member of an infinite set of signs that are assumed to refer to objects, characteristics, or facts of the world (the race, the community, love, the group, childhood, human nature, the Holy Ghost, Homer, the unconscious, the market, the culture, etc.). As one can see, they refer to objects that are very different from each other. Some of these objects concern interpersonal relationships. A couple decides to separate because their love is over. Other signs (e.g., the market, the community) play a role in socio-political and economic transactions. Others are active within scientific discourse (the unconscious is a classical example of this; see Moscovici, 1961/2008). Some of these signs are confined to specific discourses and social domains (only Christians consider the Holy Ghost an existing entity). In other cases, they have a more generalized diffusion. For example, the idea of childhood as a fact of nature

is a rather recent invention (Ariès, 1960/1962); nevertheless, it is a taken-for-granted assumption orienting scientific and political discourse as well as daily life.

In this work I will refer to these kinds of signs to address a general issue, which goes beyond them and is a very basic aspect of sense-making: the *psychological valence of signs*—that is, the fact that we experience them as referring to entities that have a life of their own in the world.

I have chosen to focus the analysis on signs like “Europe”, market, couple, and the like, because of their semiotic status. As will be made clear below, every person, whether it be a student of sense-making or a soldier, a broker, or a wife, is aware that signs of this kind do not refer to *things*—namely, entities endowed with their own substance corresponding to a specific aggregate of energy-matter extended over a specific space-temporal domain (like “stone”, “mountain”, “water”, as well as “electromagnetism”, etc.). At the same time, every person conceives of and uses them as if they were *existing entities/facts*

and as such able to have an effect on experience and therefore to affect one's own and others' way of thinking and acting. Needless to say, people vary in where they put the distinction between signs referring to things and signs concerning not-things-but-however-existing-entities/facts (see below for a definition). Yet everyone in one way or another makes this distinction.

I am interested in this distinction for two reasons. First, because the latter kind of signs are the ones mostly involved in the regulation of social life and that mostly reveal the role that social life plays in sense-making. Second, because it makes it clear how the sense of referring to the world (what we indicate below with expressions like "value of existence") may not be conceived of as a taken-for-granted quality of the sign, as such grounding the sense-making. On the contrary, the fact that some signs are conceived of as referring to existing entities/facts, yet not endowed with substantial content, highlights how the valence of existing entities/facts is not the mere mirror of the fact that these entities are pieces of the world. And once it is clear that the "value of existence" is not an inherent quality of (at least some) signs, one is led to assume it is a psychological phenomenon—actually, the very basic psychological phenomenon—that needs to be modeled.

This means bringing the problem of the *presentation*, as highlighted by Continental Psychology between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Albertazzi, Jacquette, & Poli, 2001a), back into the scientific agenda. Already at the level of perception, psychological processes are not confined to repetitively mirroring the world (as the term "represent" implies), assembling the sensorial tracks the latter leaves on the subject. Rather, every psychic act is oriented toward an object—it is a perception, a judgment, a feeling of *something* (Brentano, 1874/1995)—that is actively construed in its psychological reality. Persons do not perceive pieces of experience that are then collected and hence signified; they perceive totalities. And, given that, as Kanizsa's (1955) experiments showed, these totalities are not held in the field of experience, they have to be conceived of as the product of the constructive activity inherent to the mind—indeed, of its capability of presentification. According to Meinong (Albertazzi, Jacquette, & Poli, 2001b; Valsiner, 2009), the psychological object has a content of being that is independent of its ontological status; some

objects (mathematical entities, objects like golden mountain, square circle, or the current king of France), even if they do not exist in the world, even if they are lacking any extentional property, *subsist*. As Eco (2009) highlights, this idea comes from Avicenna, who claimed that existence is an accidental property of the object (i.e., it does not precede and ground the object; rather, it may or may not be a value of it). It is logically required by the recognition of the fact that to state that something has no being, this something must be present. Now, if one accepts that the subsistence of the object is independent from and fundamental to its very existence, one has to conclude that the psychological presentation of the object is not based on, and does not mirror, its value of empirical existence; rather, it grounds it.

Contemporary psychology has pushed aside the notion of presentation, moving the focus onto representation. In this terminological shift, there is a major conceptual change. Cognitive psychology is not interested in how the psychological value of the representation comes about—namely, the fact that it is a re-presentation. Its functionalist standpoint led to scotomization of the issue of the generative process of psychological life, fully substituted by the task of describing its way of working. My work, in this sense, is a way of coming back to the future: to the theoretical problem of how the process of presentation is performed and how it produces the value of existence of signs.

One last preliminary observation is required. Needless to say, the issue I intend to address is laden with ontological implications—I cannot but use terms such as *existence*, *life*, *world*, and the like. Nevertheless, I consider the model I propose agnostic and neutral from the point of view of ontological assumptions.

It is agnostic in the sense that it does not provide any statement concerning the ontological status of signs. I will deliberately reduce to the minimum any statement concerning the ontological status of the semiotic process on which I focus. *The reference to the existence and reality of the signs will have to be systematically understood as concerning how the sign are considered and used by the semiotic interpreters*—not in an absolute sense. This is so because my aim is to provide a model of the *process that produces the value of existence of the signs* as the basic semiotic "fuel" for sense-making. Therefore, I am not interested in whether such value of existence mirrors the world. Once one recognizes how the value of existence

varies among people, circumstances, and kind of sign, one is justified in seeing the issue of the value of existence of the signs not as an inherent datum of the world—akin the equidistance of the points of a circumference from the center—but as a phenomenon to be addressed.

It is neutral, because it is not contingent to a specific ontological frame. It is evident that if one assumes an idealist-constructivist ontology, the problem of the value of existence of signs is easy to highlight in its relevance. This is so because assuming intensional semantics and more generally the separation between language and world (as this ontological approach does) obviously raises the issue of how signs are able not only to semantically map the world but more deeply how they are able to *present* it—namely, to make it a psychological experience for the semiotic interpreter. Yet, even from the point of view of an extensional semantics and more in general from within the frame of a radical realistic ontology, which states that only what is real is signified, one would anyway have the theoretical problem of clarifying the process of how what is real in the world becomes real for the subject representing it.

In sum, I am proposing a shifting of perspective—consider the value of existence of the signs as an *explicandum* rather than an *explicans*. I am oriented to consider this shift the main meaning of my contribution. In a recent work, Eco (2009) addresses the problem of how fictional characters (e.g., Anna Karenina), even if they are recognized as such, are able to move people's emotions and actions; the paradigmatic example to which Eco refers is the Werther effect, leading many young people, on the publication of the book by Goethe, to kill themselves, so as to share the destiny of their hero (and if one considers this just an excess of romantic souls, think that a similar phenomenon happened in 1950, this time as reaction of the defeat of Brazil with Uruguay in the final of World Cup soccer championship). On the one hand, Eco raises an issue similar to the one with which I deal. On the other, however, the very fact of addressing the issue of the capacity of fictional sign to mobilize emotions shows that the theoretical problem is much broader—it does not concern only fictional signs but every kind of sign and is not only related to the emotional reaction but more basically to the value of existence that feeds the emotional reaction.

## Signs that Create Existence

### *Acts and Consequences: Based on the Signs*

Maybe most of the people of the world have somehow had a direct or indirect impact on their life as a result of acts performed by other people in accordance to what the United States means for them. And those other people, in turn, have experienced the United States in terms of the acts that other people performed in accordance with it—and so forth, in an infinite intertwining of infinite dimensionality.

Yet, people are able to recognize that “the United States” is not a *thing* (as I have defined above—namely, an entity endowed with substantial consistency). Nobody has ever been able to touch the United States or invite them to dinner. If I forget to ask for a visa, I will not be able to enter “the United States”. Yet I am aware that it is not the United States that will prevent me from entering, but someone—a frontier police officer—who will do it as if she were executing the United States' will—that is, in accordance with what “the United States” means for her/him. Moreover, the frontier police officer will be able to have a commitment to her action insofar as she regards “the United States” *as if* it was an existing entity.

Thus, signs like “the United States”, “Europe”, as well as “family”, “love”, “will”, “motivation”, “value”, “University”, “community” and so forth, are (may be) recognized as different from those signs that refer to things, but this does not mean they are considered a virtual, fantastic representation. On the contrary, they are assumed and used as referring to a real entity—namely, an entity that has existence. And as such they are able to regulate the collective action. People kill and die in the name of such signs.

In sum, signs like “the United States” play a powerful regulating role in social life, and in this sense we can say that they have value of life, not because they are believed and used as referring to substantial entities but because *they are believed and used as referring however* to existing entities by someone and for this reason are able to affect (regulate, constrain, orient or the like) that person's acts (broadly speaking).<sup>1</sup> This means that a sign like United States refers to objects that have a contingent rather than universal existence (their existence depends on the fact that someone believes in it) within a certain domain. For this reason, we define this kind of sign as a *Value-of-Existence-Producing Sign* (VEPS), to underline that

they have a meaning that is felt, thought, and used as real—namely, as endowed with the *sense of quality-of-reality* (SQR). In sum, VEPSs have SQR.

An Italian poet and singer, Fabrizio D'Andrè, wrote: "They dreamt so hard that the blood started to drip from their noses."

### ***VEPS Is Unstable***

The VEPSs play a fundamental role in social and individual life. Subjectivity as well as intersubjectivity are shaped and sustained by this kind of signs (Rommetveit, 1992). From emotions felt and communicated to working organizations, from the care of the body to sexuality, from the system of justice and security to the distribution of duties and resources, from the sense of membership of a community to deviant behavior—all these fields of experience sustaining our personal and social lives are made up of institutions, namely generalized VEPSs, taken for granted in their SQR, and as such reifying the existential concreteness of the individual, interpersonal, and social scenarios.

Interestingly enough, the VEPSs' SQR does not need to be absolute to work. In fact, in most cases it can be present in some social and subjective domains (family, school, work, groups of peers) while being silent in others, where further institutional beliefs are salient. Take, for example, a person's desire to act consistently with and serving the "collective interest" (e.g., to behave honestly, to pay taxes, to participate in local committees, to help reduce pollution, etc.). This desire depends on the fact that the person feels she is a member of the collective community and thus feels the collective good she wants to pursue as if it belonged to her (on the rule of the identification in the construction of the collective goods, *see* Olson, 1965; Putnam, 1993). And this means that the production of collective goods requires people to feel the community as an existing entity—namely, in terms of VEPS. Yet this feeling is unstable both from a spatial (intersubjective) and a temporal (intrasubjective) point of view. For example, the Italian phenomenon of organized crime (*mafia, ndrangheta, camorra*) would not be understandable if one did not take into account that in most of the territorial areas where this phenomenon is rooted (regions like Sicily, Calabria, Campania), the feeling of being part of a public collective is notably absent or may be largely marginal in contrast with the salience of the network of primary social and family linkages.

The point at stake is that the VEPSs are a product of sense-making. As such, they are not ubiquitous and invariant phenomena. As the dynamics of participating in the collective good shows, their ways of functioning, as well as the output they provide, are variable. For example, take the ways values like Nation or Obedience, which have had an existential concreteness for whole generations, can lose all their existential meaning in a relatively short time and distance.

This raises the issue of identifying the conditions in which the dynamics of sense-making are able to produce the cultural constructions generating SQR.

### **Sense-Making and Meaning**

I maintain that a processual model of sense-making is required for this issue to be addressed. Such a model is grounded on confuting two premises.

First is the idea that the meaning is the sign's correspondence with the piece of world to which it refers. An authoritative example of this extensional theory of the sign is that provided by Frege (1892/1980), who distinguished between sense and meaning. The meaning is the thing the sign denotes, whereas the sense is the way of denoting it (i.e., of referring to it). Therefore, there can be many senses for the same meaning. For example, "Moon," "the white ball in the night sky," and "the earth's only satellite" are different senses of the same meaning (in this case, the planet we call Moon).

Second is the idea that the meaning is the content that the sign expresses/conveys. This is the structuralist vision of the sign (de Saussure, 1916/1977), which holds that a sign is made up of the link between a signifier (the expression) and a signified (the content). Any perceivable element of the world (an object, an event, an image, a sound) can work as signifier; the signified is the concept, the idea that is associated to the signifier. This association is the arbitrary product of a conventional code provided by the encyclopedia shared within a given community; yet once defined, it is quite stable and powerful, so that the sign appears as the fusion of these two components. Consequently, the occurrence of the perceivable signifier instantiates the conveyed signified.

Despite various differences, these two perspectives share a basic assumption: *the extralinguistic nature of meaning*—that is, the idea that meaning is independent and precedent to the (use of the) signs. For the extensional theory the meaning is the reference, for the structuralist theory it is the idea.

In both cases, however, it is something that is separate and prior to the displaying of the signs, as such grounding and motivating this display. In the final analysis, both these general conceptions of meaning consider it as the uphill condition of sense-making: signification is possible because there is something (the meaning) that can/must be signified. One can say “Moon” (the sign) because and insofar as there is the concept (the |moon|) and/or the concrete object of the world (the moon) it stands for.

A closer look to this extralinguistic assumption leads us to realize why it is unsatisfactory. In brief, paradoxically it assumes as its premise what is actually the consequence of the phenomenon it intends to model—namely, meaning. Take the meaning of the sign “moon.” Whether it be the moon or the |moon|, however we refer to it *through and in the terms of other signs* (in this case, moon and |moon|, entailing the use of capitals and of the sign “[ ]”), we grasp neither the thing nor the idea directly. Rather, what we do is to make an association between a sign and another sign performing the function of standing for a thing and an idea. And so on *ad infinitum*. To be more precise, what I am calling “thing” and “idea” are just signs involved in a given combination with previous and following signs.

One could say that any version of the extralinguistic assumption is necessary to understand the semiopoietic capability of language. Indeed, we imply and act out this assumption every time we use signs. Even now, as I am typing on my keyboard, I have to assume that the words I am choosing are selected because they are the ones whose meaning is the closest to the one in my mind and that I want to express. Therefore, one could turn the accusation of paradoxicality back at me and state that I am grounding myself on the extralinguistic assumption to produce a text aimed at criticizing it! Nevertheless, the very central point is that the necessity of the extralinguistic assumption is not evidence coming from outside the language. Rather, it is a representation, a sign, whose value as fundamental element of the language is in turn a sign rather than an inherent characteristic of the world. In other words, the extralinguisticness concerns the content of the assumption, not its nature, which instead is still linguistic.<sup>2</sup> However, the assumption is a sign and as such plays a grounding, regulative role on sense-making. Our mental and social life is fully immersed in such a flow of signs (Mininni, Ligorio, & Traversa, 2012). We do not doubt the world outside it; yet we do not get experience of

the world in itself but of signs and combinations of signs producing such a sense of worldness—what we call SQR here. However, not doubting is a sign.

A dictionary is the emblem of this separateness and self-referentiality of language. No dictionary defines the lemmas by connecting them to the thing to which they refer. Words are defined in terms of other words—namely, in terms of a pattern of co-occurrences of signs. The dictionary shows that meaning is not connected to ostensibility; it emerges through the way signs combine with each other. Sense-making (in the sense of the process of displaying signs) is not the mobilization of meanings pre-existing somewhere and independently. Rather, *meaning is the product of sense-making* (for operative models implementing this tenet, see Andersen, 2001; Salvatore, Tebaldi, & Poti, 2009).

### ***Sense-Making As Flow of Interpretations***

Peirce’s vision of semiosis as an infinite flow of interpretation provides a useful way for understanding meaning as the product of sense-making. A sign:

“... or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.”  
(Peirce, 1897/1932, vol. 2, p. 228)

Sign (*representamen*) stands for the object through the mediation of another sign (the equivalent sign) motivated “in the mind of that person.” The equivalent sign qualifies in which “respect or capacity,” the representamen sign, represents the object (i.e., the ground of the representation). Hence, the sign performs its semiotic function (the standing for something else) through the relation with another sign (the equivalent sign, also defined *interpretant* by Peirce) that, in turn, will be interpreted by another sign. Semiosis is the infinite process of interpretation of signs by means of other signs elicited in the mind of the interpreter.

An important point at stake here is that Peirce’s view of sense-making as infinite semiosis actually leads us to realize that semiosis never goes outside itself. The object is assumed to trigger the flow of signs; nevertheless, the kind of relationship the sign has with it (what Peirce defines *ground*) is given by



the relationship the sign establishes with the following sign (i.e., the interpretant).

Namely, a sign is something, *A*, which brings something, *B*, its *interpretant* sign determined or created by it, into the same sort of correspondence with something, *C*, its *object*, as that in which itself stands to *C*.

(Peirce, 1902/1976, vol. 4, pp. 20–21)

Using Peirce's terminology, the meaning of *A* (i.e., in which respect *A* stands for the thing *C*—namely, the ground of the representamen) is not given by the relationship *A* through *C* but by the relationship between *A* and its interpretant *B*, the latter relationship being assumed equivalent to the former ( $A \leftrightarrow C = A \leftrightarrow B = B \leftrightarrow D = D \leftrightarrow E = \dots$ ). This leads to the conclusion that meaning is the way signs combine with each other—the *trajectory of the chain of signs*.<sup>3</sup> Meaning is given by the capability of semiosis to keep signs in (some kind of) correspondence with the reality they refer to by *means of their connection with other (interpretant) signs*, in turn in correspondence with reality by means of other interpretant signs, and so on, in an infinite flow. Every new interpretant somehow rewrites the relationship with the object the previous signs have shaped through their combination; at the same time, in the very fact of doing it, it keeps this relationship active, opening to further potentiality of signification.

Sense-making consists of that recursive, asymptotic stream of interpreting signs. It is permanently stretched out toward its ungraspable object (De Leo, 2008).<sup>4</sup> And this permanent tension makes it an inexhaustible generative dynamics. We can and must always interpret because no interpretation is conclusive: each triggers a further one, just as any step toward the horizon moves the horizon itself ahead. Sense-making is thus the incessant tension of filling the emptiness between language and the world. Incidentally, this idea is quite close to the psycho-analyst Wilfred Bion's statement that thought emerges through absence (Bion, 1967).

### ***The Process of Production of SQR***

I have used the term *SQR* above to denote the semiotic value of VEPS—namely, their being viewed and used as referring to existing, although not substantial, entities. This raises the question of how the *SQR* is produced.

A processual model of sense-making is required that looks at the *SQR* as the product emerging from within semiosis (Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011).

More particularly, I propose to consider *SQR as the global effect of the stability of the flow of interpretation*, where this stability consists of the only real fact that the flow reproduces itself through time. As long as signs are used—namely, as long as people communicate with each other—there will be *SQR*. In this, the *SQR* works in a way akin to light. Light is perceived and conceived of as a thing (e. g., “Give me a light, please”) or a quality (e.g., “The room is light and airy”). Yet, it is actually a process—an incessant flow of photons. This flow is not retained in the semiotic construction of any of the versions of *light*. It is the cause of the perception, not its object/content. What we perceive is the emergent, macroscopic effects produced by the invariance (stability) of the constantly changing flow of photons. In the same way, meaning is the emergent global effect of the incessant flow of signs interpreting each other.

Let us see how this happens in more detail.

### **THE SQR AS AN EMERGENT EFFECT OF THE FLOW OF SIGNS**

To understand the semiotic mechanism grounding this process of emergence, one has to take into account that any sign is interpretable only in accordance with some constraints that reduce the virtually infinite possibilities of interpretation (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2008). These constraints are further meanings that have to be taken for granted.<sup>5</sup> This means that any interpretation is possible only under a semiotic scenario working as an *unthought premise* (Christopher & Bickhard, 2007). This scenario constitutes the *condition of interpretability* of the sign. The condition of interpretability can be seen as the definition of the *version of world*—among those possible (Bruner, 1986)—within and according to which sign is interpreted.

Take the case of a man in the sea who is waving his arms and shouting “I’m drowning. Do something for me!” Moreover, suppose that there is someone on the beach seeing and hearing him. It is easy to think that this woman will interpret the man’s words as a request of help aimed at avoiding death by drowning. And so she will dive into the water to save him or will ask someone else to do it. Now, although the woman’s interpretation may be fast, it is not *immediate*. The woman has to activate some premises qualifying the semiotic scenario, making the man’s words interpretable. In this case, some of these very basic assumptions concern the fact that people don’t want to die, that it is a good thing to help people to survive, that the content of

the sentence is representative of the state of the person uttering it, and so forth. As one can see, these assumptions are very basic generalized meanings constituting the condition of interpretability of the man's words. Without them, the man's words would remain uninterpretable and he would probably end up on the seabed.

Most importantly, what enables the interpreter to perform her hermeneutic job is not the objective "truthfulness" of her unthought premises. That would entail an extralinguistic anchor point. The fact is that these assumptions ground and shape the interpretation of the signs and therefore feed into a further unfolding of the incessant semiotic flow. In other words, the premises are not an object for discussion and validation. As conditions of interpretability, they ground and regulate the interpretation, without being involved as content of it—they are *the unthought device of thinking*. Therefore, their truthfulness is not a matter of judgment and/or agreement. Rather, it is the very product of their working as the regulative ground of the interpretations. In the terms of the previous example, the woman on the beach can interpret the man's words only on the condition of assuming a version of world and on the condition of living this version as if it were the only possible world—that is, *the world*. Actually, this world is just one of the semiotic possibilities.

One could imagine other versions of worlds—for example, a world where people like to drown (version 2) or where they consider the organization of funeral rituals more important than avoiding the death of other people (version 3). Take version 2: the woman will dive, but as she reaches the man, she will probably help him to drown, having interpreted the utterance "Do something for me" in accordance with the assumption of the desirability of death. In the case of version 3, the woman will run away from the sea to start organizing the post mortem ceremony in anticipation of the man's impending drowning.

Let us come back to version 1 (the one we consider the only version, therefore not merely a version but *the real world* as it is supposed to be), and suppose the woman will try to save the man. The interpretation of the man's word associated with this reaction will keep alive the SQR of the version of the world that works as the condition of interpretability of the woman's interpretation. And because further signs will be triggered by the woman's action—for example, the man will thank her, calling her "his guardian angel"—these further

signs will go on reproducing the SQR of the version of the world grounding them. In sum, signs are interpreted through the activation of semiotic gestalts—namely, generalized premises working as the condition of interpretability.

#### THE ROLE OF SEMIOTIC GESTALT-CONSTRUCTION: REIFICATION

These semiotic gestalts are constantly kept active through the very fact that the flow of interpretations for which they are the condition of possibility unfolds through time. And therefore, as long as and insofar as the flow of interpretations goes on, the assumption of quality-of-reality is reified—namely, *SQR is experienced not as a meaning but as a fact endowed with value of life* (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2010). SQR is a very generalized and regulative meaning: it is the basic assumption that the interpreters have to make to carry out their hermeneutic work—namely, add new interpretants to the chain of interpretation. In other words, SQR is what we need to put in the foreground to be able to think. *SQR is the basic condition of interpretability of signs*.

An imaginary example inspired by Wittgenstein (1953/1958) provides an illustration of the semiotic process of reification, which is the output and at the same time the grounding of sense-making. Imagine a man with a box that cannot be opened. And imagine that this man claims that inside the box there are some little balls. This claim triggers a dialogue about the balls—their properties, the implication of their ownership, and so forth. Imagine that this dialogue goes on for a long time, from one person to another, until nobody can remember its starting point. Now, insofar as the language game goes ahead (i.e., as the flow of interpretations reproduces itself through time), the presupposition of the existence of the ball—the assumption that is the condition of interpretability of the flow—remains valid. This means that it is believed and felt as a fact by the participants in the language game. Namely, it is reified. In sum, it is not the existence of the balls that grounds the talk on the balls, but it is the talk about the balls that reify the SQR of the balls.

Consider another instance: the financial system is a paradigmatic example of a flow of signs that constantly keeps the SQR of its premises active through the very fact of reproducing itself through time. Money is a very abstract concept, as is shown by the fact that it can be associated with an infinite number of things. Its SQR is produced by the fact that the existence of its value is the condition

of interpretability of the exchanges it prompts. Thus, we could say that sense-making is like playing Monopoly. While they are part of the game, players give value of life to banknotes and contracts—namely, the signs mediating their exchange—because such conventions are assumed *as if* they create the SQR required to play and enjoy the game. What differentiates Monopoly from sense-making is that one cannot stop playing with semiosis and therefore turn off the SQR of premises. All one can do is to change the content of the premise, not stop making premises.

### ***The VEPS As Stable Condition of Interpretability***

According to the consideration provided above, the semiotic mechanism of reification can be considered in terms of the following general law: *any meaning working as the ground (i.e., as condition of interpretability) of any practice of sense-making acquires and keeps SQR in the framework of that practice.*

The statement attributed to Jesus: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew, 18:20) is the most powerful image of this tenet I am able to find; a representation (to be there) is endowed with SQR (Jesus’ presence not as mere representation or belief, but presented and viewed *as a fact*) insofar as two or more persons share the assumption that what they believe is real (i.e., being there in the name of). This is the wonderful power of language to generate the conditions of its power!

What I want to focus on now concerns the spatial-temporal stability of the salience of the condition of interpretability. The general law given above considers this point when it states that the SQR of a given premise is contingent to the framework of the practice of sense-making that such a premise regulates. As long as it works as a salient condition of interpretability, the premise is the invariant ground of the ongoing variability of the flow of interpretations. But how stable is (or must be) the salience of the premises?

To answer this question, one has to take into account that the premises are not single meanings. Rather, they are a hierarchical<sup>6</sup> network of generalized significances.

Anderson’s tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” illustrates this point. People see and act as if the Emperor were dressed, because they use the assumption of the royalty of the Emperor as the condition

of interpretability of the signs they are dealing with. And given that one of the properties associated with the regal status of the Emperor is that this condition is inconsistent with appearing naked, then what they see is interpreted in the light of the assumption that he is dressed in a very rare and valuable weave that has the quality of being invisible to stupid people. Thus, we see a hierarchical system of premises at work. The perception of the man known as the Emperor is a sign interpreted in accordance with the premise that his clothes are made of a kind of woven fabric that may either appear or not depending on the quality of the observer. This premise is in turn grounded on a further premise that serves as a condition of interpretability of the former—the regal status of the Emperor. It is only on the condition of assuming the royalty of the Emperor that the idea of such fantastic clothes becomes meaningful. Moreover, we need to introduce another very basic premise to close the gestalt: the very basic, grounding idea that everyone has of silliness as an undesirable status. As the tale tells us, as long as this network of premises works in a regulative role, the sense-making regulated by them endows them with SQR. When they lose their regulative salience, they lose their SQR. Yet, if one sees the issue through a more detailed lens, then one can realize that actually not all the premises have lost their salience. At least some of them keep their stability, even after the rupture of the previous framework, when the Emperor starts to be thought of and described as naked. The assumption of the Emperor’s royalty continues to retain its salience in the new framework; otherwise, the embarrassment as well as the other reactions at the sight of the naked man would be meaningless. Even more in-depth, the assumption of the undesirability of the status of stupidity is not destabilized by the transition to the new framework; it also works as a condition of interpretability in the new context (i.e., people see the Emperor as naked not because they agree to be considered stupid, but because they realize other aspects that in any case they interpret in the light of the assumption that stupidity is an unfair status).

In sum, as our interpretation of the Anderson tale shows, the premises have different degrees of stability to their salience. Needless to say, these differences do not depend on the inherent property of the premises. Rather, they are consequence of the way people and groups enact the practices of sense-making. As a result of these practices, some premises can be moved more easily from the background

to the foreground of sense-making, and in this way they can be made objects of signification and therefore subject to critique and/or falsification. Others are endowed with a higher power to hold in the background, and in this way they retain their salience as a regulative unthought source of thinking and acting.<sup>7</sup>

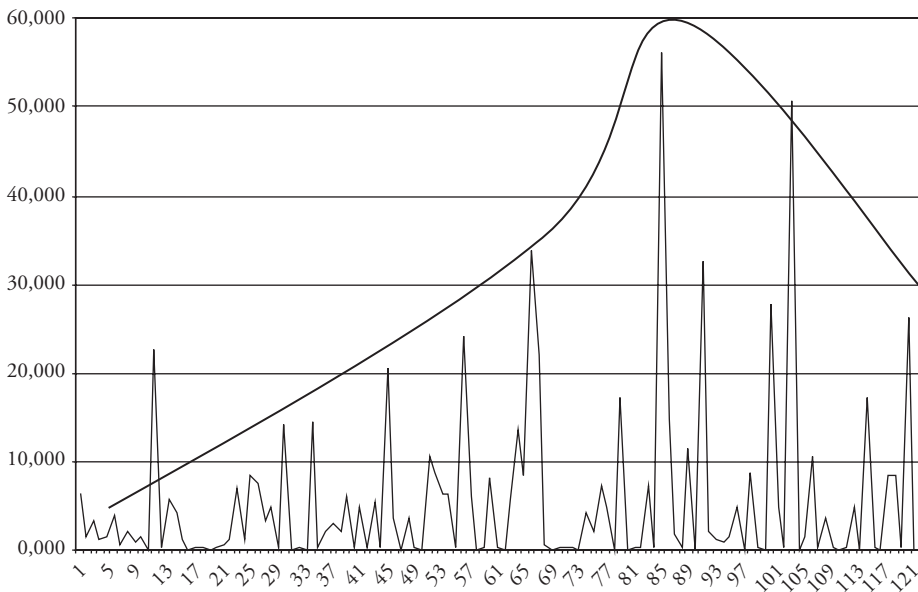
The VEPS can thus be conceived of as quite stable premises, able to keep their salience as the condition of interpretability through time and space. Thanks to this power, they can serve to regulate meaning, without being affected by the ongoing changes occurring within the semiotic flow; as such, they work as basic, invariant sources and grounds of SQR. From the standpoint of the dynamic theory of systems (Lauro-Grotto, Salvatore, Gennaro, & Gelo, 2009; Salvatore, Laura-Grotto, Gennaro, & Gelo, 2009), such invariance is a meta-stable trend that appears only at some level of scale—that is, a regularity in the ever-changing dynamics of the system. Figure 11.1 provides an example of meta-stable trend (from Salvatore et al., 2009). At a molecular level of scale, (that defined by 1 as the unit of analysis), the trajectory appears highly variable. At a higher level (that defined by 10 as the elementary unit of analysis), the trajectory designs a stable trend, defined by an almost quadratic curve, depicting the increasing–decreasing movement of the extension of the variability (i.e., the peaks) the

system is able to reach through time. The concept of meta-stability enables us to realize how in semiosis the invariance/stability of meaning is the product of an ongoing process, rather than the reflection of a static element.<sup>8</sup>

### Bivalence of Meaning: “Semiotic Silicone”

The discussion of the quality-of-reality presented so far leads us to focus on the mechanisms of sense-making involved in the micro-dynamics of the reification of signs. According to my thesis, these mechanisms are rooted in the bivalence of meaning (Abbey & Valsiner, 2007; Carli, 2007; Ribeiro, Gonçalves, & Santos, 2012; Valsiner, 2007). Generally speaking, bivalence is depictable in the following way: Taking A as what the sign makes present, then the meaning is not A but the bond of A and not-A (henceforth the *complement A*), according to which A emerges as a presence. In other words, the meaning of a sign does not only consist of the sign that follows the previous one in the flow of interpretation (i.e., the A); but it also encompasses the whole gestalt that makes such a sign the one that occurs instead of the infinite others that do not occur (henceforth we indicate this whole as the *complementSign*).

Complement A consists of both connections—*in presentia* and *in absentia*. On the one hand, any A entails an infinite number of connections with



**Figure 11.1** An example of meta-stable pattern.  
(From Salvatore, Lauro-Grotto, Gelo, Gennaro, 2009)

other signs. We have already dealt with this point when we stated that the meaning of a sign is the set of combinations it has with other signs. Yet, these bonds *in presentia* are, at the same time, relationships *in absentia*—saying that the set of combinations associable to the sign S contains X, Y, and Z means that S is *not* associable to M, N, O . . . ; any presence of signs is at the same time the absence of other signs. One could say that meaning concerns this split—namely, the border placed between what is thus made present and what is thus made absent.

The relationship between figure and background illustrates this point. Any time a form (A) is extrapolated, it is being made pertinent compared to something else (the complementA) that plays the role of background. Because there are infinite ways of separating figure and background, there are infinite possible figures. And this means that any figure is not the autonomous, self-contained content of a representation, but the product of a specific relationship with the background: the background is part of the meaning of the figure and not something simply put aside. It is necessary if the figures are to be understood.<sup>9</sup>

Consider the occurrence of a certain sign—say, “s”. That sign is experienced by us as holding a given content—say, |s|. For example, if someone utters the word “pipe,” everyone sharing the speaker’s code will consider this sign as having the value of denoting that device used for burning tobacco with the aim of breathing in the smoke produced. When we think and communicate, we act as if this experience of the signs were truth—namely, that sign s has a specific self-contained content |s|. Actually, this association is not given prior to the production of the sign, as an inherent property of the sign (Visetti & Codiot, 2002); rather, it is the product, the first product, of sense-making, emerging through the network of connections within which the sign is part (Salvatore, Tebaldi, & Potì, 2006/2009). The context is this network of sign combinations whose contingency qualifies the significance the interpreter attributes to each of them. Thus, sense-making always and in any case performs a double operation. On the one hand, it defines a denoting entity (what we are used to experiencing as the content of the sign)—namely, the making of a pertinent presence (henceforth, the *interpretandum*). And yet on the other hand, sense-making leads to the emergence of the complement of that presence—namely, the semiotic scenario according to, through, and in the terms of which

the *interpretandum* acquires sense. In sum, the meaning is not used up in the content of the utterance, because any practice of sense-making instantiates the whole semiotic field—namely, the infinite *in presentia* and *in absentia* bonds—grounding the “sensefulness”<sup>10</sup> of this content (Salvatore, Forges-Davanzati, Potì, & Ruggieri, 2009).<sup>11</sup>

Pantomime provides a fine image of the bivalence of meaning and sense-making. The mime produces some movements that work as signs (henceforth, S). The spectator sees these movements as an action (henceforth, A). For the spectator, S stands for A: S instantiates A, and A is the interpretation of S. Yet it would be misleading to consider A the content of S. A is not contained in S; rather, it is the spectators that build A as the interpretation of S. Moreover, the spectator performs this interpretative activity, adding a set of other data of imagination (i.e., other signs) that work as a complement of S and in so doing define the contextual totality that makes S therefore interpretable and thinkable. So the mime moves his arms and hands in a certain way; yet the interpretation of these movements as pulling a rope requires the spectator to complete the gestalt with a set of data of imagination concerning a long thin object being grasped by the mime, connected at the opposite end with something that resists the mime’s efforts. This set of data of imagination is the *complementSign* (cS) completing the interpreted gestalt—that is, the context. Thus, we arrive at the following definition: CON = (S + cS): *the context is produced by the sign performed by the mime integrated by the interpreter’s complementary activity of interpretation, thanks to which the interpreter makes a figure endowed with sensefulness*. It is only on this condition that the movements of the mime become interpretable as pulling a rope.

The interpretation starts, is constrained by, and has the *interpretandum* as its target; yet, strictly speaking *it does not concern it*. Rather, the *interpretandum* is the trigger element for the constructive function of producing a new sign complementing the former. *The interpretation does not specify something that is within the interpretandum, but it adds something further to it*. When the spectator signifies the mime’s movement, her hermeneutic work is not limited to the representation of what she perceives. Rather, she provides something else, complementing the context. It is the introduction of this data of imagination that, working as a semiotic silicone, allows the closure of the gestalt that makes up the interpretation.

### *The Backward Mechanism*

Taking into account the bivalence of sense-making, we need to conclude that sense-making cannot but reify.<sup>12</sup> The notion of bivalence of meaning leads us to expect that any incoming sign does not specify something that is already within/conveyed by the previous; rather, *it adds something further to it*: the kind of closing support (“semiotic silicone”) that is needed to bring the emerging gestalt into an appropriate form. The form of the gestalt can change through time, but one gestalt is always in the process of formation, because of the very fact that constantly new signs are introduced in the flow. Therefore, the stability of the semiotic flow is somehow kept and reproduced and with it the SQR.

Bivalence of sense-making leads to an inversion of the naïve view, according to which what comes before (the *interpretandum*) causes/regulates what follows (the *interpretant*). One must avoid confusing the occurrence of the sign with the semiotic function this occurrence performs within the flow of interpretations. Actually, it is not the sign that occurs, but a fact—it would be better to say, a sensorial modification in the interpreter that is assumed as a fact. This occurrence is a function of the state of the material field at the moment of the occurrence.<sup>13</sup> In itself, the occurrence has no meaning. What I have above called “condition of interpretability” does not concern it. The construction of the condition of interpretability is not the effect of the interpretandum’s capability to trigger an interpretant. On the contrary, the condition of interpretability works retrospectively, as the backward creation of the context (the gestalt), thanks to which the occurrence can work as a sign—namely, it is treatable *up to now* as the interpretant of the previous chain of signs. The linkage between interpretandum and interpretant works like the least common multiple rather than the greatest common divisor: the meaning is not (constrained within) which elements (the divisors) the two signs have in common but what they produce (the gestalt) through their being placed in common.

Hence, semiosis is inherently unlimited, because the chain of signs lacks the power to constrain the further possibilities of sign production. The subsequent sign defines the condition of interpretability of the previous one, rather than vice versa. And given that we cannot but interpret, any interpreter will be able to find a way to do it; even if the specific gestalt may change through time, the construction of a gestalt will be performed, and with it the

reproduction of the semiotic flow and the reification of the signs.

### **Future Directions**

The starting point of this contribution was the need for a processual conception of sense-making, modeled as an uninterrupted flow of signs, working as a dynamic field. This conception puts aside the idea of meaning as prior sense-making. Meaning is the emergent field product of sense-making. This model provides a different way of understanding how people, who inevitably speak and think from within and through the flow of signs, are able to feel and act as if there were a social world-out-there.

I have focused on a central aspect of this general issue: how some signs (the *VEPS*, as I have called them) are able to be felt and used as if they refer to things, although they have no other connection than that with other signs. My proposal is that semiosis provides the sense of its being in touch with the world from within itself, as the consequence of the very fact that the flow of signs goes on through time (and it does somehow go on).

This proposal entails a vision of sense-making based on the idea of the bivalence of signs: signs are made not only of what they represent but also of the whole field of meaning (the semiotic silicone) working as condition of interpretability of the sign itself. I have devoted the second part of this work to showing how this bivalent model allows us to conceptualize the microdynamics of sense-making, in terms of a backward mechanism—signs do not motivate the following ones; rather, they are construed as signs and interpreted as such by the following ones. Moreover, we have underlined how the bivalent model leads us to distinguish two levels of interpretation. On the one hand, any sign is recognized by how it is interpreted. On the other hand, however, this recognition is based on a hermeneutic work *in absentia*—namely, on the projection of the sign on a gestalt providing the condition of interpretability thanks to which the sign is addressed as senseful, and therefore interpretable (i.e., standing for something else). Consequently, the analysis of a set of signs (a text) means retrieving the generalized meaning grounding the semiotic encounter with the text. In this sense, hermeneutic analysis is always a recursive function, aimed at grasping the semiotic construction that has to be produced to perform an act of interpretation.

Needless to say, further developments are required to study in-depth the various aspects of the

model that have not been addressed in this paper. In particular, there are three aspects that I see as the most relevant to examine. First, the modeling of the microdynamics of the backward mechanism and more generally the way the bivalence of meaning works in sense-making. In this perspective, a line of investigation I consider promising is to use the topology to depict the field dynamics of the chain of signs. Second, at the current level of formulation, the model addresses the issue of the SQR only in its general aspect—namely, as the problem of how sense-making produces it. Yet, from a descriptive point of view, it is quite evident that signs are used with different gradients of SQR. The sign “stone” and the sign “the flying horse” differ from each other as concerns their SQR. Yet between these two extremes, there are many signs that, according to the circumstances and to users, have an intermediate level of SQR. Take, for example, fictional characters (Eco, 2009; Valsiner, 2009) that may or may not be endowed with SQR in a variable fashion and that do not have the same SQR as either “stone” or “flying horse.” Consequently, it is not enough to model how SQR is produced—one also has to understand what makes such production variable across the practices of sense-making. Finally, I consider it important to validate the model to test its capability to ground analysis of specific patterns of sense-making. In this chapter, I have made several references to phenomena of sense-making. Yet, these references have had a merely exemplificative function; I have not used the model to understand them, but vice versa. In the final analysis, it is in this possibility—that the model enables us to get a deeper understanding of the phenomena of social exchange—that the conceptual value of the theoretical proposal lies.

## Notes

1. My discussion does not require that the recognition of the fact that a given sign does not refer to a substantial entity should be fixed and systematic among people. On the contrary, it is usual for many people at certain times and in certain circumstances to regard signs like “the United States” as substantial entities and at other times, and in other circumstances, as nonsubstantial entities. What is relevant and required for the sake of our discussion, therefore, is the potentiality of this sign to be used as referring to nonsubstantial entities.

2. Confusing these two levels—the nature of the object represented by the sign and the nature of the sign representing it is like concluding that if a person says, “I am not speaking,” then she/he is not speaking.

3. The idea of meaning as the trajectory of the chain of signs is close to the seminal idea of Wittgenstein (1953/1958) of meaning as the use of the words. More generally, it is consistent

with the pragmatic approach to meaning that sees it as the effect the sign provides on the addressee. In our view, however, this effect has to be conceptualized as a further sign: an equivalent sign. Be it a reaction, a refusal, or an affective appraisal of the addresser’s sign, the addressee’s response works as the interpretant of the former, and in so doing develops the chain of signs comprising the meaning and keeps itself active and transforming through time.

4. Claiming this linguistic, processual and nonexpressive nature of meaning does not mean assuming a nihilist position that rejects any kind of connection between language and world. Actually, the separateness of language, as I use it here, does not entail its isolation. Rather, it is the condition of sense-making—not its limit. It is precisely because semiosis is an autonomous, self-referential, and recursive process that it can make meanings emerge. Autonomy is required for the development of the self-regulative intrasystemic dynamics that leads to the development of these processes of emergence.

5. This point is highlighted by Peirce’s triadic theory: the interpretant is a way of depicting the linkage between the representamen and the dynamic object. Therefore, any sign, any interpretation, is possible on condition that (1) there is a dynamic object in relation with the sign standing for it; (2) this relationship concerns a specific aspect of the dynamic object (the ground); (3) the ground is signified by an equally specific aspect of the sign (e.g., the image of the pipe stands for the pipe only in some perceptual properties and not in functional ones—that is why we cannot use it for smoking; at the same time, not all the elements of the image of the pipe are relevant to its function of standing for the pipe (e.g., the chemical composition of the paper on which it is drawn is not relevant).

6. In semiosis, the hierarchical linkage among the premises is intransitive in its nature (Valsiner, 2007)—that is, a given meaning A can be superordered compared to B, B can be superordered compared to C, and at the same time C can be superordered compared to A. This is so because the hierarchical organization of meaning is not an invariant structure but is contingent to the dynamics of sense-making.

7. The idea of the European Community as an entity is an example of how a meaning can have a variable gradient of SQR through time and space. In some areas of the European population—as well as at some points in the recent history of the European people—the European Community has been experienced (is being experienced) as a concrete entity, something to belong to and by which it is acceptable to be affected in our own lives. In other historical moments and other domains of the European population (e.g., in a not insignificant part of the Italian as well as the English population), the European Community is little more than a name.

8. The example of Monopoly can help to illustrate this point. During the game the Monopoly banknotes work as if endowed with SQR for the players. Yet, as soon as the game ends, they lose their salience. Therefore, because they do not have enough cross-spatial/temporal stability, they cannot be considered as VEPS. On the other hand, the value of money is quite a ubiquitous assumption in contemporary society. It is salient before and after the game and at the same time is not suspended during the game. On the contrary, the SQR of the money grounds the very possibility of considering Monopoly meaningful. It works as a condition of interpretability of the local condition of interpretability of the game and the acts of playing it. In sum, money is a meaning that retains its stability through many space/time frameworks. In this sense, it is a meta-stable condition of sense-

making, which is made salient through the variability of the local dynamics of semiosis. That is the same as saying that it is a very powerful VEPS.

9. Interestingly enough, psychoanalytic theory has conceptualized the affects as the first form of meanings emerging from the proto-differentiation of the field of experience as an indistinguishable totality (Bucci, 1997; Matte Blanco, 1975).

10. I use this term to stress that what is at stake here is not the semantic and/or pragmatic validity of the content—namely, if the interpreter considers it agreeable or not. In a more generalized way, “sensefulness” concerns the very plausibility of the act of interpreting the sign (of considering it a sign worth being interpreted). Thus, the content can be meaningful or not, but it is viewed so as a result of the fact that the interpreter addresses it—that is, as a result of the fact that it is considered “senseful.” Therefore, a sign can have sensefulness but not meaningfulness but not vice versa.

11. Recently, Bang (2009) has underlined the role of the emptiness in sense-making. This concept is another way of highlighting the interdependence between the visible (*in presentia*) and latent (*in absentia*) sides of meanings.

12. Needless to say, the SQR can appear in the discourse as the content of a statement. For example, this is true when one says: “I do not think that this actually happened.” Nevertheless, the SQR as a specific content of a statement (say “SQR”) is not to be confused with the SQR as the global sense of connection with the world that emerges from semiosis as a whole (say [SQR]). The latter is a highly generalized feeling, an embodied meaning, inherently associated with sense-making (Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011), whereas the former is a discrete sign that may or may not be used in communication. The latter is a recursive interpretation of the former, which is possible precisely because of the former.

13. It is outside the scope of this work to address the issue of how the state of the field produces new occurrences.

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# Meaningful Connections: Semiotics, Cultural Psychology, and the Forms of Sense

Robert E. Innis

## Abstract

This chapter explores what a philosophically oriented semiotics has to offer to cultural psychology. In as much as semiotics, as the general theory of signs, deals with multiple forms of meanings, its concerns are distinctively cultural. But in as much as semiotics is concerned with the experienced reality of meanings, its concerns are distinctively psychological. Nevertheless, semiotics is not itself a cultural psychology nor a psychology of culture, nor a substitute for them. This chapter presents key elements from the semiotically relevant work of C.S. Peirce, Karl Bühler, Michael Polanyi, Ernst Cassirer, and Susanne Langer to focus on the power of semiotics to model the self, situate the semiotic frames of cultural meaning, broaden the notion of signification, and to delineate the fundamental groundlines of the plenum of consciousness and establish the thresholds of sense, including the role of the tacit dimension and the semiotic relevance of embodiment.

**Keywords:** signs, modeling the self, cultural frames

Semiotics is the study of *signification* in the most general sense of that term. It is an essentially transdisciplinary study of processes of meaning-making and the meaning systems and sign systems in which they are embodied and expressed. Because of the transdisciplinary nature of semiotics, it can and does function as a kind of “big tent” within which different types of reflections and investigations take place. Philosophers, biologists, cultural theorists, psychologists, linguists, art historians, literary theorists, and many more find its conceptual tools helpful, indeed indispensable, for carrying out their studies. The central concept of semiotics is *the sign*. What Vygotsky said about words can be said, more generally, about the sign: it too not only is “a direct expression of the historical nature of human consciousness” but also is “a microcosm of human consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 256; see also van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). But how we are to frame this concept is not universally agreed

upon. In fact, semiotics takes its core categories from quite different intellectual traditions and is by no means a monolithic system or framework, despite the claims of many of its practitioners and proponents.

The differentiated conceptual toolbox of semiotics actually allows it to engage very diverse analytical, critical, and reconstructive tasks in different ways. In as much as semiotics deals with multiple forms of meanings, such as language, art, ritual, myth, religion, even science and technics, its concerns are distinctively cultural. But in as much as semiotics is concerned with the experienced reality of meanings, its concerns are distinctively psychological. Nevertheless, semiotics is not itself a cultural psychology nor a psychology of culture, nor a substitute for them, although its problems and themes intersect with them at many points. In the words of Umberto Eco, the subject matter of semiotics is “co-extensive with the whole range of cultural

phenomena, however pretentious that approach may at first seem” (Eco, 1976, p. 6).

## From Semiotics to Cultural Psychology

So, what does semiotics have to offer that could be of most benefit to cultural psychology, which seems to have the same scope, from the experiential side, as semiotics does from the side of the analysis of the logic of cultural forms? What challenges does semiotics pose to cultural psychology? And where do semiotics and cultural psychology overlap to their mutual benefit?

### *Thresholds of Semiosis*

In his *A Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco claimed that “signification encompasses the whole of cultural life, even at the lower threshold of semiotics” (Eco, 1976, p. 46). That lower threshold is the actional-affective-perceptual field itself in which the whole of cultural life, the upper threshold, is ultimately grounded and located. Eco’s claim was another formulation and consequence of the fundamental and startling semiotically grounded thesis of C. S. Peirce, the American philosopher and founder of a major strand in semiotics:

“[T]he content of consciousness, the entire phenomenal manifestation of mind, is a sign resulting from inference . . . the mind is a sign developing according to the laws of inference.”  
(Peirce, 1868, p. 53)

Peirce divided these laws of inference into the three distinctive forms of induction, deduction, and abduction, or hypothesis formation, to which the construction and interpretation of signs is attributed. Abduction, according to Peirce, is the source of all novelty. The human mind for Peirce, however, is not enclosed within the skin of an individual organism. Rather, the organism is enclosed within, or embodied in, or self-spinning into, a semiotic web, a network of signs and sign relations that are the support of its mental existence. Its mind is no more inner than outer. It is both, as Peirce illustrated in his famous example of the inkstand. In a provocative and eminently generalizable and remarkably contemporary passage, Peirce wrote:

A psychologist cuts out a lobe of my brain (*nihil animale a me alienum puto*) and then, when I find I cannot express myself, he says, “You see, your faculty of language was localized in that lobe.” No doubt it was; and so, if he had filched my inkstand, I should not have been able to continue the discussion until

I had got another. Yea, the very thoughts would not come to me. So my faculty of discussion is equally localized in my inkstand.  
(CP 7.366)

Mental existence is embodied semiosis. The production and interpretation of signs in which our thoughts come to us, and we come to thoughts, depends on objectively available semiotic tools in just the way Peirce was dependent on his metaphorical and real inkstand. This insight was developed and generalized by the rich psychological tradition initiated by Vygotsky. The semiotic tradition deriving from the structuralist project deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* confirms Peirce’s and Eco’s claims. Its concurrence is epitomized in Elmar Holenstein’s laconic assertion that structuralism “draws our attention to the root-like attachment of the world’s subjective constitution to sign systems” (Holenstein, 1976, p. 5). But it is not just the world’s constitution that is at issue. It is also the constitution of subjectivity itself. Peirce’s contention that the mind is a developing sign is paralleled in Roland Barthes’ claim that “man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages” because “the *psyche* itself is articulated like a language” (Barthes, 1977, p. 47). The semiotic problem, however, is how language itself is structured and how it should be modeled. Even if language is *the* semiotic system *par excellence*, as is almost universally admitted, that really means that although it exemplifies the features of semiosis, it does not entail that it establish them or function as the prime model of semiosis. Semiotics, or the general theory of signs, takes as its task the construction of a semiotic model that is comprehensive enough to delineate the ultimate conditions of semiosis no matter what sign forms they may take. Semiotics wants to schematize the most fundamental distinctions between the various systems of signs, among which language may or may not have a certain primacy or primordially.

Near the end of his book, Eco goes on to say that “semiotics can define the subject of every act of semiosis only by semiotic categories; thus the subject of signification is nothing more than the continuously unaccomplished system of systems of signification that reflects back on itself” (1976, p. 315). This self-reflecting system is, on this account, essentially open, or continuously unaccomplished, having no greatest upper bound. The unending spiral of semiosis (or semioses) is a perpetual dynamic oscillation between two intrinsically related thresholds,

an upper threshold of systems of signs and meanings of all sorts circulating in society as cultural forms and a lower threshold defined by the limits of the lived body as a matrix of lived-through, but not explicitly articulated, activities. The problem that all theories dealing with the mind and its socio-cultural matrices have to face is how to model this whole process—or the sets of processes occurring between these two limits. And the question has to be faced of what contribution semiotics—however we define its nature, range, and scope—can make to this modeling process. What types of semiotic categories and models have been put forth? Which ones do we really need? Is there one privileged way to model this semiotic subject? Perhaps, in light of the complexity of the semiotic subject, there is, in fact, no privileged way but, rather, the various approaches to defining the thresholds of sense and meaning and the logic of consciousness have differently weighted heuristic powers of foregrounding different aspects of pertinence and relevance. This fact would have important implications for the tasks and methods of a broadly based cultural psychology and for our being able to situate its intersections with semiotic concerns.

What then, more specifically, can cultural psychology find in semiotics' toolbox that it both can and should use for its tasks? In what senses can a semiotic analytical framework, broadly and flexibly understood, be helpful for cultural psychology? How far can we push meaning or semiosis down into the perceptual, actional, and affective stratum, and how much are semiotic processes at the higher levels characterized and conditioned by *structures of semiotic* (and other forms of) *embodiment* already limned on the lower levels? If the mind is, to repeat Peirce's formulation, a sign developing according to the laws of inference and is, according to Peirce's rich and illuminating metaphor, a plenum or "bottomless lake," how are we to *model* this field of consciousness? Where are we to draw the lines through this plenum so that the significant joints of consciousness would be differentiated and characterized? And what is the exact role of a semiotic approach to accomplishing this task? Does semiotics itself point to a kind of limit to what could be called the "principle of effability"—that is, that experience is best characterized as a semiotic process? Or is recognition of such a limit actually an unexpected enrichment of the semiotic framework? Indeed, more generally, which semiotic approaches are we to use, either exclusively or predominantly,

and what are their relations to one another? And what precisely are such approaches expected to offer in the context of the problems and issues of a cultural psychology?

The following discussion will illustrate, with no claim to completeness and with a quite definite leaning toward the philosophical side of semiotics, a very personal choice of possible answers to these questions by sketching central concepts and categories from five quite different approaches to the schematization of consciousness, represented by C.S. Peirce, Karl Bühler, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne Langer, and, as a kind of philosophical wildcard, Michael Polanyi, whose work on tacit knowing and meaning stands outside of semiotic currents in the strict sense but bears upon them in challenging ways. Others, coming from other home disciplines, would no doubt look to other resources, but, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Innis, 1982, 1992, 2002, 2009), the aforementioned thinkers are of extraordinary value.

### Framing the Semiotic Matrix

C. S. Peirce, as the initiator of one of the most powerful traditions in semiotics, proposes a semiotic approach to consciousness and cognitional structure that has as its focal point its essential dimensionality. Although this is certainly not on the surface a startling thesis, and in fact is a core thesis of cultural psychology, Peirce's actual derivation of and development of it is. Peirce argued that the dimensions of consciousness are correlated with his fundamental and well-known triadic differentiation of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. Consciousness exemplifies, and exists in, three different semiotic modes, corresponding to iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity. Iconicity is the semiotic mode that is based on resemblance and is, on Peirce's account, exemplified by sign systems composed of images, metaphors, and diagrams, to each of which Peirce devoted clear and stimulating analyses. Indexicality is the semiotic mode that is based on existential connection. It is exemplified by all species of signs that point, be it fingers, directions of the eyes, sign posts, tracks in the snow, symptoms of disease, personal and relative pronouns, definite articles, and so forth. Symbolicity is the semiotic mode that is based on convention or law. It is exemplified *par excellence* by language and mathematical and other notation systems that have a full degree of semiotic freedom and openness. Peirce engaged in multiple taxonomic and schematic characterizations of these

sign types with their attendant subdivisions. These sign types are semiotic frames within which and by means of which we give meaning to the world. They are, looked at another way, “access structures” in which we are embodied and by means of which we articulate the world and express it in signs.

On the side of their psychological instantiation, Peirce points out that the general schematization of sign types into icons, indexes, and symbols corresponds to feeling, reaction, and synthesis or, more generally, habit-taking. These are the three fundamental—indeed ultimate—ingredients of consciousness, although they are not elements in any Humean sense, as Peirce’s commitment to synechism involved holding to a principle of continuity. They are the psychological side of the semiotic frames within which consciousness functions. A feeling, on Peirce’s account, is an immediate consciousness of a quality, such as redness, bitterness, the taste of quinine, or the odor of attar. It is by means of feelings that we access the world in its suchness and do so without comparison. Peirce illuminatingly called it “*primisense*,” exploiting the ambiguity of “sense” as both a power and a type of meaning. A reaction is a felt sense of resistance, of interruption, of a breaking into consciousness of something other, such as running into a closed door or being startled by a sudden whistle. Peirce correspondingly calls this dimension of consciousness “*altersense*.” Law or convention appears psychologically as achieved synthesis or rational habit. The ability to take on differentiated sets of habits, and to control these habits, is the mark of rationality. Human life consists more and more of the rational construction and reconstruction of habits, including on the lower threshold perceptual habits where qualities and resistant particulars are synthesized or mediated into unities. Peirce calls this dimension of consciousness “*medisense*.” It is important to realize that for Peirce, these are simultaneous present dimensions of consciousness as such. But each dimension can be foregrounded in different modes of attending, which are themselves both embodied in, and enabled by, distinct sign systems.

In as much as “*primisense*” or *qualis consciousness* explores the world through objectified and expressed systems of resemblances, Peirce would instruct a semiotically aware cultural psychology to explore the cultural manifestations and variability of our sense of finding resemblances and capturing them in systems of iconic signs. Such a cultural psychology would develop with new tools the notion that it

already works with: that resemblances are not just, in certain instances, “given” but rather “taken.” To see a resemblance on the basis of shared qualities—especially of domains seemingly distant from one another—is to perform an interpretive and semiotic act. It is an activity that is both spontaneous and methodically pursued. A Peircean semiotics would point a part of cultural psychology’s research agenda to the study of the variability of image formation, of different metaphorical networks, and of the varying conditions in which diagrammatic expressions and forms of argumentation have developed. To the semiotic phenomenology of the internal content of these forms and their historical development, for which Peirce supplied the foundation, cultural psychology would add a genetic and explicitly socio-cultural dimension. Semiotics and cultural psychology work hand-in-hand here.

As to the dimension of *altersense*, this is the realm of indexes or indices. Indexicality takes two radically different forms: natural and conventional. Natural indices belong to the most basic stratum of reading nature, of following traces, of determining which traces and indications are pertinent. There is great variability in this regard, as the anthropologists have shown us. Eskimos read the traces of their (to us) minimally differentiated environments with as much confidence as rain forest dwellers read the traces of their profuse environments. A Bedouin at home in a desert landscape sees differences that are imperceptible to the city dweller. Natural intelligence on this level, or in this dimension, which includes animal and human spheres, is common to all organisms. It is connected with sensory acuity and also with being hardwired to respond to sensory cues by reason of the body that one has inherited genetically. Ecological and environmental psychology, certainly components of a comprehensive cultural psychology, must explore these domains in the company of a semiotically informed phenomenology. But trained and habitualized natural intelligence extends further out to indices that, although natural in one sense, are also culturally discerned and maybe even determined. I am thinking here specifically of such phenomena as the symptoms of disease, slips of the tongue, inadvertent gestures, and so forth, that point beyond themselves to objects and states of affairs. Conventional indices encompass all the pointing signs of every sort that we have constructed to steer us through the world, including, clearly, language in its indexical dimension. But, it could be said without exaggeration

that natural science in its technological side is also a way of capturing the signs of nature or even of provoking nature to emit signs. In this sense, natural science would be a set of practices that attend to what is taken to be pertinent and would be subject to all the subjective factors that condition patterns of attending. Once again, cultural psychology could take another look at the history of science as a variable set of patterns of attending to particulars and ascribing relevance to experienced linkages. How is this done? Why are some linkages made rather than others? To answer such questions, cultural psychology would not only join forces with semiotics but with the history of science and with psycho-analysis in the broadest sense.

Medisense captures what is involved in the symbolic dimension of consciousness. It is the mark of human mentality as such, building as it does on the iconic and indexical dimensions. Indeed, the human approach to the world is constituted by forms of mediation all the way up, as consciousness builds a more and more coherent and interlinked world and *recognizes that it is doing so*, a point argued with great force by Deacon (1997). Peirce's emphasis on medisense is intended to foreground the abductive, interpretive dimension of consciousness and cognition. It implies a kind of semiotic constructivism—that is, the thesis that the world is known through the interpretation and production of signs. And these different systems, as formulated in objective structures, lay variable networks of concepts over experience. Symbolic consciousness is, in this sense, motivated without being caused by an objective world putatively accessible outside of some symbolic scheme. For Peirce, the latter alternative is simply not possible. There is no way, Peirce argues, of accessing reality in a mind-independent or sign-independent way, even if one asserts that there is a mind-independent reality. So, in this way semiotics' central idea coincides with the research project of cultural psychology, which studies the subjective conditions and genesis of objective symbolic structures. On this conception, the focal point of cultural psychology would be the genesis and development of meanings *in* experience, whereas semiotics itself would supply the formal frame for the analysis of the meanings *of* experience.

Peirce distinguishes a grammatical, a logical, and a rhetorical dimension of the analysis of the signs, the *representamina*, that carry meaning.

The task of a semiotic *grammar or syntax* is, as Peirce puts it, to “ascertain what must be true of the

representamen used by every scientific intelligence in order that they may embody any *meaning*” (CP 2.229). Such a task is, on first glance, one of the proper tasks of a general theory of signs. Looked at this way, on the grammatical or syntactic level, semiotics is concerned with the internal constitution of signs, their defining properties and relations to one another, and their essential differences. It wants to determine the formal features of sign types and distinguish them, in terms of their intrinsic properties, from one another. Cultural psychology, taking these properties as given, would study the social and cultural conditions of how one learns these systems of differences—that is, how they are in themselves perceived and apprehended. It would also ask whether, by reason of our semiotic embodiment in different sign types with different syntactic structures, we develop very different cognitive strategies and modes of thinking that influence how we access the world. Such an issue clearly bears upon the logical dimension of signs.

The task of a *semiotic logic* is to determine the conditions that make it possible that representamina “may hold good of any *object*, that is, may be true. Or say, logic proper is the formal science of the conditions of the truth of representations” (CP 2.229). Looked at this way, on the logical level, semiotics is concerned with the bases of the relations of signs to their objects, not their syntactic or grammatical differences from one another: resemblance in the case of icons, existential connection in the case of indexes, convention in the case of symbols. These bases have psychological reality, but it is not the job of semiotics to explore them. Rather, they are interpretive frames to be used by cultural psychology in its investigations of the variability of contents in the mental appropriation of the world in different socio-cultural contexts. Cultural psychology would study, however, which iconic forms circulate in society, which indexical signs intervene in and structure both the social and individual sensoria, and which symbols structure the life-world on its many levels. In this, it would appear that once again, semiotics and cultural psychology, looked at through Peircean eyes, would work hand-in-hand (*see* Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000)

The task of a *semiotic rhetoric*, according to Peirce, is “to ascertain the laws by which in every scientific intelligence one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another” (CP 2.229). Looked at this way, semiotics is concerned with the relation of signs to their users, whether

producers or receivers. On the objective side, semiotics would study the forms of argumentation, the laws of birthing of ideas in the consciousness of others, whereas cultural psychology would attempt to situate these forms in distinctive matrices and situations. A clear example of this, which also encompasses the syntactic and logical sides, is Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought* (2003). It is evident that there is an important linkage between the two disciplines in this domain.

Peirce's semiotic project, consequently, presents in an integrated way a set of conceptual tools, analytical models, and heuristic pointers. But it not just the well-known triadic schemata of (1) feeling, reaction, and synthesis; (2) icon, index, and symbol; or (3) syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical that characterize Peirce's project and set the tasks for a developed semiotic theory that would supply the linkage to cultural psychology. Peirce points out that to understand what is involved in any achieved act or process of semiosis, or meaning-making, there are *five factors* that have to be considered. (1) *Signs* make their (2) *objects* known through their proper significant effects—that is, their (3) *interpretants*, to or in an (4) *interpreter*, and they do so, as Peirce puts it, (5) “not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground of the representamen*” (CP 2.228). Peirce understands this notion “in a sort of Platonic sense, very familiar in everyday talk” (CP 2.228) It appears to be introduced to maintain continuity of reference of a thought at different times. But it is also clearly meant to point out the aspectual dimension of a sign's relation to its object or to a *cluster of background conditions for a successful semiosis*.

### ***The Semiosphere***

An important thing to note is that Peirce's complex model, with its differentiation of sign types, its specification of ingredients of consciousness, its delineation of the factors of semiosis, applies not just to the upper threshold of semiosis, where we are dealing with objectively circulating systems of signs that make up the cultural order or what Lotman (1990) called the semiosphere. It also applies to the lower threshold, where the feeling, acting, and perceiving organism first starts to draw the lines in the continuum of experience. This is of the utmost importance for understanding the emergence of meaning and the variable and culturally defined situations in which it occurs, which is the main concern of cultural psychology. For Peirce, cognition

is a continuum, differently weighted at different levels and stages, but with the same ingredients at every level and stage. Feeling, reaction, and habits of synthesizing are, as Peirce puts it, “constant ingredients of our knowledge” and result from “congenital tendencies of the mind” (CP 1.374). In one sense, as Peirce formulates it in a kind of Scholastic mode, they can be understood as “three parts or faculties of the soul or modes of consciousness” (CP 1.374)—no matter what the level is or the cultural matrix in which consciousness is embodied. Peirce summarizes the three categories of consciousness in the following compressed text:

... first, feeling, the consciousness that can be included with an instant of time, passive consciousness of quality, without recognition of analysis; second, consciousness of an interruption into the field of consciousness, sense of resistance, of an external fact, of another something; third, synthetic consciousness, binding time together, sense of learning, thought.  
(CP 1.377)

The three categories, according to Peirce, are comprehensive and exclusive, characterizing indubitably “three radically different elements of consciousness, these and no more” (CP 1.382): immediate feeling, the polar sense, and synthetical consciousness (“the consciousness of a third or medium” [CP 1.382]). If we agree, as I have proposed, to call the lower threshold the “affective-actional-perceptual threshold” and the upper threshold the “symbolic threshold,” I think we can see that on Peircean terms, they are both intrinsically semiotic and can be modeled in the same way. Affective-actional-perceptual consciousness instantiates the categories of semiosis just as much as explicitly cultural consciousness does. An object on this level for Peirce is composed of a first—a qualitative suchness—and a second—an undergone set of resisting particulars—joined into a whole by means of a third—a synthetic, indeed synthesizing, lawfulness or habit. Such an object is a configuration of iconic/qualitative, indexical/reactive, and symbolic/mediating moments. Perceptual objects are emergent from a field of qualitative characters and indexical particulars synthesized by the interpreter or knowing subject. For Peirce, quite generally, “every kind of consciousness enters into cognition” (CP 1.381). Although, as Peirce puts it, feelings “form the warp and woof of cognition,” and although the will, in the form of attention (to the other), constantly enters, perceptual consciousness,

when it is carried to completion, is neither feeling nor the polar sense. It is “consciousness of process, and this in the form of the sense of learning, of acquiring, of mental growth.” It cannot be immediate for it cannot be “contracted into an instant.” It is “the consciousness that binds our life together. It is the consciousness of synthesis” (CP 1.381)—or, rather, synthetic consciousness. A semiotically informed cultural psychology then would explore the whole culturally variable configurations and panoplies of feelings, of forms of attention to the other and of symbolic construals. It is not reducible to cognitive psychology in any restricted sense. It is extended to ways of world-making, where the various worlds are not defined in purely conceptual terms but in terms of different types of sign configurations and meaning structures.

So, the affective-actional-perceptual field and the cultural field, characterized by objectively circulating sign systems, are informed by the three semiotic modalities and are not to be thought of in terms of a polar opposition between reified lower and higher levels. The same elements or ingredients are present on all levels, although they may be differently weighted or foregrounded in any specific instance of accessing the world. Icons, as objective signs, are the firstnesses of thirdness, indexes the secondnesses of thirdness, and symbols the thirdnesses of thirdness. This is the foundation of Deacon’s (1997) core insight into the distinctiveness of the symbolic species.

This introduces a real complexity into the tasks of a cultural psychology that is fine-grained and phenomenologically acute: it must oscillate between the low and the high. It also implies, on the human level, that the symbolic field, or more generally thirdness or mediation, enters into and permeates the spheres of feeling and action. The semiotic subject—that is, the semiotic self that is the object of a cultural psychology—is, according to the Peircean model, *a three-dimensional or three-layered self-assembling and, on the reflexive level, self-interpreting field.*

Indeed, corresponding to the stratification of the interpreter, or semiotic self, is, looking back at the factors of semiosis, the stratification of types of interpretants that qualify this subject. Peirce’s revolutionary insight is that a sign or a sign configuration gives rise to proper significant effects in sign users. Interpretants are the meanings of signs or sign configurations. But, as Peircean semiotics claims, the meaning of a sign can be (1) an emotion, feeling, or affect; (2) a pattern of actions, an

expenditure of energy and effort, an attending to the other in some way or the other; or (3) a concept or idea, something belonging to the logical order of mediations. But rather than looking at them as distinct, Peircean semiotics would instruct us to look at them as dimensions of meaning of signs with differential weightings in different contexts and situations. The peculiarity and richness of Peirce’s model of semiotics and of semiosis is that these types of interpretants allow us to access the realm of meanings in both a structured and a phenomenologically open way. Once again, they tell us what to look for, but they do not tell us what we will find.

In this way, a Peircean approach to understanding the semiotic subject, the socio-psychological side that is the theme of cultural psychology, by using the typology of signs and their significant effects as an access structure to the perceptual field in particular—a unity of feeling, reaction, and synthesis or qualities, resistances, and unities—allows us to model the field of consciousness, also on the higher level, generally both in its individual and social dimensions. The objective field of signs, in which we are embodied and which circulate extra- and intrapsychically, becomes an access structure to both the inner and the outer world. Between these two worlds there is no divide in principle, as Peirce argued in his early 1868 papers with their powerful attack on introspection and unmediated intuition of one’s mental states. Access to *oneself* is always mediated just as access to the *world of the non-self* is always mediated. The semiotic self (*see* Wiley, 1994) quite generally is a sign developing on the three levels of feelings, reactions/resistances, and mediating syntheses. And the access to the world for this semiotic self is through the *forms of sense* charted in the great typology of signs. Peircean semiotics, in this way, intersects with and offers analytical tools to cultural psychology and indeed would offer us a way to interpret, and maybe to re-interpret, the results of cultural psychology—at least in some respects. Knowing the world involves concrete processes of sign production and sign interpretation, being caught up in a play of inference, being embodied in one’s speculative instruments, which, in the Peircean case, correspond to the great division of signs into icons, indices, and symbols. They are, as the ultimate frames of all systems of expressions, objective trajectories, vectors, or carriers of consciousness, with their own differentiated and historically emergent internal logics and grammars.



The heuristic fertility of the Peircean semiotic categorical scheme, which is indeed powerful, does not by any means, however, exhaust the possible substantial contribution of semiotics to the tasks of a cultural psychology. Other semiotic or semiotically relevant thematizations of the field of consciousness lay rather different grids over the phenomena of consciousness in general and in so doing deepen, broaden, and refocus the problem of the nature of the ultimate distinctions to be drawn in the plenum of consciousness as such and whether these are universal or culturally determined. They help us delineate in more detail the groundlines of the psychological side of the play of signs in human life. They also illustrate in their own way the big tent character of semiotics and force us to recognize that all semiotic models, or models with intrinsic semiotic importance, are *pragmatic*. Semiotics is part of a comprehensive toolbox for analyzing the construction of meanings, but it is not some super-science that tells us beforehand all that we can, or should, know.

### The Situation of Language

This is illustrated by another close link between semiotics and the tasks of a cultural psychology, to be found in the alternative schematization of a semiotic event, the focal point of semiotics, proposed by the great German psychologist of language, Karl Bühler, whose masterwork *Theory of Language* is a classic exemplification of the fusion of semiotic, philosophical, and psychological themes (Bühler, 1934/1965). Here, we find heuristic clues directed toward cultural psychology that originate not from the philosophical side of semiotics, as Peirce's does, but from the psychological side itself.

Bühler formulated his schema, which he called the "organon model" of language, with explicit semiotic (or, as he called it, *sematological*) intent but without the recourse to metaphysical categories, or philosophical taxonomy, that marked Peirce's approach. Nevertheless, although it highlights a slightly different pattern of relations than the Peircean schema, it still shows that explicitly semiotic categories are both helpful and necessary for modeling the groundlines of the field of consciousness in the broadest sense and for establishing the basic outlines of the cognitional structure that is to be filled in by a comprehensive and methodologically self-aware cultural psychology. It is especially important because Bühler's work was marked by both methodological sophistication and

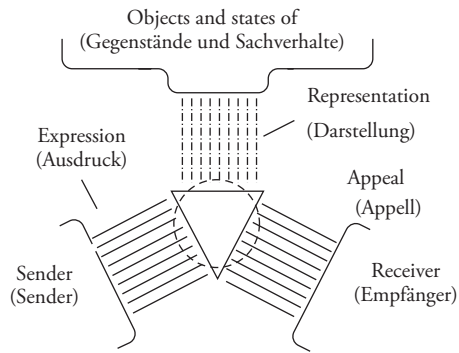


Figure 12.1 Bühler's Organon Model of Language

philosophical precision. And, indeed, Bühler himself attempted to generalize his schema.

Bühler, with no advertence to Peirce's delineation of the five factors of semiosis, has diagrammed the fundamental features of the focal semiotic event in the following way, exemplified (see figure 12.1) in the case of language:

The circle/triangle in the middle of the diagram stands for the *sign event in its material and formal reality*. It is important to recognize this duality: the sign event has a concrete side as well as an abstract side. Bühler's schema charts the realm encompassed by Peirce's five factors, but with some interesting and crucial differences, including a factor that does not appear in the schema but that is nevertheless of crucial importance for cultural psychology. Bühler, for his part, explains his diagram in the following manner, into which I have interpolated in brackets a translational gloss to generalize the schema beyond the purely linguistic level. Looked at this way, it becomes evident that other issues than those dealt with by Peirce are introduced or, at least, made more explicit and given a different weight. Bühler writes:

The circle in the middle symbolizes the concrete acoustic phenomenon [sign-configuration or sign-event]. Three variable factors in it go to give it the rank of a sign in three different manners. The sides of the inscribed triangle symbolize these three factors. In one way the triangle encloses less than the circle (thus illustrating the principle of abstractive relevance). In another way it goes beyond the circle to indicate that what is given to the senses always receives an apperceptive complement. The parallel lines symbolize the semantic functions of the (complex) language sign [sign-configuration]. It is a *symbol* by virtue of its coordination to objects and states of

affairs, a *symptom* (*Anzeichen, indicium*: index) by virtue of its dependence on the sender, whose inner states it expresses, and a *signal* by virtue of its appeal to the hearer, whose inner or outer behaviour it directs as do other communicative signs.

(Bühler, 1934, p. 35)

It is clear that the coordination of a sign configuration to objects and states of affairs, which Bühler assigns to the *symbol*, is accomplished in three ways: iconically, indexically, and symbolically. All three forms of such coordination are exemplified in language. For Bühler, they are all semiotic modes of *representation*, a term shared by Bühler and Peirce, and the proper *logical* work of a sign or sign configuration. These modes are differentiated (as has been noted) by Peirce according to their different *bases* for the coordination: resemblance for iconicity, existential connection for indexicality, and convention for symbolicity. But for Bühler, they are all modes of representation in being directed toward an objective world. Representation, which Durst-Andersen (2009) generalizes to modeling, occurs in three modes when we orient ourselves to objects and states of affairs.

The relation of the sign or sign configuration to the sender or utterer of the linguistic sign configuration, however, is not analyzed by Bühler according to a private intention. This is very important for cultural psychology. Rather, Bühler thinks of the sign configuration as having moments, *objectively discernible moments*, that reveal the subjective attitudes and orientations of the speaker—*who does not have to be an identifiable individual*. These moments belong to social forms. The moments are read off of the objective semiotic event, not the private subjectivity of the speaker, which is nevertheless *embodied* in them. In fact, the speaker utilizes them—and in creative circumstances modifies them or creates novel moments. Peirce, in another context, speaks of the “material quality” of any sign configuration, what I would call its “distinctive feel.” This quality is intrinsically joined to the sign configuration’s objectively experienced properties, which are social facts. To take an example, Bühler remarks that although the “chalk marks drawn by mathematicians and logicians on the blackboard still contain an expressive residue,” tracing the degree of effort, the carefulness of execution, the clarity of material formulation, the lyric poet’s poem or constructed utterance offers “a richer yield” of expressive features. The kinds of expressive features of an utterance, or of an objectively accessible sign event,

reveal forms of subjectivity, willingly or unwillingly—a point Langer made a centerpiece of her theory of art (see Langer, 1953). But these features can be coded and socially shared. And hence they are subject to comprehensive analysis by a fusion of semiotic and cultural psychological investigations. Forms of expressed subjectivity are social forms, as the American pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist G. H. Mead showed, not private possessions of an isolated epistemological or psychological subject. Cultures embody and are shaped by these forms. They can be studied and compared from culture to culture.

As to the sign configuration’s relation to the receiver of the sign, this is the locus of what Bühler called the appellative function or Peirce’s rhetorical dimension. The goal here is to steer the receiver, first in terms of behavior, in specific directions, giving rise to Peirce’s energetic interpretant. But in an important way, Bühler is also pointing to Peirce’s affective interpretant, to the informing of the subjectivity of the receiver in terms of affective qualities. And, further, he is pointing to the sharing of an objective orientation to objects and states of affairs. The goal of the appellative function is, therefore, also able to guide the perceptual and conceptual orientations of the receiver, provided that he or she shares the same situation with the speaker.

Bühler rightly emphasizes that these three notions—representation, expression, and appeal—are *semantic* concepts. Although he admits the relative dominance of the representational function of language for humans (confirmed and argued for, as I have already indicated, with neurological detail and in Peircean terms by Deacon), Bühler is very clear that the relation to objects and states of affairs “does not capture everything for which the sound is a mediating phenomenon, a mediator between the speaker and the hearer” (1934, p. 37). Bühler then adds a comment that I think bears upon Peirce’s murky notion of a ground, upon which cultural psychology could certainly throw some empirically derived light. Bühler, as a psychologist of language, speaks of a “speech situation,” a notion that can be generalized. He points out that

... each of the two participants has his own position in the make-up of the speech situation, namely the sender as the agent of the act of speaking, as the *subject* of the speech action on the one hand, and the receiver as the one spoken to, as the *addressee* of the speech action on the other hand. They are not simply a part of what the message is about, rather they are

the partners in an exchange, and ultimately this is the reason why it is possible that the sound as a medial product has a specific significative relationship to each, to the one and to the other severally. (1934, pp. 37–38)

Generalizing, it not just speech or language as a medial event but any sign configuration whatsoever that is at issue.

In any speech situation, or situation of the production and exchange of signs, any one of the three relationships can have dominance and be in the foreground, although Roman Jakobson (1960) later expanded the relationships to six (adding the poetic, phatic, and metalingual functions to Bühler's original three). Let us avoid these complications in the current context and consider Bühler's thesis:

... each of the three relationships, each of the three semantic functions of language signs discloses and identifies a specific realm of linguistic phenomena and facts ... 'Expression in language' and 'appeal in language' are partial objects for all of language research, and thus display their own specific structures in comparison with representation in language. To put it briefly, lyric poetry and rhetoric have something specific to themselves that distinguishes them from epic poetry and drama; and their structural laws are even more obviously different from the structural law of scientific representation. (1934, p. 39)

A complete semiotics would thematize these structural laws both generally and, in the hermeneutic mode, in particular instances. It would extend an analysis in terms of semantic functions to the whole realm of cultural phenomena, not all of which clearly have to realize all of them. It would investigate the many objective features such structural laws display or manifest. Cultural psychology's approach not just to language but to cultural phenomena quite generally would have to attend to all the ways these three (or six, if we follow Jakobson) semantic relations are encoded. They are clearly socially defined and constituted. Indeed, the focus on the situation of the speech event, or any semiotic event, injects a distinctive cultural element into it, an element that is dialogical to the core. In this respect, Bühler's investigations intersect with Bakhtin's work on the polyphonic nature of the verbal situation and of verbal interaction, as Durst-Andersen has shown (2009).

Bühler, in a way paralleling Peirce but without any reference to him, proposes in his prescient,

*Die Krise der Psychologie* (1927), to use these three semantic functions to model the whole realm of perceptions and indeed to distinguish three autonomous, but related, types of psychology: an *experiential* psychology, a *behavioral* psychology, and a *cultural* psychology. So, there is also a Bühlerian triad, with a slightly different twist than Peirce's: experience, behavior, and objective form. The focal thesis proposed by Bühler is that the three sense-functions exemplified in the sign types of symptom/indices, signals, and symbols can be used to give a theoretical account of perceptions [*Wahrnehmungen*] quite generally—admittedly a rather wide notion (1927, p. 75). The psychology of experience deals with *indices*, the psychology of behavior deals with *signals*, and cultural psychology deals with *symbols*. Accordingly, *Sinnesdaten*—what is given in the experiential field—perform three different semantic functions in structuring human intercourse with both the natural and the social world. As *indices* [*Anzeichen*], certain phenomena *indicate* both the *properties of objects* and the *interiority of associated subjects*, founding the perceptual judgment [*Wahrnehmungschluss*] whose content is a *Sachverhalt* or state of affairs in both the external common world and in the world of interiority. Bühler will locate psycho-analysis in the indexical dimension. As *signals*, the “given” sign configurations elicit and steer the behavior or action of subjects in shared actional and pragmatically oriented situations or fields, where there is a sender and a receiver, who do not have to be thematically intentional agents. As *symbols*, the sign configurations can be iconic (*abbildend*) or signifying through existential connection or conventionally—that is, through symbolizing or objectively indicating. In this way they *represent*, or point to, objects, structures, and relational complexes, eliciting (releasing) and steering recreative (*nachschaffen*) acts of reading, interpreting, and understanding.

According to Bühler, looked at from the part of the subject, the play of signs in experience—both natural and social—releases and steers (1) perception in the broadest possible sense, (2) behavior, and (3) understanding. Bühler, writing as a philosophically informed psychologist, leads us to engage in a semiotic framing of perception, behavior, and symbolic understanding, all the while showing that there is no radical gulf separating the lower and the higher thresholds on both the descriptive and operative levels. Still, Bühler's triad is not the Peircean triad of feeling, action, and mediating synthesis but

perception, behavior, and objective form. These are clearly social forms, filled with cultural content and following culturally conditioned laws. Here is another semiotic organizing device or heuristic schema for cultural psychology to work with.

A further distinguishing feature of Bühler's position that intersects with cultural psychology is its emphasis on *diacrisis* and on the *principle of abstractive relevance*, two intertwined concepts that are of great importance in determining the "forms of sense," the conditions of which, from the psychological side, cultural psychology is concerned to establish. Bühler insightfully and astutely uses the perception of a word-sign as a heuristic key to understanding not only perception and behavior but the whole field of experience. The analysis, analogous to but not identical with Peirce's proposal, reveals something essential about the lower threshold. This threshold is itself modeled according to the constitution and perception of the linguistic sign. Nevertheless, Bühler does not propose that perceived objects or structures of behavior are language-like nor that the realm of objective forms be considered in themselves as language-like.

More specifically, Bühler instructs us to take recourse here to the distinction between phones and phonemes, a distinction that is well-known in linguistic circles and was much discussed at the time he was writing. It is, in my opinion, of fundamental and permanent importance for understanding or schematizing cognitive forms with the help of semiotic categories. Phones are material entities; phonemes are formal entities, systems of significant differences immanent in the phonic reality. This commonplace distinction, Bühler insightfully claims, points to specific perceptual powers that we have. Bühler remarks:

Phonemes are sound-marks in the word's tonal reality and in every word they can be counted. But the word-image is also Gestalt-like, it has a tonal face or aspect, that also changes like a human face in the changing course of the expressive or appellative function.

(Bühler, 1934, p. 258)

Indeed, one can only agree with Bühler's further comment that there is a remarkable "constancy of the phonematic signaling of word-images in the course of their changing sound face" (p. 259). Their sound-form is a *type* that determines any particular *token* of itself, a distinction that also is found in Peirce. In fact, to go a step further, Bühler

adds a precision: "'face' and 'descriptive features' are figurative names for two, *not for one* and the same method of guaranteeing their diacritical function, for the 'face' in our sense belongs to the domain of *Gestalten* and the 'descriptive features' essentially belongs either completely or extensively to the domain of 'summative connections' [*Undverbindungen*]" (p. 2).

Phonology, for Bühler, is concerned with specific types of differential invariants, abstract types, that are present in the inexhaustible sound-fund [*Lautschatz*] of a language. It is not the task of cultural psychology, but of linguistics, to determine these. But cultural psychology must acknowledge the powers needed to grasp them and to look for differential invariants in the cultural contexts of experience. In the case of language, these invariants are ideal unities, single classes of sounds functioning as *notae* [*Kennzeichen*] in the sound-whole [*Lautgestalt*]. They are functional, not substantial, unities. This is a permanent insight of the structuralist tradition in semiotics deriving from Saussure, an insight that Bühler willingly acknowledged. Diacrisis, Bühler shows, aims at discriminating these functional unities and through them of grasping the word as a *sense-filled unity*. Now it is precisely sense-filled unities of all sorts and at all levels of complexity that a culturally informed psychology shares with semiotics as its subject matter. Cultural psychology thematizes the individual and social conditions of emergence and interiorization of these unities, whereas semiotics discovers and analyzes their "logic" and their "content." But these two tasks are not in opposition and, in fact, could be thought of as two sides of a coin, despite clear methodological contrasts and demands.

Out of this notion of "recognizing differences that make a difference" (an anticipation of the work of Gregory Bateson who made this idea a centerpiece of his own reflections), Bühler derives his *principle of abstractive relevance*, which has permanent epistemological importance despite what looks like a rather scholastic and analytic context. The notion has already appeared in Bühler's explication of his diagram of the organon-model of language. Bühler writes:

In the case of signs that bear a meaning, the situation is such that the sensible thing, this perceptible something with which we are immediately dealing, does not have to enter with the total plethora of its concrete properties into the semantic function.

Rather it can be the case that for it to fulfill its function as a sign only certain specific abstract moments are *relevant*. That, in the simplest words, is the principle of abstractive relevance.

(Bühler, 1931, p. 38)

The heuristic rule Bühler issues to cultural psychology is to study *systems of relevance* in all meaning-bearing situations. Different cultural frames perform different acts of abstraction, taking different abstract moments as relevant. The sensible thing that Bühler so laconically mentions can be a whole intricately socio-cultural situation or cultural context: meaning systems of every sort and scale. Cultural psychology, then, looked at from the point of view of a semiotics inspired by Bühlerian elements, is concerned with systems of pertinence and not with descriptions of the way the world is independently of its being taken. In this the interests of cultural psychology and semiotics coincide, and once again, cultural psychology will supply empirical content to an analytic frame that will be a part of cultural psychology but clearly not the whole of it. Cultural psychology is more fine-grained on the conditions of realization side than semiotics, which supplies a kind of upper analytical blade to the conceptual armature of cultural psychology.

It should be noted, then, that Bühler's suggestion allows us to use the *perception* of language and linguistic unities as a heuristic tool for understanding semiotic phenomena rather than using *language* itself as the primary model for understanding semiosis. Here is a ringing text in which Bühler issues a challenge, from the psychological side, to a semiotics of culture:

If linguists and language theorists today feel inspired once again to essay forth from their own domain into the age-old dispute of the masters concerning the problem of abstraction, they can give good reason for doing so. For the one who knows how to turn the old interest around, to turn the gaze of the abstraction theorist away from the things that are being named to the naming activity of the words themselves, to the tonal structure, he gains a new chance for dealing with this issue. And he does so for the simple reason that these structures are not only ready at hand but also produced by the persons who know them. Indeed, they are produced precisely for this end by every speaker of a language, so that his conversational partner can recognize correctly each sound structure for what it is and can distinguish it from others.

Therein lies the great chance for those who want to tackle anew the problem of abstraction as linguists, relying on the findings of phonology.

(1934, p. 288)

Bühler is certainly right that the phenomenon of abstraction as a cognitive achievement lies at the core of semiosis, understood as a process giving rise to abstractions—that is, products existing in objective form. It is these objective forms, and not just in the format of language, that semiotics, oriented toward the description of sign types and their contents, studies for the most part, whereas the psychological side in its empirical detail and levels is the focal point of psychology. The question semiotics would put to cultural psychology is: What are the social and cultural matrices that condition *a tergo*—that is, from behind, the processes of abstraction and what influences do the actual abstractions that one is assimilated into have on the psychological conditions of abstraction itself? Bühler himself, in this context, is pointing downward toward the lower threshold that in his opinion is already semiotically rich and to which language is not related as a veneer. The situation is quite different. Bühler writes:

The linguistic fixating and grasping of perceived states of affairs is prepared and rooted in the processes we are accustomed to calling “perceptions” and to separating off in an unjustifiably rigorous way from a “following” linguistic apprehension . . . The orientational instrument of human language which is produced in linguistic intercourse potentiates what the natural signals and symptoms accomplish, which we in the process of perception derive from things and our speech partners and to which we are indebted.

(1934, p. 252)

Nevertheless, Bühler's pushdown to the lower threshold also challenges or at least seems to modify Eco's and Peirce's thesis, but also his own, about the comprehensiveness of semiotic terminology in the description of consciousness, whether individual or social. Bühler saw the complexity of trying to balance semiotic with non-semiotic factors in the description of consciousness. More specifically, Bühler thought that the Gestalt principle was “phylogenetically originary” (Bühler 1960, p. 74). Despite his deep commitment to an explicitly semiotic model for analyzing the groundlines of consciousness, Bühler never gave up his adherence to

the validity of the concept of a whole. In his *Die Krise der Psychologie*, he wrote:

It is not correct to conflate the concepts of structure [*Struktur*], sense [*Sinn*], and value [*Wert*]. The concept of a whole [*der Begriff der Ganzheit*] with its constitutive moments is the widest concept and to it is ordered knowledge by insight. Intentionally produced wholes that are meaning structures . . . can only be a restricted domain of structures quite generally.

(Bühler, 1927, p. 137)

Clearly there is no strict opposition posited between wholes and meaning structures. Bühler is noting here a peculiar tension between diacrisis on the basis of indexical properties and the grasp of structure or form on the basis of a perceptual apprehension that does not rely on an explicit reading of determining indices. In fact, perception is marked by the *emergence* of structures as configurations from an irreducible parts/whole correlation. The whole is more than the sum of its parts, an emergence, and in the case of produced meaning structures, there is an intrinsic duality between the selectivity of pertinence, which involves elimination of irrelevancies, and the emergence of novelty, which involves a kind of addition of meaning. Bühler puts it this way, in a context where these notions apply to language primarily in its metaphorical dimension but can also be extended to cultural systems of meaning.

Overlapping, falling away, selection, the difference effect are expressions for one and the same simple phenomenon, which it is necessary to place beside the criterion of *Übersummativität*, which alone has been emphasized in Gestalt theory since the time of von Ehrenfels, in order to describe completely the role of attributive structures in language . . .

*Übersummativität* and *Untersummativität* of attributive structures increase the productivity of language to an astonishing degree and make possible a laconic form of naming. Admittedly, the system also has at its disposal a correction for the indefiniteness or ambiguities of these structures.

(Bühler, 1934, pp. 349–350)

Where is this “correction” to be found? In answering this question, Bühler introduces a most important notion, that of *Sachwissen*, or material knowledge, which certainly belongs to the subject matter of a cultural psychology, although it is introduced in a specifically linguistic context. How so?

Bühler’s language theory is based on a fundamental distinction between what he calls the *Zeigfeld* and the *Symbolfeld*—that is, the deictic field, defined by pointing, and the symbol field, defined by articulating or conceptual grasping. The general notion is that language frees itself from indexicality as it heads toward and is transformed by symbolicity. But Bühler writes:

Perhaps we overestimate the freeing from the deictic field; perhaps we underestimate the fact of the essential openness and the need, proper to every linguistic representation of a state of affairs, to be completed by our knowledge of this state of affairs. Or, what is the same thing: perhaps there is an expansion of all linguistically constituted knowledge from a source that does not run in the channels of the linguistic symbol system and nevertheless produces genuine knowledge.

(1934, p. 255)

This source is our material, or what Peirce called “collateral,” knowledge that is needed to make sense of signs. Bühler calls it *Sachwissen*, knowledge of a domain, or material knowledge, knowledge of the thing meant. Is not one of the tasks of cultural psychology to explore this dimension of our knowing, which is certainly culturally relative and differentially distributed? It is the support of our understanding of signs, which do not make a closed circle from which there is no escape.

There is, however, another form of support of our understanding that is more distinctively semiotic. Bühler asserts that the deictic field (*Zeigfeld*) and the symbol field (*Symbolfeld*) are “the two sources out of which in every case the precise interpretation of linguistic expressions is nourished” (1934, p. 149). Pointing and representing, not in themselves but as semiotic systems (rather than isolated acts), also supply collateral knowledge, but it comes from being embodied in a semiotic field. The general point Bühler wants to make is that all semiosis, and all the knowing effected by semiosis, is field-dependent. Signs must be situated or located in a surrounding field to do their work. This field is not just a linguistic field. Bühler is making a general semiotic point, which can, I think, be extended out to the whole realm of cultural analysis.

Thought that is expressed in speech, along with it every other operation with representational symbols in the service of knowing, is in need of a symbol field in exactly the same way as the painter needs

his painting surface, the cartographer his coordinate system of latitudinal and longitudinal lines, and the composer his still-otherwise-constructed surface, or put in general terms, just as every two-class system of representational signs.

(Bühler, 1934, p. 254)

The reference to a two-class system is central, exemplified in Bühler's "dogma of lexicon and syntax," or sign unit and surrounding field of relations. Is not cultural psychology dedicated to investigating the surrounding relational fields of meaning units, their genetic conditions on both the individual and social levels, and the degrees and stages in which they are learned? Does not a generalization of Bühler's insights help formulate in a laconic manner just what cultural psychology can do and is doing?

### **Between Signification and Structure: Semiotic Relevance of Tacit Knowing**

But can we take another look at the tension between structure and signification to which Bühler draws attention? Is there a way to specify their relations in more detail, this time from an epistemological position that has great semiotic relevance but was not developed within any of the major semiotic traditions? Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing, which is based on a generalization of Gestalt theory, needs to be incorporated into any semiotic model that strives to contribute to framing central issues in cultural psychology and the model(s) of mind that it both presupposes and tries to develop. It also adds some new insights and concepts that bear upon other issues that lie immanent in Bühler's conceptual system.

Philosophizing, as Bühler partially did, with the tools of and against the background of Gestalt psychology, Polanyi offers us a way around the dichotomy between structure and meaning by means of his fruitful distinction between *existential and representative meanings and wholes*. He further specifies how the recognizing of these wholes arises through *tacit*, not explicit, processes and how his indispensable distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness adds a new twist to our understanding of the parallel ways we are *embodied in* or *indwell* sign systems and meaning systems at both thresholds, including our indwelling in language, which he, along with Ernst Cassirer, discuss in probal terms. The analogy of the probe is a rich image-schema of our relationship to and use of language as well as other expression systems.

The background to Polanyi's position, which stands midway between semiotics and psychology, and its relevance to cultural psychology, is foregrounded in the following texts from Wolfgang Köhler, which still maintain their challenging position in our attempts to think through the problem of the ultimacy of the semiotic project in general and its relation to supplying analytical and epistemological underpinnings to cultural psychology. They concern, first of all, the schematization of the lower threshold but bear upon the possibility and nature of a valid modeling of this threshold in upper-threshold terms.

Consider the following formulation of one of Köhler's most challenging theses:

In Gestalt psychology we distinguish three major traits which are conspicuous in all cases of specific organization or gestalt. Phenomenally the world is neither an indifferent mosaic nor an indifferent continuum. It exhibits definite segregated units or contexts in all degrees of complexity, articulation and clearness. Secondly, such units show properties belonging to them as contexts or systems. Again, the parts of such units or contexts exhibit dependent properties in the sense that, given the place of a part in the context, its dependent properties are determined by this position.

(Köhler, 1938, p. 85)

Other relevant aspects and contexts are specified by Köhler in his classic *Gestalt Psychology*:

Gestalt psychology holds [that] sensory units have acquired names, have become richly symbolic, and are now known to have certain practical uses, while nevertheless they have existed as units before any of these further facts were added. Gestalt psychology claims that it is precisely the original segregation of circumscribed wholes which makes it possible for the sensory world to appear so utterly imbued with meaning to the adult; for, in the gradual entrance into the sensory field, meaning follows the lines drawn by natural organization; it usually enters into segregated wholes.

(Köhler, 1947, p. 82)

The fundamental questions in this context are: Is the original segregation a semiotic process, and what is the relation between the notion of a *circumscribed whole* in all its varieties and a *meaning*? Are circumscribed wholes at the lower threshold sign configurations or able to be analyzed as sign configurations?

Polanyi introduces an indispensable set of concepts here that joins together in a creative unity the notion of structure with that of meaning. It is extraordinarily important for establishing a sufficiently rich and flexible model of cognitional structure that would inform, frame, and support the investigations of a cultural psychology. Polanyi argues that in any grasp of, or construction of, a “circumscribed whole,” we *attend from* certain things, *which include our bodies*, while we *attend to* the whole. In Polanyi’s terminology, we are *subsidiarily aware* of the particulars of any whole while we are *focally aware* of the whole. Now, more generally, Polanyi points out that “when something is seen as subsidiary to a whole, this implies that it participates in sustaining the whole, and we may now regard this function as its *meaning*, within the whole” (Polanyi, 1958a, p. 58). The subsidiary particular is a kind of semiotic vector that is not independent of, although clearly not identical with, what it means. Polanyi, in a deep and penetrating passage, distinguishes in *Personal Knowledge* two kinds of wholes and two kinds of meanings: an *explicit sign/object whole* and the kinds of wholes exemplified by physiognomies, tunes, and patterns. Here is an important link with Bühler and Köhler. Polanyi writes:

The distinction between two kinds of awareness allows us readily to acknowledge these two kinds of wholes and two kinds of meaning. Remembering the various uses of a stick, for pointing, for exploring or for hitting, we can easily see that anything that functions effectively within an accredited context has a meaning in that context and that any such context will itself be appreciated as meaningful. We may describe the kind of meaning which a context possesses in itself as *existential*, to distinguish it especially from *denotative* or, more generally, *representative* meaning. In this sense pure mathematics has an existential meaning, while a mathematical theory in physics has a denotative meaning. The meaning of music is mainly existential, that of a portrait more or less representative, and so on. All kinds of order, whether contrived or natural, has existential meaning; but contrived order usually also conveys a message.

(Polanyi, 1958a, p. 58)

Although this admittedly controversial passage needs some unpacking and refining, and maybe even reformulation in places, it contains fundamental insights about the nature of meaning and

about the issue of the relations between perception and semiosis and about the thresholds of sense. On Polanyi’s account, structure and meaning are not opposed in principle, once we accept his fundamental distinction between the two kinds of awareness. Most generally, his claim is that *the genesis of meaning is the genesis of ordered contexts*. It seems to me that this is a key insight to be followed up by cultural psychology as well as by a genetically oriented semiotics and philosophy of knowledge. The kind of meaning denoted by “existential” is “meaning as object,” or more generally, “meaning as ordered context,” which can be a self-enclosed world. A physical object, in as much as it is a coherence, *is* a meaning, on this account. It does not just have a meaning projected onto it. It is a resisting experienced sense-filled unity. It is *suffused* by a distinctive quality or suchness, marked by its indexically functioning particulars, and *integrated* by a mediating act. Such a characterization corresponds to Peirce’s distinctions, which we discussed earlier, and which Peirce also labeled as *primisense*, *altersense*, *medisense*, the three indispensable and ever-present factors or ingredients in cognition. Systems of contrived order such as sign systems are themselves ordered wholes, which in addition to being internally structured, with their own internal objects, inform us *about*, or *refer to*, objects and states of affairs that are in a real sense “independently objective.” On Polanyi’s account, *thing meaning* and *sign meaning* are both at one and the same time autonomous and related forms of *meaning*. The thing meant, even whole cultural orders such as mythic and aesthetic worlds, does not have to exist outside of the frame, but there is no thing meant independent of some frame. The point is to determine, both directly and reflectively, the frames. This process of determining is first and foremost active and constructive, whereas the process of analyzing the internal logic of these culturally specific frames is both empirical and interpretive.

Polanyi draws an ontological consequence from these considerations, just as Peirce did, something that perhaps a pure semiotics, focusing on the internal structures of meaning systems, and a philosophically pure cultural psychology would hesitate to do. Consider the following text of Polanyi:

Since tacit knowing establishes a meaningful relation between two terms, we may identify it with the *understanding* of the comprehensive entity which these two terms jointly constitute. Thus, the proximal term represents the *particulars* of



this entity, and we can say, accordingly, that we comprehend the entity by relying on our awareness of its particulars for attending to their joint meaning.

(Polanyi, 1966, p. 13)

The *joint meaning* is an emergence, an instance of Peircean thirdness or Bühlerian-Ehrenfeldian *Übersummativität*, which could take numerous different forms: affective in the case of feelings, actional in the case of goal-directed behavior, and conceptual in the case of language and other constructed systems. However, one of the deepest and most fateful consequences of the notion of *attending from* is its extension to how we are conscious of our bodies and the consequent notion of *indwelling*, Polanyi's term that refers to the same phenomenon that *embodiment* does in the phenomenological tradition. Polanyi writes in *The Tacit Dimension*:

All thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body. Hence thinking is not only necessarily intentional, as Brentano has taught: it is also necessarily fraught with the roots it embodies. It has a *from-to* structure.

(1966, p. x)

Just as we dwell in our bodies, Polanyi, observes, so we dwell in *all* the subsidiary clues that we integrate or synthesize into comprehensive wholes. The analogy of the probe is, then, extended to language—and I would add to all cultural forms. “We can, accordingly, interpret the use of tools, of probes, and of pointers as further instances of the art of knowing, and may add to our list also the denotative use of language, as a kind of verbal pointing” (1966, p. 7). The extension here is: Cultural forms are embodiments of the art of knowing. This essentially cultural process of integration or synthesis of fields of particulars into meaningful wholes, Polanyi argues—and in my opinion has shown—is essentially *tacit*. It is also not something over which we have control and so it does not involve thematic reading of signs, although we are clearly often presented with sign configurations that demand strenuous interpretive effort. Polanyi's model of tacit knowing shows, I think, that thinking of experience itself in semiotic terms does not entail postulating an explicitly cognitive relationship to the continuum or plenum of experience, into which we are drawing lines.

Consider the following passage and its range of examples:

We may instantly recognize a familiar writing or voice, or a person's gait, or a well-cooked omelette, while being unable to tell—except quite vaguely—by what particulars we recognize these things. The same is true of the recognition of pathological symptoms, of the diagnosis of diseases and the identification of specimens. In all these instances we learn to comprehend an entity without ever getting to know, or to know clearly, the particulars that are *unspecifiable because they are unknown*.

(Polanyi, 1958b, p. 45)

This is the way we are assimilated into cultural forms, through apprenticeship and practice, on both technical and popular levels. An important qualification follows:

But a particular pointing beyond itself may be fully visible or audible and yet be unspecifiable in the sense that if attention is directed on it focally—so that it is now known in itself—it ceases to function as a clue or a sign and loses its meaning as such.

(Polanyi, 1958b, p. 45)

Analysis alone does not give us access to the material knowledge of the participants in a culture. They are participants first and foremost. Analysis come afterward. *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*. Thus, Polanyi allows us to see how signs in experience and the experience of signs are not contrasted in any principled way to one another, once we can distinguish between dwelling in and analyzing. Even tacit knowledge relies on an interpretation of signs, but an interpretation that avoids the cognitive stance ascribed to the epistemological subject. Knowing, as John Dewey put it, is not a “Kodak fixation” nor is the mind a kind of “mental carbon paper.”

Polanyi's notion of indwelling, which certainly modifies our picture of the knowing subject, allows us to understand what it means, quite generally, to be embodied in sign systems and also, from a totally different angle, shows us what unlimited semiosis entails: We are inside the play of signs and never outside. There is no explicit greatest upper bound from which we can survey the total range of experience. Read the following passage from the preface to Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*, which talks about a post-critical philosophy and not an a-critical philosophy, in light of what I have just said and with the appropriate interpolation of semiotic terms alongside Polanyi's own terminology.

I regard knowing [semiosis] as an active comprehension [signifying] of the things known [meant], an action that requires skill. Skilful knowing and doing [skilful sign-production and interpretation] is performed by subordinating a set of particulars [signs and sign-configurations], as clues or tools, to the shaping of a skilful [semiotic] achievement, whether practical or theoretical. We may then be said to become “subsidiarily aware” of these particulars [signs and sign-configurations] within our “focal awareness” of the coherent entity [object-domains] that we achieve [signify]. Clues and tools [signs and sign-configurations] are things used as such and not observed in themselves. They are made to function as extensions of our bodily equipment [mental equipment] and this involves a certain change in our own being. Acts of comprehension [acts of semiosis] are to this extent irreversible, and also non-critical. For we cannot possess any fixed framework within which the reshaping of our hitherto fixed framework could be critically tested.

(Polanyi, 1958a, p. vii)

This rotation of our problem adds new descriptive and explanatory categories to semiotics and exemplifies, once again, the big tent, non-dogmatic, and non-overreaching nature of semiotics as an analytical framework and transdisciplinary project. As to the tasks of a cultural psychology, it points to a host of analytical and descriptive tasks: to recognize and validate the tacit dimension—that is, that we can know more than we can say, to show that knowing and skillful doing have the same logical structure, and that the body, including our exosomatic or semiotic body, is an essential component of all knowing, which is not a matter of the head alone. It also suggests that the form-structure of awareness is actually isomorphic with, while still enriching, the sign-interpretant-object triad foregrounded by Peirce and that the lines that divide up the continuum of experience can be modeled in flexible, yet complementary ways. This last claim lies at the heart of the project of a cultural psychology.

But this is by no means the end of the matter. I would like, in concluding, to point out how elements from two other interlinked semiotic theories, those of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, can contribute to the mutual enrichment between cultural psychology and semiotics.

## Forms of Sense and the Mind of Feeling: Cassirer and Langer

In his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer wrote that the “concept of consciousness seems to be the very Proteus of philosophy” (1929, p/ 48). Certainly, it is also the same for a cultural psychology that accepts the task of charting the contours of consciousness shaped in the course of cultural interactions. The task Cassirer set for himself was to uncover what he called “the original attitudes and formative modes of consciousness”—that is, a kind of *a priori* structure within which meanings are constituted and expressed. Cassirer described his goal, echoing but transforming the static schema of Kant, as an attempt to resolve “the question of the structure of the perceptive, intuitive and cognitive consciousness” (1929, p. 57), from which arise the “three form worlds” (1929, p. 448) that constitute progressively more objectifying relations to the world. These form worlds make up the ultimate frame of sense-giving and sense-reading. The distinctiveness of Cassirer’s project is that it is also based on a tripartite semiotic schema that, like Peirce’s, does not just refer to successive phases of a process of knowing and meaning-making but to “its necessarily intertwined . . . constitutive factors” (1929, p. 9), what Peirce called the “permanent ingredients” of consciousness. It also gestures toward a kind of teleology and hierarchization, as if perception, intuition, and cognition were phases in a process. The distinctiveness of Cassirer’s procedure, however, mainly results from its correlation of these factors with three different semiotic categories or sense functions. Indeed, they are, in reality, not so much phases as dimensions. The form worlds, defined by the three sense functions, are the ultimate frames or matrices of sense-giving and sense-reading, which for Cassirer are by no means restricted to the explicit and thematic use of signs.

Cassirer correlated the psychological and philosophical term *perception* [*Wahrnehmung*] with the semiotic category of *expression* [*Ausdruck*]<sup>1</sup>—that is, with the level of sense and meaning that we have been calling physiognomic or existential or qualitative. Expression is the sense function where sign, meaning, and object are so indissolubly joined that the sign is taken to participate existentially in, or have an ontological affinity with, its intended reality. For Cassirer, word magic and mythic consciousness are prime exemplifications of this stratum or form of consciousness. They are continued, although

residually, in higher forms of religion and their distinctively affective configurations. Expression, then, is the realm primarily of physiognomic and qualitatively defined meanings. Mythic consciousness is analyzed in volume one of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

Cassirer correlated the psychological and philosophical term *intuition* [*Anschauung*] with the semiotic category of *representation* [*Repräsentation* or *Darstellung*], with the grasp or constitution in the experiential continuum of objects with properties and their embodiment in language, the subject of the volume two of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. It is the recognition of objects by properties, functioning as marks or diacritical features, that introduces a kind of indexical feature into perception. The perceived properties support the perceptual process and do so in such a manner that the supports themselves are connected with what they point to. This second sense function, representation, is the sense function where the relations among signs, meanings, and objects have moved to a higher level of abstraction but are still bound to the sensory order. Whereas mythical consciousness, a true semiotic phenomenon, works within the dimension of affectively charged identity, or at least identification of sign with object, representation introduces difference, although in a rather different sense than one is familiar with in the structural and post-structuralist traditions. As Cassirer puts it in a way resonant with later discussions, "The aim of repetition lies in identity—the aim of linguistic designation lies in difference" (p. 189). On this level, the word is not the thing; the image is not the imaged. Words and images, doing the work of representation, articulate the world *without being a part of it*. Language and art for Cassirer exemplify in clearest fashion this sense function, albeit in rather different ways. They grasp [*begreifen*] the world, upon an intuitive [*anschaulich*] base, to be sure, but they do not take hold [*greifen*] of it in any material or magical fashion, despite their engrossing and magical effects on the psychological level.

Cassirer correlated the *scientific* [*wissenschaftlich*]—that is, theoretical—understanding [*Erkenntnis*] with pure signification [*Bedeutung*], with the grasp of abstract relations, a grasp based on free and unmotivated systems of signs. This third sense function, pure signification, is the stratum of sense functions farthest removed from normal sensory, intuitive supports. The concrete physical reality of the sensible, vectorially functioning signs and the objects

that they both point to and constitute recedes. This meaning space accesses, indeed constitutes, a world of law-governed events that are defined by their relations to one another and not to our intuitional or objectively oriented capacities. It is exemplified in modern mathematical physics and the *notation systems* that make it possible (as well as the various systems of pure mathematics and symbolic logic). A general reflection on this stratum, and a correlation of it with the two other strata, is the subject of volume three of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, devoted to the phenomenology of knowledge in the semiotic mode.

According to Cassirer, the basis for the differentiation of these three sense functions is the increasing distance between the sign and the realities accessed through it—indeed, an increasing transparency of the sign, a disappearing of its material character and physical reality and underpinnings, which, however, can never be left behind. Even abstract systems of signs have a kind of diaphanous or even disembodied feel, which makes up, paradoxically, their semiotic body. This is what Peirce called the material quality of the sign, which each sense function, semiotically considered, has. By means of this "spiritual triad" (1929, p. 101), Cassirer wanted to place precisely the forms of sense-giving in relation to one another and to analyze their inner logics and developmental stages, which he did under the rubric not just of his philosophy of symbolic forms but of a philosophy of human culture, epitomized in his *An Essay on Man* (1944). Cultural psychology engages paradigmatic exemplifications of these sense functions. Indeed, I think that cultural psychology could examine and evaluate the psychological validity of Cassirer's rather high-road schematization of these sense functions. Here, the descriptive tasks of semiotics both coincide with and inform those of a cultural psychology.

This is nowhere clearer than in the work of Langer, who consciously in many and important ways has continued and extended Cassirer's attempt to broaden the scope of semiotics to the history of culture as such and to base it on a distinctive and original model of mind. In her early work, *The Practice of Philosophy* (1930), Langer argues that philosophy's proper object is interpretation—indeed, the interpretation of interpretations that are expressed in various sign systems. In a way paralleling Peirce, but with no explicit use of his terms, Langer argues that human beings spread two very different sign systems, the discursive and the

representative, over the continuum of experience. In her classic *Philosophy in a New Key*, this distinction becomes one between discursive and presentational forms. It is the job of semiotics to study the general logic of signs and symbols and then to explore the specific logic of each general class of sign systems and their specific exemplifications in language, myth, ritual, art, science, and so on. The realm of human rationality is divided into these two semiotic modes, corresponding roughly to a distinction between saying and showing, a distinction she takes from Wittgenstein and uses in her own way—heading toward results that Wittgenstein himself would not have sanctioned. But Langer goes further in her analysis. Like Cassirer, she sees the human being as *animal symbolicum*, but she pushes the symbolic capacity all the way down to the lower threshold of meaning-making, which she subsumes under the rubric of symbolic transformation.

Langer notes that the human mind is to be understood as a transformer and not a transmitter. It not only grasps forms but transforms, rendering the data of experience meaningful. “Meaning accrues essentially to forms,” she writes in *Philosophy in a New Key* (p. 90), with a generous gesture toward Gestalt psychology’s central thesis. By connecting the grasp of form with the recognition of symbolic structure, Langer herself pushes meaning down and arrives at a position similar to Peirce’s. But, just as with Peirce, Langer does not remain on the level of individual subjective transformations of experience but extends her attention out to all those objective forms that emerge out of these transformations. Langer’s contention is that recognizing two radically different types of symbolic transformations broadens our very notion of rationality. And, moreover, in her final trilogy, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Langer attempts to develop a comprehensive concept of *feeling* to cover the total mental field and to connect it with symbolization as the central activity of human mentation. The structures of feeling are accessed and exemplified in paradigmatic form in the rise of the art symbol, a pregnant image that displays the life of feeling in objective form.

For Langer feeling is, quite generally, “whatever is felt in any way, as sensory stimulus or inward tension, pain, emotion or intent.” It is *the* “mark of mentality” (Langer, 1967, p. 4). Feeling, on Langer’s conception, characterizes physiological systems, not as an additional reality but as a dimension or phase of the system. Psychology, on Langer’s conception, is “oriented toward the aspects

of sensibility, awareness, excitement, gratification or suffering” which belong to physiological events when they reach a certain level of complexity and are *felt* (Langer, 1967, p. 4). Mentality and feeling, Langer proposes, are synonymous. Mentality is a field of “felt impingements and activities” (Langer, 1967, p. 9) and covers not just the normal notion of feeling but also thought, sensation, dream, and actions. Feeling is “the modulus of psychological conception” (Langer, 1967, p. 21) and being felt is a phase of vital processes, “a mode of appearance, and not an added factor” (Langer, 1967, p. 21). The chief thesis explored and defended by Langer is that “the entire psychological field—including human conception, responsible action, rationality, knowledge—is a vast and branching development of feeling” (1967, p. 23) and that there is no “primitive forms of feeling which is its ‘real’ form” (1967, p. 19).

How is feeling to be known? How does it make itself known? Langer’s idea is that the heuristic key to feeling is to be found in images, *specifically art images*.

An image does not exemplify the same principles of construction as the object it symbolizes but abstracts its phenomenal character, its immediate effect on our sensibility or the way it presents itself as something of importance, magnitude, strength or fragility, permanence or transience, etc. It organizes and enhances the impression directly received. And as most of our awareness of the world is a continual play of impressions, our primitive intellectual equipment is largely a fund of images, not necessarily visual, but often gestic, kinesthetic, verbal or what I can only call “situational.”... [W]e apprehend everything which comes to us as impact from the world by imposing some image on it that stresses its salient features and shapes it for recognition and memory.  
(1967, p. 59)

This is the root of Langer’s notion of a *form of feeling*—which Langer applies to her analysis of art (Langer, 1953). But the point is actually more general. Langer thinks that the original act of the mind is, by a kind of abstraction, to impose, or recognize, a form in the flux of experience and to construct some symbolic representation of it, rooted in the symbolizing activity of the imagination. The process is most evident in the production of artistic symbols, which exist in imaginal form. But projection does not take place only in the symbolic form of art.

Symbolic projection in all modalities aims to intercept every form of meaning in experience. Once again, cultural psychology and semiotics coincide. Langer asks cultural psychology to extend its range to examining all the manifestations of mind but especially the symbolic images of art. Langer adds an aesthetic twist to cultural psychology. It asks it to contribute to a semiotic exploration of “the form of felt life” (Langer, 1967, p. 64). It introduces the notion of symbolic exemplification as a challenge to cultural psychology to make sure that it encompasses, from its own point of view, the whole phenomenal manifestation of mind. The material quality of a sign configuration can be generalized: every sign configuration has a distinctive feel, whether in the discursive or presentational mode. Each type of sign configuration embodies gradients. These gradients reflect the ways we access the world. Cultural psychology, on the experiential side, follows the lead of semiotics and at the same time enriches it with empirical detail. It shows cultural psychology to be both modeling and phenomenologically empirical at one and the same time. But it challenges cultural psychology to focus on image fields and to avoid all form of logocentrism, to insert the symbolic imagination into its object domain. Indeed, because the basic idea of semiotics is that *meaning must appear*, Langer tells us that semiotics as well as cultural psychology must collaborate not just in the analysis of the logic of the forms of feeling but in the experience of these forms as they appear to and in culturally defined and situated persons and groups.

### The Universal Relevance of von Uexküll’s Functional Circle

Finally, I would like to note that Jakob von Uexküll’s functional circle, presented in his *Theory of Meaning* (1940), displays, within what has become an explicit biosemiotic context, the circuit of meaning of any organism *qua tale*. It is extremely important, as heuristic schema, for the proper understanding not just of the task of a general semiotics but of another way of formulating the frame for a cultural psychology that understands the bodily roots of semiosis. Any organism, on von Uexküll’s account, is defined by a deep receptivity to perceptual stimuli and by varying degrees and types of reactions that change the originating stimuli in a constant dynamic spiral. The path from the meaning-bearing object to the organism von Uexküll calls the “receptor arc.” The path from the organism to the meaning-bearing and meaning-receiving

object von Uexküll calls the “effector arc.” Although we can distinguish between the “perceptual arc” and the “effector arc,” we must all the while acknowledge the intimate relations between the two. In fact, the perceptual and the effector are dimensions rather than separate spheres, because the organism is never merely passive nor purely active, never merely interpreting or materially constructing. Indeed, Cassirer saw that in the case of humans, it is precisely the ingression of articulate meaning systems, what he called the “symbolic network,” into these two other systems that transforms the whole. von Uexküll’s revolutionary insight is that we should think of all these arcs in semiotic terms—that is, in terms of meaning and of differential cue carriers. The receptor arc is marked by the grasp of differences in the perceptual field, which Gregory Bateson also foregrounded. Although other organisms are for the most part confined to predetermined fields of cues, humans are open to a vast array of articulate cues, having not an *Umwelt* but a *Welt*—that is, not an environment but a world—or in Langer’s terms, an “open ambient.” This human world is an open world, permeated by articulate, exosomatic systems that inform and embody perception, in the broad sense of that term. This world is constituted by the material and semiotic *results* of human constructive action, which introduce vast systems of differences into the natural and the social world. These effected differences are themselves perceived by the organism in a continuous and ever-expanding spiral.

Cassirer’s delineates our situation in a ringing remark:

Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium.

(Cassirer, 1944, p. 25)

Is this not the goal of both semiotics and cultural psychology—to study this sign-dependent and -constituted artificial medium and process in which human beings “weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience?” Can we not adapt and extend Vygotsky’s closing reflection to the widest semiotic frame, thinking of “sign” when he speaks of “word.” “Consciousness,” he writes, “is reflected in a word [sign] as the sun in a drop of water.

A word [sign] relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word [sign] is a microcosm of human consciousness" (1934, p. 256). As Peirce puts it, "the word or sign that man uses *is* the man himself" (Peirce, 1868, p. 54).

### Conclusions and Future Perspectives

Cultural psychology and a broad-based semiotics, it is clear, intersect at many levels and in many ways. Cultural psychology, in as much as it deals with human meaning-making on the experiential and socio-cultural levels, is in need of explicit schemas of the various forms that meaning-making takes. Semiotics, however, does not offer one unified schema but, rather, a bundle of schemas that can guide cultural psychological investigations. The various semiotic schemas have different points of origin and consequently rather different kinds of relevance for cultural psychology. They foreground and schematize different features of meaning-making processes and give them different weight. Prior to concrete investigations, they do not tell cultural psychology what it will find, but they do point out some distinctive types of things with which cultural psychology will concern itself and supply it with analytical tools that will inform and thicken its empirical investigations.

The Peircean schema has a twofold value: (1) it offers a triadic model of sign types—icons, indexes, and symbols—that has great heuristic power, and (2) it delineates with remarkable clarity the five factors of semiosis, of the production and interpretation of signs, that make such a process the entangled phenomenon that it is. Of special importance is Peirce's notion of an interpretant, or the "proper significate effect" of a sign. Peirce's model of the self shows it to be three-leveled, with the self engaging the world on the level of feeling, effective action, and cognition. Semiotics would point cultural psychology toward empirical investigations of the social and cultural exemplifications of these interpretant realms and the varieties of contents mediated by icons, indexes, and symbols at the various stages of an individual's and a culture's development.

Karl Bühler offers a semiotic schema developed not from a logical or philosophical point of view but from a generalization of a speech event. Bühler showed that language is not just a representational tool, carrying out a representational function. A speech event also reveals or expresses the subjectivity of the speaker and it steers the behavior of the

addressee. Furthermore, Bühler's organon model foregrounds the pivotal phenomenon of abstraction and the mental processes of diacrisis. Bühler sees the human mind as focused on systems of relevance both in the apprehension of the linguistic sign and in the cultural world quite generally. Moreover, the differentiation of expression, appeal, and representation, as semantic functions is correlated by Bühler with the semiotic distinction between indexes, signals, and symbols. On this basis, Bühler saw three principal domains for psychology to study: (1) the structures of experiencing subjects, (2) the forms of behavior and behavioral steering, and (3) the systems of formed content found in objective meaning systems. Cultural psychology should avail itself of Bühler's suggestions here in terms of the tasks of psychology as well as drawing on his advanced notion of a field, which is not restricted to a purely linguistic field.

Michael Polanyi adds to the focal concerns of a cultural psychology the important notion of a tacit dimension, that we can know more than we can say, and the notion of skillful knowing and doing. Could cultural psychology, taking up Polanyi's hints, not be advanced by adverting to the revolutionary nature of Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness and the consequent key concept of indwelling? Moreover, Polanyi's insistence on the tacit assimilation of cues and clues shows that knowing does not involve an explicit or thematic cognitive stance. It also shows that knowing is fraught with the roots that it embodies, roots over which we have no control at the primary level of assimilation.

Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer point the way to a semiotically grounded philosophy of culture, Cassirer by offering his own tripartite schema of sense functions, expression, representation, and pure signification and pointing to how they inform and structure the whole realm of symbolic forms that make up the world, Langer by developing the general notion of symbolic transformation and a comprehensive concept of feeling. Both rely on a vast realm of data from the human sciences and show how semiotics does not legislate from on high but exists in symbiotic relationship with the whole cultural and biological world. Such a position joins them to von Uexküll's attempt to fuse the biological and the cultural, the lower and upper thresholds of human meaning making.

The various positions with which we have dealt in this article have one major lesson for cultural

psychology. They all teach us that semiotics without the study of cultural forms is empty, and the study of cultural forms without semiotics is blind.

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# The City As a Sign: A Developmental-Experiential Approach to Spatial Life

Nikita A. Kharlamov

## Abstract

The galloping urbanization of the world simultaneously transforms human society into a thoroughly urban society and dismantles the traditional “rural–urban” dichotomy. It is increasingly recognized in urban studies that human spatiality entails a complex pattern of settlements and dwellings. I propose a developmental-experiential theoretical framework for addressing what Stanley Milgram called the experience of living in cities. This framework particularly focuses on the atmosphere of living in cities. Founded on organismic-developmental axiomatic base introduced by Jacob von Uexküll, Heinz Werner, and Bernard Kaplan, and developed as cultural-developmental approach by Jaan Valsiner, the proposed framework centers on the experience of individual organismic relating to spatial environment. I draw on the work of Manuel Castells, Edward Soja, and Yi-Fu Tuan to conceptualize the emergence of meaningful places as the outcome of experiencing space. The concept of encounter introduced by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift is used to locate the experience of the banal, everyday city life. Following Erving Goffman, the central question for the framework becomes the question of organization of experience. This question is tackled through Jaan Valsiner’s notions of semiotic mediation and regulation. I specifically focus on spatial signs that humans use to regulate the meaning-making process that creates as meaningful what Georges Perec called species of spaces, such as towns and cities. “The city,” from this standpoint, becomes one of the most important signs that mediate and regulate our experience of environments we inhabit. I discuss a number of theoretical and methodological directions in which this framework could be further developed to revive the urban, or settlement, psychology, which failed to develop as a viable subdiscipline despite the proposals of Georg Simmel and Nikolai Antsiferov in the early twentieth century, and the latter proposals of Milgram. This discipline should join efforts with settlement sociology and settlement geography to tackle the multiple challenges of urbanization by exploring its experiential dimension in its fascinating cultural diversity and intra- and interindividual variation.

**Keywords:** city, development, encounter, experience, meaning, person-environment-behavior, place, space, sign–spatial, Umwelt, urban psychology

“The metropolis reveals itself as one of those great historical formations in which opposing streams which enclose life unfold, as well as join one another with equal right.”

—(*Simmel*, 1903/1997, p. 185)

“Every city has its own face.”

—(*Antsiferov*, 1925, p. 25)



“The Great Khan owns an atlas in which are gathered the maps of all the cities: those whose walls rest on solid foundations, those which fell in ruins and were swallowed up by the sand, those that will exist one day and in whose place now only hares’ holes gape . . . The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins. In the last pages of the atlas there is an outpouring of networks without beginning or end, cities in the shape of Los Angeles, in the shape of Kyōto-Ōsaka, without shape.”  
—(Calvino, 1972/1974, pp. 137–139)

“Don’t be too hasty in trying to find a definition of the town; it’s far too big and there’s every chance of getting it wrong.”  
—(Perec, 1974/2008a, p. 60).

Georg Simmel, whose lecture, *The metropolis and the mental life* (1903/1997), attained a monumental position in urban literature and in the imagination of urban scholars, understood the city as the mediating vehicle between societal-cultural transition to modernity and the everyday life of the people (Kharlamov, 2009). For him, metropolis *existed* as a spatial and psychic,<sup>1</sup> or even *spiritual*,<sup>2</sup> environment and was visible, ostensive, and palpable. In fact, Simmel’s metropolis is well-known to have been the *fin-de-siècle* Berlin (Jazbinsek, 2003). However, only 70 years after Simmel’s piece, Italo Calvino conveyed an image of the great omniscient Kublai Khan flipping through the pages of a wondrous atlas that predicted the end of the city form as we know it. Calvino’s friend Georges Perec simply stated that there is no quick way of arriving at a structured understanding of what a “town” is, instead proceeding by way of scrupulous documentation of town-ness of that, as he called it, “species of spaces.”

*Method:* you must either give up talking of the town, about town, or else force yourself to talk about it as simply as possible, obviously, familiarly. Get rid of all preconceived ideas. Stop thinking in ready-made terms, forget what the town planners and sociologists have said.

(Perec, 1974/2008a, pp. 61–62, italics in original)

And yet, as Nikolai Antsiferov succinctly stated, places where people live have unique identities (“faces”), so that we still can recognize Los Angeles even if we agree that it has no form but the vast, endless sprawl. We even ordinarily recognize it as a

city! But what does it mean then to live in a post-city? *What is the experience of living in the city?*

Defining the meaning of the terms “urban” and “city” is a monumental task that radiates the feeling of futility. These words—along with mind, society, power, economy, and many others—belong to the class of *foundational concepts* that travel through human sciences, ever settling the research interests, guiding generation of questions and research programs, and at the same time evading attempts to create solid and agreed-upon definitions and operationalizations.

What makes the notions of *city* and *urban* special among foundational concepts is that they are to some extent *ostensive*. That is, there is some *a priori* obviousness to these notions, a possibility to detect the presence of *the urban* by merely looking at a place, pointing a finger at a location, and suggesting that it is an urban location, before invoking powers of reflection and scientific reasoning (Fig. 13.1). But how do we approach this ostensiveness?

### The “Soul of the City”: Calls for an Urban Psychology

At least some (and probably all) cities have such a powerful grasp on our sensory and cognitive apparatus that they attain a lasting and individual *identity*. Nikolai Antsiferov, an early Soviet urbanist, developed a holistic, organicist conception of the city (1925). He identified three dimensions and, correspondingly, divided the urban science into three branches. The physical form, “the physical nature of the city constituting its concrete, material base”



**Figure 13.1** An urban place—Malaya Ordynka Street, Moscow, Russia (Photograph by author, 2005)

(*ibid.*, p. 21), was to be the subject matter of *urban anatomy*. The functions of urban organism, “the city pulsing with all its organs through the activity of the society” (*ibid.*, p. 22, italics removed), were the domain of *urban physiology*. Finally, Antsiferov asserted that the city has a synthetic image, recognizable in the flow of time, and stated that “the *soul of the city* [is] a *historically* formed *unity* of all elements, constituting the urban *organism* as a concrete *individuality*” (1925, p. 26, italics in original). In this secular definition he attempted, predating many concerns in urban studies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, to capture the constellation of landscape, history, memory, and architectural and planning styles (*ibid.*, Chapter 4) that makes the city. This was what, according to Antsiferov, urban psychology should study.

Writing 45 years after Antsiferov, Milgram (1970/2010) proposed an agenda for urban psychology. In addition to the issues familiar to social psychology—such as bystander intervention and role behavior—Milgram’s seminal article contained a section entitled, nebulously, “Further aspects of urban experience” (*ibid.*, pp. 20 ff.). Echoing Antsiferov (1925), and presumably independently from him, Milgram proposed to study the “‘atmosphere’ of great cities” (*ibid.*). This phenomenon encompassed such things as the “vibrant” and “frenetic” character of New York’s city life. Milgram treated this phenomenon in terms of how people *perceive* cities and suggested that at least three factors are responsible (1970/2010, pp. 21–22):

1. “Implicit standard of comparison,” such as the person’s hometown;

2. “Whether the observer is a tourist, a newcomer, or a longer-term resident”;

3. “The popular myths and expectations each visitor brings to the city.”

Milgram suggested that a program of research on these subjective dimensions of perceiving the city should be augmented by measures of objective factors, such as population and its density, characteristics of urban society such as the geographic origin of migrants, national culture, and history of a given city (*ibid.*, p. 25). He even suggested to study, in addition to behavioral measures, and following the work of Kevin Lynch (1960), the “cognitive maps” people have of their cities.

The urban psychology according to Antsiferov and Milgram, however, apparently never blossomed, especially with respect to proposing integrative theories and conceptual frameworks. In the United States (and elsewhere) “urban psychology in the year 2009 barely exists as a discipline, with no journal, organization, or degree program” (Takooshian, 2009, p. 916). Takooshian suggests that the impact of Milgram’s proposal has dissipated, even as the original article became a citation classic. Indeed, today what amounts to urban psychology is concerned quite narrowly with a range of familiar psychological topics—such as prosocial and antisocial behaviors, attitudes, health, locating them in the cities as external settings—*essentially as independent variables*. A recent report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Urban Psychology (American Psychological Association [APA], 2005) stated that urban psychology deals

with urban environments, ranging in scale from inner cities to metropolitan areas, and:

the central question for urban psychology concerns how the distinctive characteristics of the people and places that make up urban environments give rise to particular types of experiences and behaviors, and have particular consequences for mental health, well-being, and human development.

(APA, 2005, p. 2)

Although this definition sounds promising, in reality it furthers the dissipation of its subject matter by approaching the notion of urban in a *non-problematic way*: the urban, for APA Task Force, is what the U.S. Census Bureau defines it to be, through a threshold of population density. It also includes what is non-rural, or non-agricultural, and what is “part of the global system of economic production and distribution” (ibid., pp. 1–2). Consequently, the rest of the report documents a wide range of issues psychology has been studying for varying lengths in the past century, such as acculturation, aging, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities, homelessness, substance abuse, physical and mental health, urban decay, urban schools, and even vulnerability to terrorism.<sup>3</sup> In studying all these, psychology largely takes urban for granted and dissolves in absence of an integrating, central psychological concept that would define the subject matter of this subdiscipline.

### **Developmental-Experiential Approach to Life in Spaces: Structure of the Argument**

The present chapter is an attempt to approach spaces *Homo sapiens* live in, or dwell in, or inhabit, beginning with the guiding intuition of *ostensiveness*. It is an attempt to provide novel theoretical and methodological tools for addressing the very basic question about urban life: *What constitutes the city?* It is also an attempt to find the subject matter for an urban psychology—or psychology of human settlement spaces—in *developmental axiomatic base applied to the phenomenon of spatial experience*. An answer to this question is the ontological foundation for any further inquiry into human settlement form. I explicitly adopt a perspective focused on persons—the sentient inhabitants of environments—and their *intentionality*, which is the source of meanings and activities that define cities as spatial forms, and focus thus on psychic experience of urban living. Hence the title of the chapter: furthering the move taken by Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (1986), whose seminal collection on urban semiotics was entitled *The City*

*and the Sign*, I suggest that the city is a meaning, or, more specifically and importantly, it is *the sign* that organizes meaning-making around human settlements and ultimately defines what we mean by the city and what it means to live in a *good place*.

The chapter begins with an examination of the notion of “the city” in context of recent discussions on the end of modern city forms and the emergence of radically new settlements such as decentered urbanized regions. This establishes the *core problem*: If today there is indeed a new essence to the urban form and urban life, what is the experience of living in these new settlements? And how do people make sense of these new surroundings? The remainder of the chapter is devoted to outlining a developmental-experiential approach to encountering space and making sense of it. I consecutively discuss the developmental axiomatic base, the notions of space and place, and introduce the concepts of experience and encounter. I then examine the semiotically mediated nature of experience and the regulative function of culture. The final part of the chapter is devoted to discussing how humans recognize different species of spaces on the basis of spatial signs, and the implications of this approach to understanding the nature of cities and urban life. The chapter concludes with a number of future directions of inquiry.

### **Are We Really All Heading Urban? Or, What Are the Spaces We Inhabit Today?**

“Sometime early next [twenty-first] century, if present trends continue, more than half of the world’s population will be classified as urban rather than rural,” predicted David Harvey (1996, p. 403). He went on the Marxist track to elaborate on the notion of urbanization as a process fueled by technological innovation and founded on the social-economic-political process of “relentless capital accumulation”: “We are all embroiled in a *global process of capitalist urbanization or uneven spatio-temporal development*” (p. 414). Indeed, in 2007 a United Nations (U.N. Population Fund [UNFPA], 2007) report stated, “[T]he world is about to leave its rural past behind: By 2008, for the first time, more than half of the globe’s population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in towns and cities” (ibid., p. 6). This statement was immediately picked up by urban practitioners, pundits, and academics from across the spectrum of disciplines dealing with cities and urban life.

Remarkable as this statistical statement is, however, it raises more questions than it provides

answers. It is a *statistical assertion* of the highest, most general scale.<sup>4</sup> Unpacking its meaning requires asking: What constitutes a city? Given the galloping pace of urbanization all over the world, is there still salience to the dichotomy “urban–rural”? Or maybe the distinction becomes an example of unity of opposites—as with sustainable local agriculture initiatives in the heart of American inner cities and with high-speed Internet connections in Northern Russian villages? What kind of life then is urban life? How is the city shaped by its inhabitants, and how is it, in turn, shaping them? What is cultural about this process? What is the future of human settlement forms and human mobility patterns in face of fossil resource exhaustion and global warming? And not least—as thinkers such as Iris Marion Young (1990) and David Harvey (1996) remind—what is the justice dimension of human settlement process? These questions form the crux of urban studies and demand cooperation and integration across disciplines. The underlying complexity of “50% urban population” statement underscores the topicality and urgency of these questions about urban life not only for abstract scientific thinking but for broad domains of public concern and applied policy.

### ***The New Urban Form: Urban, Suburban, Post-Suburban, Apocalyptic . . .***

One possible track of unpacking the issue of what constitutes a city is to start with the assertion that today cities go beyond the traditional, modern urban form into something radically new—such as the *sprawling urbanized region with multiple centers*. In 1987, Robert Fishman, in his seminal history of the American suburban model, suggested that the traditional model of city with an identifiable core (which in modern times has been “augmented” with a rim of bedroom suburbs) is being replaced by “technoburb”: “With its highways and advanced communication technology, the new perimeter city can generate urban diversity without urban concentration” (p. 17). Fishman’s vision of “technoburbs” and “techno-cities” (1987, Chapter 7) was inspired first and foremost by Los Angeles—the iconic urban sprawl developed literally from a scratch of a few thousand homesteaders over (at best) some 150 years into a megalopolis of well over 16 million people. The entire region manifests the dissolution of rural–urban dichotomy.

In effect, Southern California constitutes a single metropolitan district which should be characterized

as *urban*: neither city nor country but everywhere a mixture of both. Just as Southern California is the least rural of all the regions in America, so, paradoxically, Los Angeles is the least *cityfied* of all the cities of America.

(McWilliams, 1973, pp. 12–13)

For today’s urban studies, Los Angeles has become a *paradigmatic city*: “the city that displays more clearly than other cities the fundamental features and trends of the wider urban system” (Nijman, 2000, p. 135).<sup>5</sup> Jan Nijman—who claims that Miami, rather than Los Angeles, could serve as a paradigmatic American city for the twenty-first century—inserts a caveat that the paradigmatic city is not a city that all other cities will become but, rather, a future-projected extreme most clearly manifesting the general trends. The imagination of Los Angeles found its way into concepts underscoring the regionalized nature of settlement patterns, such as the “multicentered metropolitan region,” which Gottdiener and Hutchison have called “the first really new way people have organized their living and working arrangements in 10,000 years” (2006, p. 5). In contrast to the bounded traditional city with a recognizable central core, such as the city reflected in the classical concentric ring growth model of the Chicago School (Burgess, 1925), the “new form of settlement space . . . can be typified by two features: It extends over a large region, and it contains many separate centers, each with its own abilities to draw workers, shoppers, and residents” (Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2006, p. 5). Fishman succinctly expressed the gist of this new city: “the creation of a decentralized environment that nevertheless possesses all the economic and technological dynamism we associate with the city” (1987, p. 184).

Fishman’s vision could create an impression of optimism toward this new form of city living. Not all observers are that optimistic. Davis (1990/2006) painted a bleak picture of Los Angeles as a city of inequality, oppression, disenchantment, and unfreedom, an apocalyptic landscape before apocalypse itself. Among other things, Davis’s pessimistic vision epitomizes a wider trend of post-1990 urban studies, with a prominence of calls for social and, importantly, spatial and urban justice (following, among others, the theoretical proposals of David Harvey, 1996, and Iris Marion Young, 1990) juxtaposed with an overarching pessimism toward the present and future of the city as a *livable* space. The looming question is whether cities today indeed are the seats of the “good” dynamism and diversity or the spatial train of modernity is headed uncontrollably toward the catastrophe

of *dystopia*, as visualized in movies such as *Blade Runner* (1982).<sup>6</sup> The *utopian dimension* of this question is of primary importance: utopian thinking, as John Friedmann defined it, is “the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from what we know to be a general condition in the present” (2000, p. 462), and this capacity requires combining a critique of the present condition with a constructive vision for the future (ibid.). The answer to the question “What does it mean to live in the city?” is foundational, for without a clear understanding of this, it is impossible to constructively proceed along constructing normative visions of cities without falling into the traps of ideal cities (Kharlamov, 2010).

### ***Life in Places and Thirdspaces: Locating the Urban Experience***

Even if Los Angeles may be just one of the urban places of today, and other cities may assume different spatial forms—especially outside the United States with its car-centered highway mobility regime—there appears to be a broad consensus in urban studies that cities today are on the forefront of the broader social, cultural, political, and economic<sup>7</sup> change. One of the possible approaches to this new configuration of human life is offered by Manuel Castells. Castells’ trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (1996/2010), offers a grand survey of human condition in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries informed by the overarching concept of network society, Castells suggested that cities—especially megacities such as Tokyo, New York, Mexico City, and, of course, Los Angeles—manifest the *spatial logic of this new society*. In a statement echoing Fishman’s, Castells captures the nature of mega-cities: “It is [the] distinctive feature of being globally connected and locally disconnected, physically and socially, that makes megacities a new urban form” (1996/2010, p. 436, italics removed). He called the new spatial logic “the space of flows.”

The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society.

(Castells, 1996/2010, p. 442, italics removed)

In a nutshell, space of flows is about the disconnection of simultaneous interaction, communication,

and shared (or collective) activity (or “time-sharing social practices”) across the domains of human life from the constraints of material, physical space.<sup>8</sup> Castells, however, did not embark on the track of unbounded techno-optimism. His cautious note is founded on the distinction between “space” and “place.” Defining *space* as “the material support of time-sharing social practices” (ibid., p. 441), and thus grounding it in material, objective realm of practice, he introduced the subjective, meaningful dimension of space by defining *place* as “a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity” (ibid., p. 453, italics removed). The overwhelming majority of people, according to him, “still live in places” (ibid., p. 458)—and thus there is a mismatch, a “structural schizophrenia” (ibid., p. 459) between the logic of places and the logic of flows.

In this statement, Castells captured *the essence of the urban problem today*. If the social, economic, political, cultural life is becoming increasingly detached from the identifiable and personally recognizable locale in space, then how should we account for the personal experience of spaces and places? And what is the relation of this personal experience to the objective configurations of space such as those captured by concepts like “multicentered metropolitan region?”

Another way to locate this problem can be drawn from the work of Soja (2000), whose discussion of “postmetropolis” rests on the conceptual foundation he called “trialectics of cityspace.” It is worth examining this conception at some length. Addressing the “spatiality of human life” and highlighting the intrinsic spatiality of the city as a “material and symbolic habitat for human life” (ibid., pp. 6–8), Soja drew on the work of Henri Lefebvre to conceptualize *Firstspace* as a perspective that views cityspace as “physically and empirically perceived as form and process, as measurable and mappable configurations and practices of urban life” (Soja, 2000, p. 10). Conceptualizing the city in terms of, for example, spatial distribution of population and arriving at a concept of “multicentered metropolitan region” is an application of Firstspace perspective. In terms of *Secondspace*, “cityspace becomes more of a mental or ideational field, conceptualized in imagery, reflexive thought, and symbolic representation, a *conceived* space of the imagination” (ibid., p. 11, italics in original). Thus, Secondspace could be interpreted as a meta-perspective on phenomena such as urban theories and personal representations

of cities in memories or “mental maps.” In addition to these two perspectives, Soja suggested employing a *Thirdspace* (a term derived from the work of Bhabha, 1990) perspective and recognizing and understanding cityspace as “fully *lived space*, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency” (ibid., italics in original). In three main parts of his book, Soja outlines, respectively, the three perspectives, focusing first on the “geohistory of cityspace,” outlining the evolution of human cities that culminates, not surprisingly, in Los Angeles. The second part of his book is a sweeping overview of urban theory, particularly that which takes Los Angeles as its paradigm and source of imagination. The third part—concerned with Thirdspace—withdraws from the scholarly writing of the first two parts. In it, Soja presents a collage of fragments—poetry interspersed with newspaper excerpts and quotations from philosophers and urbanists—all focused in different ways on the 1992 riots in Los Angeles that followed the acquittal of four White police officers who beat up a Black driver (Rodney King). This collage is an attempt to approach the lived space of Los Angeles and the complexity of experiences and perspectives involved in one particular iconic event.

Castells’ suggestion of a “structural schizophrenia” between the logic of space of the network society and the experiential world of living humans and Soja’s attempt to grasp the lived space of post-metropolis point toward a lacuna in urban theory and methodology of urban studies. Every objective measure in the urbanists’ toolboxes points toward changes in urban form, urban process, and urban life. Population growth; migration patterns; changes in economic structure, production, and consumption; emergence of creative/knowledge economies; religious and ethnic tensions; the demise of traditional structures of urban governance; explosion of the city territory and the dissolution of urban/rural dichotomy; and the development of mostly urban “evil paradises” (Davis & Monk, 2007)—pockets of neoliberal exploitation and totalizing negation of human rights across the world, from Los Angeles to Dubai and Kabul—suggest that urbanization became the global *conditio humana*. And yet it appears that *the urban experience*—especially those transient qualities of urban life that Antsiferov (1925) called “the soul of the city” and Milgram (1970/2010) referred to as the atmosphere of great cities—escapes from the urbanists’ nets.

John Urry, following the work of Heidegger, suggests that *atmospheres* “stem from how people are ‘attuned’ to particular places” (2007, p. 73). How do we approach these atmospheres in Thirdspace? One interesting path is to concentrate on the multiple “texts” that the city produces as a result of expressive activity of the urbanites. This was the path Soja (2000) took in his excavation of Thirdspace of 1992 L.A. “Justice Riots,” as he called them.<sup>9</sup> I suggest that another fruitful path is to *develop theoretical and methodological tools to grasp the psychic experience of the city*. I will now turn to assembling a theoretical framework geared to this task.

### **From Space to Place: Development of Meaningful Environment**

I am learning to drive a car. My friend, who is teaching me, sits in the passenger seat and guides me while I am concentrated on safely keeping the vehicle on the road, maintaining speed, and making turns at my teacher’s command. One day I make a left turn into a long stretch of road outside the dense residential neighborhood, and for the next 10 minutes or so I drive at the speed of about 40 miles per hour on a well-paved freeway with few cars. We like this road so much (it has little traffic, the turns are wide and easy, there are no confusing intersections or blind driveways, and the other drivers appear to be polite) that for the next couple weeks we use this road for our lessons while I am getting more comfortable with operating the car on an open road. One evening as I drive into one of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen, I suddenly realize that this road, which I by now know down to each turn, lane, and road sign, actually goes past Worcester Regional Airport. Not only has my newly developed level of comfort with the car allowed me to pay attention to the sunset and notice that it is very beautiful—it has also allowed me to pay enough attention to the surroundings to realize that what used to be just a road in the middle of nowhere (I could not remember after the first couple drives how we got there and where we drove) in fact is *somewhere*—and this somewhere is near the regional airport. What could be *anyplace* become a specific, defined, relatively meaningful place marked by a landmark. What has happened to this stretch of urban space? Apparently, the physical, built environment on the fringes of the city of Worcester has not changed because of my newly developed recognition. But for me *as a person*, it is no longer an undefined space—instead, it is a place

imbued with meaning and (admittedly romantic) memory of the first prolonged experience of driving a motor vehicle. How did this happen?

### ***Assuming a Developmental Perspective on Human Spatiality***

*How do spaces become places?* The answer to this question requires exploring the notions of space and place from a developmental standpoint. This exploration will open the pathway for tackling the issue of what the city is and how it acquires the urban quality for humans.

#### **AXIOMS OF DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH**

The “*developmental perspective in any science entails investigation of general laws of emergence of novelty in irreversible time*” (Valsiner, 2000, p. 17, italics in original). Valsiner further suggests that *novelty*—the new phenomena that are different from those that have happened in the past—emerges on at least two distinguishable levels: on an *individual* level and on the *comparative-collective* level. What was novel for me as a person in recognizing the airport was not novel on a collective level of the population of drivers driving past it—and yet it was novel at the time when the road was first opened. Similarly, the notion of airport for me was no longer novel, although at one point in my past I discovered what an actual airport is when I first went to an airport to fly for the first time, armed with the culturally shared—but, until that point, abstract and not validated by personal experience—knowledge of what is an airport. And yet in the past there was an emergence of the airport as a cultural-technological phenomenon as humans extended the existing technologies such as the harbor and the train station to accommodate the newly invented flying machines.

The developmental axiom of “becoming and dynamic self-maintenance” (Valsiner, 2000, p. 20) implies that the study of emergence of meaningful places necessarily deals with the question of how these places become meaningful and how the meaning is maintained in irreversible time as a stable phenomenon. This dynamic, processual axiom is a pathway to access the lived reality of Soja’s (2000) Thirdspace and to understand how people create meaningful locales that Castells (1996/2010) called places—and to unpack their atmospheric qualities. Developmental treatment of this question requires applying the “orthogenetic principle”: “organisms are naturally directed towards a series of transformations—reflecting a tendency to move from a state of

relative globality and undifferentiatedness towards states of increasing differentiation and hierarchic integration” (Werner & Kaplan, 1963/1984, p. 7; *see also* Valsiner, 2000, Chapter 2). It follows from this principle—which is a fundamental axiomatic principle of developmental science according to Werner and Kaplan—that differentiation, articulation, and integration of space (Valsiner, 2000, p. 20) by the organism is inherent in its very basic functioning in relating to environment.

#### **RELATING TO ENVIRONMENT: HUMAN SPATIALITY AND HUMAN UMWELT**

The notion of *relating to environment* derives from von Uexküll’s theoretical biology. Central for von Uexküll (1940/1982) has been the concept of *Umwelt*—the subjective phenomenal world that each organism inhabits and that is the only reality accessible to this organism.<sup>10</sup> “Everything that falls under the spell of an Umwelt (subjective universe) is altered and reshaped until it has become a useful meaning-carrier; otherwise it is totally neglected” (ibid., p. 31). von Uexküll develops the model of *functional circle* to account for the organism’s relation to environment. This model accounts for perception of objects as meaning-carriers and activity of the subject (organism) as meaning-receivers in that subjects perceive objects as perceptual cue-carriers and act on the objects as effector cue-carriers. At the center of the functional circle is the notion of sign, which is the general mediator of meanings of any events, internal and external. Thus the model of functional circle accounts for perception of the world, making sense of it (making it meaningful for the organism) and acting on it as a meaningful reality (*see* Magnus & Kull, 2012, for a more detailed explanation of Uexküll’s theory; *see* Chang, 2009, for a range of its applications in cultural psychology).

Werner and Kaplan’s (1963/1984) developmental theory explicitly relies on von Uexküll’s conception and allows one to *treat it dynamically and to ask how meanings emerge*, or develop, in the process of the organism’s living in environment, and what *function* these meanings play in maintaining the relation to this environment. This is what they call “organismic-developmental framework” (ibid., Chapter 1). Given the concern of this chapter with the “city” as meaning, this question becomes: What is the nature and role of the meaning of the city in human relating to built environment? To proceed with this discussion, it is necessary to apply the

organismic-developmental framework to emergence of places from undifferentiated space and to introduce the notion of “experience of space.” A conceptual framework pertinent to this task was developed in human geography by Yi-Fu Tuan.

### *Experiential Geography and the Emergence of Meaningful Places*

There isn't one space, a beautiful space, a beautiful space round about, a beautiful space all around us, there's a whole lot of small bits of space, and one of these bits is a Métro corridor, and another of them is a public park . . . In short, spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.

(Perec, 1974/2008a, pp. 5–6)

Georges Perec, the French writer and the keenest observer of the “infra-ordinary” in the fabric of our everyday life, understood the problem of this chapter only too well. His book, *Species of Spaces* (1974/2008a), which he himself aptly called a “sociological” undertaking on “how to look at the everyday” (Perec, 1978/2008c, p. 141), covers exactly the different *species* of spaces—arranged on the scale of rising abstraction from the book page to apartment and street to the world and space in general. In terms of the organismic-developmental framework, emergence of species of space is the result of *differentiation of space*—the “nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immaterial; extension, the external, what is external to us, what we move about in the midst of, our ambient milieu, the space around us” (Perec, 1974/2008a, p. 5)—and its *articulation* into meaningful places (which could be followed by hierarchical integration according to, for example, the relation to home).

#### THE NATURE OF SPATIAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS ORGANIZATION

What fuels this developmental process of differentiation and articulation, for Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), is experience of space. It is the key to conceptualizing space and place and a means of distinguishing the two without giving any of the concepts primacy. *Experience* is another foundational concept in sciences that resists stable definition. Tuan defined experience as “a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and

constructs a reality” (1977, p. 8; *see also* the notion of experience in Boesch, 2012). Experience encompasses the entire spectrum of possibilities of relating to a reality<sup>11</sup>: sensation, perception, and conception on a continuum from more emotional to thoughtful modes. It is externally related and ranges from passive contemplation to active exploration of the world and acting in it.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that Tuan's treatment of experience is in broad accord with phenomenology, and a relevant parallel can be made to Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974/1986). Goffman, who was drawing on William James's question, “Under what circumstances do we think things are real?” (James, *Principles of Psychology*, quoted in Goffman 1974/1986, p. 2, italics removed) as well as on Alfred Schuetz's (1945) phenomenology of multiple realities defined as “provinces of meaning” (rather than provinces of being or physical existence), interpreted experience as *anything that occurs to a person in a situation*. Goffman assumed “that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: ‘What is it that is going on here?’” (Goffman, 1974/1986, p. 8). *Definitions of situations* (a familiar term from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism) stem from answering this question.

The crucial research problem becomes: how can people make sense of situations, come up with their definitions, and proceed with their activities? That is, how is experience *organized*? Goffman's aim became “to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events” (*ibid.*, p. 10)<sup>13</sup>—and his conceptual device was “frame”<sup>14</sup>: “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them . . . [frame analysis is] the examination in these terms of the organization of experience” (*ibid.*, pp. 10–11). The relevance of Goffman's conceptualization for the present theoretical framework is that it explicitly postulates the fundamental necessity of meaning-making in situations—that is, of making sense of experience—and raises the question of organization of experience. Although his arguments are made for social situations, and the present chapter is concerned with spatial experience, the general question is the same, and the core issue is to approach it developmentally: How do meanings emerge in situations, and what is the effect of signs on experience?



What is spatial experience? Amedeo, Golledge, and Stimson underscore the relation of space to situations: “[S]pace’s most dominant expression in the human context [is] its role as a dimension in *situational surroundings* in which human activities are commonly enacted and experiences are felt” (2009, p. 5). For Tuan (1977), similarly to Pereg (1974/2008a), space is general, unspecified, vague, and expansive; there is little human attachment to space. In von Uexküll’s terminology, it is nothing more than a sign-based orientational framework for the organism’s Umwelt. Space is the physical environment *before* human experience. The developmental process of experience of environment transforms it into place, which begins with a “pause in movement”, allowing for the minimal moment of attention to environment. “An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind” (Tuan, 1977, p. 18).

#### FROM SPACE TO MEANINGFUL PLACES

Tuan postulates that the process of experiencing the world and thus creating places is a *universal human process* that also closely follows development of human organisms through life-course, from birth to death. “All people undertake to change amorphous space into articulated geography” (ibid., p. 83). This is the essence of environmental meaning-making and environmental knowing—and this conceptualization corresponds to developmental axioms expressed in Werner and Kaplan’s orthogenetic principle (1963/1984). It occurs on an individual level—as when I slowly learned the details of a stretch of the road to realize at one point that it passes by an airport. I acquired novel spatial knowledge (see Golledge & Stimson, 1997, Chapter 5). For each organism, development of complex spatial knowledge presupposes mobility—movement, with occasional pauses, through spaces and making sense of them (Jensen, 2009; Urry, 2007). It also occurs on collective level—“Polynesian and Micronesian navigators have conquered space by transforming it into a familiar world of routes and places” (Tuan, 1977, p. 83)—and today, when satellites have ended geographical discoveries on Earth, we continuously re-enact this articulation through the practices of tourist gaze (Urry, 2002), which has not subsided with the proliferation of electronic media and instantly accessible images of faraway places but, on the contrary, is further reinforced by them.

Thus, Tuan reinforces what is implicit in von Uexküll’s Umwelt conception: Space is not in and by itself a causal factor. Space alone is static and inert. *It is spatial experience, the developmental process of meaning-making, that produces an articulated and organized world of sensible places.*<sup>15</sup> This is consistent with the notion of space as a *form* of social life introduced by Simmel in his attempt to develop the sociology of space in the seminal chapter (*Space and the Spatial Ordering of Society*) of his opus magnum, *Sociology* (Simmel, 1908/2009, Chapter 9): “[S]pace remains always the form, in itself ineffectual, in whose modifications the real energies are indeed revealed . . . Not space, but the psychologically consequential organization and concentration of its parts have social significance” (pp. 543–544). Filippov (2008) clarifies that this is, in its foundation, a Kantian position, and that what Simmel had in mind when he developed his sociology of space was a “concrete phenomenology of sociality” (ibid., p. 106)—that is, an inquiry into how, in the course of social life, specific, concrete, particular forms such as the “territory” or the “boundary” become socially meaningful and hence attain an important role in social life (ibid., p. 116). Importantly for the present discussion, the city could be interpreted as one of such *meaningful forms*.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Simmel’s sociology also leads to the issue of the organizing principle that transforms abstract form of space into socially meaningful forms such as the city.

As Agnew (2005) has suggested, Tuan’s conceptualization was one of the first attempts in contemporary human geography to seriously define space and place in a way that would not make one *prioritized* at the expense of the other. Agnew has indicated that there are at least three meanings of place that have to be accounted for: “as location or a site in space where an activity or object is located and which relates to other sites or locations because of the interaction and movement between them”; “as locale or setting where everyday-life activities take place”; and “as sense of place or identification with a place as a unique community, landscape and moral order” (ibid., p. 89). Implicitly, Agnew has already situated these meanings on a continuum from more detached and abstract to more personal and embodied. In a humanistic perspective, which both Tuan and Agnew follow, “the focus lies in relating location and locale to sense of place through the experiences of human beings as agents” (ibid.).

**SPATIAL COGNITION AND SPATIAL BEHAVIOR:  
LESSONS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AND BEHAVIORAL GEOGRAPHY**

Thus far, the outline of a developmental perspective on meaning-making in the spatial *Umwelten* of human beings bypassed the notions of *spatial cognition* and *spatial behavior*. These notions, however, demarcate well-developed research programs in the closely related fields of environmental psychology and behavioral geography, and therefore it is imperative to clearly identify their relevance in context of the present discussion, keeping in mind the overarching interest in the meanings of spaces we inhabit.

Research on *spatial cognition and learning* focuses on how people acquire, store, and operate with the information about space they inhabit (Golledge & Stimson, 1997, Chapter 7). It is concerned with orientation in space, and it assumes that humans routinely form *representations* of their environments, that environmental experience leaves a discernible trace in human memory, and that this trace is accessible at some later point in time. This research program fits into the broader paradigm of cognitive science, whose “founding axioms are that people come to know what is ‘out there’ in the world by representing it in the mind, in the form of ‘mental models’, and that such representations are the result of a computational process working upon information received by the senses” (Ingold, 2000, p. 163).

One particularly salient concept integrating research interest in spatial cognition is that of *cognitive map*—“an individual’s knowledge of spatial and environmental relations, and the cognitive processes associated with the encoding and retrieval of information from which it is composed” (Kitchin & Blades, 2002, p. 1). This definition explicitly employs the metaphor of “map,” essentially positing that each of us has in our head a representation, a version of space we know, and that we use it in a way similar to the way we use a paper map—to find our way around. Kitchin and Blades (2002) have provided one of the most integrative syntheses of research using this concept.

Historically, cognitive mapping approach received a powerful thrust with the publication of the seminal work of Kevin Lynch (1960). His book, *The Image of the City*, explicitly adopted a *textual metaphor* of urban environment as he was concerned with legibility of the city—that is, the capability of the environment to be read and understood by the urbanites.<sup>17</sup> He used the notion of mental map—a

synonym to cognitive map—and clearly translated theoretical concern with representations of the city into practical terms of urban planning and architectural design (his latter book, *Good City Form* [1981], further developed normative standards for the highly legible city). The prominently applied character of Lynch’s research and the clear path to practical recommendations led to lasting popularity of mental mapping as well as the widespread focus on cognition of built environment.

This applied focus on orienting in space has its twin in research on *navigating in space*. Behavioral approach to the city favored by behavioral geography is focused on the role of perception, cognition, memory, and ability play in *performance of space-related tasks*. A particularly important task is orientation, or wayfinding (Golledge, 1999)—how humans get around the urban environment and what factors facilitate success in these tasks.

Both spatial cognition and spatial behavior perspectives have particular practical relevance to design of environments—architectural design on scale of small buildings, and urban and transportation planning on the scale of cities and urban districts as wholes.<sup>18</sup> They also often share the *cognitive-representational axiomatic base*. Some integrative attempts have focused on linking cognitive representations and computations with behavioral performance, as in the proposal by Carlson, Hölscher, Shipley, and Dalton (2010) to consider the *intersection* of built environment, person’s cognitive map, and individual strategies and abilities, as constituting the complex outcome of navigation in space. Presumably, good fit between the three would lead to successful performance, whereas (as in their example of the recently constructed Seattle Public Library) lack of fit leads to confusion and frustration on part of the users.

It follows from the cognitivist, representational, and behavioral axiomatic bases of these approaches that the inquiry is geared toward examining those ways of relating to space that are relevant to task performance, *at the expense of other kinds of engagement with environment*, including aesthetic engagement. The latter is often subsumed under pragmatically defined qualities of aesthetic response to environment, and linked back to cognition. Generally, this makes the inquiry functional—that is, it conceives of humans as users of environment who respond to it with more or less success and satisfaction. Indeed, since the early years of environment-behavior research, satisfaction is often posited as the ultimate

goal of experience: “environmental experience is an active process in which the individual utilizes his resources in order to create a situation in which he can carry out his activities with a maximum of satisfaction” (Ittelson, Franck, & O’Hanlon, 1976, p. 199). In less teleological versions it is still posited as the most important evaluative domain of experience. Thus, Jack Nasar (1989) proposed to examine experience of urban public spaces (perception, cognition, and evaluation) through related concepts of urban cognition (“knowledge of where we are—orientation—and how to get to desired destinations—wayfinding” [p. 33]) and urban esthetics (“urban affect or perceived quality of the urban surroundings” [ibid.]). Nasar’s suggestion to assume that relations between “urban physical features, perceptual/cognitive measures of those features, affective appraisals of the scene, psychological well-being, and spatial behavior” (p. 37) explicitly frames urban esthetics as following the same cognitivist input–output axiom. It thus reinforces the prominent “person–environment” dualism as well as the older Cartesian ontology that “divorces the activity of the mind from that of the body in the world [so that the] body continues to be regarded as nothing more than an input device whose role is to receive information to be ‘processed’ by the mind, rather than playing any part in cognition itself” (Ingold, 2000, p. 165).

Transactional approach in environmental psychology (Werner & Altman, 2000) offers a less explicitly teleological and cognitivist perspective that attempts to bridge the gap between environment and the human as it defines people and situation holistically “by their unifying processes, and the changing relations among them” and “emphasizes the dynamic unity between people and setting” (ibid., p. 23). Werner and Altman have further stipulated that time and change are intrinsic to the person–environment phenomena and that there are multiple perspectives on the same situation, which should be interpreted in terms of its patterns and forms rather than determinist cause-and-effect chains. This approach, however, does not specify what role *meanings play in relation of people to environments* nor does it contain conceptual tools to approach cultural diversity of possible person–environment relations.

To sum up, cognitive-representational and behavioral approaches broadly focus on representations of space that people have and the behavior people manifest in space. This essentially replaces

von Uexküll’s phenomenological meanings with cognitive schemata, which potentially follow universalist principles. There is also a question regarding whether it is possible to apply a developmental axiomatic base to these approaches. Cultural variability is another domain where these approaches fall short as they implicitly follow cognitivist axioms of universal perceptive-cognitive apparatus. The less clearly definable atmospheric (Antsiferov, 1925; Milgram, 1970/2010; Urry, 2007) qualities of environments, such as memory, desire, and spirit recognized by Leonie Sandercock (1998/2003), also easily evade such frameworks.

Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, neither approach is concerned with the *specificity and distinctiveness of “species of space”*—assuming uncritically that space, such as “city” or “town” or “Lake District” beloved by Romantic poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, is a given environment that people relate to using their particular mental schemata or practical schemes. In that sense, space remains an external “independent variable” that is not explicitly addressed from a psychological standpoint. Indeed, it could be said that the urban focus of wayfinding studies stems much more from the demands of urban policy and concerns of traffic planning than from internal theoretical concerns. In this it much more follows what Ingold (2000) called the *building perspective* than the experiential, existential, phenomenological *dwelling perspective* he has advocated.

### ***Encountering the Environment***

If persons and environments are in a mutually constitutive relationship, then the issue becomes how to *conceptualize the connection between them*. In Goffman’s (1974/1986) framework, experience of social situations presumably requires *being in* a social situation or being exposed to one. What does it mean to be an environmental situation? What does it mean to be exposed to the world? More apposite to the task at hand: If space as such is undefined and abstract, and place is a result of its becoming meaningful through human experience, then what are conditions under which experience happens? And what is the nature of the emerging meaning?

What is missing in the scheme so far is a conceptual tool that would bring together persons and environments and clarify *where* and *under what circumstances*, spaces become places and pauses occur in movements. The nature of the intersection of

time and space, that moment of being open to the world (cf. Agamben, 2002/2004) at which experience creates places and emerges as *urban* experience, should be identified.

One of the ways of conceptualizing this intersection is to use the term *encounter*. Amin and Thrift (2002) have developed this notion to establish a basic ontology for an everyday urbanism that would attempt to “grasp the significant banality of everyday life in the city” (pp. 8–9). Encounter, the minimal building block of urban life, is the coming together of different entities. In our case, these entities are human and the urban environment (although Amin and Thrift forcefully reject limiting the enquiry to just humans but include all the different kinds of life in the city, such as animal life). “The city is made up of potential and actual entities/associations/togethernesses which there is no going beyond to find anything ‘more real’” (p. 27). *Process* and *potentialities* are the watchwords of encounter ontology that focuses on processual, dynamic character of reality. Encounter is the formative “being there,” which all experience of spaces begins with, the moment of exposure to the environment, the moment when human (without differentiating mind and body) is phenomenally exposed to the world.<sup>19</sup>

The most important contribution of this notion to the present framework is that it explicitly renders the city in a processual, developmental way, emphasizing the moment of becoming: “encounter, and reaction to it, is a formative element in the urban world” (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 30). Neither the city nor the human experience of it is thus *pre-given*, as built environment or as cognitive representations. On the contrary, they only come together, and inseparably, in the actual encounter. Encounter of human and space is exactly what gives rise to experience that transforms mere point in space into what Agnew (2005) interpreted as a defined location, a locale of activities, and a sense of place. The dynamic character of encounter emphasized by Amin and Thrift allows us to clarify two of Tuan’s (1977, p. 198) relevant arguments on place and time. Tuan has stated that it takes a *pause* in time and movement for a place to emerge and that it takes time for *attachment* to place to develop. Conceptualizing experience as an emergent outcome of encountering space allows making these arguments dynamic. First, no place is just one pause in movement. Indeed, even for the “stable” aboriginal communities referenced by Tuan, keeping place stable is an achievement, a result of routine day-to-day work akin to maintaining urban

infrastructure in the largest metropoli of the world. Second, attachment to place and meaning of place as a dwelling or home is itself never fixed, a reached goal, but always a meaning-in-the-making.

In developmental terms, then, *encounter is what brings the city into being as a novel experience in the irreversible time*. It is only in encounters that places become “urban”: “places ... are best thought of not so much as enduring sites but as *moments of encounter*, not so much as ‘presents’, fixed in space and time, but as variable events; twists and fluxes of interrelation” (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 30). In a similar way, Jensen defines place as “mobility-defined spatio-temporal event that relates to the way we configure narratives of self and other” (2009, p. 147), thus connecting place to subjectivity and identity. In summary, places are not stable and given in advance, not external independents—as they are for cognitive-representational environmental psychology and behavioral geography—they only become places when humans encounter space, and only in this encounter places develop as such.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Organizing Experience: Signs and the Regulatory Function of Culture***

Experience emerges in the encounter of human and environment. It is what transforms spaces into meaningful places. It is also what constitutes urban life on the most basic level. Experience, however, is not predetermined by the setting so that each person entering the setting would experience the same thing (this is what the adepts of spatial determinism would have us believe, and this is what cognitivist-representational frameworks tend to draw in through the back door). Neither is it entirely free-flowing. The crucial issue is to consider what *regulates* the emerging experience.

### **CULTURALLY SPECIFIC WAYS OF RELATING TO THE WORLD: ERVING GOFFMAN’S INSIGHTS**

This question logically follows from the developmental approach as it is the question about how novelty—in each moment of experience—emerges and develops. Ingold identified the anthropological dimension of this question (the anthropological problem of perception and cognition) as the problem of *cultural variation*: “Take people from different backgrounds and place them in the same situation: they are likely to differ in what they make of it” (2000, p. 157). This is what Goffman (1974/1986) was concerned with when he constructed his frame analysis. For Goffman, it is the

“primary frameworks,” “schemata of interpretation,” that are responsible for “rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (1974/1986, p. 21). These frameworks are shared among members of a group and are the foundation of its culture<sup>21</sup>:

Taken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, especially insofar as understandings emerge concerning principal classes of schemata, the relations of these classes to one another, and the sum total of forces and agents that these interpretive designs acknowledge to be loose in the world.

(Goffman, 1974/1986, p. 27)

Human culture is thus first and foremost the specific *way of relating to the world*. Unfortunately, the notion of frame, apparently contrary to intentions of Goffman as well as Bateson (1972), from whose work on play and fantasy the notion originated, has come to bear a lot of resemblance to cognitivist computational schemata. Also, in Goffman’s treatment this notion and the entire analytical apparatus of frame analysis is limited to social situations and their definitions—leaving out nonsocial experience as well as affective, emotional dimension of experience.<sup>22</sup> How then could we approach the issue of organization and regulation of experience—in our case, spatial experience—while keeping in mind Goffman’s insight about its cultural specificity?

#### SEMIOTIC MEDIATION AND REGULATION IN UMWELTEN

One conceptual advantage of von Uexküll’s conception of Umwelt is that it is explicitly concerned with theorizing the relation between the organism and the environment. Instead of following a behaviorist mechanistic tradition<sup>23</sup> of theorizing this relation away, he established a functional circle between the inner and the outer world of the organism.

Umwelt as the world of meaningful objects, is always paired by its intra-organismic counterpart—*Innenwelt* (inner world). If *umwelt* denotes the outside world as it appears to the animal via its perceptual and motor apparatus, then *Innenwelt* refers to the experience side of the phenomena as experienced by the organism.

(Magnus & Kull, 2012, p. 651, italics in original)

The vehicle of this relation is *meaning*—which plays a connecting role (von Uexküll drew a musical analogy to counterpoint in composition, 1940/1982,

p. 52 ff.) between the organism’s inner world and its environment (as well as between Umwelten of different organisms and species). Thus, the relation is *mediated* by meaning.

Valsiner (2007, p. 32 ff.) interpreted this mediating function of meaning as *semiotic mediation* within the larger understanding of culture as reflexive distancing of human and the world, which at the same time plays a regulative role vis-à-vis psychic processes.

The person creates a distance—by way of semiotic mediation—in relation to the here-and-now context . . . This reflection—which is cognitive and affective at the same time—allows the psychological system to consider contexts of the past, imagine the contexts of the future, and take perspectives of other persons (in the form of empathy).

(Valsiner, 2007, p. 33)

Culture “takes the form of constructing and using signs to transform the here-and-now setting of the human being . . . *human cultural relating to the world entails simultaneous closeness to, and distancing from, the actual situation* the person is in” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 72, italics in original). In place of Goffman’s frames and cognitivist computational schemata, this conceptualization identifies *signs* as specific mediators and regulators. Through specific identifiable signs, culture regulates the affective engagement with environment. Emergent meanings (or, in semiotic terms, signs) serve a function of connecting the inner world of the organism with the world around the organism. Some of these signs attain the property of being “promoter signs”—signs that guide “the possible range of variability of meaning-construction in the future” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 58).

This raises the question of *levels of development*, and given the present concern with the most basic encounter with space in Thirdspace (Soja, 2000), the proper level to start the inquiry would be *microgenesis*—“a form of emergence (and disappearance) of biological, psychological form within an immediate, short time frame” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 356, n. 1). As “the human immediate living experience is primarily *microgenetic*, occurring as the person faces the ever-new next time moment in the infinite sequence of irreversible time” (ibid., p. 301), humans organize this experience developmentally through signs. This microgenetic process is part of a larger hierarchical developmental structure involving also mesogenesis (process in structured, repetitive situated activity contexts) and ontogenesis (development over the

life-course). Encounters develop microgenetically (see Valsiner, 2007, Chapter 8, for methodological approaches to microgenesis; Wagoner, 2009, develops constructive microgenesis as an experimental methodology).

Thus, microgenesis is regulated by culture. Culture, however, is not a whole outside the individual (and thus having an objective reality *qua* Durkheim's social fact), akin to society or economy. Culture in this sense is *personal* (Valsiner, 2000, p. 55 ff.; Valsiner, 2007, p. 60) and is constituted by development of the person and their prior experience in the realm of "interpersonal signs-mediated communicative processes" (ibid.; the latter forming collective culture having no reality and causality outside these interpersonal communicative semiotic processes).<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the process of experience is developmentally regulated by culture through specific signs.

### Spatial Signs as Species of Spaces

How does the organization of spatial experience look in light of this framework? It is time to bring all elements of the *framework* together. A developmental perspective entails assuming a processual vision of experience as emerging in irreversible time. Experiential humanistic geography interprets places as created and maintained by human spatial experience—as entities imbued with a certain meaning. Encounter ontology presupposes that the only reality spaces have is the reality they assume when humans exist and live in space, and places are thus moments of encounter of organism with environment. Finally, it follows from the notion of Umwelt and semiotic mediation perspective on microgenetic organization of experience that through specific signs, personal culture regulates the functional relation of organism and environment—environmental experience—and mediates it.

#### THE NATURE OF SPATIAL SIGNS

Spatial experience is organized by specific *cultural signs*. What are these signs? They are precisely what Perce's (1974/2008a) *species of spaces* are for each of us. From the standpoint of individual experience, signs that we draw from our personal culture and create on the basis of it function in the domain of spatial experience as those meanings that space attains for us, thus becoming *identified as meaningful place*. It is on the basis of this identification that our past experience of space is re-interpreted and future experience of space is projected. On the same basis, our cognitive and affective relation to environment

is regulated once a meaning of space is established. When we encounter space, we interpret it as *something* (e.g., as an "urban street"). Our future relation to it as well as our memory of all past experience of it is developmentally mediated and regulated by this newly emerged *spatial sign*—a mediating-regulating sign that constitutes the meaning of place (or one of several such signs). *Space is identified as species*.

"The Rue Vilin starts level with No 29 in the Rue des Couronnes, opposite some new blocks of council flats, recently built with something old about them already"—thus George Perec (1977/2008b, p. 212) identified his object of interest, recognizing it as a "member" of the species of "the street" (cf. his analysis of this species, 1974/2008a, p. 46 ff.). Choosing his scale and applying boundaries to his object of interest (operations he did as a person—and which regulated his further inquiry into this street; what for us as geographers and sociologists is a matter of heated debates is resolved practically *out there* on a daily basis for us as persons), he proceeded to meticulously record and describe six encounters with "Rue Vilin," each connected to the previous and each organized by this *sign*.

#### DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF EXPERIENCE OF SPATIAL ENCOUNTER

This conceptual framework could be integrated into a *microgenetic developmental model* represented in Figure 13.2. At the center of the model is encounter—the lived presence of the person in the spatial world. Experience of this encounter is mediated and microgenetically organized and regulated by spatial signs and proceeds by way of von Uexküll's functional circle of perception and action. Spatial signs emerge out of personal culture and achieve a unique encounter-specific configuration that defines that particular experience (although it may bear resemblance, or similarity, to other encounters). Through their promoter function, spatial signs create grounds for future meaning construction within the same encounters (at the very next moment) and beyond it. By the same token, space is articulated into places, which enter memory as encounter fades into the past to form the foundations for future potential encounters in irreversible time. Thus the process of living in space is formed by a multitude of encounters that flow into one another as we move through space in time (or stand in one place while time goes by).

Thus my own experience of the road near Worcester Regional Airport is partly mediated and regulated now

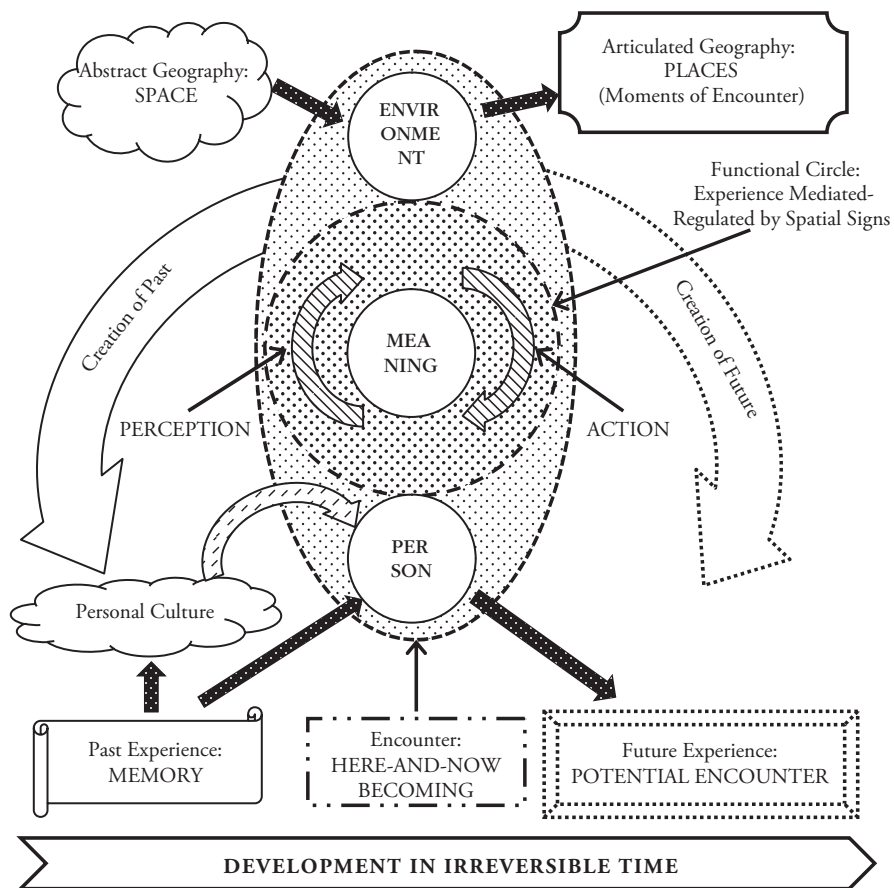


Figure 13.2 Microgenetic Developmental Model of Experience of Spatial Encounter

by the sign “Worcester Regional Airport”—and given that whenever I was driving there I did not know or remember the name of the road (as an anxious learner, I was more concerned with making a smooth turn into the road without making my encounter with the nearest telegraph pole a bodily encounter than with reading the sign with the road’s name), this road is still identified for me by that sign in terms of its location. Even as I write these words I have no map and no Internet access to discover its true name. (Does it have any relevance for me though?)

But there are many other signs that regulate the experience of that road for me—some of those being hypergeneralized affective semiotic fields (Valsiner, 2007, pp. 51, 312 ff.) belonging to the upper levels of affective regulation and only partially accessible to my verbalizations of them. Those semiotic fields encompass my subjective, personal, private experience of driving the motor vehicle for the first time myself and the associated combination of excitement, anxiety, and other feelings that will possibly reverberate in my memory for years to come. Other semiotic

fields feed on specific affective states (such as fear and panic) and elevate these states into high-level regulatory signs such as “night,” associated with fear of strangers and feeding into our perceiving the same places differently at night and during daytime. In this way we can read, through developmental-experiential lens, Williams (2008) excavation of night spaces as fundamental spaces in social life in terms of dynamics of territorialization (control by forces of governmentality), deterritorialization (transgression and disruption of social order), and reterritorialization (re-establishment of control).<sup>25</sup> For example, the same street in Moscow (Figs. 13.3 and 13.4, taken at the same date) during daytime and nighttime exhibits vastly different visual cues related to light, darkness, presence of people, speeds of cars, and others; but importantly, we microgenetically make sense of all these visual cues here-and-now, in an encounter, under the regulatory influence of night as an overarching cultural meaning.

Thus, “species of spaces” signs are only part of the story of semiotic mediation of environmental



**Figure 13.3** Myasnitskaya Street, Moscow, Russia, in daytime  
(Photograph by author, 2006)



**Figure 13.4** Myasnitskaya Street, Moscow, Russia, at night  
(Photograph by author, 2006)

experience. They are not the least important part, however, and this part is especially pertinent when it comes to *recognizing the city as a sign*.

### The City As a Sign, or Recognizing Species of Settlements

Water of Leith is a small river that runs through the city of Edinburgh. It ends in Leith, where it flows into the Firth of Forth. A pedestrian walkway (Fig. 13.5) was constructed some years ago on the bank of the river. On this walkway, a person can walk through Edinburgh starting in the suburbs and finishing the walk on the shore of the sea. Depending on the exact starting location, an average person could walk this route in about a day, passing different parts of Edinburgh, for a while being very

close to the city center and the Edinburgh Castle, yet hardly noticing it.

An array of spatial signs such as “Edinburgh” and “pedestrian walkway” regulates experience of this walkway. One such sign is “city.” Indeed, although several parts of the walkway could appear suburban (assuming that “suburbia” could be recognized visually through features such as single-family homes with lawns), knowing that the walk goes through Edinburgh leaves its impression on experiencing this walk, depending on, for example, whether the person associates “danger of crime” (another regulating sign) with “the city.”

Similarly, recognizing that some place is an “inner city” in the United States is enough to trigger a panic affective response in many people, although





**Figure 13.5** Water of Leith Walkway, Edinburgh, Scotland  
(Photograph by author, 2007)

it may have nothing to do with whether this place is “objectively” an inner city (as defined by urban sociologists and demographers) or whether at the given time of the day in the given place there is any “objective” (as defined by crime statistics) or “real” (as defined by the actual presence of criminals looking for someone to mug or rape) danger of crime.

### ***“The City”*: Spatial Sign Designating a Specific Species of Space**

The story of Water of Leith indicates that for a particular person, the experience of encountering space proceeds by way of semiotic regulation before and partially independently from *objective* (physical, material) properties of that space. For the meaning of the city—or for *construing the city as a sign*—this entails that “*the city*” is *precisely a regulative sign that operates as a guide for the emerging experience*. When this sign is activated in an encounter with environment, it serves as a field-like promoter sign that allows the entire setting and the experience of this setting to be recognized as—and thus made sense of as—urban setting and urban experience. It follows that if the person is not equipped with a sign that bears that meaning, meaning-making can proceed in a way that will not designate experience of place as urban experience. Similarly, if these signs are not activated, meaning-making may organize

experience as something other than urban—as with someone from Western Europe “failing to recognize” a middle-sized American city as a “city” in the sense that urban life has for them (Fig. 13.6).

Developmental-experiential approach to meaning of the city thus starts with the encounter and emergence of experience. It is concerned with the ongoing, here-and-now process of meaning-making, as opposed to relatively static representations of space that are supposed to have stability and duration in human memory—such as cognitive maps and attitudes. The focus on meaning-making process means that task-performance fades into background, and non-pragmatic ways of meaning-making, such as aesthetic judgment (beyond simple “good–bad” dimensions), emerge as visible to this approach. In short, “the city” is one of the spatial signs that we routinely employ as an organizing principle for our experience of environments where we live and travel.

### ***Reversal of Objectivist Urbanism: Exploring the Meaning of the City***

The concern with meaning of the city thus takes the following form: *What are the conditions for emergence of such a meaning attached to space, that places emerge as urban places?* In other words, in which kinds of situations humans in their everyday



**Figure 13.6** Dewey Street, Worcester, MA  
(Photograph by author, 2010)

life understand their surroundings as being urban surroundings?

Behind this simple wording, in fact, is a *reversal of the usual way of defining the city* “from upside-down” typical of traditional urban disciplines such as urban geography. These disciplines routinely specify physical characteristics of territories (e.g., having dense built environment), social characteristics of the population (e.g., size, density, permanence, heterogeneity famously indicated by Louis Wirth, 1938), economic functions (e.g., predominantly industrial or service economy whether measured in terms of occupational structure or types of businesses), or similar characteristics that are located outside persons and are expected to project urbanism onto persons living in these conditions. In that sense, it fundamentally goes against the simple spatial determinism characteristic of some strands of urban planning (epitomized by utopian modernism of Le Corbusier) and conceptions of ideal city whereby “good” urban life is determined by and consequently is achievable through “good” design (Kharlamov, 2010).

Simply put, *the city is a meaning*—and therefore exploring *what is a city* entails exploring the diversity of meanings that ordinary people (rather than what planners, administrators, or even depersonalized sciences classified as “urban studies” mean by it) create that allow them to qualify certain places as urban places, as well as the process of emergence of these meanings itself.<sup>26</sup>

By bringing together the developmental nature of human psychic processes and the notion of place

as that which humans create through experiencing general and unspecified space, the humanistic perspective on space and place allows us to approach the issue of ostensiveness of the city in a person-oriented processual way. Human geography and urban sociology often work with defining the city in an “objective” fashion (thus working in “space over place” mode in terms of Agnew, 2005), through properties of physical distribution of things on a territory. The city thus becomes a sufficiently dense set of buildings, pavements, and human bodies. In contrast, from a humanistic standpoint, the urban is first and foremost a specific meaning attached to these things.

### **Conclusions: Situating Human Life in Settlement Space**

Luhmann (1984/1995) famously started his theorizing of social systems from the assertion that his “considerations assume that there are systems” (ibid., p. 12). His theory explicitly postulated that social systems have communication as their basic constitutive element—and that analysis of communication in social systems can proceed without considering persons—as individuals or as selves—at all. In fact, for Luhmann, social systems have nothing to do with people at all, even as groups or populations. His systems theory suggests that selves and persons do not exist—rather, the domain of psychic life should be reconfigured in psychology as a psychic system.

This radical formulation illustrates very well what all the traditional ways of looking at cities share:

the tendency to look at *wholes above individuals or wholes to which individuals are entirely irrelevant as the primary foci of inquiry*. Built environment, economy, community, neighborhood—all are examples of such wholes. At best, persons get reduced to being members of populations or communities.

Starting from the elementary encounter of an individual person with space requires reversing this kind of frameworks. This reversal task has particular salience for urban studies as they struggle with the evident failure of the rural–urban dichotomy on which they have constructed themselves. Presumably, urban geography deals with urban space, and urban economics deals with urban economy; however, in the world where regional economies take the form of urbanized regions without any discernible city center (Fishman, 1987; Dear & Flusty, 1998; Soja, 2000), this self-definition loses all utility and serves as a source of confusion.

In fact, there is nothing very new about this; in 1976 Castells was already questioning whether urban sociology had any salient subject matter. Thirty-three years later, Gans (2009) criticized the metro-centrism of American urban sociology, which concerned itself almost exclusively with a small number of iconic cities such as Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. Gans' choice of the central organizing category to replace "urban" is settlement:

A focus on settlements would suggest examining and comparing the interactions, routine and unusual, peaceful and conflict ridden, and competitive and cooperative among and between all the various groups and institutions without concern as to whether they were urban or not but without losing sight of the fact that they are settlements.

(Gans, 2009, p. 215)

What this proposal best captures is that *wherever humans live, they appropriate environment around them as their Umwelt*. They settle—or, in Ingold's (2000) terms, *dwel*—in space: "it is through being inhabited, rather than through its assimilation to a formal design specification, that the world becomes a meaningful environment for people" (p. 173). Hence the issue is to put a more nuanced conceptual system in place of the old rural–urban dichotomy. In other words, it is necessary to de-essentialize spaces, or territories (Brighenti, 2010) as well as the notion of "amorphous, non-differentiated space," which could have no more salience to a non-geographer and non-psychologist than "standard metropolitan statistical area." What a psychology

of species of space (or settlement space, if we are to borrow Gans' term) could add to objectivist approaches that would classify places that people create and live according to their properties (social, economic, material, and other) is an insight into the ordinary meanings that people routinely employ to make sense of their surroundings. These might or might not correspond to "objective" dimension, and it is this domain of correspondence-non-correspondence where most fruitful transdisciplinary integration could be hoped for.

### **Future Directions: Integrating Cultural Psychology With Urban Sociology and Geography**

The proposed developmental-experiential perspective on human spatial life opens up a number of lines of future inquiry. At the center of this possible research program is, to draw on the title of Milgram's seminal article (1970/2010), the experience of living in spaces, or, in terms of Soja (2000), Thirdspace.

The first direction is to examine the *immense variety of settlements* that people create and inhabit. More specifically, the issue is what spatial signs define these settlements. Recent calls for de-metrocentrizing urban studies (Bell & Jayne, 2009; Bunnell & Maringanti, 2010; Gans, 2009) have forcefully argued against limiting inquiries to a small number of paradigmatic metropoli—a tendency that could be traced back to Simmel (1903/1997). A particularly important issue that emerges is to closely study "the city" as one of the most prominent and salient spatial signs, especially when it comes to differentiating cities. What could be "large" and "small" for urban geography may not be the same as large and small for many people who simply live in cities. Perhaps, personally and culturally specific taxonomies of settlements, dwellings, and other species of spaces could emerge as the outcome, *a la* the Linnaeus standard biological classification system.

Second, models of individual development are needed to account for the *immense intrapersonal variation* in these "taxonomies of spaces." In other words, on a mesogenetic and ontogenetic level, each of us develops our spatial taxonomies over time, and these taxonomies serve as further repertoires of spatial signs to regulate future experiences.

Third, on an interpersonal level, the important issue is how relatively *stable shared cultural complexes of spatial signs* emerge in communicative processes of collective cultures.

Fourth, it is important to understand what the *configurations* that spatial signs enter are and what are the regulative outcomes of these configurations (e.g., coupling “inner city” with “danger of crime” and the resulting affective reaction of “fear”). Further, it is important to study the specific characteristics of these signs and configurations, such as hierarchical organization and propensity to verbalization and expression in other forms.

Fifth, situations of *ambiguity and ambivalence* are an important area of research, such as when people employ different and/or conflicting spatial signs in their ongoing meaning-making. Study of boundaries (such as boundaries between different city areas or boundaries associated with different affective reactions—e.g., “ghetto begins on the other side of this street”), boundaries, and their maintenance and transgressions may be among the most fruitful areas in this respect (Brighenti, 2010; Kaganskiy, 1983; Rodoman, 1983). One interesting concept to develop in this way is Foucault’s notion of *heterotopias*:

real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable. (Foucault, 1967/2008, p. 17)

This notion has been developed in multiple ways to account for ambiguous spaces, including some of the spaces that writers such as Sorkin (1992) and Davis and Monk (2007) classified, respectively, as theme parks and evil paradises (*see* collection of applications of the concept of heterotopia in Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008). These spaces oscillate between different spatial regimes and functions and routinely misplace stable spatial orders in ways reminiscent of keying and rekeying in Goffman’s frame analysis (1974/1986). The enterprise of “heterotopology”, the science of heterotopias, (Foucault, 1967/2008), would benefit greatly from a personal perspective, a psychology of heterotopias and other strange places (cf. Edensor’s, 2005, analysis of industrial ruins as ambiguous spaces).

Sixth, the questions first asked by Antsiferov (1925), on what defines the *soul*, *the unique synthetic identity of the city*, and Milgram (1970/2010), on the atmosphere of great cities, could be fruitfully

tackled using this approach. Cities—and, for that matter, all places—have identities that we recognize as salient, and thus no matter how many skyscrapers are there in the world, there is only one Manhattan, and no matter how many cities were built around medieval fortifications, there is only one Moscow with its Kremlin and only one Warsaw with its fortifications built anew after it was leveled by bombs in World War II. Dresden, Coventry, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, for that matter, did not lose their “souls” with the destruction of material built environment but, rather, solidified them and added new dimensions to them.

Seventh, the presented developmental-experiential approach to human spatiality should be taken further along the lines of accounting for time and sociality. The *temporal dimension* emphasized by Castells with reference to social life in network society (Castells, 1996/2010, Chapter 7) is fundamental for the approach and is reflected in the notion of irreversible time (Valsiner, 2007) in which development occurs. This dimension needs to be coherently and thoroughly conceptualized, including the personal perception of time and temporality and the role of time in organization of experience. The *social dimension* should be integrated with the spatial dimension, as many spatial encounters are also encounters with others (Amin & Thrift, 2002), and this bridging of the frameworks would allow accessing the rich theoretical resources such as the work of Mead (1934) and Goffman (1974/1986). In particular, these two dimensions are indispensable for accounting for the unique nature of city life understood so well by Simmel (1903/1997). These dimensions could also add to the understanding of new role of virtual worlds, these “new fractal social spaces” (Urry, 2007, p. 181) that are enabled by communicative technologies creating “connections and communities [that] are simultaneously private and public, intimate and distant” (*ibid.*). Indeed, whole new social realms emerge in the virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, and many of these at least attempt to simulate, emulate, and recreate the urban space and urban experience.

Eighth, *new methodologies* need to be developed that would grasp encounter in its microgenetic developmental unfolding. These methodologies might follow the track of controlled field experiments (Ittelson, Franck, & O’Hanlon, 1976) and more generally the recent trend toward mobile methodologies (Büscher & Urry, 2009; Fincham, McGuinness, & Murray, 2010; Büscher, Urry, &

Witchger, 2011) such as go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003). The notion of non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008) captures very well the methodological necessity to go beyond assumptions of cognitive representations (and the corresponding empirical reliance on laboratory experiments popular in cognitive psychology) to grasp the affective, performative nature of experience. Thus, Urry reminds that the atmosphere of places is “in the relationship of peoples and objects. It is something sensed often through movement and experienced in a tactile kind of way, what Thrift terms ‘non-representational’ practices (1996)” (Urry, 2007, p. 73; see Jensen, 2009, for a conceptualization of ordinary urban mobility as a meaningful practice and a site for interaction). Although it may be wise—contrary to some proponents of non-representational theory—to retain the vision of theory as at least one of the outcomes of inquiry. These new methodologies could be fruitfully grounded in cultural-developmental psychology (Valsiner, 2007, Chapter 8).

Finally, integrative efforts should be directed toward recognizing the *complexity and emergent character of life in space*—which is impossible to account for from any one standpoint including the experiential standpoint. Rather, it is important to establish common grounds between different disciplinary efforts at understanding human life in space. Space, its use, and experience of it all come together in the complex interplay of affect, meaning, culture, social relations, technologies, and environmental settings that human living is about. Hence, urban psychology, or *settlement psychology* (not coterminous with either ecological or environmental psychology), could complement settlement sociology and settlement geography in exploring—*empirically* as well as theoretically—the personal, psychic, existential meaning of our habitats. This concerted effort is essential today if we are to revive utopian thinking and constructively assess what human life in spaces is and how to make it better and more just in face of the challenges of overpopulation, slumming, tensions and conflicts along identity lines, and global warming and resource exhaustion—challenges that target every city in the world today much as the individualist spirit of modernity, according to Simmel (1903/1997), converged on the fin-de-siècle Berlin.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Svetlana Bankovskaya and Jaan Valsiner, who have supported the development of the ideas presented in this chapter in various contexts over the past 4 years. Alexander

Filippov and Nikita Pokrovsky helped me in many more ways than I can account for. I am grateful to the members of the Kitchen Seminar at Clark University, on whose cutting board I was a happy fish more than once. This research was presented at the Perceptive Minds and Affective Bodies in Urban Environment symposium at Aalborg University in October 2010. This research was supported by the Oxford Russia Fund Scholarship (2005–2007), Oxford Russia Fund Adam Smith Scholarship (2007), and Foundation for Urban and Regional Studies Studentship (2009–2011).

## Notes

1. I find strange the common (and dating back even to Simmel and before) use of the adjective “psychological” to denote mental processes, whereas the adjective “psychic” is reserved for weird things such as telepathy. This use essentially suggests that what is happening in our heads exists *only inasmuch as* it is accounted for by professionally trained people graduating with degrees in science of psychology. However, I am optimistic about the propensity of humans to maintain active and healthy psychic life without the intrusion of white-coated and/or tie-wearing professionals, at least most of the time—just as we seldom need sociologists to live active and healthy “social” lives. Hence, through this chapter the term *psychic*, with the exception of quotations, will be used to denote mental phenomena. The term *psychological* will be reserved for those phenomena that are made accountable for by means of the science of psychology, or for the concepts and standpoints used therein.

2. In fact, the original German title of Simmel’s lecture, *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*, could be translated as *The metropoli and the spiritual life*. Nikolai Antsiferov does not cite Simmel, but given that a Russian translation (using the word “spiritual” rather than “mental” in the title) was made shortly after the initial German publication, it is entirely possible that Antsiferov developed his notion of “soul of the city” and his proposal for urban psychology under Simmel’s influence.

3. Methodologically, the APA report hardly goes beyond calls for mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as calls for interdisciplinarity and using methods borrowed from other disciplines (APA, 2005, pp. 45–48). One interesting proposal contained in the report is to adopt a “strength-based approach,” recognizing that urban life is not all about decay and disorder, and that in addition to infamous deficits and drawbacks, there are unique strengths that urban individuals, families, communities, and cultural groups have.

4. “Urban” is defined in the report as “Settlements or localities defined as ‘urban’ by national statistical agencies” (UNFPA, 2007, p. 6). Its authors immediately explain themselves: “since mindsets, planning efforts and data are still compartmentalized, the rural-urban distinction is still necessary, although imprecise . . . the deficiencies of . . . data are less significant when analyzing broad trends and prospects of urban growth at the world and regional levels” (ibid., p. 7). Thus, they imply that there is a tacit knowledge of what urban and rural means, shared by professionals and laypeople alike.

5. The paradigmatic status of Los Angeles has been largely crystallized through the efforts of the self-proclaimed “Los Angeles School of Urbanism.” Michael Dear and Edward Soja are the most prominent representatives of this group (the foundational works of the “school” are assembled in Dear, 2002, and Scott & Soja, 1996).

6. The great urbanist Jane Jacobs (1961/1993) called *diversity* the main principle of the city: “This ubiquitous principle is

the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially” (p. 19). “City diversity itself permits and stimulates more diversity” (ibid., p. 190), asserted Jacobs, and for her this was the diversity of uses of places coupled with the diversity of intentions people have for coming into a certain place (she was particularly hostile toward separating residential, leisure, and work functions of places). In the decades after her seminal book, *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities* (1961/1993), this diversity has received many interpretations. Thus, Iris Marion Young (1990), in one of the most prominent treatments of justice and social life, asserted that the good, just life is about elimination of institutionalized dominance and oppression, and affirming difference on multiple dimensions (such as race, sexuality, etc.). She had an urban vision: the normative ideal she suggested for human living was the “city life,” which she defined as the “being together of strangers” (p. 237). “Social justice in the city requires the realization of a politics of difference” (p. 240). In a way, the concept of diversity—more recently conceptualized as difference—is one of the most articulated ways of interpreting the old dictum that “city air makes people free.” Friedmann (2000) names, among other things, human flourishing as a foundational value and “multipli/city” as a primary good in a “good city.” Difference is also a founding element of Sandercock’s *Cosmopolis* (1998/2003; Sandercock draws on the work of Iris Marion Young, 1990, in discussing this concept).

7. “Moral” could be added, although this word has lately fallen out of fashion in human sciences, replaced by a blander notion of “values.” The word “moral”, however, links the concern with relations between people, the problem of social order, and the issues of justice and equity much better than “values” (but see Sandercock, 1998/2003, who names memory, desire, and spirit as important dimensions of urbanism—these three capture at least some of the spatial significance of moral orders of the city).

8. Cf. the works of John Urry (2000; 2007), who proposed “mobility” rather than “society” as the central concept of sociology concerned with social life today.

9. Highmore (2005) developed an interesting approach grounded in Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “rhythmanalysis.” He suggested that a study of urban culture could read the city as a text, but attempt first and foremost not to “make the urban legible” but to “declare its object to be the social anxiety caused by the city’s perceived illegibility” (ibid., p. 7). In this way, for example, he approached the material such as the movie *The Matrix* (1999) by reading it as a manifestation of network-connective urbanism. In Soja’s (2000) terms, however, this could still be considered a study of Secondspace.

10. It should be noted that von Uexküll’s conception is not anthropocentric. On the contrary, he powerfully asserts that Umwelten are species-specific, and therefore a dog inhabits a vastly different reality—and space—than a human. His *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men* (von Uexküll, 1934/1992) is a picturesque statement to this effect, which, as Giorgio Agamben (2002/2004, Chapter 10) reminds, has the potential of stopping the “anthropological machine” that in our culture maintains the distinction between humans and animals. Accordingly, it would be interesting to extend the arguments presented in this chapter outside the domain of *Homo sapiens* to other species and to question whether city has phenomenal salience for those species’ relating to environments. For pragmatic reasons of simplicity, this chapter does not make this move, but such a move would entirely fit with the wide movement in human sciences

away from anthropocentrism, evident, for example, in “animal geographies” (Wolch & Emel, 1998).

11. It should be remembered that realities, in von Uexküll’s theoretical biology as well as in phenomenology in general, are *multiple* (Schuetz, 1945) and are different even in the subjective experience of one organism, as well as between organisms and between species.

12. This is broadly consistent with a definition for person–environment–behavior research perspective offered by Amedeo, Golledge, and Stimson: “either a focused level of cognition activated and reflected on by an individual . . . and/or . . . a particular reaction . . . undergone by an individual who may have been aroused or stimulated by some environmental and/or spatially related situation” (2009, p. 5). However, this latter definition gives primacy to environment and environmental stimulation, whereas, as von Uexküll’s framework suggests, the individual phenomenal world is *as much active as it is reactive*. It is nevertheless instructive in that it both brings in more traditional psychological concepts (cognition, reaction) and further reinforces the argument that experience is fundamentally related to situation and that situation always has an important spatial or environmental dimension.

13. Goffman continued this aim: “and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are suspect” (Goffman, 1974/1986, p. 10). Indeed, the bulk of his book is devoted to exploring how definitions of situations get transformed, “keyed” and “rekeyed,” such as when a legitimate game is subverted to become a set up. This focus will not be followed in the present inquiry, although it could serve as an inspiration for further exploration, for example, of the personal experience of “theme park urbanism” characterized by disguising consumption spaces as urban public space (Sorkin, 1992).

14. Goffman draws on Gregory Bateson’s (1972) notion of frame. In the present context, “sign” is the correlate of the concept of “frame” in relation to organization of experience.

15. Compare this to Herbert Gans’ “use-centered view” on sociology of space:

Natural space becomes a social phenomenon, or social space, once people begin to use it, boundaries are put on it, and meanings . . . are attached to it. Then the air-over-dirt becomes a lot or a plot, and if residential users obtain control over the bounded space, it becomes their place. (Gans, 2002, p. 329)

Gans’ use of “natural space” in this sense corresponds roughly to abstract space, although he leaves open the possibility that some space would be natural because humans do not (or even, for some reason, cannot) use it, rather than because they do not attach any meaning to it. Brighenti (2010) proposes a similar understanding, suggesting that the notion of “territory” could be an all-encompassing term to denote what happens to space when it is appropriated by humans and human social institutions. He also puts the notion of boundary forward as one of the crucial aspects of territory-making (cf. a cultural-developmental understanding of boundaries in Valsiner, 2007). Brighenti does not, however, provide a conceptual apparatus to approach the experience of territories and spaces. Nor this is a problem for Gans.

16. Simmel himself made a seminal contribution to the nascent urban studies in his *The metropolis and the mental life* (Simmel, 1903/1997), which, as Frisby and Featherstone remind, could be “read in the context of his more systematic explorations of social space and the social psychological impact of socio-spatial relations” (1997, p. 11). Simmel’s metropolis, the

spatial epitome of modernity (Kharlamov, 2009), was *the* form of modern social life:

An enquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body, so to speak, must seek to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set between the individual and the supra-individual contents of life.  
(Simmel, 1903/1997, p. 175)

In that sense, Simmel's 'environmental-psychological' remarks on intensity of nervous stimulation that urbanites face, picked up by latter observers such as Milgram (1970/2010, p. 12) in form of concepts such as "overload," were only a starting position for a deeper philosophical inquiry into the essence of modern culture and its spatial condensation in modern metropolis.

17. Cf. the understanding of the "legibility of the everyday city" in the work of Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002, Chapter 1) and the way Highmore (2005) discusses urban legibility and illegibility.

18. There are few axiomatic, conceptual, and theoretical differences between frameworks developed for environments on different scale, and their discussion falls outside the scope of this chapter.

19. Cf. the notion of encounter as used by Goffman (1961), whose focus is exclusively on *human interaction*, and more specifically, on focused interpersonal interaction with mutually sustained attention.

20. Von Uexküll's theoretical biology thus allows us to turn Amin and Thrift's concern with de-humanizing knowing the city (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 26) upside down—by asking whether there is, and could be, such a thing, or such a meaning, as "the city" in the Umwelt of dogs and ticks, instead of trying to suggest that human Umwelt is shared with them. Indeed—what is for the subway rat that environment, which humans call Manhattan, and attribute unique meanings, a "soul" (Antsiferov, 1925), to it?

21. Goffman's figure is illuminative in history of science and disciplinary traditions. Erving Goffman started his career *almost* as an anthropologist, defending his dissertation (Goffman, 1953) on patterns of communicative conduct in a rural community on the islands off the British coast. His dissertation—which was defended in Chicago as a dissertation in *sociology*—was completed under the guidance of William Lloyd Warner (himself an anthropologist and a student of Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown) after 12 months of fieldwork using "observant participation" (*ibid.*, p. 2). Goffman's primary concern in his dissertation was with social order and social interaction. For him this was the beginning of a career-long conversation (cf. Goffman, 1983) with the work of Parsons (1951), back then the bible of theoretical sociology. However, his unique sensibility to the intimate complexities of human everyday life and to its immense variation across humanity—reflected in the methodology of his dissertation fieldwork—was unquestionably *anthropological*.

22. Erving Goffman, in an otherwise rare homage to early Durkheim's vision of sociology, did not cover *non-social experience*, and his primary interest in any situation was its social nature. Similarly, Mead (1934), whose rethinking of behaviorism introduced symbols and meanings as serving the mediating function between the mind and the environment, was mostly focused on *experience in social interactions* (starting with elementary analysis of gesture). This is the essential obstacle in applying their theories to spatial experience.

23. Behaviorist doctrine of mechanism excluding any notions of experience—especially private experience—"The behaviorist finds no evidence for 'mental existences' or 'mental processes' of any kind" (Watson, 1924, p. 2 n. 1)—was criticized by Mead (1934), for whom experience was the central matter of (social) psychology. It is, however, strangely re-enacted by contemporary cognitive neuroscience, which ideally would reduce all "internal" phenomena such as experience or consciousness to epiphenomena of neural processes in the central nervous system.

24. It should be noted in passing that such formulation, emphasizing the relative autonomy of personal cultures from collective culture (Valsiner, 2007, p. 61), avoids *reifying* the notions of group, community, and society, and assuming that there are cultures as bounded entities projecting their essence onto individual members of culture. As Urry (2000) shows, bounded "society"—and by extension "culture," usually coterminous in social and human sciences with "society" or even "nation-state"—is an inadequate concept for a highly mobile world of individuals constantly soaked in multiple settings.

25. Cf. the way Amin and Thrift (2002, p. 119 ff.) conceptualize night as one of "escape attempts" everyday life takes from the controlling forces of governmentality, and how it is in turn put back under control, for example through "theming" and consumerizing.

26. This is not to say that planners and architects are not people. Indeed they are—and it would be an interesting research project to see whether planners and administrators employ their "professional" notion of "the city" when they drive their kids to the doctor or leisurely walk in the city park.

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# Modeling Iconic Literacy: The Dynamic Models for Complex Cultural Objects

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## Abstract

Paradoxical objects are everywhere in human lives—and they are used as a cultural scenario to capture cognitive processes and trigger inferential operations. I look at how Nonlinear Dynamic Systems Theory can be used to make sense of cognitive processes, as these are embedded within the environment of cultural kind. Coordinating two different techniques—the *minimae* and *maximae* estimation, and the wavelet techniques—allow researchers to capture the dynamic nature of the mind. The discovered effectively inferential operations have a fractal structure. But perhaps more important is that the human mind in varied contexts and disparate perspectives may be studied by these techniques from Nonlinear Dynamic Systems Theory. The paradoxical objects—cartoons and other media—open a panorama for the study of the mind. The mind—through dealing with paradoxical objects—is sensitive and open to culture. It may be that cognitive and cultural psychology become united in the study of paradoxical objects.

**Keywords:** paradoxical objects, nonlinear dynamic systems, fractals

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the approach from nonlinear dynamics to human cognitive development by using paradoxical objects of an iconic nature in a cultural method. The emphasis here is based on the idea that **paradoxical iconic objects are by nature essentially cultural**. We encounter cartoons in everyday life, and we smile or laugh. Why? After all, these are merely some drawn graphic images that are not even—and purposefully not—adequate replica of the objects they depict.

The paradoxical objects with which our research program at University of Valle in California has worked are exclusively of visual and iconic nature. At the same time, we want to emphasize that not only verbal and argumentative procedures could get us closer to deciphering some thought processes. The key to this chapter is dynamic systems as a perspective that takes complex ideas into account.

Paradoxical objects can be understood through complex cognitive processes.

The choice of paradoxical objects for the study of development from a cultural perspective begins from the principle that these objects condense what is understood culturally. These are objects that “make sense” (in immediate encounter) they are not just perceived gestalts. Francastel argued that the arts in general are the result of a vision of an era, of a time, of a geographical moment, and of a world historically and culturally understood (Francastel, 1970)—an idea that captures the nature of paradoxical objects very well. In that sense, they constitute “a place of convergence” between the author and the world that is being re-created. Nonetheless, Barthes refers to some icons as representing a kind of hallmark, a celebration, a “spiritualization” of the object—not only as an object but as a sense.

Paradoxical objects contain another privileged relationship—that is, the relationship of the viewer with the work. In any artwork, be it iconic or not, there are converging perspectives coming from different sides, which overlap in shared meaning and significance. All art, says Barthes, has two dimensions: that of the work and that of the viewer. Effectively, the work is “a meeting place for the spirits of an era, they are a sign, not a building or a painting can have an existence independent of a double effort, that of the artist and that of the viewer that in meeting form it” (Francastel, 1970, p. 11). An exaltation is a joining “spiritualization” of the object that goes beyond it and returns not only as object but as a sense. From this perspective, the paradoxical object includes the future or a linkage of the past and future occurring in the present. In effect, the fact that the author and audience share the sense of perspective despite differences in eras, geographies, and cultures is a living example of a historicity that includes the future (Lyra & Valsiner, 2010). Needless to say, this intersection between cognitive development in a cultural approach, by using paradoxical objects, is not a usual way that cultural psychological studies are covered.

### **Nonlinear Dynamic Systems and Cultural Cognitive Development**

Nonlinear dynamic systems (NLDS) constitute neither a dominant approach in developmental psychological literature in general nor one in cultural cognitive development, in particular. It is an approach that, despite being new and promising, does not yet produce a large number of studies. The analysis of the comprehension of paradoxical objects as a way to integrate cultural aspects and do it from NLDS results in a doubly risky bet. Maybe these elements make the text provocative and then encourage the reader to become interested and join the discussion.

In recent literature there have been many authors who have claimed the use of NLDS for the study of cultural developmental psychology (Rose & Fischer, 2009; Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Fogel, Lyra, & Lewis, 2000.) “Dynamic modeling offers tools to better understand development and learning in their full complexity, integrating influences involving person, context, and culture” (Rose & Fischer, 2009, p. 417). The position defended is that from nonlinear and open conceptions, one would be in better shape to decode and make sense of the complexity

of cultural objects. That position gathers strength when it comes to studying the cognitive processes involved in understanding doubtful ambiguities and evidently the little that is literal with paradoxical objects. The comprehension of paradoxical objects plays on the unpredictable, on uncertainty, and the transgressions of the conventional, and all of those are conditions for NLDS.

However, it is necessary to elaborate a bit more on the implications of working on cognitive development and specifically on the inferential elaborations involved in understanding paradoxical objects from the perspective of NLDS. The first argument rests on the idea that the chaotic phenomena studied with NLDS are of qualitative kind. They are characterized by being in the middle of the road between the periodic and a-periodic, between the predictable and unpredictable (although they are deterministic), between the regular and the irregular, and between the systematic and the random. It can be said that they do not conform to the distribution of the Gaussian curve, although they present a certain degree of consistency.

Working within the framework of these ideas, it is not risky to postulate that many cognitive and cultural processes, as well as cultural cognitive development, are phenomena of chaotic structure. They are unpredictable in the sense that the prediction thresholds are rather flexible and relative. As Rose and Fischer have outlined:

Developmental processes are highly nonlinear, heterogenous and dependent on a wide factors.

(Rose & Fischer, 2009, p. 417)

In the emergence of making inference, for example, we know that some categorical inferences must be present at the end of the first year, but the precise moment of their appearance is uncertain. They show great irregularity and variability (Rose & Fischer, 2009; Adolph, Robinson, Young, & Alvarez, 2008; Combariza & Puche-Navarro, 2009; Puche-Navarro, 2009b; Yan & Fischer, 2002). This irregularity that psychologists study under the concept of variability—behaviors that appear and disappear, breaking the image of stable growth that has always been taken as the rule in developmental studies—has caused nightmares to the developmental researcher (Smith & Thelen, 2003). In summary and generally speaking, recent research is increasingly insistent in providing evidence to confirm the chaotic nature of the operations and information-processing mechanisms in cognition.

## Some Terms of Dynamic Systems

Notions such as nonlinearity, self-regulation and self-organization, multilevel, attractors, and fractals then emerge as more appropriate and relevant to account for the nature of cultural psychological processes (Lewis, 2000; Thelen, 1995; van Geert, 1998; Smith & Thelen, 2003; van Geert, 1994, 1998, 2003; van Geert & Steenbeek, 2005a, 2005b). Taken together, these notions are information-bearing units on chaotic structure. Thelen, for example, approaches such developmental psychological phenomena in terms of components that interact with strong interdependencies among many variables, breaking with the simplified conception between an independent and dependent variable. Perhaps his most famous work is the illustration of the emergence of walking as a simultaneous interaction between multiple components with their respective covariance in self-regulatory processes (Smith & Thelen, 2003). Fischer, for his part, suggests an original reconceptualization of development called “dynamic theory of abilities,” from the NLDS. In that conceptualization, self-organization has a specific role in integrating the nonlinear dynamic with his own concepts of development and explains variability as an indicator of the complex organization of human activity (Yan & Fischer, 2007).

According to van Geert:

Non-linearity means, among others things, that the effect of a dynamic process differs from the sum of its parts . . . ( . . . ) An alternative and somewhat more intuitive understanding way of defining the property of nonlinearity is to say that the effect of a factor that influences the system is not (necessarily) proportional to the magnitude of that factor.

(van Geert, 2003, p. 657)

As is known, linearity supposes only one solution—the implied cause-and-effect relation only produces proportional effects. In contrast, in a nonlinear system, bifurcations occur as the causal relationships become more complex, leading to unexpected consequences and opening a range of possibilities with several possible alternative solutions. In the development of mother-child interactions, many studies show how in the observed trajectories, the emergence of patterns is not the result of accumulation, but precisely from the combinations among many variables that interact over time (Hollenstein & Lewis, 2006; Lamey, Hollenstein, Lewis, & Granic, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Lewis, Lamey, & Douglas, 1999). Other authors

have provided evidence on development and emergence of language in children. One such study reports on the individual pathway of Helen, who after little more than 1 year of follow-up, shows that her performance is not described by ascending, cumulative linear trajectories. By contrast, they take into account fluctuations that move within nonlinear dynamics and in which variability is always present (van Dijk, 2004). Studies such as these with clear empirical evidence constitute compelling reasons to consider that nonlinear systems are better able to access the complexity of cultural cognitive processes (for further elaboration of this point, see Cortés, Combariza, & Puche-Navarro, 2009).

The second argument is the questioning of linear methods for studying cultural cognitive processes. Those who make this criticism criticize linearity because it leads to a necessary simplification as opposed to the complexity of psychological processes, in general, and cultural cognitive process, in particular. The doubt that linear methods can preserve the basic properties of the complexity of a system such as cultural cognitive development is supported by accumulating developmental theories and methodologies that insistently raise this issue (Munné, 2005; Valsiner, 2004; van Geert, 2003). From linearity, it is difficult to capture the complexity of psychological processes, such as cognitive activity, and to obtain a meaningful understanding of the numerous relationships that hold in such a complex system.

## TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

As van Geert has emphasized:

The adoption of linear statistical modeling enhanced the methodological rigor of research, but weakened aspects of comprehensiveness and mutuality from the oldest conceptualizations of development.

(van Geert, 2003, p. 643).

Without new tools, conceptualization from NLDS is not possible to study and to understand information from new perspectives. Concepts such as strange attractors, fractals, bifurcation, and iteration, besides being closely related, are the basis of techniques and tools for NLDS.

The classic definition of strange attractors considers them as a zone of turbulence (Combariza & Puche-Navarro, 2009). Hence their capture shows a set of paths characterized by not repeating themselves, by not crossing with each other, and not merging. Although it appears disordered, in reality

it is governed by an underlying order and regularity not visible at first sight (Smith, 1998). A good example is seen in the Rössel attractor (*see* [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roessler\\_attractor.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roessler_attractor.png)).

One of the growing possibilities that are very attractive to psychologists is to visualize the transition from one state to another. In that sense, the attractors are very useful in the study of cognitive change (Lewis et al., 1999; Spencer & Perone, 2008; Yan & Fischer, 2007). In addition to Fischer (Yan & Fischer, 2002), they have also been used by Lewis et al. (1999), Hollenstein (2007), and more recently by Spencer and Perone (2008). Studying cultural cognitive activity and other developmental processes starting with attractors has permitted a visualizing of the change between states in the processes of developmental change from cognitive activity (Lamey et al., 2004).

Fractals, in turn, are defined as established by Mandelbrot (2006) on the basis that they always repeat themselves on any scale. Munné (2008) relates this self-similarity characteristic of fractals to iteration to point out that fractals can be understood as generated by rules that produce self-similar phenomena in differing spatial and time-scales. Curiously, although attractors have been frequently used by psychologists, as mentioned before, this has not similarly occurred with fractals.

### **Paradoxical Objects and Cultural Development**

Any comprehension of humorous paradoxical objects constitutes a privileged scenario for capturing the historical nature of culturally understood cognitive development. Thus, the paradoxical objects are spaces in which, to paraphrase Francastel, culture and society enter and leave, and some of its features (geographical, scientific, economic, or of gender) establish themselves and leave traces, which is why time in art does not remain fixed (Francastel, 1970, p. 195). Obviously, the relationship that arises between paradoxical objects and their perceivers is not a new relationship; it was identified in the art world long ago. According to Gombrich (1997), for example, the entirety of visual contradictions suggested by paradoxical objects is highly illustrative of the processes of representation. For Magritte, they synthesize a “superposition from the thought exercise to the revealing exercise of his painting” (Meuris, 1992). Both make explicit and play on the

relationship between visual paradox and cognitive exercise.

One of the most appreciated benefits of paradoxical objects is precisely that they are just ineffable, they play in their own drawing, as Gombrich says, “the drawings (by themselves) get much more than the words would ever do” (Gombrich, 1997, p. 189). In the line of analysis of transgressions that embody different paradoxical objects, one can easily transform it into a review of how the subject knows. The diversity of paradoxical objects opens the spectrum of different inferential elaborations involved in comprehension.

The paradoxical objects are built on a transgression of the logical and conventional structure that subverts the shared meaning between those who produce it and those who read it. It demands the complicity of the spectator to be able to follow the traces of intermittent transformations and unexpected combinations before concluding and deriving consequences. Such a relationship between visual objects and the cognitive activity of those who read them perhaps have been clearer to drawing artists and art critics than to developmental psychologists. According to Gombrich, Steinberg was very conscious of this, as evidenced by the following quote: “I appeal to my reader’s complicity to transform the line into meaning by using our common cultural past, history, poetry. The contemporary, in that sense, is a complicity” (Gombrich, 1997, p. 192). It is therefore not surprising, although unusual, to argue that visual objects constitute an ideal scenario that fits well with the inquiry into the representational activity of the young child.

### ***Semiological Analysis***

One tool that has contributed to this work is semiological analysis of such objects that permit the establishment of distinctions among them while deriving important differences as to what is being referred to by the involved inferential elaborations (Puche-Navarro, 2001, 2004, 2009b). Semiological analysis of the paradoxical objects offers a rigorous examination of the necessary requirements for their understanding. The analysis of paradoxical objects discovers the contradictions in which they are based, as well as the conditions required by the subject to resolve the proposed crossroads. In other words, it allows for anticipating and controlling the explicit responses of the interrogated subject. A clearly subversive suggestion, even humorous, is to say that it is based on alienation and/or ambiguity.

Our previous studies have used semiological analysis as a tool to distinguish among different types of paradoxical objects. There is no doubt that differentiation between visual objects derives from the nature of transgression. The semiologic analysis could characterize very precisely if the display of distinctive inferential functioning already evolved is some kind of analyzing task used in psychology (Orozco, 2000; Pascual-Leone, 1991).

#### WHAT PARADOXICAL VISUAL OBJECTS MEAN?

The paradoxical object is presented as a problem to solve, a type of ambiguous enigma and at a crossroads for those observing it. Magritte refers to it as an ambiguity in which an object is transformed into another (Meuris, 1992). It is treated as a deliberately subversive suggestion that leads to an estrangement that produces an enjoyment of the humorous. There is some consensus that paradoxical objects combine possibilities for play, illusion, poetry, and humor. The work on the spatial aspects leads to traces of illusions and to geometric shapes that break with convention to open the door to the imagination and the unthinkable.

Perhaps the characteristics of uncertainty that surround paradoxical objects make them very diverse in nature and of different types. Magritte, for example, draws attention to the different types of transformations that lead to a wide heterogeneity of objects (Meuris, 1992). The nature of the subversive transformation (or of incongruence, as they're called by psychologists like Bariaud, 1983; McGhee, 1979; and Schultz, 1996) would define different types of paradoxical objects. Below is an incomplete typology that characterizes some of them.

In this classification, at a first and important place are Mutations, characterized by a transformation undergone by an object in front of the eyes of the spectator. A second type concerns objects that develop Recursions, which is the case for objects that break the distance between the author and his creation. Finally, there are the Mentalists: objects that play on the contradictions of content that take place in the mental states of the reader. Let us review them in more detail.

Magritte's work by itself constitutes an excellent overview of many of these distinct paradoxical objects. In this wide range, specific types of paradoxical objects are called mutations, named as such by Magritte to refer to those objects that undergo radical transformations. They are characterized as such because the transformation they undergo is of

such a magnitude that the objects cease to belong to one class or species, and, from the effect of that change, it becomes part of another distinct species.

"In the course of the inquiries I found a new possibility of things gradually becoming something different, an object becomes another (...) This means in my opinion, something very different from the coincidence between two objects because there is no break, no boundaries between the two materials." (Quoted by Meuris, 1992, p. 51; see illustrations of The Boots of Magritte in <http://cognitiva.univalle.edu.co/imagenes.htm>)

A second specific type of paradoxical object is when the drawing comes from the drawing, when the object is derived from the traces of the very act of drawing. Magnificent examples of that type of paradoxical objects are Escher's *The Drawing Hands* or Steinberg's *Passport*; the latter is certainly less transcendent but with a not insignificant dose of wit and humor. Steinberg puts it well when he says: "What draws is the drawing (and) drawing comes from the drawing. My line wants to be constantly reminded that it is made of ink" (Rosenberg, cited by Gombrich, 1997, p. 189). (See Illustration of Escher's *The Drawing Hands* and Steinberg's *The Passport* at <http://cognitiva.univalle.edu.co/imagenes.htm>.)

In the case of *The Drawing Hands* and *The Passport*, the author breaks down the barrier between that which draws and the action of drawing so that therein is the contradiction. A different thing occurs with mutations in that the transformation plays between two different objects, producing a hybrid. In the work *The Boots*, the feet turn into shoes in the presence of the spectator's eyes. That which characterizes this extraordinary mutation places it on the road to the metaphor. It is the same case as those paradoxical objects of Escher's that are half-bird, half-fish (extremes between two asymmetric animal species, one aquatic and one aerial—not in vain called Sky and Water) or as those found in *Meeting*, where he plays with the variation between ape and man.

Finally, other paradoxical objects are termed Mentalists. They have the specific feature of being psychological; in other words, they are anchored in mental states. This is nothing other than what is seen when a child interprets what occurs in the image that alludes a mental state of the protagonist and in front of which the viewer can situate themselves. Mentalist objects conciliate that early

capacity of children (or adults) to interpret and reproduce in their own emotional system the states, intentions, beliefs, and assumptions identified in the paradoxical object. That projection destroys the literal meaning of the object by discovering properties that it did not have, by creating ironies, and by opening other senses to the content acted upon. The dog sickness (Fig. 14.1) serves as a good example of this. The paradox is built on the fact that the reader has to know, that the dog “knows” what sickness means.

It is intended in those ways to better locate the class that we have named mentalists. It really is about these objects that our team has dedicated part of its work and has gathered much information. In fact, some of obtained results are used to account for the fertile and beneficial implications of returning to the iconic.

Paradoxical objects have a humorous side; in addition to being objects with meaning, they add an element of fun, which is also a cultural phenomenon. In a way of understanding the complexity of relations of development in a cultural approach, it is not surprising to come to a comprehension of them. No review of paradoxical objects would be complete without pointing out, if even briefly, the fact that humor plays an important role. Not all paradoxical objects are humorous, and not all visual humor proceeds from paradoxical objects. In this latter case, let’s just say, for example, a comic strip is some kind of iconic joke (Lozano & Puche-Navarro, 1998). In the first case, perhaps we can say that humor plays a fundamental role in understanding the greater part of paradoxical objects. Gombrich claims that “may be not other artist alive (referring to Steinberg) knows more than this humorist about the representation of philosophy” (Gombrich, 1997, p. 188).

The Mentalist class of objects may also include several different subclasses because they cover certain heterogeneity in the use of mental states. Consider some of the following subclasses.

#### *Mentalist 1*

When the transgressive relationship that is proposed transforms an object into another through projection that alludes to a desire or a sentiment of the protagonist. In the case of the object we have called *Cat in the Mirror*, subversion is defined by the functioning of a mirror that instead of reflecting (its fundamental property) transforms whoever is in front. What the reader must infer is the projection that is behind the relationship of “desired transformation.”

#### *Mentalist 2*

The contradiction that this object proposes is based on a clearly identifiable mental state but one that the protagonists cannot possess. It is clear that the television sets are discussing among themselves and that the reader can identify this directly and rapidly, but the contradiction is precisely that the television sets do not have the property for discussion among themselves (i.e., they “can” not do it).

Inferential demands that require an understanding of the evidence that mentalistic objects provide are not always the same. In some cases, the empirical evidence offered by this object is not direct (television sets), but they are necessary to deduce similar properties in the object. In the case of the *Cat in Front of the Mirror*, it is necessary to think and feel like the cat to understand the meaning of the lion in the mirror.

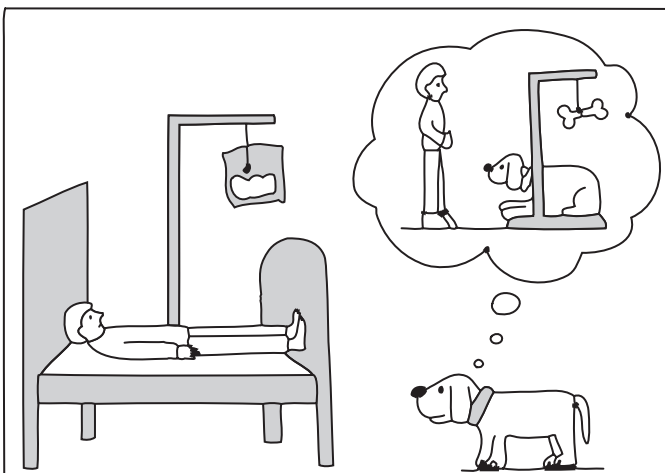


Figure 14.1 The Dog’s Sickness

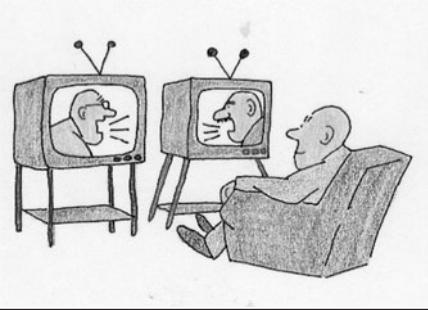

**HUMOROUS OBJECTS**

Perhaps it is time now to review some of the findings from our studies on understanding objects that have a clear humorous ingredient, to point out more precisely what is intended to be shown in this chapter. The spectators in our studies—the interpreters of paradoxical objects—are children. The age range used in the study was from 3 years to 4 years. Another element is that this child–spectator idea acts as a basic inquirer in the words of Karmiloff-Smith (2002), as a subject that raises questions and thus “reads the world.” It takes advantage of the paradoxical objects posed as a riddle, precisely to trigger the child’s abilities to discover what is being posed. In this exercise, one tries to understand what the posed object accesses from the inferential operations involved in such attempts at understanding. The results of previous studies (Lozano & Puche-Navarro, 1998; Puche-Navarro, 2001; 2002, 2004, 2009b) take into account such mental functioning required to make what is in the image explicit and find the original meaning that is implicit. The results are as surprising as they are diverse.

It is equally important to note that in the case of studies with children, the humorous ingredient of the paradoxical objects is a component that facilitates the child’s access to them. The young child’s ability to understand the meaning embodied in the subversion of the humorous visual object is necessary when it masters the double sense that it proposes. Such understanding assumes an inferential operation that when animated by the humorous ingredient moves the reader to decipher the meaning (see Table 14.1).

Table 14.1 shows that children of about age 4 years took the handling of mental states into account, which is the architecture required for understanding the mentalistic object. This fact by itself is surprising from the perspective of traditional child psychology. But equally interesting is the difference in the performance of children facing the mentalistic object 1 and the mentalistic object 2. Our semiological analysis of the requirements for understanding one and the other showed such differences. In one case the mental state is clearly identifiable, whereas with the other it is necessary to discover it. That discrimination that translates the different inferential operations

**Table 14.1. Comparison of the Understanding of Two Mentalists Jokes in Children from 3 to 8 years**

Mentalistic	Percentages of children that solve the problem
Mentalistic 1 (TV)	37/50 = 74%
	
Mentalistic 2 (Cat in the Mirror)	26/50 = 52%
	



shows them with relative transparency. Indeed, that the child discriminates between those two mentalistic objects implies that they require inferential operations at a different level of complexity.

One of the most important pieces of information collected shows that the understanding of different humorous objects of the mentalist type occurs quite early—that is, around age 4 years (Puche-Navarro, 2002). Precociously then, the children pass in a flexible and agile manner along the trajectory that separates the original representation of the subverted embodied in the iconic object. It is worth reiterating how humor plays an anchoring role in the reception that the child makes from the paradoxical object.

The very fact that the child discriminates between different paradoxical objects is a first-order fact to continue our study directed to delving deeply into the various classes of differential operations involved. It has been hypothesized that the understanding of paradoxical objects is played out on the unpredictable, on uncertainty, and on the transgressions of the conventional. These doubtful ambiguities and the little literal evidenced by the paradoxical objects should be enriched by taking up a larger class of them and adopting NLDS to try to explain the nature of the inferential operations that are derived.

In the subject's activity, one can then differentiate many kinds of inferences (although some of them are not included in our work). There are some that are of an inductive type (along the long-known ideas of David Hume), as are many of those working on children's ability to relate theory with evidence (Koslowski, 1996; Kuhn, 2002); there will be a relational or deductive type; and there will be the abductive, as those working in the emergence of metaphor (de la Rosa, 2006), to name but a few. However, the important thing to consider is that inferential operations cover a wide range. According to this idea, one of the most recent studies by our team worked on a task based on different objects requiring distinct operations. The study utilized conditions and the scenario favorable for differentiating them (Puche-Navarro, 2002, 2004, 2009b; Lozano & Puche-Navarro, 1998).

It is necessary to contextualize that traditionally the focus that has dominated the study of inferential operations has been that of pointing out an order of appearance (Mandler, 2007). Despite the importance of that work, and given the evidence that was just mentioned of the young child of around age 4 years, discriminating between various paradoxical

objects, it may also be relevant to question these facts differently. A very pertinent issue may be trying to find out what the structure is of the inferential operations that are involved and to investigate emerging alternatives that adopt the NLDS perspective to try to establish if they take into account a chaotic structure. Although the linearity of age-related behavior has been dominant, it is worth exploring what happens if one works from nonlinearity and bifurcation. The problem then would not be about the time of emergence of inferential operations nor stratification in relation to age. From nonlinearity the issue would be to explore what the paths of inferential operations over a span of several weeks involve to know what it is that these trajectories show. Paradoxical objects of the mentalistic type, others of the hyperbolic type, and, third, those of the substitution type are again taken into account. The paradoxical objects identified as mentalistic are characterized by a game of transgression based on the use of mental states. Hyperbolic paradoxical objects are characterized as such because the transgression takes place as a function of character exaggeration (e.g., a quiet fisherman in a small boat catches a fish three times the size of the boat). The transgression that gives rise to a substitution object is characterized by transposition of a structural element of the image that completely transforms the meaning of it (e.g., a cow with the head of an orchid).

The first objects that have been widely treated throughout the text (the mentalistic) are characterized from the standpoint of inferential operations as demanding deductive inferences that require a second-order intentional system (Dennett, 1995). That is, **the subject needs to think or feel what the protagonist thinks or feels**. The second objects of nature, hyperbolic, require inferential operations of the inductive type to the extent that they derive from direct and concrete indications of the iconic object. Finally, the third type of operations, the substitution, pose a transductive inference type, according to the classification of de Gortari (1969), who defines them as such for being of relational character given that they extract knowledge from among two or more elements. This can be seen in Table 14.2 with three paradoxical objects involving three distinct inferential operations (Combariza & Puche-Navarro, 2009).

On the one hand and from what can be seen in Table 14.2, it may be necessary to insist on the benefit of speaking of inferential operations in the plural and not simply of inference in the singular.

**Table 14.2. Relation between Paradoxical Objects and Types of Inferential Operations**

Paradoxical objects	Type of inferential operation
Hyperbolic	Inferential operations of the inductive type
Mentalistic	Inferential operations of the deductive type
Substitution	Inferential operations of the transductive type

In the given study, we worked with a paradoxical object situation on a problem-solving task with a branching structure. Faced with a board with three columns and four choices, the child could make three consecutive choices in sequences (which are given in the vertical columns) versus four options from the paradoxical objects (three distracters and a neutral option). In this way, we could keep itineraries of the choices for each child.

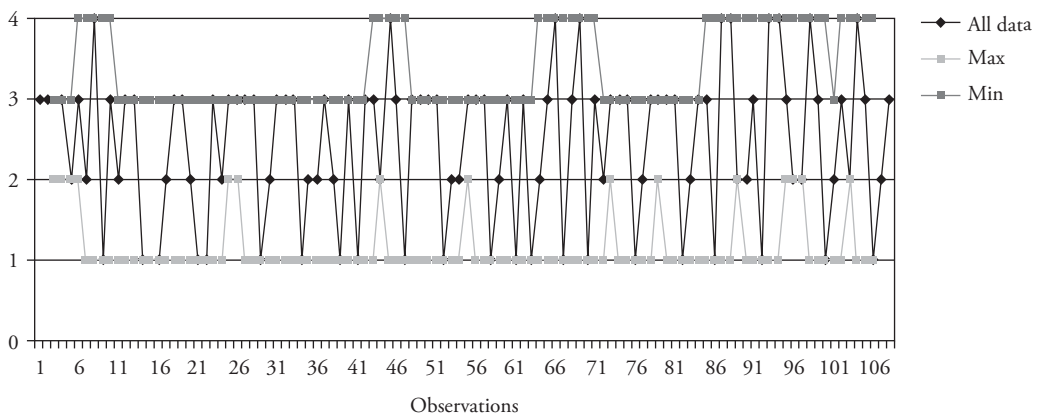
The study was carried out with a time-series design that allowed for obtaining 108 measures by presenting the subject 9 sessions where each experiment collected 12 data units (12 x 9 = 108). The data were treated with the graphic technique of *minimae* and *maximae* (van Geert & van Dijk, 2002) applied to the individual performances determined by the choices of the subject. The result is a band with observational measures. The *x*-axis represents the period of 108 observations and *y*-axis represents the scored choices of paradoxical objects (scale 1: control, 2: hyperbolic,

3: mentalistic, and 4: substitution). This technique, then, displays the temporal sequence of each choice among the four scores along the 9 repeated experiments (Combariza & Puche-Navarro, 2009).

In reality, rather than the technical specifications of the experiment that may be observed in the cited study, what we want to highlight here is that from the NLDS perspective, it sought to explore the performance of various inferential operations involved in the three paradoxical objects utilized. Let's look at some outcomes in an individual case (Fig. 14.2).

Juan's trajectory shows (Fig. 14.2) that much of the choices are scored as a 2. In the first 10 observations, the scores ranged among 2, 3, and 4 options with a wide bandwidth. The same thing occurred in the last 20 observations, a segment in which the largest number of option 4 appears. Between 10 and 45 the options are from 1, 2, and 3. A similar trajectory is presented between observations 47 and 64, as well as between observations 72 to 85. Another feature is that very few choices are recorded for option 4 because only 8 are counted. The bandwidth shows that Juan's scores range intermittently between the four options. The picture shown in these trajectories is a rather incessant oscillation of choices. This time-series technique results in highly irregular data showing variability as a recurrent and a-periodical process.

What these data reveal is that the choices of the subject are marked by oscillations. It would be expected that once the subject chooses the paradoxical mentalistic object, it would continue doing so. On the contrary, the study found that the next time,



**Figure 14.2** Juan's Performances of Various Inferential Operations Involved in the Three Paradoxical Objects along 108 Observations

a hyperbolic or a control may be chosen. There definitely does not seem to be an order or a sequence between the various choices.

These three types of inferential operations do not show sequentially among themselves. It is not recorded, for example, that the inferential operations of the inductive type (hyperbolic) precede the deductive (mentalist) nor those of the transductive type (substitution), following a growing line of progression. These three types of inferential operations do not evolve in fixed sequences, but their development is interdependent.

If there is no linear relationship among the various inferential operations, then the next step is to respond to whether they effectively have a fractal structure. To answer that question, it is necessary to identify whether they behave as a transition region and whether they might be treated as nodal points—that is, an area of attractors. This answer confirms the application of techniques such as the wavelet that was applied to the same data collected in the same situation and under the same conditions.

### ***New Methods: The Wavelet Model***

The history of this technique is in itself remarkable because it was rediscovered several times (Mackenzie, 2001). The name *wavelet* is first found in an article by Morlet in 1984 (Goupillaud, Grossman, & Morlet, 1984). Technically speaking, it is a transformed signal and of optimal visual representation with qualitative character and pattern productive. Its virtue is to identify within a cluster of data a code that allows for representing the facts in a simple manner. One of its great virtues is to identify a-periodicity in chaotic systems. In this regard, it is a privilege to know if the paths that make inferential operations in the selections of the different paradoxical objects correspond with chaotic systems.

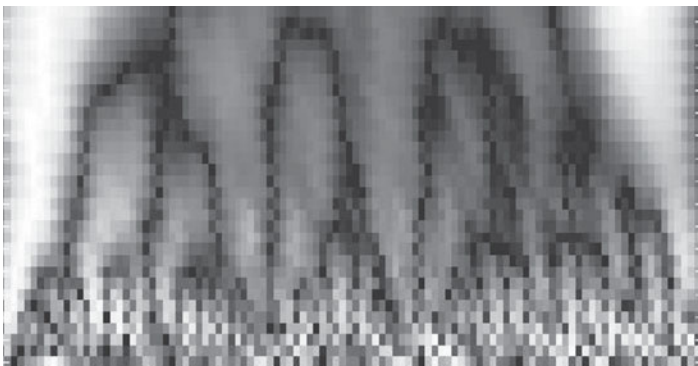
Consider the wavelet of the same child, Juan, whose data were seen with the graphical technique of minimums and maximums in the Figure 14.3.

What does this image reveal? There are three characteristics: the vertical axes show shapes as arcs diffuse; these arcs are self-contained; they represent lack of symmetry. These three characteristics prove the multifractal nature of Juan's response pattern.

The wavelet produced by the set of inferential operations exposes a certain irregularity between different arcs that seem self-contained. These forms reveal the presence of different fractals in a multifractal space. Based on this information, it can be confirmed that the inferential operations studied mathematically correspond to a multifractal structure and to a strange attractor (Combariza & Puché-Navarro, 2009). The wavelet indicates that the trajectories studied belong to the same attractor.

The wavelet shows evidence that allows us to assume that the inferential operations constitute a system of coupled variables that control each other and that act simultaneously, formally demonstrating the nonlinear nature of the phenomenon under study. The three types of inferential operations belong to a region of attractors, which implies that they change each other in an interdependent manner. That is, if the inference involved in mentalistic object grows, then the inferential operations corresponding to the other two objects (hyperbolic and substitution) decrease. This type of interaction would respond in the game between the three objects in which one serves as a bridge between the two other visual objects.

The wavelet shows different patterns that emerge from the same model that underlies its functioning. Rose and Fischer pose the presence of “patterns of attractors” to refer to common values that would



**Figure 14.3** Juan's Performances Applied to Wavelet

account for the connections between these different domains (Rose & Fischer, 2009). These outcomes would show these patterns of attractors between different functioning of inferences, derived rising from the various paradoxical objects.

The passage between successive micro-attractors evidences that this is not a fixed sequence without uniform order. In terms of inferential operations, this implies that their evolution does not follow a pre-established linear process. Rather, it is on a somewhat illogical path with no apparent order, similarly to the passage from one memory to another, but that behaves much as dynamic systems and therefore has an underlying structure of a chaotic nature. As Rose and Fischer exposed: “Dynamic modeling offers tools to better understand development and learning in their full complexity, integrating influences involving person, context, and culture” (2009, pp. 417).

### **Conclusions: Toward Exploration of Nonlinearity in Mind and Culture**

One of the aims of this chapter was to demonstrate the virtuosity of paradoxical objects in the study of development from a cultural perspective. We believe that one is able to establish that they contain multiple paths of access to different levels for comprehension of the subject. The fact that a child can grasp the understanding of an object created in another distant place and in another century is, as we said before, as much surprising as revealing of the object’s ability to interface between perspectives and different times.

However, another important conclusion is the pertinence of NLDS to account for the complexity of inferential operations. Indeed, fluctuations and peculiarities of inferential functioning in understanding objects such as paradoxical ones requires a type of approach that is not schematic nor linear. In fact, methodologically employing our graphic technique of *minimae* and *maximae* and the wavelets technique, we have been able to establish that human cognitive inferential operations have a fractal nature. They belong to a *strange attractor* zone. We can show the path from one attractor to another—yet without a steady sequence. It breaks the idea of an order in appearance of inferential operations development complexity. Wavelet shows that the distinctive inferential operations evolve in an interdependent way.

Multifractality found in inferential operations leads to the issue of evolution of cognitive functions. This evolution is not necessarily from past–future relations as the sole and exclusive option—

in classical proportional or sequential relations between a previous element and a posterior one—but necessarily entails numerous bifurcated scenarios. Inferential operations fail to evolve in stages, and their levels of complexity do not appear in a stepwise fashion where the simplest precedes and is a condition of that which follows. Further, they do not necessarily follow an unequivocal form not a single cause and effect chain. The role of multiple interactions of the components that comprise the subject’s relations with its environment is very present. At least, perhaps the approach of Ilya Prigogine that can be found in the reconstitution of his conference, *L’homme devant l’incertain*, is perhaps very appropriate:

The vision of an evolving and bifurcating world requires a new rationality, a nature that invites us to wonder, and that wonder is the common source of the arts and science.

### **Future Directions**

Perhaps many more questions arise than answers that have been able to be established from this chapter. It is then worthwhile to focus on two issues on which this work is built: paradoxical objects, dynamic systems, and the role of both in a cultural approach to cognitive development.

Paradoxical objects constitute, in themselves, a great diversity and that diversity is what allows us to investigate the various kinds of cognitive activities, culturally understood. The semiotic analysis of paradoxical objects complements this form of inquiry by providing a map of the possibilities of the human mind in varied contexts and disparate perspectives. Being such a useful tool, the question is perhaps, “Why have paradoxical objects been used only by art critics and journalists, not by psychologists?” Perhaps the simplest answer is found in the weight of tradition. Psychologists are quite wedded to devices and tools that last and are reluctant to take risks. However, to innovate and especially refresh research when it offers interesting results is a task for everyone. In the agenda of researchers in developmental psychology from a cultural perspective, one must see the needs for innovation with the use of paradoxical objects (especially in a technological age where much of the information is imparted through images) as another road with fertile results.

It is also evident that there are not many authors who have adopted the NLDS as a conceptual and methodological perspective in the study of the

development as a system that evolves under a context. Why? It seems that this alternative is quite risky and requires the use of mathematical thought, which is a challenge for most psychologists. Nevertheless, in the future, there will be the capacity to build interdisciplinary teams composed by psychologists, anthropologists, physicists and mathematicians that will be suited to approach the problem from the psychology with the NLDS vision and methodology:

A dynamic approach can change the way you think about development and it can change the way you conduct research in development. Once we began to view development from a dynamic and selectionist approach, we found the ideas so powerful that we could never go back to other ways of thinking. Every paper we read, every talk we heard, every new bit of data from our labs took on new meaning . . . The final test of dynamics in development, of course, is in its usefulness to a wide range of scholars. We hope readers will accept the challenge of the new way of thinking and working and we look forward to the report card. (Thelen & Smith, 1994, pp. 341–342)

What Thelen and Smith raised here about the possibilities for the study of cognitive development from the perspective of NLDS can be applied with full force to the study of cognitive development from a cultural approach. Indeed, the dynamic model can reconcile what appear to be disparate aspects in development because of a whole range of influences, both cultural and otherwise. It is fairly safe to say that if psychologists look at the future, the latter provides new opportunities.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express her gratitude to professors Ernesto Combariza, and Mariela Orozco members of the Centro de Investigaciones en Psicología, Cognición y Cultura, de la Universidad del Valle, for their help in for their careful, attentive reviewing, which allowed a significant improvement in the text. Much of the information contained in this chapter is part of an investigation project Cognitive development from dynamic non-linear systems. The empirical project was financed by internal resources of the Vice-Dean of research of Universidad del Valle, to the Center of Psychology and Cognition and Culture

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# Existential Semiotics and Cultural Psychology

Eero Tarasti

## Abstract

Existential Semiotics is a new approach, or “school,” within the general semiotics and philosophy. It tries to renew the epistemic foundations of the theory of signs, inspired by rereading the classics of continental philosophy in the line of Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Arendt, and Sartre and, on the other hand, the whole tradition of classical semiotics from Saussure to A.J. Greimas. Yet, the new issue it offers is the revalorization of subject and subjectivity, and hence it opens the field to psychological explanation and application as well. It launches new notions to the field, such as transcendence, Dasein, modalities, values, *Moi/Soi*, and so forth. It constitutes a kind of ontological semiotics starting from the modality of Being and shifting toward Doing and Appearing, as well. Many concepts of various disciplines from representation and genre to dialogue and nature of communication can be re-interpreted in its light. Albeit it also takes into account moral and axiological acts, it emphasizes the transcendental aspect of value as virtual entities and hence does not belong so much to any post-modern or post-structuralist thought; rather, it aims for what is called “neosemiotics,” philosophy, and methodology of signification conceived in the 2010s.

**Keywords:** transcendence, subject, modalities, Being, Doing, Appearance (Schein), Dasein, *Moi/Soi*, sign categories: pre-sign, act-sign, post-sign, neosemiotics, existentiality

The mere notion of “existential semiotics” in the title evokes many issues in the history of ideas and study of signs.<sup>1</sup> As such, it is new theory of studies of communication and signification, as Eco has defined the scope of the discipline of semiotics (Eco, 1979, p. 8). But the attribute “existential” calls on a certain psychological dimension—namely, existential philosophy and even existentialism. In a broader sense one can ask, like once my publisher John Gallman from Indiana University Press: Is it something like existential life (this came to my mind since the American transcendentalist philosophers, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the writer Henry Thoreau and others can be considered a kind of pre-existentialist thinkers) On the other hand, it certainly carries a philosophical tinge at least and brings us back to German speculative philosophy, to the time

of Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and thereafter the existentialist line in the proper sense (i.e., Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Arendt, Wahl, Gabriel, Marcel, etc.). However, albeit this new theory may get its inspiration from these classical sources, one cannot return into any earlier historic phase, the theoretical thought in 2010 is definitely philosophy in our time and in our case is enriched by the development of semiotic discipline through the twentieth century particularly.

## Return to Basic Ideas

These theoretical and philosophical reflections have started from the hypothesis that semiotics cannot forever stay as the classics from Peirce and Saussure to Greimas, Lotman, Sebeok, and others have established it. Semiotics is in flux and reflects

new epistemic choices in the situation of sciences in the 2000s. With existential semiotics, I by no means attempt any kind of return to existentialism or to some earlier historic thinker, like Hegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre, or Heidegger. I have felt entitled to search for inspiration in these philosophers because of the actuality of their ideas in the new context.

Existential semiotics aims for discovering the life of signs from within. It studies unique phenomena—unlike most previous semiotics, which have investigated only the conditions of such particular meanings. It studies signs in movement and flux, signs becoming signs (i.e., as pre-signs, act-signs, and post-signs), as I have portrayed this process (Tarasti, 2000, p. 33). It sees signs fluctuating between what I call by the German term *Dasein*—Being there (our world with subjects and objects) and transcendence. Completely new sign categories emerge in this tension between reality and being beyond it. We have to make a new list of categories in the side of that once done by Peirce. Such new signs so far discovered are a.o. trans-signs, endo- and exo-signs, quasi-signs (or as-if-signs), and pheno- and geno-signs.

In my own previous theory of musical semiotics, which is my special field of empirical research (Tarasti, 1994, pp. 27, 38–43), I came to the conclusion that the most important manner of music to signify comes from its modalities. This evokes the background of my theories in the so-called “Paris School of Semiotics,” and particularly its founder, the Lithuanian-born scholar Algirdas Julien Greimas. Before Greimas, I had studied with Claude Lévi-Strauss, but the Greimasian theory definitely brought me into the core of the European tradition of semiotics. Greimas started with his *Sémantique structurale* (1966) stemming from phenomenology, semantics, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, and Levi-Straussian structural anthropology, not to mention Saussure and Hjelmslev. He launched new concepts such as semanalysis, actantial model, isotopies, and so forth. In the late 1970s, he put his thought into a generative course, fashionable model at that time (Greimas, 1979, pp. 157–164). However, the most radical of his innovations was just the discovery of modalities, to which he always referred to as the “third semiotic revolution” (the first being the invention of semantics by Bréal and the second the structural linguistics by de Saussure). Modalities remained probably the most durable and innovative aspect of the Paris school. By modalities, he meant the manners whereby a speaker animates

his/her speech providing it with his/her wishes, hopes, certainties, uncertainties, duties, emotions, and so forth. They meant, in fact, a psychological turn in the semiotics (even if it basically preserved its conceptual nature). Larousse’s French dictionary defines modality as:

Psychic activity that the speaker projects into what he is saying. A thought is not content with a simple presentation, but demands active participation by the thinking subject, activity which in the expression forms the soul of the sentence, without it the sentence does not exist.

(quoted from *Tarasti*, 1994, p. 39)

Modalities appeared in the grammar of some language as a special subjunctive verb form of subphrase. In French, one says: “Il faut que *j’aille à la banque*,” or “*J’espère qu’il vienne*” (so not: “Je vais” or “Il vient”). In Italian, one says: “*Credo che questa sia possibile.*”

### *Dasein*

Fundamental modalities were “being” and “doing.” Moreover, we can distinguish a third—namely, becoming, referring to the “normal” temporal course of events in our *Dasein*. Other modalities are, in turn, will, can, know, and must plus believe. Importantly, here modalities are processual concepts. Therefore, they are the element that is certainly preserved as valid from the “classical” semiotics, in the new existential semiotics, precisely because of their dynamic nature.

They are very apt to portray what happens inside what I call *Dasein* of the following model (Tarasti, 2000, p. 10) in Figure 15.1.

The concept of *Dasein* (which I have left untranslated because of its strong philosophical connotations) has been borrowed from German philosophy, Heidegger, and Jaspers (*see also* Jaspers, 1948, pp. 6–11, 57–66, 295); however, unlike in Heidegger, for whom *Dasein* in the first place meant **my** existence, here it does not refer only to one subject, Me, but also to Others and likewise to the objects that we desire. Yet, we have to notice that there is something beyond the concrete reality in which we live—namely, that which is called “transcendence.” The easiest definition of this intriguing notion, which certainly not all semioticians would wish welcome to semiotic theory, might be the following: Transcendent is anything that is absent but present in our minds. Furthermore, in the model, a new element is introduced—namely, the subject.



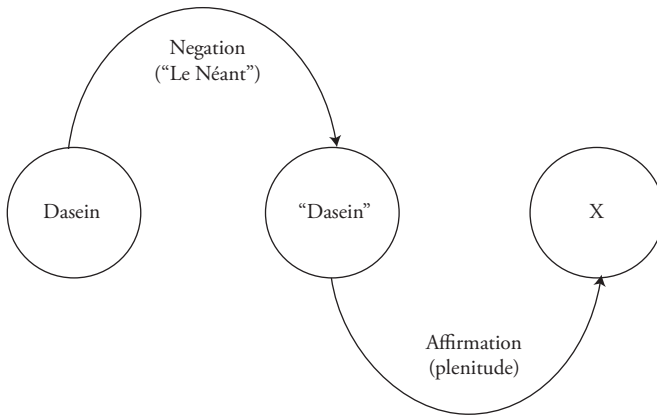


Figure 15.1 The model of *Dasein*.

There is a subject dwelling in the *Dasein*, who feels it somehow deficient, not satisfactory, and so negates it. This is what Sartre called *néantisation* (Sartre, 1943, pp. 44–45), the lack of the existence that forces the subject to search for something else and more. But in the model, there are two transcendental acts: first negation, followed by affirmation. As a result, we have the “existential style” in the *Dasein* x. That is what has been called also “existential move.”

First our subject finds himself amidst the objective signs of *Dasein*. But then the subject recognizes the emptiness and Nothingness surrounding the existence from which he has come—that is, which precedes him and comes after him. The subject makes a leap into Nothingness, to the realm of *Le Néant*, described by Sartre. In its light, the whole earlier *Dasein* seems to have lost its ground: it appears to be senseless. This constitutes the first act of transcendence, or the negation. Nevertheless the movement of the subject continues further and now follows the second act of transcendence: He encounters the opposite pole of the Nothingness—the universe that is meaningful but in some supra-individual way, independently of his own act of signification. The act can be called affirmation; as the consequence of this act, he finds what Peirce called the *Ground*. For me, it was first difficult to find a suitable concept to portray this state, before I noticed, after reading the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1965, pp. 348–349), that it was the same as what in the Gnostic philosophy was called *pleroma* or plenitude. This again evokes *die Weltseele*, the world soul of Schelling (see also Ralph Waldo Emerson), which he defined as follows: “The soul of the world, anima mundi, is the unitary inner nature of the world, which is thought to be a living,

willing, conceiving, and feeling being.” Accordingly, what Schelling did was to portray the world soul as a “modal” entity, to use the semiotic vocabulary of the Paris School (Greimas, 1979, pp. 230–232).

As early as here I want to emphasize that the model is of conceptual nature and not of empirical one. This, of course, does not exclude any kind of subsequent psychological, anthropological, theological applications. Someone has proposed that “transcendental journey” means “a psychedelic trip,” some others have compared it to the act of a shaman in which his soul after he has eaten mushrooms, makes a transmundane wandering to other realities, and so forth. However, the scheme itself is philosophical and deals with what Kant called *transzendental* rather than *transzendent* (Kant, 1787/1968, p. 379).

We can, of course, provide the logical operations of affirmation and negation with a more psychological content and distinguish within them subtle nuances of these acts. For example, **negation** means:

- abandoning, giving up—that is, one is in a situation in which some x has appeared, the subject has taken it into its possession but now abandons it, and is “disjuncted” from it (formalized as S V O, in the Greimassian semiotics; see Greimas, 1979, p. 108)
- passing by: x appears but a subject passes by it
- forgetting: x has appeared, but it is forgotten; it does not have any impact
- making a counter-argument: x appears, but something totally different follows: y or x appears and it is followed by its negation (inversion, contrast, opposition or else) or this corresponds to Greimas’s semiotic square and its categories s1 and

s2, and non-s1 and non-s2 (Greimas, 1979, pp. 29–33)

- rejecting: x appears, but it is rejected
- preventing: x is going to appear, but it is prevented
- taking away the relations attributes: x appears, but one eliminates its seems x . . . xn where after only it becomes acceptable
- destroying: x appears, but it is destroyed
- collapsing, vanishing: x appears, but it then disappears by itself, without our ability or will to influence it
- concealing: the appearance of x is hidden, but altogether it “is” on a certain level
- parodizing: x appears, but it is not taken seriously; it is taken as an “as-if sign”
- mocking: x appears, but one jokes with it; it is ironized, made grotesque
- dissolution: x appears, but it is reduced to smaller parts; when its total phenomenal quality is lost, one does not see the forest from trees. Or, according to Adorno: “When one scrutinizes art works very close, even most objective works turn into confusion, texts into words . . . the particular element of the work vanishes, its abridgment evaporates under microscopic glance” (Adorno, 2006, p. 209)
- misunderstanding: x appears, but it is not interpreted as x but as something else.

#### Affirmation means:

- acceptance: x appears and we accept it without intervening it; for example, we rejoice in others’ success
- helping: contributing to the fact that x appears
- enlightenment: we see x in a favorable light
- revelation of the truth and disappearance of lie: x appears, it is recognized as *Schein*, lie, and as its counterpole we do so that, or allow that x’ appears
- beginning: we start to strive for, we undertake an act so that some positive, euphoric x appears
- duration: we attempt to maintain the appearance of x; for example, by teaching someone
- finishing: x appears as the end result of a process, as a reward of pain; the shine, the brilliance has been gained by labor (*see* later the modality of appearing)
- organic vitality: x erupts, appears as consequence of an organic process, as abandoning to it, as “striding at the top of a wave”

- transfiguration: x radiates something that stems from its background, not from its own power but as the weight of the invisible reality; for example, the bodies in El Greco’s paintings—in this case, we first encounter the negation: the body is portrayed as suffering, pining, but behind it looms some clarity
- victory: x appears as the end of a long struggle; for example, C major at the end of Beethoven’s Fifth
- opening: the appearance of x means a gate to the world of possibilities, new universes open for us
- liberation: the appearance of x signifies getting rid of the chains of y or x’.

However, one has to note two other aspects of this model of how our psyche is adapted to his/her existential situation and journeys. For the first, there is one thing that is evoked by pondering negation as a kind of **alienation**, estrangement. Namely, when a subject temporarily exits his *Dasein* in his transcendental act, he can naturally stay in this journey one minute, hour, day, week, year, decades. In the temporal sense, the journey can thus last whatsoever time span. Yet, it can occur that when he returns to the world of his *Dasein*, symbolized by a globe, it has changed, it has been all the time in motion by itself and completely independently of our subject, it has perhaps turned around to some directions so that our subject does not return any longer to the same world. There has been in-built in our model as a kind of solipsist idea that *Dasein* exists only for one subject and that it changes its shape because of **his/her** existential experiences. Yet it is not only so. During the transcendental journey, the world may have in the meantime developed into a new direction. Subject does not return at home but to a quite different world from that which he left. As far as we take *Dasein* as a collective entity, which consists of subjects and objects, of Others, we encounter the community and the autonomous development of the collectivity, the change brought by the history. Our subject can either accept this change and try to adapt to it or deny it. A special opportunity for semiotics of resistance emerges from the latter case. Progress does not mean to go along the normal course of the journey, but to look at other alternatives, or **what might have happened**, what might have been possible (*see* Tarasti, 2009, pp. 51, 61–65) as shown in Figure 15.2.

In addition, there is another aspect at our model, which opens new avenues after the previous one.

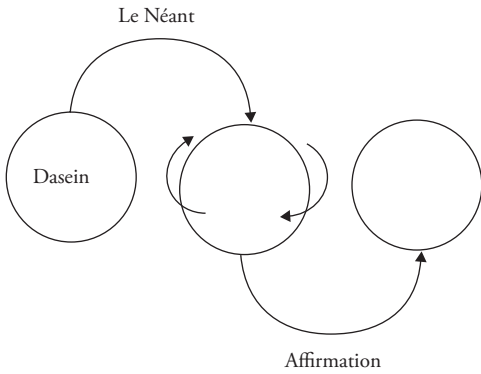


Figure 15.2 The turn-around of *Dasein*.

Namely, the arrows can go backward as well. Our subject recalls how *Dasein* was before and returns to it on the basis of his memory. His memory has kept still some images and ideas from these previous worlds and their phases, as we can see in Figure 15.3.

Some of them he may have already forgotten, and similarly the *Dasein* may have forgotten him. There is danger indeed that if he dwells too long in his position of resistance and outside the *Dasein*, then he is forgotten—like a text that has to be destroyed and ignored from the collective memory of a culture. This leads to strong social implications of our theory. Real thinkers of resistance are always forgotten and suppressed. If they were accepted, they would not be what they want to be. Thus, in our model the arrows go also to another direction: backward. This leads us to ponder the return of signs and problems of history, determination and optionality, causality, and communication.

### Values

In the existential theory, regarding semiotics (one may have already wondered what this has to do with the theory of signs), signs are in constant movement between transcendence and *Dasein*. Depending on their distance to *Dasein*, whether they are approaching it or distancing from it we indeed get new types of signs. For the first, we have pre-signs—that is, ideas or values that have not yet become concrete signs. Such signs are virtual. When they become manifest as a sign object or “vehicle” or an act, they become act-signs. Moreover, when they exercise their impact on receivers, they become post-signs. In their virtual, potential state as transcendental entities, they can be called *trans-signs*. These three or four phases correspond to three activities of the human mind: virtualizing, actualizing, and realizing—not only

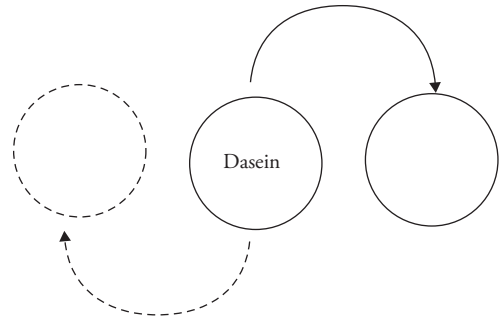


Figure 15.3 The counter-current of the *Dasein*.

used by Greimas but appearing also in the phenomenological theories by Roman Ingarden.

Ultimately, this is an axiological problem of the existence of values. In the Saussurean tradition values are relative: they are determined only in their context as opposed to other values by the linguistic community (Saussure, 1916/1995, p. 116). In my theory, values are transcendental but become signs via the activities of the subject. In the aesthetic field such a view is of course problematic. How can we say that the value of, say, a Beethoven sonata existed before its creation? Was it looming somewhere and waiting for its actualization in the *Dasein*? We may say that transcendental values do not become a manifest reality without an agent who actualizes them.

When this occurs, such pre-signs can also become something different than they were thought to be before, as mere pre-signs (Tarasti, 2000, p. 33). Without the help of other modalities, know, can, must, and will they are never concretized. Signs can be also classified as endo- and exo-signs (Tarasti, 2000, pp. 37–55)—that is, either something internal to our subject’s world or external to it.

Let us scrutinize this problem regarding moral values. If we would like to abridge what was said above, then we could present the following figure:



The movement would be from the left to the right, when in the semiosis stepwise some abstract idea is condensed and crystallizes at the end into a sign (see Tarasti, 2004, p. 39). The psychological moment is situated at modalities and modalizations. But can we call this process a semiosis? Shall we then not commit the error that we consider signs not straightly as values but at least value vehicles, and then we would correspondingly keep values as signs? To some philosophers, to say that something

is “sign” is not any recommendation. But on which grounds could we reason that if something is of sign character, then it would be less “real” and valuable? Peirce’s way of thinking was that to become conscious of a sign is a second. The French novel writer Le Clezio said that as soon as when reading a novel, we exclaim: “Oh this was well said!” it is a kind of sign, and it does not function any longer. The functionality of signs has become almost an aesthetic slogan in recent years. But this is the same as stated above—namely, the value reality escapes our hold on it, and everything becomes only technical problems of functionality. Some may say that this was the fault of the semioticians! They taught us that all is only sign and semiosis: there can be disturbances in its functioning, but they can be corrected with the technical knowledge of dominance that we have of the functioning of text. Thus, values remain completely external, and transcendental, and one does not need to believe in their existence: There are only opinions, language, discourse, but no transcendental categories. Greimas (1979/1999) said: “*Il n’y a pas de vérité, il n’y a que véridiction*” [“There is no truth, there are only statements about truth”].

All moral philosophers have to deal with Moore and Hume. The latter proposed as his thesis that no values can be inferred from facts. From the state of how things are, we cannot logically infer how they should be. In my existential semiotics, I have defended the idea that values could be transcendental ideas in the side of other values that exist outside the *Dasein*. However, in some cases and under certain circumstances, they start to exercise their influence within the *Dasein*, when some living subject therein—individual or collective—feels such a value as his own, experiences it to oblige him/her into something and finally realizes this value as a sign. The British philosopher John Mackie in his work *Inventing Right and Wrong* (Mackie 1977), has represented extreme value nominalism. Views of different cultures of what is right and wrong are so different that no value facts exist. All moral statements are thus untrue. Mackie’s idea is that all objective moral theories make a mistake when they say that man cannot step outside and above morals if he/she wants to do so. In his mind, moral is a special form of social life, which man and his community creates and chooses. This sounds already rather existential. He says: “If moral leads into quarrel and dispute, then moral shall be forgotten!”

If, even after this, we keep on the point that moral values exist in transcendence, it remains on

the responsibility of the person of *Dasein* whether he/she believes in this and whether he/she lets them have any impact on his/her acts. This idea probably provides us with the key to the problem of how to fit values into modalities and furthermore into signs—that is, how to act. I offer you now such a proposal. No one can say that I pursue such and such an act because a transcendental value  $x$  requires me to do so.” When I select value  $x$  as my ideal, it is always my own choice for which I am responsible. This is my main argument against the argument most often used to attack the value realists—that is, who and/or what guarantees that some person does not start to enact some completely foolish transcendental value and even imagine to be right. However, when I have picked up the value  $x$ , it falls into the field of the modalities and passions of our *Dasein*, amidst our wanting, obligations, abilities, and knowing. Then I make the act,  $x$  or non- $x$ —that is, I fulfill an act following this value or I give it up, I do something against it, I negate the value by my act, see Figure 15.4.

Hence, the signified of the act is the transcendental value but only insofar as this, our subject, has the right value of competence for the code whereby he/she can connect such an act to the transcendental value under question.

At the same time this act further launches other acts, which either affirm or negate the act  $x$ /non- $x$ . Consequently, we can infer the crucial imperative for any moral activity: If the act  $x$ =/non- $x$ = causes in its *Umwelt* other negative acts, which are negative in relations to other transcendental values, then such an act should not be committed. In other words, we have to apply there the postulate by Mackie that says that we have to give up moral judgment and activity. We might, for example, imagine that we

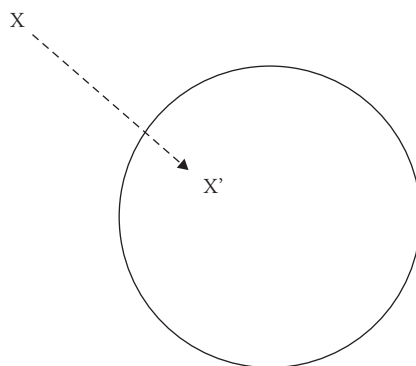


Figure 15.4 The enactment of values.

have the transcendental value of being honest or keeping promises. However, somebody does something contrary (e.g., breaks a contract). This negative act enhances in its social environment reactions or other acts that can likewise be negative: non-y punishing, non-p abandoning, exclusion outside the community, non-q hatred. All these reactive value acts are, in turn, negations of some transcendental values, like indulgence, benevolence, abstinence from violence, charity, look at Figure 15.5, and so forth.

In other words, if the correction of a negative value act causes more negative acts in its *Umwelt* than the original negative act, then one has to give up such a correction, being morally right and displaying it.

Two kinds of modalities function in such a moral value act, like in any fulfillment of a value: (1) modalities that regulate acts and the behaviors of their agents in the *Dasein*, and (2) modalities that regulate the relationships of value acts to their transcendental values. This movement takes place in two directions: either it is manifesting, concretizing values or the process in which, as Greimas states, virtual act changes into actual and sometimes even real - this takes place when we 'return' to the value as it is in transcendence and compare the 'actual' value to the 'virtual value', hence the transcendental value serves as the source of the actualized value in *Dasein*. These two acts of metamodalization, i.e. making values concrete entities by actualizing them and by comparing them to their transcendental and virtual sources, presuppose a particular value competence. If our subjects do not possess the right codes to connect a potential, virtual value into an act that concretizes it and if they cannot decode from an act its value content and compare it to the

encyclopedia of values, then the reality of values is not fulfilled at all.

This model should likewise fit to other values, as said, like the truth or epistemic values and the beauty or aesthetic values. In any case, the subject of *Dasein* is totally responsible for his value choices—that is, which value he *metamodalizes* from the encyclopedia of values. Naturally when he is devoid of some value because of his education, for example, one can say that also his community, "senders" (school, parents, teachers), are responsible. Yet, he is existentially responsible for which transcendental values he selects, how he modalizes them into a value act, and which kind of value acts and modalities they bring about.

The intermediate phase of modalities is indispensable in making values and signs compatible. It also explains why some originally right value can, when it is transformed into a value act, get distorted into a caricature of itself: It is caused by modalization, or in the transformation of the phase of actualizing when the human passions intervene.

This explains the nature of meta-modalities: They are altogether activities of a subject. Yet, how then do meta-modalities distinguish from ordinary modalities? They contribute to the particular act of signification in which a value is connected to a physical act or object of the sign vehicle. That implies the following varieties of ordinary modalities:

1. want (*vouloir*): I want to connect value x to the signified of act x. If subject would not want it, this value could not manifest. But another concern is if such a wanting differs from that wanting and desire, whereby the subjects of *Dasein* look after each other or various value objects. Not even a supporter of the psychoanalytic theory would presume that the Freudian desire would as such explain for example, artistic activity, ethical choice or scientific theory. A special form of human wanting is involved.

2. know (*savoir*): I know that value x exists; without such knowledge I cannot even want to concretize it in my value act: But which kind of knowing is this? Is it quite similar information as the one we receive in our *Dasein* and that can be measured by the information theoretical concepts of entropy and redundancy?

3. can (*pouvoir*): I am able to connect a value x to an act x—for example, I want to help sick people but to do something I have to master medicine; I want to help the poor, but unless I am

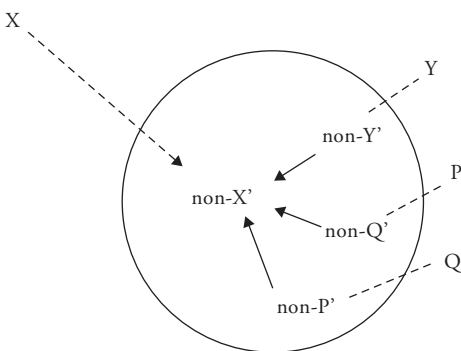


Figure 15.5. Reaction to a value act.

able to provide a property, then I cannot do it; I want to transmit artistic experiences, but if I do not master good techniques, then I cannot produce any such emotions; and so forth.

4)=must=(*devoir*): *must* means the internalization of values, so that we could experience that a value obliges us. But even then the meta-modality *must* is our own existential choice.

## New Types of Signs

The traffic between these instances of signs—that is, between transcendence and existence—is taken care of by meta-modalities, as we would call them. Altogether, signs have their *situations*—an aspect found essential in the existential approach. If we take this first model as a narrative structure portraying human life, it radically differs from classical story schemes, which are symmetrical. Following Greimas, any narrative starts with a situation in which we are *hic, nunc, ego* (or here, now, me), but then something happens (the so-called “initial lack” in Vladimir Propp’s theory of Russian folk tales) that causes a “disengagement” from this prior state into there, then, others. Yet, normally in a classical storytelling, we return back to the initial state—that is, we are “engaged” with it, and so the syntagmatic line becomes symmetrical. However, in the existential semiosis, there is no return—what happens next is always unknown, unpredictable. This evokes the idea of Levinas in his theory of Totality and Infinite (Levinas, 1971).

Another new scientific paradigm that enters into existential semiotics—perhaps paradoxically to some minds—is the biosemiotics. Biosemiotics is one of the new schools that have emerged in the last 20 years within general semiotics, thanks to writings of Thomas A. Sebeok (*see also* Sebeok, 2001, pp. 31–44), and above all to the discovery of the founder of this doctrine, the Estonian Jakob v. Uexküll (*see also* Uexküll, 1940). For the first, the surprise with this new issue is that it does NOT mean that semiotic, symbolic processes and forms were reduced into something biological—for example, in sociobiological theories that say that society at the end is nothing but biology. It is the other way around: biology and vital processes are shown to be semioses. The son of Jakob, Thure v. Uexküll has said that his father’s doctrine is particularly well-compatible with Peircean semiotics (T. Uexküll et al, 1993), but nothing prevents us from using it in other conceptual frameworks as well. To illustrate

how such semiosis functions within an organism, Uexküll uses musical metaphors; he says that every organism surrounded by its *Umwelt* possesses its codes or something like a score, which determines which signs it accepts from *Umwelt*, and which it rejects. This principle is called *Ich-Ton*, Me-Tone (*see in music* Tarasti, 2002, pp. 98, 109). Moreover, Thure von Uexküll calls this process of signs intruding the organism and functioning within it on various levels from molecules to cells *endosemiosis*. On this basis, we can speak of two kinds of signs: endo-signs and exo-signs, in these two states of being either in or out (Tarasti, 2000, pp. 37–56).

I have tried to bring the wonderful idea of Me-Tone back to music and art by arguing that every composer, every composition, every artwork also has its Me-Tone that determines its characteristics. In this new framework of existential semiotics, and its fundamental notions of *Dasein* and transcendence, we can give it a Kantian interpretation so that *Ich-Ton* appears through Kantian categories of subject (actor)-time-space when some transcendental idea is filtered into *Dasein*.

Moreover, I distinguish as-if signs (i.e., signs that must not be taken quite literally in the *Dasein*, but rather as a kind of metaphors). All signs of artistic representation are of this nature any signs in cinema, theater that should never be blended with reality. Furthermore we can distinguish pheno- and geno-signs. This has nothing to do with Julia Kristeva’s geno- and pheno-text (Kristeva, 1969), nor with Barthes’s pheno- and geno-song (Barthes, 1977, p. 182). Pheno-signs are simply traditional signs that refer to or stand for something else. When referring or standing for, the sign remains what it is—it is only a tool, a window to the world of signified. Instead in the case of geno-sign, the entire process of signs becoming signs is included: the whole generation of the sign with various phases is vividly evoked by the appearance of such a sign. For example, when we listen for the first time to the overture to Parsifal by Richard Wagner, it launches with a motif raising from the depths, as something solemn, sad, appealing, longing for something. It is a pheno-sign that by its mere musical qualities evokes certain modal content (will, can, etc.). If one is a perfect Wagnerian, then one may recognize it as the *Abendmal* motif, referring to Amfortas. However, this motif, when heard at the end of the 6-hour-long opera, gets a turn into E-flat major with a cadence, and has become a geno-sign. We feel that it contains the whole growth of Parsifal

from a young ignorant foolish into the repemptor of the Graal knights, Kundry included. It carries the whole story in it. Here again the essential is that signs are nothing fixed; they are always in the movement of becoming something else.

However, in what follows, I want to scrutinize some new issues and concepts whereby existential semiotics tries to contribute to semiotics and humanities in general. These will be discussed under the headings of Transcendence, Subject, Being, Doing, and Appearing.

## Transcendence

Transcendence is not a concept we are used to encountering in the semiotic context. Dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks from Greimas and Sebeok as well as Posner, Nöth, and Bouissac simply exclude it from semiotic discussion. However, no one can deny its cogency and centrality in the German philosophy from Kant to Heidegger. As far as this philosophical tradition, its idealist nature, rejected by most of semiotic theories, is more and more seen as a fertilizing seed to contemporary semiotics (like the turn to phenomenology and hermeneutics in the European context and deconstruction in the American scene show), and we cannot any longer ignore its existence. In the existential semiotics, the life of signs is situated in their movement and traffic between transcendence and *Dasein*.

To some, the mere introducing of such a notion like transcendence has some kind celestial, almost theological tinge about it. If we go in this direction (which would also be very Heideggerian as far as he considered the ultimate goal of every being and *Dasein* its disappearance, *Sein zum Tod*), we can notice that within existential semiotics we are able to deal with even such profound and serious issues. In this framework, death means the disappearance of the boundaries of the *Dasein* and the blending of a subject to transcendence. There the juxtaposition of temporality of *Dasein* and atemporality of transcendence (i.e., time and not-time) is reconciled. All that has happened in the *Dasein* (according to certain narrativity, dynamism, and processuality) has accumulated into acts of this subject. They are signs left by him that fuse together with acts by other subjects who have already moved into transcendence. This is irreversible; nothing can be changed any longer therein. They can be naturally renarrativized and rendered to constitute a part of the pseudo-narrativity and temporality of history writing. In such a case, a subject is able to “remodalize” them

(I refer here to the modal logics developed by Greimas and angloanalytic philosophers and Finnish scholar Georg Henrik v. Wright). They are again subjected to communication process. Yet, transcendence represents pure signification **without** narrativization. Therefore, one can say that when the boundaries of the *Dasein* get vague or vanish, then starts the real semiosis without narrativity. There is narrativity only in *Dasein*. When, in turn, some transcendental idea intrudes to the *Dasein* of a subject, it becomes a sign, and it participates to the communication.

Now one has to ask, what is that force that makes a transcendental idea manifest in communication or incarnate into a sign? Signs have a certain imperishable part. Goethe said: *Kein Wesen kann zum nichts zerfallen* [No being can disappear], and he certainly meant this. Nevertheless signs also have a perishable, temporal spatial, and actorial part. From the viewpoint of a subject, the manifestation of content in the physical appearance of the sign vehicle is involved. The essential point here is thus the concept of a boundary. A transcendental idea has to transgress the limit to become a sign.

Ricoeur (1983, pp. 85–129) speaks about three kinds of mimesis. Could we not then say that the becoming of transcendence into a sign in a *Dasein* is the first mimesis? In other words, the *Dasein* of a subject can simulate transcendence: man wants by his act to change his *Dasein* according to some idea. Every action is based on this: a contradiction prevails between an idea and the reality of *Dasein*. Subject wants to intervene the course of events. Existentially he can do so—that is, he is free to do so. However, when a subject in his *Dasein* creates an artwork, which is like a model of his *Dasein* (in which case the world of a work imitates his living world), then the second mimesis occurs. In the theory of Ricoeur, the mimesis essentially belongs to the course of process of communication: mimesis1 = production of sign, and mimesis2 = the manner in which a sign simulates or portrays the living world (*Dasein*). Then, the third mimesis (i.e., mimesis3) would be the same as aisthesis, the interpretation of a sign.

Instead, in our own model, mimesis does **not** take place **horizontally**, in a syntagmatic or linear way as a kind of narrative course from a sender to receiver, **but vertically** as a movement from transcendence or a subject's inner consciousness, from a transcendental subject toward his living world, **Dasein** (by a transcendental subject, we then understand a subject who, by his thought, tries to conceive

the transcendence). Following this theory, I should make a slight correction to my earlier model of transcendental journeys and acts (see Tarasti, 2000, p. 10). There are no two different transcendences, one empty and anguishing nothingness (*le néant*), and the other rich and overwhelming plenitude, full with meanings or the “world soul,” as Schelling called it. There is only one transcendence, which the subject experiences as nothingness in his act of negation, when he clings to his *Dasein* in his fear of the experience transgressing the limits of the boundaries of his existence. This is caused by his unwillingness to give up the merits, achievements, and signs he has obtained and gained in the phases of his *Dasein*. In front of the unknown atemporal and anti-narrative transcendence, he experiences anguish, and he feels the nothingness threatens the significations he has made in his *Dasein*, which he believes he has created himself. All statements about the fact that life has went down the drain, the plans, and the noemas of a subject not being realized in the narrative processes of the *Dasein* result from this metaphysical attitude. Instead, when the boundaries of *Dasein* get blurred, the subject sees the connection of his signs and acts to their proper timeless transcendence and real signification. The subject has the liberty to pursue affirmation and negation as stated above. This means here that he/she can reject the processes of mimesis1 through mimesis3. When he opposes to mimesis1, he does not want to listen to the voice of the transcendental subject within himself and does not transform transcendental ideas into signs. His existence does not reach the level of sign; it remains a series of detached moments in the process of communication without a real content. The aesthetician Kierkegaard, who gets lost in his hedonistic life, is such a person rejecting mimesis1.

The models that keep within the *Dasein* and emphasize its immanency, which claim that the only reality is the *Dasein* itself, the body, the society as a continuous process, and that nothing else exists, is based on the rejection of mimesis1. However, a subject can also reject mimesis2 or the idea that he would create intentional objects in the course of *Dasein*. He can stay without realizing that he can, by his acts and signs (act-signs), imitate and simulate the narration of the *Dasein*. An artist again creates artwork, copies, and models of his *Dasein*, in which, however, one can try to see the existential in the narration of his proper life. Music serves as such a narration on a high level of abstraction.

Again, mimesis3 also may not be—that is, the subject does not accept the idea that he should give up the positions and signs he has gained during the processes of communication. Yet, unless he does not understand to make the limits of his *Dasein* vis-à-vis transcendence more transparent and thus experience the plenitude of the transcendence—what is nothing else but the encyclopedia of the acts and ideas in the entire transcendence—he is left without this essential deliberating and positive experience, which can also change his attitude toward death, the vanishing of his *Dasein*. In fact, in every temporal artwork, such disappearance already takes place, but still the subject is after such a mini-narration transfigured, because he has mirrored the imperishable transcendental entities of his living world to the aforementioned model and become aware of them.

In any case, there is only one transcendence, but the individual who has clung to the communication processes of his *Dasein*, as rich as they may ever be, is blinded to its contents, to the true semiosis of ideas and acts and significations, and believes it is empty. Therefore, only when he abandons the boundaries of his *Dasein* or via an act of conception and is able to step over this borderline, does he realize the true plenitude of the transcendence. This experience is connected with the existential experience that he is already waited for on the other side of the boundary. All that positive or negative, which he has left in his life, waits for him in the transcendence. Thus mimesis3 means transgressing the boundary, striving to get beyond oneself and its realization.

The continuous crossing-over limits of transcendence and *Dasein* is one of the most profound problems of existential semiotics. It manifests as many subproblems of the communication processes of the *Dasein*. Is it then so that it is not sufficient that a subject hears inside the voice of a transcendental subject that tells to him the right aesthetic resolution or ethical choice, but he has to manifest this voice to others in the world of communication (i.e., encounter a subject who is alien-psycho entity to him)? Such an encounter of the **alien-psycho** is again essentially an event of mimesis2—that is, our subject creates his model of “mini-*Dasein*” not to himself but in a dialogue with someone else, and this other influences it essentially. Our subject strives for anticipating such a transcendence of the other—for example, to please him, to get his message understood. But why is this so terribly important? Why does our subject want to communicate? Communication is always crossing over the



boundary, and in this sense it is a model of both mimesis<sup>1</sup> and mimesis<sup>2</sup>. The subject wants to show by it that his message goes beyond the boundary. It is supported by the authority of transcendence, but he also wants by this communicative act to abandon his own boundaries and taste in advance what the definite vanishing of such borderlines would mean. Communication on this level of transference or shifts of values and modalities means just such a fusion with the Other. It is anticipating the final blending with the Other or the transcendence in the proper sense.

In fact semiosis has two movements or “forces”: vertical and horizontal. **Vertical** force leads into the fulfillment of ideas of transcendence, to mimesis in the *Dasein*, in such a manner that they first become noemas of a subject. Thereafter the vertical movement continues within the *Dasein* as its modeling and simulating in various texts and narratives. This represents the second degree of mimesis. The third phase is, in fact, already a kind of de-mimesis, or the return of the ideas back to the transcendence, to which they are blended. Narrativity is a special kind of syntagmatic form, which appears first in the living world of the *Dasein* and then in the world of text. In other words, they at the same time get modalized and syntagmatized to participate to process of communication. This is the **horizontal** direction of semiosis, its temporalization. On this basis, I have argued that both aspects of semiotics are ultimately of transcendental nature: communication—every act of communication is the encounter of the Other, the alien psychic, a leap toward the unknown; and signification—by signs we talk about things that are not present. Therefore, both essential sections of any semiotics, communication and signification represent for existential semiotics the transcendental: when in Saussure’s picture of a dialogue, Mr. A sends signs to Mr. B, the latter is a transcendental entity to the former; there is a gap between them, but in human communication it is not empty: it is filled by **modalities** and modalizations by these subjects—that is, the destinator and destinee. Furthermore, the signs used and emitted here are transcendental entities because they are *aliquid stat pro aliquot*—something standing for something as the oldest scholastic definition of sign is put.

### Subject Reconsidered or BEING

In the structuralist phase, subject was eliminated in favor of systems and grammars that were talking

in us, like Lacan postulated: *Ca parle*. However, in poststructuralist and postmodern theories the subject re-entered. One may interpret existential semiotics as one of these new revalorizations of subjectivity in the history of ideas, but I would not call it any “post”-phenomenon any longer; rather, I would call it “neosemiotics.” This paradigm is setting forth something radically new, using freely from the classical semiotics what it needs and combining these ideas to what is the most inspiring in the speculative philosophy from Kant and Hegel to Sartre and Marcel. It never considers only the text but all its conditions, its whole *Umwelt*, its process of becoming a text, the whole act of enunciation. There has been much talk about subjects and subjectivity in many neighboring areas of semiotics, like in psychoanalysis, gender theories, and cultural theories.

However, without a more articulated vision of how a subject appears in the enunciation and our semiotic activities, such theoretical views remain at half of their goals, as laudable as their efforts as such might be. To do so, I need to make a short excursion to the roots of existential semiotics, which means to go back to Hegel and his logics. For some semioticians, Hegel is mere conceptual poetry, to someone he was only acceptable after a Marxist turn-around, but to some like Arendt he was the most central thinker of Western philosophy altogether, who had compiled phenomena of nature and history as a homogeneous construction, of which, however, one did not know whether it was a prison or a palace (Arendt, 2000, p. 111). To Arendt, Hegel was the last word of the Western philosophy. All that came after him was either his imitation or rebellion against him. The present schools of thought (i.e., in Arendt’s case, Husserl, Heidegger, and Jaspers) were the epigones of Hegel. They all tried to reconstruct the unity of thinking and being without reaching a balance when they either privileged matter (materialism) or mind (idealism). It may be that Arendt was right. I do believe that even the semiotic thought is indebted to Hegel, whose traces we can follow both in Peirce and Royce as well as in French structuralists, the Tartu cultural semioticians—particularly in existential semiotics. Therefore, I take as my starting point only one detail from the Hegelian logic, the principle by which we construct further our theory of subject—namely, his categories of *an-sich-sein* (Being-in-itself) and *für-sich-sein* (Being-for-itself). In the Hegel dictionary edited by Michael Inwood, there is an entry *in, for, and in and for, itself, himself, etc.* (Inwood, 1992, pp. 133–136).

Hegel used the terms *an sich* and *für sich* in their ordinary senses but also provided them with contrasting meaning. As finite a thing has a determinate nature only in virtue of its relation with other things, in negation of, and by, them. This is true not only of items within the world but also of Kant's thing-in-itself, as it, too, is cut off from our cognition. Thus, a thing as it is *an sich* has no overt determinate character: at most, it has potential character that will be actualized only by its relations to other things. An infant, for example, is *an sich* rational potentially, not actually. A tailor is tailor *an sich* in the sense of having certain internal skills that suit him for this role and of having certain overt features that distinguish him from e.h. sailor. Being a tailor, or musician, thus involves an interplay between being *an sich* and being for another. But a person is not simply a role occupant. He is also an individual "I," and as such can distance himself from his role and think of himself just as *me* or *I*. When he does this, he is no longer for others but *for himself*. For example, a bus driver has already left but notices one person still running to the stop. Against the rules, he stops and takes the passenger because he feels compassion for him. Although his self-consciousness may presuppose recognition by others, an "I" is not one of a system of contrasting roles: Everyone is an I.

Moreover, the idea that if something is for itself, it is aware of itself, leads to the further idea that an entity may have in itself certain characteristics that are not *for itself*. A slave is, as a man, free in himself, but he may not be free for himself. The student is future doctor and professor, but he does not know it. Finally, the terms *an sich* and *für sich* start to mean potential and actual and may be applied to the development. When a person becomes for himself what he is in himself, he usually recognizes his identity: he becomes meaningful to himself to use semiotic vocabulary. But before we make an existential-semiotic turn-around of Hegel, let us look what Kierkegaard did with the notions of *an sich* and *für sich*. In him, they turn into subjective and objective being. In his chapter, *Becoming a Subject*, in his treatise, *Unscientific Ending Postscript* (Kierkegaard 1993, the original in Danish *Afluttende videnskabelig Efterskrift* 1846), Kierkegaard speaks about an individual who is said to be a subject, or such an individual "who is what he is because he has become like it." In the existential semiotics, such a subject who has become himself could be considered a geno-sign. The advent of a subject from *an sich*

being to *für sich* being corresponds to his becoming a sign to himself, or the emergence of his identity. Kierkegaard says: the task of a subject is more and more to take off his subjectivity and become more and more objective. The objective being is the same as observing and being observed. But this observation has to be of ethical nature, in his theory.

The next careful reader of Hegel (as well as of Kierkegaard) was Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *L'Être et le néant* was, to a great extent, based on Hegelian concepts of *an sich* and *für sich* or: *être-en-soi* and *être-pour-soi*. According to Sartre, being only is and cannot but be. But it has as its potentiality the fact that it becomes aware of itself via act of negation. In other words, in Kierkegaardian terms the being becomes an observer of itself, and hence it is shifted into Being-for-itself. This is just transcending. The *pour-soi* as the outburst of negation forms the basis for the identity. It appears as a lack. According to Sartre, this is the beginning of transcendence (as said above): human reality strives for something that it lacks (Sartre, 1943, pp. 124–125). Man starts to exist when he realizes the incompleteness of its being. Via this effort also the value enters human life. Value is the one to which one is aspiring. Being-in-itself precedes every consciousness, Being-in-itself is the same as what Being-for-itself was earlier. The essential change in Sartre's theory regarding Hegel is the movement between these two categories, and a kind of subjectivization of them considering the existence.

Now we need still one modernization of Hegel and his categories. It has been offered by Fontanille in his study *Soma et séma. Figures du corps* (Fontanille s.d.). In fact, it deals with corporeal semiotics but presents the distinction between categories of *Moi* and *Soi* in a fresh manner. As a Greimassian semiotician, Fontanille starts from actant and his/her body. He distinguishes between body and form. We speak of body as such or flesh (*chair*), which is the center of all, the material resistance or impulse to semiotic processes. Body is the sensorial motor fulcrum of a semiotic experience (Fontanille, op. cit. p. 22). Yet, on the other hand, there is a body in the proper sense that constitutes the identity and directional principle of the body. Body is the carrier of the "me" (*Moi*), whereas the proper body supports the "self" (*Soi*) (Fontanille, op. cit. pp. 22–23). The *Soi* builds itself in the discursive activity. The *Soi* is that part of ourselves, which me, *Moi*, projects out of itself to create itself in its activity. The *Moi* is that part of ourselves to

which the *Soi* refers when establishing itself. The *Moi* provides the *Soi* with impulse and resistance whereby it can become something. Again the *Soi* furnishes the *Moi* with a reflexivity that it needs to keep within its limits when it changes. The *Moi* resists and forces the *Soi* to meet its own alterity. Hence they are inseparable.

Although Fontanille is a semiotician (and albeit he quotes here Paul Ricoeur), his reasoning fits well to the aforementioned Hegelian categories. A new interpretation to *an sich* and *für sich* is involved, the first corresponding to bodily ego and the latter its stability and identity and its aspiration outward, or the Sartrean negation. The *Soi* functions as a kind of memory of the body or *Moi*, it yields the form to those traces of tensions and needs that have been inserted in the flesh of the *Moi*.

In the light of Fontanille's concepts, we could change the Hegelian Being-in-itself or Being-for-itself, the *an-sich-sein* and *für-sich-sein*, into *an-mir-sein* and *für-mich-sein*—Being-in-myself and Being-for-myself. Nevertheless, before we ponder which consequences this has in our existential semiotics, we can scrutinize the principles of *Moi* and *Soi* as such. Then anything belonging to the category of *mich*, me, concerns the subject as an individual entity, whereas the concept of *sich* has to be reserved for the social aspect of this subject. When we think now again about Uexküll's principle of *Ich-Ton*, which determines the identity and individuality of an organism, we can distinguish in it two aspects: *Moi* and *Soi*. In "me," the subject appears as such, as a bundle of sensations, and in the "self," the subject appears as observed by others or socially determined. These constitute the existential and social aspect of the subject or, rather, the individual and community side of it.

### *Moi/Soi*

I can now put together the most important ideas presented above. My intention was to specify the category of being by providing this basic modality with new species from Kant and Hegel and to follow the phases of this concept further from Kierkegaard to Sartre and Fontanille. When one aims for more subtle tools in semiotics, one can still find basic innovations at classics of the philosophy. The Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself were turned into Being-in-and-for-myself in the existential semiotics. When these notions are combined in the Greimassian semiotic square, one gets the following cases like in Figure 15.6.

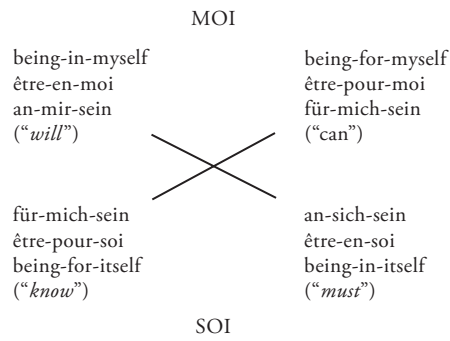


Figure 15.6 MOI/SOI

They can be interpreted in the following ways:

1. Being-in-myself represents our bodily ego, which appears as kinetic energy, "khora," desire, gestures, intonations, Peirce's first. Our ego is not yet in any way conscious of itself but rests in the naive Firstness of its being; modality: endotactic, will.

2. Being-for-myself corresponds to Kierkegaard's attitude of an "observer." Sartre's negation in which the mere being shifts to transcendence notes the lack of its existence and hence the being becomes aware of itself and transcendence. The mere being of the subject becomes existing. This corresponds to the transcendental acts of my previous model: negation and affirmation. Ego discovers its identity, reaches a certain kind of stability, permanent corporeality via habit; modality: endotactic, can.

3. Being-in-itself is a transcendental category. It refers to norms, ideas, and values, which are purely conceptual and virtual; they are potentialities of a subject, which he can either actualize or not actualize. Abstract units and categories are involved; modality: exotactic, must.

4. Being-for-itself means the aforementioned norms, ideas, and values as realized by the conduct of our subject in his *Dasein*. Those abstract entities appear here as distinctions, applied values, choices, and realizations that often will be far away from original transcendental entities; modality: exotactic, know.

The essential aspect of the model is that it combines the spheres of the *Moi* and the *Soi*, the individual and collective subjectivities. It portrays semiosis not only as a movement of the collective Hegelian spirit, but by adding the Being-in-and-for-itself the presence of a subject via Being-in-and-for-myself. Not only is the distinction of these four

logical cases crucial, but also the **movement** among them, the transformation of a chaotic corporeal ego into its identity, the becoming of ego into a sign to itself; furthermore, we have to take into account the impact of such stable and completely responsible ‘transcendental’ ego on the actualization of transcendental values, in which the ego becomes a sign to other subjects. In this phase, the Being-in-and-for-myself meets the you or Being-in-and-for-yourself, Others. Behind thus created social field looms the realm of transcendental, virtual values and norms, signs that have not yet become signs to anyone. So what is involved is also a psychological model portraying the varieties of our individual and social being **within** the mind of a subject. It shows how the social intrudes our innermost being and makes us social “animals.” In the classical sense, the semiotic sphere consists only of fields of Being-for-myself and Being-for-itself. The extremities of the semiotic square are the field of pre-signs, which surround from two sides the semiosis in the proper sense. However, in this semiosis, the process of act-signs cannot be understood without going outside of it, to the transcendence. The existential analysis hence becomes a Kantian transcendental analytics in these two phases.

Next we can start to elaborate this achronic structure, a kind of semiotic square in the Greimassian sense further. In fact, strictly speaking, it is no longer any Greimassian square with its rigorous logical relations of contrariety, contradiction, and implication. In what follows, I still go further away from the idea of such a square into a more dynamic and flexible model in which everything is in motion—as one of the fundamental theses of existential semiotics has tried to argue since its beginning.

We can now improve the model and make it still simpler by indicating those four cases of being by signs: M1, M2, M3, M4 and S1, S2, S3, S4. When

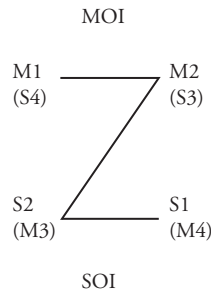


Figure 15.7 MOI/SOI

put in a semiotic square, they partly overlap as we can see in Figure 15.7.

These cases would contain the following issues, which are almost the same as above but are now seen from the standpoint of our semiotic subject in general and not as his acts embodied in texts or signs portrayed by Figure 15.8.

There are two directions in the model: one from the pure corporeality and sensibility, (M1; *le sensible* by Lévi-Strauss), to permanent, stable body (i.e. M2), and further to the social representation of the body in social roles and professions (M3), and to abstract values and norms of a society (M4; *l'intelligible, l'abstrait*). On the other hand, there is a movement from abstract norms to their exemplifications or representations in certain social institutions, and further their enactment via suitable personalities that these institutes recruit for their purposes, and ultimately certain corporeal entities. Therefore, there is in every form of square, at the upper side of the *Moi* (as we call that part of the “me” in the model), a tiny trace of the social; correspondingly in even most abstract social norms, there is a tiny trace of pure corporeality. The model itself takes place within the mind of a subject explaining how the social is internalized in it, and so, why we behave socially (i.e., obeying the laws and norms);

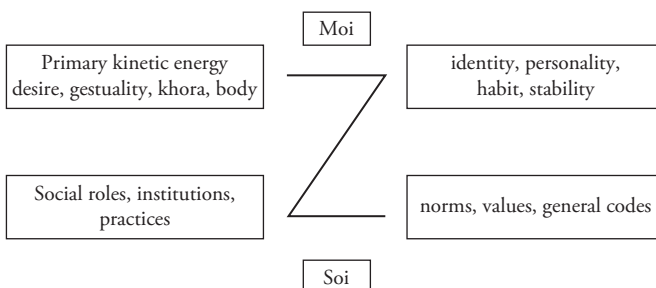


Figure 15.8. MOI/SOI

it explains how the society keeps us in its hold. To say it in the way of Adorno, what is involved is the juxtaposition of *Ich und Gesellschaft*. As to the idea that it would serve as a Greimassian semiotic square, I have already in my previous studies made efforts to temporalize it viewing movements among its members. So I would now rather call it a “Z” model, considering of its inner motions.

Nevertheless, the model seems to offer almost any possible type of theory or approach to human reality, depending on which aspect of the subjectivity, psychological, individual, or collective it emphasizes. For example, *L'esprit des lois* by Montesquieu (S1); *Culture in Minds and Societies* by Jaan Valsiner (2007; all M case in the light of the S:s); *Philosophy of Flesh* by Mark Johnson (M1); *Dictionnaire du Corps* (CNRS Editions 2008; all varieties of M); *Characters* by La Bruyère (M2); *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* by Goethe, *Dreams from My Father. A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama (1995), and *Bildungsroman* in general shift from M1 to S1. We can also situate a lot of further central concepts of existential semiotics into these positions: dialogue, representation, and so forth. I leave the transcendence here out, because the model is still completely immanent—that is, it deals with phenomena of our empirical or phenomenal world, *Dasein* (it will be an essential addenda later).

However, the model evokes a lot of further elaborations. For example, it is about four stable moments of Being, but what if we consider the modality of Doing? Are the four instances there to represent a kind of “organic” growth from pure body to social norms? If yes, does this development take place by itself or by acts and activities of our subject? Is he/she able to promote or resist it—that is, affirm or deny it? As Schelling put it: either we are only looking at and observing this process (i.e., we are in a state of *Schauen*), or we can influence in it, cause it (i.e., we act via *Handeln*). How does the dialogue take place as an autocommunication among those instances of subject? Which signs and texts represent each moment? Which kinds of questions does our subject encounter in each stage?

### Questions by a Subject: From BEING to DOING

In the aforementioned scheme, man poses questions; in the cases of M, these questions are individual, whereas in cases of S they are collective. This is very typical of existential semiotics, which always tries to imagine and portray the life of signs from

within—that is how one feels to be in the position of S1 or S2, and so forth.

**M1:** In the case of M1 one may ask: Who am I in my body perceived in its chaotic and fleshly Firstness? “I wake up in the morning, I breathe, I do not feel in any pain, I exist, this is wonderful.” Avicenna, in his psychology, imagined a man floating in the air without any external stimuli, and still being sure of its existence, this would equal to the state of M1. Yet, as early as this primary being has been modalized, with euphoric or dysphoric “thymic” values as follows: which properties I have, what I am capable of, at which I am good—that is, what is involved is my sensuality, sensibility, my *Sinnlichkeit*, or to put it in terms of Lévi-Strauss, this is the “concrete,” *le sensible*, this is the case of being in archaic societies, like Suyu Indians in Mato Grosso, with a corporeal existence (but in direct touch with myths—that is, beliefs in the case of S1; see particularly the studies and video documents by the American anthropologist Anthony Seeger, 2004).

**M2:** How can I develop my properties so that I become a personality, I assume an identity? This is the idea of personality by Snellman (1848/1982), or Goethean *schöner Geist*; how I can get training and education whereby I sublimate my physical essence into a man/woman with a certain competence?

**M3:** How I can obtain a job, position, role in a social institute that would correspond to my personality, skills, and inclinations? How I become that and that, manager, artist, politician, administrator, teacher, professor, officer, priest, and so forth. How do I get a job and work that is equal to my capacities? How I can act in the community so that I become an accepted member of it and gain appreciation and success?

**M4:** Can I accept the value and norms that are dominant in my community and society—if yes, then how can I bring them on this level of ‘Fourthness’ into their brilliance, and efficiency. If no (as we can always either affirm or deny), then how can I become a dissident until the extreme negation and refusal, withdrawal from those values that I find unacceptable, and how can I then become a pacifist, ecologist, and so forth, with extreme attitudes?

Here we see that we are dealing with quite concrete cases and positions of our subject, not only with theoretical ontological varieties of different

kinds of “being.” However, from the standpoint of the society, its members, individuals (its *Mois*) are only carriers or vehicles of the *Soi*, its tools, and implementations.

Therefore equally from the *Soi* we can ask the following collective questions:

**S1:** It represents the voice of the society, its ideology, and its axiology, which appears in sanctified texts, myths. It represents the society as a virtual belief system.

**S2:** Here, the norms and principles are shifted into manifest laws, rules, and institutions. How are the activities of individual members of the society regulated, dominated, and ruled by norms and social practices; how are they channeled into acceptable form and genres of behavior? This is the same as Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*.

**S3:** To which extent can individual personal properties and characteristics serve the society—that is, which personalities and person-types are proper material for its institutions? How are persons recruited into these practices? The interviews in job-hunting, for example, are functional here.

**S4:** How does the society penetrate even to the physical sensible behavior of an individual? How are even gender distinctions partly constructed? Here, we encounter those modalities whereby a *Soi* enacts its contracts, and those passions that make it real in the innermost individual core by emotions and feelings of guilty conscience, shame, glory, duty, and their quasi-physical counterparts of the behavior.

Involved here is the realization of *Moi* and *Soi* via four phases in two opposed directions, in the *Dasein*; the questions are linked to this movement and its goal-directness, Kantian *Zweckmässigkeit* (1790/1974, pp. 322–325), hence this constitutes the Schellingian action, *Handeln*. Yet each phase also has its existential side—that is, each phase can stop, it can cease moving automatically, organically forward by stepping into transcendence, by reflecting on each developmental stage from the viewpoint of its **essence** (i.e., that “idea” or “value” that tells us how things **should** be). However, as we know, from being itself we cannot infer in any way how it should be.

### **Consequences for the Varieties of Our Subjectivity**

I take the liberty to present these observations in the form of 17 “theses:”

**1. Every sign or text stems from its being, or a certain being behind it: ontological foundation.** Hence, the basis of this theory is in the modality of being or in the category of *Sein* in the philosophical sense. In this sense the theory proposed here is “realist” and not nominalist; the latter would mean taking into account only what is in the discourse, textual level, whereas here we postulate an agent, subject from whom these texts and signs originate. This means that we can somehow scrutinize every species and form of signs in this framework as well as we can interpret every scientific theory and discourse about human life in this context.

**2. Each sign or text is either done by a subject in a given state of being or it emerges “organically” from it.** This is one of the fundamental issues of any semiotic theory—that is, whether signs are just pragmatic, changeable, and variable tools that are all the time criticized and improved by our agents using them or whether they exist objectively and independent of choices and acts of our semiotic subject.

**3. One mode of being transforms, changes into another.** Hence, the shift from M1 to M4 can also be interpreted as a psychological development of a subject from childhood to adult. So it represents genetic course of it—noting, however, that no achieved stage disappears from one’s life anywhere when reaching a new state: man is constructed as a multileveled psyche in the course of the life. Even in the body, M1 changes physically when aging, and as Darrault has studied it, a young person or an aged one is anguished in noticing these changes and has to remodelize him/herself (Darrault & Klein, 2007). On the other hand, in a subjective microtime, within 1 day, one has to give one part of its to one’s corporeal existence (i.e., M1—eat, sleep, etc.), one part to personal hobbies in M2, one part for salary work in M3, and maybe one part for general interests, public life in a society of activity in some associations for universal values (i.e., in M4 = S1). Bertrand Russell recommended that with age the last part should become more and more prominent when M3 action is finished with a retirement. Yet this is valid in Western societies, in archaic communities the division of daily routine is different, and the same in postmodern, postindustrial society; an unemployed may be deprived of levels M3 and M4 but he can focus in his M1 and M2. Different profiles of lifestyles,

as Kristian Bankov has defined this concept in his studies on consumer society, can thus be sketched on the basis of our 'Z' model.

**4. Different modes of being are in a dialogue with each other.** So far existential semiotics has mostly dealt with only one solipsistic subject living its life in his/her *Dasein* and pursuing his/her "transcendental journeys." However, as much as on his/her own choices, he/she is formed and constituted by his/her communication with other subjects. John Dewey said that the mere communication is as such educative. Some scholars have even argued that such a dialogue is the primary issue; in other words, communication and mediation—all our ideas, concepts, and values—are nothing but absolutizations of these experiences of dialogue. The best known theory in this field is the one by Mihail Bakhtin. An entire school of psychology has been elaborated on his theory by Hubert J.M. Hermans, who speaks about "the dialogical self as a society of mind." To his mind, the dialogical self is inspired by William James in his classic distinction of "I" and "Me" (occurring also at George Herbert Mead) and by Bakhtin in his theory of the polyphonic novel. Thus, for Hermans, "Self and society both function as a polyphony of consonant and dissonant voices" (Hermans, 2002, p. 148). Other scholars of the school has confirmed this (Paul and John Lysaker in their essay "Narrative structures in psychosis: The self is inherently 'dialogical' or the product of ongoing conversations both within the individual and between the individual and others (op.cit p. 209).

The problem now here is whether we consider the dialogue as a disturbing element, ("noise") in our Z model that seems to be a relatively closed and autotelic process. Or, do we take dialogue as the precondition of any such process and shift from one phase to the other? If we adopt the phenomenological point, then the only certain thing is our own stream of consciousness; anything that happens in other's mind is only our hypothesis and constant source of frustrations in our lives when these others do not behave as we expected. Yet, the dialogue always constitutes the unpredictable element in our *Dasein*, it serves as the Freudian reality principle correcting our otherwise chainless and sometimes wild fantasies and conceptions. The other external provides us with standards, forcing elements is the transcendence.

**5. One mode of being transforms, changes into another.** This is the principle of "unfolding" development, history both in individuals and societies. There are two major narratives of such metamorphoses, one stemming from M1 toward S1 and the other from S1 reaching ultimately M1. The Finnish psychiatrist and writer Oscar Parland wrote a novel, *Förvandlingar* (Changes, Parland 1945/1966), in which he, with astonishment, scrutinized transformations of human life, in which new identities could emerge under the cover of the gastropod shell and a brilliant butterfly could come out. Or, as in Turgenev's novel, one person is portrayed in a heartbreaking incurable sorrow and anguish at one moment and appears in next, years after, talking and laughing cheerfully with others.

**6. Every mode of being has its history—that is, memory of what it was, and expectations of what it will be.** This means that the paradigms of memory and expectation are open at each moment of the process of the horizontal appearance, but in the existential sense we are not bound with them. In his speech at La Coruna world congress of semiotics (IASS), Salman Rushdie asked whether we are bound to our history or not. Expectation is again based on the modality of "believe" (Greimas) or the principle of hope (Ernst Bloch, 1985). These again are close to the modality of "knowing." Someone would say that hope is based on ignorance, the fact we do not know what will probably happen. The life is a determined semiosis in many respects; however, there is that *improbabilité infinie*, the infinite improbable that can happen and that in fact really happens, and causes huge empires to collapse; a person can achieve something against any estimates and evaluations. This was the idea by Arendt (1972, p. 221). If all the signs obtain their power in the Proustian sense in their reference to the past by functioning of the unvoluntary memory (Henri Bergson), they also can be re-articulated first by reflection and thought in our presence, and then in our textual and discursive activities, whereby these intuitions are communicated to others, and hence what was first totally private, unique, mental, becomes public, common, and ultimately a semiotic force in the sense of Umberto Eco reshaping our *Dasein*.

**7. Every sign or text is considered an appearance regarding its being; thus, being constitutes its truth.** Can we then say that the

Z model describes the essence of the world, what and how the life really is in our *Dasein*, some kind of ontological depth that then appears as our semiotico-symbolic activities? The whole theory of *Schein* is extremely important here. Yet here we speak of “vertical appearance.” To say that the truth is always conditioned by history would mean to deny this type of *Schein* (in the sense of Kant: “. . . so kann man nicht vermeiden, dass nicht alles dadurch in blossen Schein verwandelt werde”; 1787/1968, p. 116).

**8. Dialogue between two subjects carrying, “doing” them or how modes take place among their “levels” or modes.** Who speaks in a dialogue? A subject who consists of various portions or degrees of the principles M and S. That is why dialogue is transference (in psychoanalytic sense) and it is helped or obstructed by similarity, identity, or difference, strangeness between the *Moi* and *Soi*. We can say that a dialogue exists (*a*) when within the same *Dasein* the two *Mois*, *MoiA* and *MoiB*, share the same *Soi* or (*b*) when they share the same S and M (e.g., M = gender and S = values, and these two actors, x and y, in communication both have their own variants of M1, M2, M3 . . . and S1, S2, S3 . . .). For the first the Italian scholars Gino Stefani and Stefania Guerra Lisi have in their pathbreaking treatise on art therapy (*Globalità di linguaggi*, see Guerra Lisi & Stefani, 2006) have spoken about the principle of contact in all communication. How we get a contact with other persons is certainly a fundamental issue in our *Dasein*, and negatively if a speaker, performer feels he did not get a contact with his audience, or a teacher with his pupils, then the situation is lost.

Now following questions arise: (1) How does the dialogue intervene and influence our becoming and growth from M1 to S1? and (2) How does the dialogue intervene our becoming from the social man into an individual who has a unique destiny in the world, and who distinguishes him-/herself not only socially (Bourdieu) but also existentially? We can say that in the first case, our subject-actor externalizes him-/herself, becomes manifest; he/she explains himself by getting involved in broader and broader circles and contexts (explaining according to the genetic structuralist Lucien Goldmann), whereas in the latter case, it is the society, S, that understands itself by becoming more and more substantial and concrete. How does the subject in his/her state of M1 reach toward S1 in his/

her efforts to socialize, have a success in the social life, and in its desire to become accepted (i.e., in its social needs)? On the other hand, how is M1 manipulated by S1 and S2 (see theories on manipulation by Landowski, 1989, pp. 250–253) via its formation process, *Bildung*, *Erscheinen*, development?

Communication is a special type of appearance, *Erscheinen*. We have there, in an ideal case, two subjects, x and y (or Saussure’s Mr. A and Mr. B) in a dialogue. x sends a sign from his/her M1 and y answers from the position of his/her M2—for example, a young artist or student with full enthusiasm but without techniques shows something he has written chaotically by his intuition and the other answers from his/her S3: Do not try, you should first work and learn a lot! But the answer can also arrive from the destinee’s S2: you have to be first a professionally recognized artist. Or from S1: your expression has no aesthetic value whatsoever! The contact is not reached unless the subjects talk in the same level of their M/S modes. This is one source of misunderstanding among individuals and collective actors. In a therapy session, we listen to the signs of M in any case. In the real action in a society, we listen to the signs of S. If signs of M and S fall into conflict, how do we judge? This is analogous to Husserl’s distinction of two types of sign: *Bedeutungszeichen* and *Ausdruckszeichen*—that is, symbolic, conventional exo-signs as signs of S, and expressive, endo-signs, often iconic, organic signs of M. The third type of sign is transcendental signs, leading us beyond both *Moi* and *Soi*. By them we reflect on signs of M/S—that is, they form a kind of meta-language whereby we talk about our situation in the *Dasein* and transcend it.

**9. The real semiotic forces in the universe occur in the two opposed directions: from body to values, from concrete to abstract (M1–S1) or from values and norms to “khora” (S1–M1).** However, there the essential issue leading us toward semiotics of action, toward what Habermas called “*kommunikatives Handeln*” (Habermas, 1987), is whether we can trust that these forces function organically in any case, and look only if something goes wrong to correct the Z process in its right course like Zorro in the movies, or are we required in every shift from M1 to M2 to M3 = S2, and so forth, to do something, pursue a special semiotic act? If yes, what is the nature of such an act whereby we intervene in the course of the



events? Should it be studied like G.H. v. Wright following his logic of action—that is, considering how the world *p* becomes *q*? Or should we adopt the Heideggerian principle of *Gelassenheit*, or the principle of letting things happen put forth by Morris (Morris, 1956)? We can here turn to what Arendt and Schütz have said about this problem—without forgetting what Greimas first said in his Dictionary about the semiotics of acts.

**10. The encounter or touch between *Moi* and *Soi* or body and society takes place between M2 and S2.** Therefore, the essential shift is from social practices to individual or already half-socialized identities and personalities. Yet this “bridge” from M to S or from S to M cannot be separated from the whole “generative course” (NOT here in the linguistic sense!). We might say that there are two concepts that crystallize this encounter. One is “gesture,” which characterizes the cases M1 and M2, in M1 “gesture” is still only on the level of “behavior” or *Verhalten*, as Schütz and Luckmann have stated in their understanding sociology (*Verstehende Soziologie*). Yet gesture can become intentional in M2 when it is done by a person with an identity, and then we reach the phase of “acting” or *Handeln*. Nevertheless, the other important notion here is the one of “genre,” or *Gattung*, as a special type of social practice both in action and text. All genre scholars admit that it is essentially a social notion, based on a collective agreement, and presupposes a proper audience, receiver community. For example, TV, cinema, and mass media genres have been formed for special types of public, as Copley has emphasized (2001, p. 192). In literature it is constituted by readers, in music it is constituted by listeners. Therefore, the encounter of Me and Society, *Moi* and *Soi*, takes place as the meeting, blending together, or conflict between gesture and genre. Regarding gestures, Adorno has said that they cannot be developed, only repeated and intensified (1974, p. 32). They have to be sublimated into expression—that is, they have to be put in expressive genres to be influential in cultural sense, and not remain on merely the psychological, individual level. Sometimes it is the “me” who wants to impose its own new *Soi*; regarding avant-garde artwork, it is said that they create their own audience. However, this may be difficult because communication is possible only by accepting language (i.e., grammar as a social agreement and construction). A single *Moi* cannot decide it on his/her own unless he/she wants to speak an

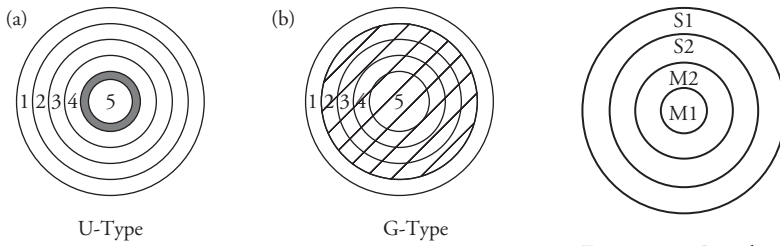
idiolect language understood by one person only. On the other hand, genres need to be attractive for individual persons, M2s, which they try to recruit for their purposes. In this sense, genre (or *Gattung*) employs the third case of human activity called *Wirken* (impact), which means acting according to a certain plan (*Entwurf*; see Schütz & Luckmann, 1994, p. 22). This plan again is very much the same as what is called in semiotics a “narrative program.”

We might as well portray the phases leading our subject (internally) from one mode or phase to the others as: shift from S1 to S2 = virtuality; from S2 to S3 (M2) = passage to an act; and from S3 (M2) to S4 (M1) = achievement, applying the narrative theory by Brémond (1973). Here, we may only ask how this is related to the demand of existentiality? Is existentiality present in phases M1 and M2, giving thereafter a place for something “social”—that is, *Soi* that would be then the original of semiosis? Then a semiotic act would be essentially of social nature, and we would from those phenomenological adventures return to the Saussurean basis. However, if we conceive the semiotic act existentially as a transcendental act, we would rather think that our subject was able to distance from all those four modes of being, and even doings connecting them and putting them into a developmental scheme from M1 to S1 or vice versa, so to step outside of this process: Then the real leap is just based on the liberty of the subject to scrutinize his/her *Dasein* from a transcendental viewpoint and pursue thus what we earlier called a “transcendental journey.”

**11. In the analysis of subjects (of Being and Doing) and their representations (Appearing), the four modes can exist simultaneously; they are looming behind each other.**

Valsiner quotes Lewin’s comparison between American and German personality spheres and how easily its borderlines can be crossed. The structure of intrapsychological borderline system is involved. Layer 5 is the utmost subjective, deeply intrapersonal level. In the American U-type personality, it is strongly protected by resistance boundaries for outsider’s penetration, whereas the other layers (1–4) can be crossed in the interpersonal domain with relative ease. In German G-type only, the outermost layer is easily crossed; in other layers one is already more protected:

Valsiner has concluded that each person creates one’s own personal-cultural structure of the self-boundaries, and rules for entry into varied layers of



**Figure 15.9** Kurt Lewin's comparison of social relations in (a) America and (b) Germany. (Valsiner, 2007, p. 247)

**Figure 15.10** Boundaries of the self, according to Valsiner

one's self for his various roles (2007, p. 247). We could say the same about crossing the boundaries among M1 through S1 in circles.

Yet it is crucial to note that the boundaries are not necessarily fixed but vary in different situations of dialogue with other persons in the community. Signs are used to mark these spheres: clothes, such as uniforms, can signify the protection of the M1 and M2 in the social role of a priest, soldier, businessmen (nothing else but Georges Dumezil's [1971] three Indo-European mythological functions—war, religion, government—transformed into a myth of our time!). In the airplane, passengers quickly mark their spheres by leaving things around themselves. If one lets another person intrude into one's M2 or even M1, it does not hold true in another. Marshal Mannerheim could toast with a young soldier in evening party, but the next day he was again in his high position. However, the dialogical self model questions the idea of a fixed core—assuming that as Hermans defines it (Valsiner, 2007, p. 149): “The dialogical self is conceived as social—not in the sense that a self-contained individual enters into social interactions with other outside people, but in the sense that other people occupy positions in the multivoiced self. The self is not only ‘here’ but also ‘there,’ and because of the power of imagination the person can act as if he or she were the other.” This was evident as early as in the early works of Bakhtin, when he discovered the dialogical nature of any communication in the disputes in Nääveli, after the Revolution (see Erkki Peuranen: “Semiotics of disputes”; *Synteesi*, 1982, p. 45–46). This dialogical principle is organized into an “imaginary landscape in which ‘I’ has the possibility to move as in space. This is exactly what Proust said about music and its capacity to teach people to see unknown realities through others’ eyes. Bakhtin showed the polyphonic

consciousness in Dostoyevsky's novels based on simultaneity of its different narrator voices. However, I consider this view as additional to the basic phenomenological view of the fundamental nature of our stream of consciousness, as Schütz has proposed.

**12. Among the modes, there exists a process of learning from a subject's inner point of view (“know”) or of educating, teaching (“make known”).** Learning and teaching are essentially dialogue, but the problem certainly for every individual M1 is to become M2 and M3, and so forth, whereas from the viewpoint of culture, it is crucial that its values of S1 are adopted, assimilated, maintained, and renewed by institutions, personalities, and ultimately living experiencing human subjects. So, for example, if S1 = love for fatherland (*Heimat*), then S2 can = army, S3 = M2 = soldier and then S4 = M1 = a certain combination of qualities; or S1 = love for beauty in communication; S2 = theater, M2 = actor, M1 = certain psychophysical qualities (remembering that theater is always communication of communication; Ivo Olsobe); or S1 = love for beauty in sounds, intonations; S2 = orchestra, S3 = M2 = musician, M1 = certain ability to hear and for corporeal movement, kinetics, psycho-physical “harmony” (notion of the Russian school of music education). Whether teaching occurs as a dialogue between a Master with high competence and younger pupil imitating him/her or as a self-teaching process in a dialogical group or club (“*Du är själv din bästa lärare*” [You are yourself your best teacher], said the Swedish music pedagogue Gunnar Hallhagen) is an interesting educational challenge. On one hand, culture decides which texts and modalities are to be preserved and further transmitted to younger generations and which have to be forgotten. Ultimately the distinction between “culture” and

“civilization” (see Elias, 1997) concerns putting the emphasis either on S1 (as internal, interoceptive—like the Germans, *der deutsche Geist*) or M1 (as exteroceptive, sensual, pleasure—like the Mediterraneans, *die Lateiner*).

**13. Every mode of Being and Doing as well as becoming has its own ambiance, atmosphere, Stimmung, how they feel in their positions.**

Such an emotional atmosphere emerges from the isotopies, which are the basis of any action or decision making. The existential project just emphasizes this inner view of things.

**14. From every stage or mode, there are open possibilities for reflection (Schauen), distanciation, alienation, and existentiality, which means a shift to a metalevel, “meta-being” via affirmation/negation. Hence, the possibility of freedom opens in the side of necessity.** Here, we have to ponder how the transcendence appears and manifests in the *Dasein*; often, it occurs as a noise or disturbance in the communication. Let us think of such value as goodness. How can we explain that such things like goodness are a reality? Those who make good acts most often have to suffer from their consequences, not merely in the sense of ingratitude from the side of the objects of goodness, but even their hostility, and even becoming martyrs. Arendt has said that good acts have to be concealed, they can never be public. However, that cannot always be avoided. How can we explain that goodness makes people worse and not better? Because goodness means strength, by helping others, one shows he/she is stronger than the other, so it becomes a form of subordination that people consider unbearable. Yet one can argue. Goodness makes the evil appear, and when it is no longer imminent, when it is foregrounded, it can be more easily attacked and conquered. Goodness may thus seem an anomaly and disturbance. Very often transcendence is felt like that.

**15. One mode of being can compensate or sublimate another.** In the process of civilization, certain basic qualities are, via training and education, elevated from their merely physical qualities into most spiritual Thirdness-level phenomena and sign action. Yet there are limits: the lack of certain M1 properties cannot be compensated by any strong belief in certain values and cultural goals. A young person may hear in an entrance examination: “You will never become

that and that.” Prophecies often realize themselves but also cause counter-reactions that make an individual cross over his normal boundaries.

**16. Every mode of being is an actuality, but in a dialogue with others it becomes reality; yet, they originate from virtuality and they are aiming for virtualities.** Insofar as virtuality here is the same as transcendence, the problem is how do we communicate with such an entity as transcendence? Is transcendental journey or movement opposed to a dialogue in *Dasein*? Dialogue can strengthen or criticize or weaken *Moi*’s development. In fact, *Moi* is constituted by and in a dialogue only, but how can we be sure that there is a transcendental dimension in our whole existence? What we consider the voice of transcendence may be nothing but that impact of another subject on us, and via him/her the S1 what our surrounding community takes as transcendental—that is, true, absolute, under all circumstances. What is the difference and how do we distinguish between truth in *Dasein* and truth in a transcendental sense? How do we talk with transcendence? Via meta-modalities? If I want something in *Dasein*, how will that differ from the case where I want to strive for something transcendental? Does the latter mean an elevation of something into a general and universal principle for all others as well? Or if I know something in *Dasein*, how do I know in transcendence? The latter may seem irrational, absurd in the light of the former (*but: Credo quia absurdum*).

**17. Every mode of being has one dominant modality while organizing and subordinating others.** Thus, in M1 it is “will” that is the most important, everything is in a state of wanting to be actualized; in M2 “can” organizes all the other modalities, which find their place in the harmony or disharmony of thus organizing can—that is, what one realistically can do with one’s modalities, how they can be actualized. In M3, “know” gives further possibilities for enacting and actualizing and realizing modalities; the knowledge (*Wissen*) accumulated in a society in its institution provides persons with their proper position in a society. In M4, “must” operates (i.e., evaluates, orders, commands, subordinates, tempts previous modes—that is, sanctifies them). It seems to me that the modalities are built in order of their development upon each other so that they accumulate and remain valid. So essentially the “must” of S1 would never have any power

on subjects unless they would have internalized it in their own “will.” Jaspers has written about phenomenology of the “will” (Jaspers, 1948, pp. 423–435). Thanks to will, the *Dasein* is not closed in its own world but reaches beyond. There is illusion and reality. Will tries to make illusions concrete realities. Thanks to “will” the *Dasein* steps into history. With energy of will we strive in our imaginary directive of interiority toward real situations. So Jaspers conceives energy and power of “will as a kind thorough streaming force so that it connects various modes of being M1-M2-M3-M4. So will is not satisfied with satisfaction at one moment but it constitutes the ‘destiny’ and basis for the continuity of our existence” (Jaspers 1948, p. 425). On the other hand “will” is at the origin of our semiotic acts. It is as Jaspers well says: “Duration as continuity of the sense” [*Sie ist Dauer als Kontinuität des Sinns*] (Jaspers 1948, p. 425) Yet also the first sign of functioning of a “will” is bodily movement (gesture?), which should be seen as a continuation of our psychic events as it appears at a given moment (*Augenblick*). For Jaspers, this is a truly magic moment because there the spiritual directly intervenes the psychic and physical world and causes a change in our *Dasein*. Therefore, “will” is the moment that then recruits all other modalities for its fulfillment. It is the counterforce to the mere happening, organic, or automatic course from M1 to S1. So, on one hand, we have growth and becoming, full and force; on the other hand, we have doing and goals (*Wachsen und Werden, Fülle und Kraft; Machen und Zweck*) (Jaspers 1948, p. 429). In this aspect “will” might even seem to be something uncreative, it can only “want” such things that are given in that automatic process and set its goals according to the “know” of S2 and “must” of S1.

### *Appearance or APPEARING*

In the side of the fundamental modalities of “Being” and “Doing,” which we thus inherited from Greimassian semiotics, to conclude, I want to ponder the modality of “appearing” (*paraître*). One structuralist reasoning to which grand part of semiotics has stayed faithful—is that the true reality is not the one to be seen, heard, and felt, but the structure behind it, which causes it. The surface of the reality is only, as Greimas said “*effet du sens*”—that is, a meaning effect. In one word, the reality is only *Schein*, like as early as Schiller and Kant taught, or appearance or illusion.

### VERTICAL APPEARANCE

The idea of the appearance of the *Schein* is not quite a new finding; it dates back to German philosophy. Kant spoke about it in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1787/1969); in his *Briefe über ästhetische Erziehung*, Schiller spoke about it (1795/2000). Kant ponders *Schein* in critique of the pure reason in the chapter “Transcendental aesthetics.” He argues how space and time determine all our perception concerning both external objects and our own psychological states of mind; Greimas later coined terms interoceptive/exteroceptive (it is altogether not difficult to turn Kant into semiotics in the framework of Paris School). But then how do the external and internal world appear to our senses? From this, one cannot yet reason that they were mere *Schein* (*ein blosser Schein*). As early as this nuance represents the attitude that *Schein* is something less real than objects.

In any case, for Kant the term *Schein* always appears in the context of *bloss* or *falsch*—that is, something apparent in a negative sense. Adorno inherited this view directly from Kant, *Schein* was illusion, phantasmagory, which art paradoxically had to deny and abolish by its own *Schein*. Schiller became familiar with Kant’s thought immediately, and as one result we have his famous letters about aesthetic education. Yet, the radical difference to Kant was that he speaks about the **joy** of *Schein*. Savage men became humans when they were so detached from reality that they started to take it as a play and as a *Schein*, which could be appreciated as such. The dissolution from interests of the reality toward the world of *Schein* was a decisive step of progress for mankind. Consequently, we have two basic theories of *Schein*: one keeps it false, illusion, betrayal, and the other an independent, autonomous reality of its own, a great step of progress of humanity. How these theories have been inherited by later discussion about *Schein* soon will be seen. Similarly, the French phenomenologist Etienne Souriau, who also had an impact on early semiotic structuralism, like *Sémantique structurale* by Greimas, and whose monumental knowledge of the whole twentieth century was gathered in the collective work *Vocabulaire d’esthétique*, gives new meanings to the terms of *appearance* and *apparition* (Souriau, 1990, pp. 141–144).

The term *appearance* is defined by Souriau: an aspect whereby an object manifests, insofar as this representation then distinguishes itself from the object thus becoming manifest. From this definition,

furthermore, three different nuances open, which are: (1) the mere appearance of something to our senses (i.e., a phenomenon); (2) precisely the illusory appearance or illusion; and (3) the appearance that presupposes some kind of judgment (i.e., is the same as *vraisemblance*, verisimilitude). As far as what is involved is an illusion, we speak about the illusion of reality in painting or theater.

The truth of theater is based on three kinds of illusions: representation of emotions of men, the illusion of time and place or diegesis, and presentation of natural or supernatural phenomena to provoke strong emotions in spectator or to increase the credibility of the events on stage in general. The latter case also leads to the term *apparition*, which thus means appearance of something surprising to the spectator. What appears can be a real person who indeed appears at a right moment on stage—for example, the masked subscriber of *Requiem* in the movie *Amadeus* by Forman; but it can also be a real person who is imagined to be present, or it can be in reality a supernatural being, such as *Il commandatore* at the end of *Don Giovanni*. It is evident that *apparence* corresponds to the German notion of *Schein* and *apparition* to *Erscheinung*. Altogether these cases deal with *Schein* as a vertical phenomenon, in depth: it is something, somewhere, which then is elevated to the surface of reality and manifests. Also Greimas's theory of *paraitre* is of this kind. In his well-known so-called “veridictory square,” we act by categories of *être* and *paraitre* (Being and Appearing). When they are negated, we get four cases; Being, not-Being, Appearing, not-Appearing. When they are situated in the square, we get four meaning effects: truth, untruth, lie, and secret, always according to the relationship of these categories: truth is what appears and is what it appears; lie is what appears but is not that; secret is something that is but does not appear in any way; and untruth is something that neither is nor appears, as shown in Figure 15.11.

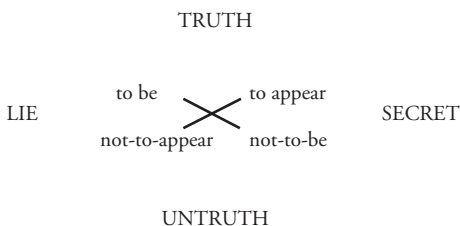


Figure 15.11 The veridictory square by Greimas

In fact, it is already on this basis that we can sketch a theory of vertical *Schein*. We notice how many topical problems of culture, art, and philosophy find their proper place in this framework. Regarding existential semiotics, a theory of *Dasein* is involved. Lehto has proposed that *Dasein* is characterized by its particular *Da-signs* (2010, pp. 156–165). But to what extent are they in reality *Da-shine* in the sense of brilliance, virtuosity, and bravura of this term? Although in *shine* there is always the same danger (as with *Schein*), or it is always under certain conditions the same as fake and illusions, the lie: Not all is gold that glitters. Without love the words are empty as it is said in the Bible.

Thus one has to distinguish between *Pseudo-shine*, which belongs to the category of vanity, and the authentic shine or brilliance, which is always based on the truth of being. What is involved can be shine, which has been gained by work according to the protestant ethics. We accept richness if it has been obtained by striving or overwhelming talents but doubt *nouveau riches*. On a symbolic level, in a symphony the law of thematic elaboration prevails: the victory finale of the end has to be earned by the struggle of thematic actorial forces in music in their *Durchführung* and in the whole structure; if in music there is shine without this work, it is entertainment, lower level shimmer. Yet there is also brilliance that is like a gift of nature, proof of vitality, overwhelming energy, like in the case of Australian aboriginal handicraft studied by Hénault (2002). The problem of shine remains in the aforementioned distinction: from which signs can we distinguish between pseudo-shine and real, good shine?

To do this, we need to compare *Schein* to *Sein*—to continue our playing with words. The appearance and being manifest in many forms and variations in the history of ideas. First, we have a pair of concepts referring to this: *structure* and *ornament*. One thinks that structure “is”—that is, it is really, is something permanent, whereas its decoration is merely the quality of surface.

Moreover, the whole theory of simulacra, copies of reality as *Schein* belongs to this category. Here, the doctrines of Jean Baudrillard get a new dimension, just as Eco's theory of forgery. The problem of a forgery is not only in comparison of two objects on the same level but in the shift of levels—in the dialectics of appearance and being, in the Kantian sense. The whole network of these concepts can be seen in Figure 15.12.

SEIN	SCHEIN	SHINE	SIGN
ETRE BEING	APPARENCE (APPARITION)	BRILLIANCE	
ERSCHEINEN PARAITRE APPEAR		ÉCLAT VIRTUOSITÉ BRAVOURE	
morality:			
GOODNESS EVILNESS	EVILNESS GOODNESS		
	ILLUSION IMAGINATION ORNEMENT		
STRUCTURE	SIMULACRA FAKES/FORGERIES		
SUBJECT OBJECT CULTURE KULTUR GEIST (MIND)	DREAM OBJECT or: SUBJECT (depending on epistemology) CIVILISATION  MATERIE (MATTER)		
life style:			
IDENTITY SPIRIT (Earth spirit)	FASHION BODY	KITSCH	STYLE
communication:			
PHRASE	GESTURE		
TRANSCENDENCE (distinction) PROFOUND	DASEIN (being-there) SUPERFICIAL	DASEIN	TRANSCENDENCE.
		either: PSEUDO-SHINE: vanity, illusion or: AUTHENTIC SHINE referring to the “truth of being” SHINE as earned (Protestant ethics) SHINE as gift of nature	

**Figure 15.12** Categories around the appearance

### HORIZONTAL APPEARANCE

Nevertheless, in the aforementioned dictionary by Souriau is a passage that opens a different view. Namely, we find the following definition for the term *appareance*: “Certain art works never appear to the spectator entirely and by all parts simultaneously. The temporal arts like music, theater and cinema, are all based upon successive appearance” (Souriau, 1990, p. 140).

Hence, when we join the idea of temporality—of succession, linearity, syntagmaticity, seriality, unfolding, developing—to such a static concept like *Schein* or being, we are lead to a radically new theory. A naive fact is that we can live our lives only one moment at

a time. So the reality all the time *appears* to us temporarily, it has a certain rhythm, which we can neither retardate or accelerate, but which altogether proceeds irrefutably. We are all the time going toward something unknown and imprevisible; we are all the time transgressing some boundary or moving toward transcendence. Schutz and Luckmann considered just such an idea of borderline essential in the idea of the transcendence. The thought could be resumed in one phrase: the appearance (*Erscheinen*) is becoming of transcendence (*Werden der Transzendenz*). Yet not whatsoever becoming is an existential revelation or realization of the transcendence—that is, existential choice. There is also blind becoming, without any

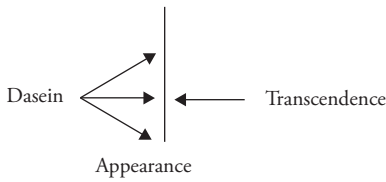


Figure 15.13 Existential appearance

chosen direction, the principle of *laisser-aller*, which means throwing and abandoning into the power of uncertain future, perhaps its narrative course leading assumingly into good. The situation could be illustrated with the scheme in Figure 15.13.

The modalities of existential appearance are: becoming (necessity) and doing (freedom) and their alternation or balance.

One could say that the existential appearance is directed only by the *Ich-Ton*, the identity of a subject (the concept has been borrowed from v. Uexküll's biosemiotics), but we cannot know in advance how it reacts in each situation. Therefore, the *Schein*, which manifests the truth of being as a kind of figuration of a structure, its ornamentation, is not yet existential *Schein* in this new sense. Similarly, the brilliance of the appearance, which is realization of the structure of being, is of course a kind of brilliance but one has to distinguish from it the *shine*, which occurs in the choice at every moment, and the fact that we are truly free to choose and not as predetermined by any structural or ontological principle.

These starting points have immediate consequences, even to such a far-seeming theory as semiotics. Namely, when in semiotics communication is the only properly dynamic temporal process in the mediation of message from destinator to destinee, we have here found a completely new deeper epistemic level: appearance.

Appearance as the existentiality of subjects and appearance in general is a still more fundamental category as communication. Which kind of semiotics might emerge if we would take this principle of horizontal appearance as our fulcrum? Which kind of theory, which methods, which analyses? I already referred to the new research program of Eric Landowski, the semiotics of life and irregularities, which are analogous to existential semiotics. But also new approaches may emanate.

Transcendence as nothingness is just such in which the appearance has stopped, the time has been finished, one is in a totally achronic state and one could not even imagine anything more anguishing

for a subject. Instead transcendence as a plenitude means the virtuality of innumerable possibilities, omnitemporality (a concept by Karsavine, 2003), which only artists have been able to conceive and simulate: Wagner in the networks of his leitmotifs in his operas and Proust by the time dimensions going to all direction in his novels. These simulacra models are *Schein* that correspond to the truth of being. Its modus is appearance, linear and horizontal.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Existential semiotics emerged from several sources, both semiotical and philosophical. If we would try to situate it in the panorama of recent trends in these fields, one might be tempted to classify it among the so-called "post-structuralist" and "postmodern" issues. It is true that the heritage of French semiotics has been so modified there that it is in this respect a "post-Greimassian" theory. Also the concern of human subject and its living and acting in the world with all of its moral issues provides it with a certain tinge, which some others have called "semio-ethics" (like Deely, 2008 Bonfantini, Petrilli, & Ponzio, 2009). What it attempts to underline in this debate on the nature of values is that values are not relative as Saussurean linguistic theory proposed—that is, completely determined by the position of a sign in a certain system. Rather, values are considered virtual and transcendental entities waiting for their actualization in our living world. Altogether, the theory is definitely a product of our time, which perhaps is no longer any post issue but rather something neo.

Yet, it preserves the ties with the long tradition of Western thought and has not thrown itself into purely contemporary doctrines of so-called "innovation"—with commercial and technological usefulness and direct applications. However, amazingly even in this respect already existential value aspects are applied to the study of consumers' values or comparison of law systems of various kinds.

We could say first that the theory is not yet ready and completed at all. But then, to what directions should it be developed further? Should it become a complete, coherent, maybe even axiomatic system of human mind and its various activities in the world? Then the goal of such science would be a kind of system, or generative construction in which concepts and levels are derived from each other, so that it seems as if they were logically and organically growing from the basic hypotheses. That would be something like Hegel Science of Logics

of McTaggart's Nature of Existence (McTaggart, 1927/1988). On the other hand, one would then easily argue that the time of such big narratives has passed away and that the human mind, history, and experience in all its complexity and diversity cannot be any longer captured into one unified system of thought. In such a case, the theory should unfold into a more fragmentary treatise, something like Schlegel's *Athenäum Fragmente* or Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (Ruskin, 1843–1873/1987) as its goal. Perhaps such a presentation would better do justice to the contradictory nature of the world or *Dasein* that it tries to portray and mirror. The time of clean and rational generative courses has gone. One would also develop it as a discourse into more figurative expressions, supposing that meanings are created in the language and texts. Yet, the great difference to this structuralist views is that the origin is definitely a theory of subject and a kind of psychology.

In this aspect, one should think that it would grow into a direction of collective subjectivities reaching the level of communities and cultures. For any cultural theory, it would provide a new type of approach. It would, in this respect, have its impact, not yet tried, on gender theories as well. Yet keeping ourselves in the social sphere, it might next focus on the modality of Doing if so far the being and appearing have been focus. It might develop into a theory of action, and even in its radical and political sense, telling us What We Have To Do, like Leo Tolstoy once asked. However it could also flourish in the field of such an indefinable notion like transcendence. Even if this concept were originally conceived here as something purely conceptual and philosophical, it can certainly have psychological, anthropological, and even theological repercussions, like the Rumanian mathematician Solomon Marcus, who has connected it to divinity (at a roundtable on existential semiotics in Paris, October 27, 2010). I am also convinced that once having reached such an epistemic status, the theory would proceed into a new methodology of human sciences and into a new type of analysis of human mind and its various signs. As one of the most tempting fields here, it offers the artistic texts and signs, such as, say, music: after the existential approach, one could not imagine any musical or any aesthetic utterance but is simultaneously corporeal (M1), expression of human personality (M2), manifesting certain genres (S2), and fulfilling aesthetic values (S1). Accordingly, I believe the avenues opening from

existential semiotics may lead not only the semiotic theory to new configurations but also change our basic understanding of mind and culture leading perhaps into new discoveries.

## Notes

1. Since fifteen years ago I launched a new theoretical project to renew the so-called classical semiotic approach and to rethink its epistemological bases. So far I have published on this topics a monograph *Existential Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2000), and in addition several articles in various journals and anthologies. Moreover the Belgian review DEGRES published in 2003 a special issue on *Sémiotique existentielle* with some international reactions to these new theories. Yet recently there have appeared two other volumes in Italian and French in which the theory has become remarkably larger and aspired towards deeper epistemic levels. These were *Fondamenti di semiotica esistenziale* transl. by Massimo Berruti (Bari: Laterza Editore, Tarasti 2009a) and *Fondements de la sémiotique existentielle* transl. by Jean-Laurent Csinidis (Paris: L'Harmattan, Tarasti 2009b)

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Action, Self, and  
Narration

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## Culture: Result and Condition of Action

Ernest E. Boesch

### Abstract

How to use human potentials constructively will be a major problem for a science of culture. This chapter covers the key issues that follow from its author's Symbolic Action Theory. That theory (which has been developed since the 1960s) has been rooted in the work of Jean Piaget, whose constructivism has opened my eyes for human creativity; Pierre Janet, whose theory of feelings started me on action theory; Sigmund Freud, whose use of free association became an important method for the study of symbols; Gaston Bachelard, with his books on the symbolism of the house, the Earth, the air, and fire; Claude Lévi-Strauss, by his studies of South American Indian myths; Raymond Firth, whose work on symbols was a great help; and the anthropologists Mary Douglas and Victor Turner, who contributed importantly to the symbolic side of the theory. Gaining multiple insights into traditional Thai customs provided the cultural contrast for the development of the holistic theory.

**Keywords:** culture, self, action

For one who has lived the horrors of the twentieth century, it is not easy to write about culture. We tend to think of culture as a special, positive endowment of the human species, and if we say that a man or a woman are cultivated, we mean that they show endearing human qualities. Yet, the deprivations of the past century were, indeed, also a product of culture. The systematic killing of 6 million Jews, Gypsies, invalids, and others were committed by science and weapons produced by our culture, applied by its members and justified by a cultural ideology. And so were the Stalinist mass killings, or the extermination of almost half of the Khmer population. Deeds, perhaps less striking but still horrible enough, have accompanied the history of culture: The burning of heretics at the stake or the stoning to death of a woman presumed to be adulterous are cultural, as are the modern terrorist killings of women and children in market places.

The writing of the Bible was a cultural feat, but using it to justify expulsion, slavery, executions, and torture was no less cultural; the extermination of whole non-believing communities of men, women, children, and cattle had been at the origin of Jewish civilization, a biblical command, contrary to the ten commandments demonstrating the Janus face of culture. The atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were a feat of science and a crime in the name of culture. The large depletion of forests for oil rather than food production is done with cultural techniques and for cultural purposes. Religion, of course, has benefited culture in many ways but has also brought intolerance, war, cruelty, and suppression. Science, equally, has largely improved human life; yet, it has also produced weapons with more and more destructive power and sophisticated poisons and, intentionally or not, a misuse of medical knowledge; even art had to serve ideological indoctrination and commercial seduction. Culture shows

a double face. It is man-made and as conflictual as the man himself (Boesch, 2005).

### A Terminological Note

In the following, I will often speak of *experience* and *action*, so it might be helpful to explain from the outset my use of these terms. “Experience” is the larger one. It means everything that enters our senses and our mind, be it conscious or unconscious. I consider it as equivalent to the German word *Erlebnis*, meaning what we live.

“Action” means striving for a result, therefore not all we experience is action—we perceive or feel the sun, the wind, the heat, the cold, the rain, sounds and noises, and the smile or anger in the face of a person. All these are not actions but influence our mood and our awareness of reality, and thus they may instigate or at least influence actions.

By action we experience our world, its attractions or threats, but at the same time we experience ourselves, our strength, our abilities, and our weaknesses or vulnerability. This twofold experience makes action particularly important. As a student, I learned from Pierre Janet that emotions and feelings were regulators of action, which, by making actions as frequent as emotions, required us to define them anew. If even dreams were actions as Sigmund Freud had taught us, then we would have to accept also unconscious actions, but what, then, were their goals? I finally concluded that all we do for regulating our relationship with the environment and ourselves, be it physical or mental (with the exception of reflexes), is action. Thereby action became one of the two main sources of self-evaluation (the other one being social feedback). The term, in this large conception, allows us to better understand self-formation in relation to culture (Boesch, 1975, 1976, 1991).

In the following, the word *meaning* will also be used frequently. Meanings can be public and private. Public meanings concern generally accepted purpose, function, or sign quality of a thing or an event. Private meanings consist of subjective evaluations such as beauty or ugliness, attraction, repulsion, hope, or fear. The distinction between public and private meaning is not always easy, as they can blend, and language lacks sufficiently subtle terms. We will meet enough examples for illustrating both, but I tend to use the term *meaning* mainly in its private sense. As to the term *symbol*, also frequently used, it is explained in the text.

### Culture: Basic Functions

Culture is man-made, of course, but for each newborn child it is the existing world, firm but strange, full of things to discover and explore progressively. At first a child will discover persons, the mother and other caretakers as sources of gratification and pleasure. During the first months, the child will smile at any face entering its field of vision; later, distinguishing between familiar and strange faces, it will show pleasure seeing the first and will reject the second. This is a distinction between the familiar and strange, which, however primitive, tends to remain with most people all their lives. Of course, the number of familiar and strange faces will increase, and the child will learn to differentiate between persons—yet the basic distinction will remain.

The child’s world, of course, consists also of objects, an unending realm of discovery. Objects form its space by their shape, color, weight, sound, smell, and taste; by variable illumination; and, of course, by their different use. All this the child discovers by acting on objects, experiencing curiosity and pleasure related to attractive things and places, but the child learns also to be cautious with unknown, possibly dangerous objects. Thus, the child first structures the world along dimensions of attraction or avoidance; it starts being a valence world (1963). This first organization of the environment is not yet culture—every animal also structures its surroundings along the places and objects of positive or negative valence.

Yet, this world of valences—including objects, people, and events—will soon be connected with rules: “Do this, don’t do that.” The child will discover such rules by his/her own action, which reveals the quality and function, the use, and the beauty or danger of objects. But rules result also from adults or older children, who demonstrate or teach appropriate behaviors. Important rules concern property: “No, you can’t play with that, it belongs to your sister!” Property rules emphasize the I-vs.-you distinction, and thereby the possession of things will soon manifest self-value. Although the correct use of objects requires knowledge and skill, the rules concerning property limit one’s action in a way that cannot be overcome by skill. They demand new kinds of action obeying other social rules—begging or borrowing will have to replace the act of simply taking. The child will have to learn that, which is not easy, and so property will also give rise to new emotions, jealousy, greed, and aggression. Conflicts

about property tend to be most frequent already in kindergarten and probably occupy the major time of civil courts. Without that, these conflicts can easily turn into hostility, with the loss of property felt as a threat to one's self.

These initial actions, of course, are accompanied by words. The child's world soon will become a *named* world. Mother tells her boy: "Go to the baker to buy bread." Here, the object is classified by naming, integrating it into a category of similar things, separated from "no-breads" as, for example, from cakes. Or during a walk in the woods, the mother might instruct her boy who collects berries: "Take only blackberries, leave raspberries, they are infested with worms." She classifies not only with relation to other berries but also to clean or infected ones. Thus, naming facilitates orientation within one's known and knowable world. It refers to a structure existing prior to individual experience. Even should a name be forgotten—for example, as with a technical term—we still know that the thing belongs to a named category. Language, a collective system of signs, orders the world. Yet it does so only to the extent that it is understood, understanding language is as much part of cultural learning as is naming correctly. Both are needed for useful orientation.

Words do not simply classify things and events—they also include qualities. "Don't eat these black berries, they are poisonous nightshades, you might die of them", the mother would warn her son. Words establish relationships between thing and actor—perhaps correctly, perhaps erroneously, but in both ways they constitute reality. Soon the world of the child will be somehow doubled by language, which defines qualities, and thereby conducts action.

There exists a further basic aspect of culture. Soon children will start acting on objects. As a boy, my grandfather taught me how to fashion a kind of flute from a hazelnut twig. Such transformations of reality may begin even early in phylogeny. When a chimpanzee mother takes a big stone, places on it a nut, and knocks it open with a strong truncheon, she uses elements present in her environment in a novel way. In other words, she *transforms* nature to conform with her subjective intentions. Culture starts with such transformations, subjecting nature to the wants and needs of individuals, for limited purposes at first, sometimes for mere curiosity or play, but it will become more and more complex with individual growth or social development. The baker transforms natural products into bread by making use of fire, whose destructive power he tames and

controls; cotton wool is spun, woven, and sewn into shirts, and the construction of automobiles is only a more complex transformation of natural materials and utilization of natural powers.

These transformations often require interaction and cooperation, and this, too, the child will meet early. Wanting to construct a toy, the child will have to ask for the help of an elder brother who then will need material or tools from their father. Depending on the cooperation of others, the child discovers the need for action chains. In fact, culture consists of a dense and complex web of action chains, of cooperating actors. This, besides the coordination of competences and means, also requires mutual trust. Trust is an emotion without which no culture can exist.

These are the basic functions of culture: structuring the environment along positive and negative valences; inventing language to classify things and events and to communicate about them; establishing rules for regulating action and interaction; and transforming nature to meet the desires and needs of people. And, finally, there is cooperation of actors with different competences and means for pursuing common goals. These functions, of course, engender consequences. The monkey who discovers the breaking of nutshells instigates a corresponding rhythm of seasonal behavior and fosters new habits of eating and sharing; the baker who transforms wheat into bread initiates a new breakfast culture and, as a consequence, also transformations in the environment—for example, wheat fields replacing woods. Even more so the automobile makers, by introducing new habits and skills, have altered individuals, society, and even nature and climate. The hunter who blows into the hollow leg bone of a deer or perceives the humming of the bow string discovers new sounds and, playing with them, develops musical instruments, which, simple at first, engender progressively an almost entirely non-natural musical culture (Boesch, 1998). All that, from primitive beginnings, led to increasingly complex transformations of nature, accompanied by new habits, increased skills and knowledge, new social formations, and even a change in mentality—to our benefit and peril as well.

### **Objective and Subjective Culture**

All this relates to actions by which the child structures his/her world. Such actions not only form the environment but acquire meaning themselves—actions have their significance, otherwise one would



not perform them. There is nothing invented, constructed, sold, bought, used, exchanged, borrowed, given, stolen, or destroyed without a meaning to the actor. By their meaning, things and actions become subjective realities.

Yet, meanings can be expressed by language, and then they belong to a mental system different from the inside experience. In other words, meanings named differ from meanings felt. The sentence “I am walking” says only that I move by feet somewhere in space, in a way different, for example, from running. It does not say how I walk, where to, why, nor what I see or feel while walking—language points at categories of reality, not at specifics of experience. Adding more details, such as, “I am walking from home to office,” would clarify where I walk but still nothing of the experienced meaning.

Indeed, the experience of walking implies a number of proprioceptive, physical sensations, and it includes the anticipation of a goal, related to expectations, hopes, or concerns, and it is colored not only by perceptions of the surroundings I pass by but also by a general feeling of idleness or haste, by the weather, or by unarticulated memories of other walks, and even, unconsciously, by the style of my walking—the gait of a soldier or the ambling of a sightseer are obviously felt differently, but so are, even less consciously, the walking styles of a German or of a Thai. In other words, naming the act places it within objective categories, whereas performing it relates it to a net of connotations. Let us not forget that this applies also to the very action of saying something; this, too, is subjectively experienced and has its own meanings, which, of course, differ from the content expressed: saying something addresses a person, with expectations and feelings of sympathy or unease, we try to form our speech accordingly, being aware at the same time whether we do it well or not. The addressee, on his side, will try to guess the intentions behind the words. Language has to be understood semantically *plus* the meanings connoted by the words spoken *and* by the act of speaking them.

This complexity of meanings, of course, is true for actions as well as for objects. By saying that in the center of my hometown stands a Baroque cathedral, I mention a specific category of buildings, and even adding more descriptions, my explication still remains limited to the architectural structure and objective function of the church. Although in the individual experience, the cathedral relates to religious teachings and rituals at home, in church, in

school, as well as to cathedrals seen elsewhere, it reminds of sin and merit, of guilt and atonement, of anxiety and hope. The cathedral, far from being simply a particular building, becomes a symbol for a whole complex of memories, feelings, and expectations. And, of course, why, when, and to whom I speak of the cathedral has its own symbolic meanings. Let me emphasize, these meanings are not just appended to an object, an action, or a situation: they change its quality.

The two kinds of meaning determine the relationship of citizens with their culture. The objective meaning concerns material structure, factual events, shared customs, myths, ideologies, and theories. Objectively, the Baroque cathedral stands for religious services, rituals, sermons, and their performance—in short, for customs and creeds an anthropologist might neutrally observe. The subjective meaning just described relates somehow to identification with the place and to feelings of belonging, of being at home, or, contrarily, of strangeness, even adversity. I may describe my culture, may enumerate its characteristics, but I also feel at home in it, identify with its customs and values; identifying with one’s culture is very different from factual knowledge.

All this leads to the conclusion that the term *culture* has two meanings. On the one hand, it is objective. Our surroundings are factual. Of course, most of it is created by individuals at a certain time. Yet, once produced, these creations become public facts of generally accepted qualities. Houses, individually built, become parts of the common landscape; laws, individually conceived, regulate public life. Even a poem or a painting, once published or exhibited, belongs to the factual culture. Language, man-made too, is a pervasive element of objective culture.

But how about genuine nature—the hills and the forests, the rivers and lakes, the birds, wind, clouds, storm? Although not man-made, they are given a cultural significance by classification, use, and interpretation. Trees are named, used for specific purposes, they may be inhabited by spirits one must placate before falling them; wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning may be attributed to gods or explained by science—both of course, being objective culture.

These factual elements of culture are connected with rules determining their use and function. Those rules, too, are objective facts. Shops are for selling and buying, offices for working, schools for learning, hospitals for curing, churches for services, and so on; tools have to be used correctly, traffic

codes have to be obeyed, and even forms of greeting and other social rituals are objective culture.

Objective culture shapes the person to a large extent but not exclusively. Mountain peasants may be different from seaside fishermen, yet in each of these groups individuals differ, too, and will, as far as circumstances allow, tend to select or shape their own environment—their culture will turn subjective. “My home is my castle” goes the British saying—the home area is the center of each individual’s subjective culture, from here she or he will branch out and return again. Here, the objective constraints are minimal; the individual enjoys freedom of action much more than in the outside world.

Yet, this points at a subtle balance. The inside of the home may be a place of maximum individuality, yet it is nevertheless also controlled by objective culture. Furniture, decorations, curtains, and even small gadgets in most homes correspond to public taste and fashion. Common rules of doing and acting also considerably influence personal behavior at home. On the other hand, the outside world is structured and interpreted subjectively, sometimes minimally, at other times considerably. The individual strives continuously at establishing his or her balance between subjective and objective culture. My Swiss dialect, for example, sounds typically San Gallese, yet it still retains my own personal tone and rhythm, distinguishable from other San Gallese speakers. My language, which is objective, of course, still retains a subjective flavor. How such balances are achieved remains enigmatic. The process is mainly unconscious, but usually so are the rules along which an individual realizes the subjective–objective balance in his home.

Let me try a more detailed look at this subjective–objective relationship. The pond in our garden is surrounded by a lawn, and the whole site is enclosed by big trees of various kinds. They somehow close off our private area from neighbors, and I enjoy the quiet privacy and the soothing green scenery, but I have apparently not much interest in details; I never can remember the names of many trees, cannot distinguish their foliage or bloom, and tend to confound, when mowing the lawn, kitchen herbs with weeds. My wife, obviously, also enjoys the green surroundings, but in addition she observes each smallest plant, watches their growth, knows almost personally the frogs and the newts in the pond, and distinguishes not only the song of different birds but even its change when a cat prowls in the garden.

In other words, she not only enjoys the garden, but she lives with it. Her and my objective reality are, of course, identical, yet subjectively they differ. This difference is not easy to define, because it is not simply conceptual but implies, more importantly, a difference of identification. For her, she looks at plants, birds, or frogs with a kind of spontaneous empathy. I envy her, and I might, of course, try to live up to her knowledge of the garden, but it would remain a mere cognitive competence, devoid of the feelings of identification and empathy. Her culture and mine, objectively similar, differ subjectively.

This difference, of course, has its history. My wife spent her childhood and young years in a tropical country, surrounded by a nature full of life, with plants growing almost at sight, producing fruits for food or enjoyment, with all kinds of animals, snakes, geckos, bats, rats, fishes, birds, insects—in short, a nature that required continuous attention but provided also a multitude of pleasures. And by her Buddhist education she was taught since early years, too, that all this life surrounding her was, essentially, a life similar to ours. Animals were our relatives, and plants possessed a power of their own—not simply medical but magical, too.

This difference in subjective meanings can be shown in more details with every object. Take the water lilies in our pond. For me, they are somehow imbued with my recollection of the lotus flowers in the pond near the house in which I lived for a time in Bangkok; less consciously, they also recall the beautiful reflections of the evening light on the water surface. They might surreptitiously call up other memories, such as the strange snake with tentacles like a snail I had seen swimming there or the nightly concert of frogs and toads around the pond. Occasionally, the water lilies remind me of Buddha’s parable of the lotus bud striving out of the deep water mud toward the sun. Unexpectedly even, I think of the lotus song my mother sang while as a boy I sat listening under the piano of my father. And, of course, the water lilies imply not only memories but also future anticipations—for example, the hope to re-experience such beauty.

For my wife, our water lilies also remind her of the lotus in her home nature, but her recollections are much richer, including her swimming in the nearby canals and the life of animals she observed there, but they refer also to very different lotus flowers, related to myth stories of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as to religious rituals—lotus buds were offered to the Buddha and to monks during religious ceremonies.

In other words, lotus plants were holy plants, and therefore even the view of our water lilies appealed to very private religious feelings. Their subjective and public meaning blended inextricably.

One might object that such memories connected with the garden in no way alter its factual reality. One can enjoy it, can work in it, but always only as far as its size, structure, and content allow. Whatever the different past experiences, action still remains determined by the objective reality. This is true only if one neglects the very different garden behavior of my wife and myself. Objective reality determines our action, but we select its relevant contents, which thereby receives a meaning that is both subjective and factual. Again, the manner in which this blend is achieved remains a puzzle.

Our life does not consist of disconnected events. We want ourselves to be a consistent continuity. Therefore, what I experience now will color coming moments. While driving, I pass near the scene of a car accident, with police and ambulances. Will that not affect the style of my further driving? The beatings I received as an unruly boy still somehow influence my adult behavior, and the stories I was then told even today color my imagination. To be a permanent self implies that experience, as different as it may be, be tied by a thread of continuity—what this thread is, is difficult to tell; it corresponds to our continuous construction of the self, but we ignore what directs this construction.

Thus, it is this thread of continuity that affects the different garden behaviors of my wife and myself. Yet, these differences remain at the subverbal level. The thousand and thousand impressions that constitute a life will only rarely be present in our mind; yet, there are reasons to presume that, although latent, they still remain active. An apparently long forgotten memory may suddenly re-emerge at a particular moment, not in all details probably, but in some of its personally relevant features. Unnoticed, it was here all the time and must have melted somehow into the totality of our experience and view of life, I tend to think that this totality in some way constitutes a prism through which we perceive reality, thereby contributing to our action tendencies. According to the angle through which we look, the image perceived may change, but it still results from the same prism. Of course, that is only an image, but it allows me to understand the continuous integration of experience in an individual's life. We not only act with regard to an actual situation but continue always the thread of our life.

The example of the garden is a simile for the intimate blend of objective and subjective culture, but it demonstrates also another important aspect. When we built the house, the garden area was an uneven terrain of dirt and rubble. We had it leveled and planted the saplings with a vision of their growing big. Saplings, of course, symbolize the trees, but they symbolized as well a life in nature, with all that implies in memory and hope. Thus, we created objective culture, yet with a view on future subjective options. Those would be many years ahead—action is future-oriented. It may welcome immediate reinforcements but as a confirmation of hope.

Such distant goals require imagination, which, of course, is fed by previous experience. Imagination, however, is not simply repetitive: it expands or strengthens our action potential and can do so in quite novel ways. When we built the garden as an objective structure, we imagined it to offer not only different but also new opportunities to our every action—to anticipate newness can particularly animate imagination. Thus, a concrete situation is always open; it allows individuals their private interpretations.

### **Factual and Imagined Reality**

Action, I said, is both real and symbolic. Besides its specific goal, it always pursues other related interests—the polyvalence we already have met. We have also discussed the overdetermination, meaning that past experiences also enter the present motivation of action. Polyvalence and overdetermination constitute a major part of the symbolic variance of action and experience. Symbolism enriches the actual experience by relating it with outside contents. Those may be directly tied to present action (as polyvalence and overdetermination), may be connected with conventional beliefs (such as the lotus buds), may recall some recollection, or may be result from private imaginations, some or all of those in combination. Symbolism, thus, is complex and polyvalent itself. Although mostly unconscious, it serves an important function: to relate actual with previous experience and to thereby guarantee the continuity of our self and cultural belonging.

By its symbolism, action necessarily includes imagination. Imagination, therefore, is omnipresent. It may confine itself to the already known, but it can also reach toward the unknown. Even when weighing alternatives of an intended action, we

imagine possible outcomes, some never experienced before; imagination is a creative function.

For me, the creation of language is a striking example. Indeed, linking a sound with an object establishes a connection not present in reality. The phome “fish” has nothing in common with the animal; the sound “table” nothing with the material object. Therefore, to believe that imagination results from language puts the cart before the horse: the invention of language requires imagination.

However, language progressively becomes a major vehicle for imagination. It opens, as I have said, the realm of the unreal. And the unreal is present at every moment. Whatever somebody says refers to meanings that have to be imagined. But imagination extends further. It works already in the simple contemplation of a flower, an insect, or a bird; it colors our perception of a person, and from anticipating the results of an action it leads up to the most artificial and abstract constructions of mind. Facts, I said previously, become real only through the meanings attached to them, which implies that it is imagination that constitutes the reality of facts.

Therefore culture, consisting of meaningful facts, is also always imagined; it operates constantly on the two levels of concrete facts and imagination—the two, of course, being inextricably interrelated. This relationship constitutes reality. Each factual creation results from imagination, and for achieving its effect, it needs imagination, too. On the other hand, imaginations strive at material reality. Artists paint or sculpt their inner images, the founders of religion mold their spiritual inspirations into words and materialize them in innumerable ways. Yet, despite their close alliance, concrete action and imagination have to observe different rules. Objective action requires close observation of matter and compliance with its qualities. For imagination, on the contrary, anything is possible; even the rules of consistency, logic, and truth may often be disregarded.

Language, opening the dimension of the unreal, permits invention and fiction but also lie and deceit. Although invention and fiction enjoy much prestige and lead to the highest creations in art, literature, religion, and science, the ever-present possibility of untruth introduces suspicion and distrust. This ambivalence plays an important role in culture. Imaginative creations, like religion or political programs, may positively influence culture, but they can also mislead and provoke dissent or even deadly conflicts. Therefore, any culture invents rules that try to guarantee trust. These are not always

successful—lies can be profitable. Yet trust, necessary for any cultural community, is itself a belief based on imagination.

Trust is not only concerned with possible dishonesty; one must also trust oneself. Let me recall an aspect of language touched upon earlier. A meaning said and a meaning felt, we found, are not identical. Expressing a thought or a feeling by words unavoidably curtails or even distorts them. Therefore speech, for being understood, requires completion by imagination, and one must be able to trust it. The speaker, on the other side, needs to trust that his words truly express his intention. Both may be wrong, their trust unfounded—a cause for much misunderstanding, possibly even conflict.

Thus, pure imaginations, apparently unrelated to facts, are more than ineffectual creations of mind; they can persuade and can give rise to hope or despair, which gives them a strong emotional appeal. Imaginations not only make facts real, as we already found, but may constitute facts or suggest their existence. Aware of that, perhaps unconsciously, we often tend to believe imagination more than facts. Love relationships, financial investments, down to the preference of certain foods rely extensively on imaginations, and multiple are the conflicts resulting from imagination more than factual reality. Indeed, in Europe, religious wars were probably more passionate and cruel than territorial ones. The bloodiest war in history, World War II, had many causes, but the ideological ones were prominent. That was true as well for the crusades or the 30 Years War. In the United States, the Civil War was fought over racial ideologies, and in our days religious zeal creates bloody terror. To fight and kill for religious or ideological reasons seemed, up to our days, to many people legitimate, or even required. Cruel punishments for real or suspected heresy were widely acclaimed, and lynch justice persisted until recently. Now merely fictive imaginations can engender violence that is real.

The relationship between imagination and violence leads to two overarching concerns of human beings: To know who we are, what is the meaning of our life, and in what kind of a world we live. These are strange questions. Animals live from day to day without ever wondering about the sense of their existence. Mankind, from as early times as we know, unceasingly asks these questions. Dryness and floods, thunder, lightning, earthquakes, or diseases disturb the routine of their lives, and they start wondering about their causes. The world

seems to be full of enigmatic powers—and how to deal with them. This is an issue that appears to be the root of culture formation and has directed our evolution up to modern science. Our curiosity, the drive at increasing the transparency of our world, has brought us down to the depths of oceans, up to the expanses of the universe and into the microscopic insides of matter. It has not only immensely increased our knowledge and mastery but also our feelings of security—the enigmatic occurrences that had threatened us have largely lost their power, whereas the one of mankind has increased.

Yet, the question—*Who are we?*—still remains. We may live a longer, easier, and more pleasant life, but we still die, and for most of us, life still consists of struggle more than of pleasure. With luck, we will reach an age of pension, allowing us (again with luck) a carefree life for a few years, not enough to compensate the toil of the preceding decades. What then were all our efforts and pains for? Some of us may have the means to eschew this question—at least for a time—by accumulating pleasant experiences. The meaning of life, they may find, is to enjoy it. However, for the majority, even nowadays, this remains utopian. So what, then, was the meaning of life?

It is one of the main functions of culture to provide answers to these questions. I don't know of any culture that did not try to explain the world and the universe and to define the role and destiny of human beings. Mythology, religion, philosophy, art, science—they all compete to offer answers. These are manifold, varying from superstitious beliefs to Indian cosmology, from Egyptian religion to Greek mythology, from medieval religions to modern science. They may stress the worldly role of individuals, their social contribution, and responsibility, or they may link man's fate to metaphysical powers. Such answers, whatever they say, turn to be collective creeds; they dispel doubts, provide security, and thus induce strong feelings of belonging. Although pure imaginations, devoid of empirical proof, they tend to be taken as factual truths, strengthening the self and its social bond. This explains why any attack on such beliefs appears as an existential threat and risks to provoke violent reactions. Imaginations, not only establishing the reality of facts, gain tremendous power by constituting also our self.

Of course, the impact of factual conditions on human beings is evident. Poverty creates frustration, and frustration engenders anger and aggression. True. Yet, there exist people living in what we would call

stark poverty who are apparently content with their sort. The impact of factual conditions varies according to the meaning we attach to them. This meaning results, of course, from previous experiences, meaningful in their own way but no less from the cultural answers to the existential questions. External objects and events are real as well as symbolic.

The cultural views on life and the world take form in myths and theories; in minute details of fashion, taste, and customs; and, most strikingly, in concrete creations. A temple, a mosque, a church are not only material manifestations of cultural beliefs, but by their size and magnificence confirm them impressively. The same is true for sports stadiums or race courts, for hospitals or universities—they all resulted from a cultural ideology. Imaginations respond to facts and want to turn into facts themselves—facts, as I said, become real by imagination, but imagination strives at factual concretization. Thus, facts and imagination form that symbiotic unity that we call culture.

### *A Note on Cultural Differences*

Cultures are different. That is a truism. But how and why do they differ? Not an easy question. The usual answer is that, living in different ecological surroundings, populations are forced to develop different ways of coping. That is true, yet not a sufficient explanation. Of course, peasant cultures in moderate climates, for example, resemble each other, without, however, being identical. Or let us look at an even more instructive example: the male and female cultures, which obviously differ all over the globe. Men and women tend to differ in language, movement, taste and body care; in social and sexual behavior; and in emotional reactions, religious inclinations, art preference, and probably many more ways. Ecological conditions, being identical for both sexes, can of course not explain their difference. Therefore, it is usual to see the reason in their unequal anatomical and physiological constitution. That seemed plausible until recently but now appears less convincing. Women enter professions and occupations previously reserved for males; they compete successfully in science, sports, and other fields. Of course, child bearing will necessarily remain female, but it seems to hinder less and less their full participation in the hitherto male world. The difference between male and female culture is on the wane, because of, let us not forget, the creative opposition to the prevailing order by individuals, both women and men.

## Future Directions

The conclusion appears evident: The difference was to a large extent ideological. Cultures gave men and women a different answer to the basic question “Who am I?” Without denying the importance of ecology in forming cultures, we have to accept, too, that ideologies carry considerable weight. Why?

The question “Who am I?” asks for evaluating oneself. Self-evaluation derives mainly from two sources: action potential and social feedback. The action potential results, as we know (1976, 1991), from previous successes and failures, allowing the individual to conceive future actions – the action potential is prospective. But what is a success; what is a failure? We need criteria to evaluate them, and apparently it is social feedback to our behavior that mainly provides these criteria. Yet, social feedback is multiple and often contradictory, the one may praise what the other blames, and they may also differ from own evaluations. Therefore, the individual will select among social reactions and form personal criteria of success and failure. Those, however, will still result from cultural inputs. Thus, action experience blends intimately with cultural evaluations.

Let us look again at female culture. Cultural imprinting starts early. Soon the child will exhort: “No, that is not for girls”; or “Don’t act boyishly”; “A good girl will behave this way” and so on. Advice and examples will lead the growing girl to identify with her female belonging and its appropriate behaviors. She will learn sewing, knitting, and cooking rather than working wood or metal. She may rebel occasionally, may reject certain constraints, but on the whole will accept being a woman to be one of her tribe with its particular culture. However, only to be a woman is no sufficient answer to the question “Who am I?”. The individual wants to know “What kind of a woman am I?”. Within the confines of their culture, each person seeks to form and define their particular identity. This may be easier in some cultures than in others because cultural constraints vary. The cultural ideology provides security but limits also the individual’s personal way of life. To some, security counts more, for them culture is a welcome stabilizer, which lets us understand that many women at first resisted the feminist revolt. It threatened their self and the gratifications related to cultural identification.

We all belong to many cultures—national, sexual, religious, professional ones—each with their conditions for membership, their rules, benefits, prohibitions, rituals, even their particular language.

They are subcultures within an all-encompassing cultural field with its own opportunities and demands. How can we maintain an individuality in balance with such diversity? Some may choose to howl with the wolves, to bark with the dogs, and to sing with the birds, being content to be simply what each situation requires. Himmler was, without qualms, a family man, an amateur musician, and a killer of Jews. Others may strive at an independent self, consistent over variable situations. Such a self will, of course, not be culture-free but will integrate creatively diverse cultural elements. For those, to maintain a balance between self and diverse cultures requires creativity, critical understanding, and empathy. Such individuals, history tells, can influence their culture in important ways, but on a more modest level, everyone may contribute to shape their close or even distant world. Each of us leaves his or her traces wherever we dwell and act—it is worth pondering about what kind of traces we wish to remain. Human beings, although products of their culture to a major degree, still also shape or even transform it—some minimally but some also with considerable impact. Science may often prefer to neglect human creativity, looking at individuals as mere results of outside forces. Yet, without considering the balance people create between mind and culture, we would never understand the emergence of cultural differences. Let us, however, remain mindful. Human creativity, history tells again, can benefit as well as harm our lives and world. How to use human potentials constructively will have to be a major concern for a science of culture.

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# Culture-Inclusive Action Theory: Action Theory in Dialectics and Dialectics in Action Theory

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## Abstract

The following chapter deals with the concept of Culture-Inclusive Action Theory (CIAT) and research the author and his coworkers conducted primarily in Saarbrücken (and later in Frankfurt) over the last 35 years in two (complementary) subject areas, which also form the roots of the chapter: cross-cultural research and development of moral judgment in the tradition of Piaget/Kohlberg. In cross-cultural psychology, the duality “person versus culture” is unavoidable. In moral development, the dualities “content versus structure,” “facts versus norms,” and “affects versus cognition” are likewise unavoidable. In both research fields, the assumption of a dialectical relation between these dualities and the role of action theory in relation to dialectics was and still is attractive. In the following this role is interpreted also within Dynamic System Theory, by the concepts of upward emergence and downward selection, which are synthesized by the human action. This theoretical orientation from the very beginning called for its justification vis-a-vis mainstream psychology by implying meta-theoretical reflections. After a short introduction into dialectics and action theory in psychology, a more detailed treatment of the two research subjects are presented. The first step in both topics was (biographically) a systematic theoretical analysis dealing with the meaning of culture for psychology and the deep structure of moral development. In both topics the (descriptive) application of action theory and the (interpretative) appropriation of dialectics was productive and lead to contextualized research by conceptualizing a “regional cultural identity” on the one hand and formulating “types of everyday morality” on the other. This cultural contextualization is the reason for calling our approach *Culture-Inclusive Action Theory* (CIAT). A later study on the process of coming to terms with cancer was based on the same theoretical model; developed in both fields (culture and morality), it was also methodically contextualized from the very beginnings.

**Keywords:** moral judgment, culture, action, dialectics, cross-cultural research

In cross-cultural psychology, the duality “person versus culture” is unavoidable (e.g., Eckensberger, 1979, 1990a, 1990b, 1996a, 1996b, 2002a, 2010a; Krewer, 1990). It has a long tradition in culture and personality studies (for an overview, see Eckensberger & Römhild, 2000; for an early critique, see Shweder, 1980). In moral development, the dualities “content versus structure” (Eckensberger, 1986; Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1978, 1980; Eckensberger & Burgard, 1986), “facts versus norms” are likewise unavoidable

(Breit & Eckensberger, 2004b; Eckensberger, 1993a; Eckensberger, 2006a), as is the duality of “affects and cognition” (Eckensberger, 1989a; Eckensberger & Emminghaus, 1982; Villenave-Cremer & Eckensberger, 1985). In both research fields, the role of action theory in relation to dialectics in dealing with these dualities was and still is attractive.

The first step in both topics of research was a systematic theoretical analysis dealing with (1) the meaning of culture for psychology and (2) the theoretical



foundation of moral development. Both topics lead to contextualized research by conceptualizing a “regional cultural identity” on the one hand (e.g., Krewer & Eckensberger, 1990; Krewer, 1990) and formulating “types of everyday morality” on the other (see Breit & Eckensberger, 1998; Breit, Döring, & Eckensberger, 2003; Döring, Eckensberger, Huppert, & Breit, 2008; Eckensberger, 2006; Eckensberger, 2010b; Eckensberger, Döring, & Breit, 2001). A later study on the process of coming to terms with cancer was based on a theoretical model, which was developed in both fields of research (culture and morality) (e.g., Eckensberger, Kreibich-Fischer, Gaul, & Schnurre, 1990). However, this study also contributed to the model itself, although it is not closed yet. The following chapter rests upon these studies. But the action-theoretical orientation from the very beginning forced me to justify this approach in the context of mainstream psychology by “meta-theoretical” reflections (Eckensberger, 1979, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010a, 2011a, 2011b). This work will also be summarized in the following. Molz (2010) has recently reconstructed my work also by comparing it with the theories of Yrjö Engeström and Jacques Demorgon.

Although the Culture Inclusive Action Theory (CIAT) is genuinely developmental, the chapter does not intend to give an overview of action theory in developmental psychology in general. Examples for such overviews can be found in Brandstaedter<sup>1</sup> and Lerner (1999) and with reference to social cognition in Eckensberger and Plath (2006a). Rather, the chapter by necessity has a historical (autobiographic) dimension, which implies (1) that it not only rests on my recent work, but it also starts with its root in the 70s; (2) it also sometimes refers to unpublished work like reports; and (3) to save space, sometimes larger chapters I contributed to handbooks or reviews are referred to, which contain detailed literature dealt with in the following.

### Multiple Views on Dialectics in Psychology

The term *dialectical/dialectics* has a long and complex history. Briefly characterized, dialectics can be regarded as (1) a basic principle in dealing with dualities in development/progress (often) in form of a spiral (not helix), also known as the negation of negation; (2) dealing with (overriding, synthesizing) dualities, or contradictions (thesis, antithesis); and (3) the transformation of quantity into quality that implies nonlinear concepts of development. Often it is understood as a principle of interpenetration or interdependency between dualities. Furthermore a

distinction is made between dialectics as an inherent aspect of things or thought (although this distinction is difficult to maintain under a constructivist perspective), but dialectics is also considered an assumed relation between concepts and an operation.

Dialectic thought exists both in the West and in Eastern philosophies—for example, in Taoism (Lin Yuang, 1948). In the West it goes back to classical “old Greek” philosophy (Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato); it was a topic in medieval philosophy but primarily in the modern philosophy of the nineteenth century. Here the outstanding figures are Hegel and Marx, whose political impact certainly did not contribute to an appreciation of dialectics in science. Yet, later it played a role in the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969). These authors already indicate that dialectics was/is not only relevant for psychological theorizing but also for sociology and, in fact, for all sciences that deal with development/change and with dualities (e.g., nature vs. nurture; individual vs. society/culture; norms vs. facts; theory vs. practice, etc.) and thus also for biology (Levins & Lewontin, 1985) and even physics (Cross, 1991).

### *Dialectical Thinking and Developmental Psychology*

As the work, summarized here, began in the 1970s, a word about the “Zeitgeist” of that decade is in order. During that time, dialectics received considerable attention in *developmental psychology* (e.g., by Riegel, 1979; Rychlak, 1976; Schmidt, 1972; Datan & Reese, 1977; Buss, 1979). But the reception of dialectics in psychology was also quite critical. Psychology was—and still is—heavily influenced by Popper’s (1959) critical rationalism, in which the principle of falsification is crucial. It is plausible therefore that for Popper, contradictions (antithesis in dialectics) cannot be *logically* accepted as valid. This argument is explicitly formulated in Popper’s early criticism of dialectics in a paper entitled “What Is Dialectic?” (Popper, 1937/1963). There, he concludes that “two contradictory statements can never be true together” (1963, p. 5). It is important to realize, however, that basically Popper evaluates a “newly formulated” perspective by using traditional criteria of Boolean two-valent logic—which the originators of dialectics Hegel and Fichte had left behind more than a century earlier.

Baltes, Reese, and Nesselroade (1977) stated: “What the basic metaphor of dialectics is, is open

to question” (p. 26), and in the same year Baltes and Cornelius (1977) speculated that “many developmentalists . . . are attracted to dialectics as a philosophical theory or as a theoretical orientation . . . however, whether the convergence of research issues in developmental research with the proposition of dialectics is more than a temporary courtship is another question” (p. 123). Hook (1957) and Mehlberg (1955), like Popper, evaluate dialectics in terms of a traditional scientific method, when Hook states:

“the dialectic method can claim to have meaning and validity only when it is understood to be synonymous with scientific method, and that therefore there is no need to talk about dialectic method at all.”

(Hook, 1957, p. 27, quoted by Baltes and Cornelius, 1977, p. 126)

In contrast, Baltes and Cornelius (1977) have discussed different aspects and levels of the principles of scientific method much more moderately and in more detail. They claimed pragmatically or strategically: “In order to implement a dialectical perspective, pluralistic but systematic methodological procedures are necessary” (p. 130). This argument is based on their effort to break the associative link between the dialectical perspective and paradigm as well as between paradigms and the scientific method. They argue, “A dialectical perspective need not be linked with a specific metaphysical . . . paradigm nor with a specific epistemological model, but may be better implemented by the utilization of multiple world views or meta-paradigms” (p. 130). The same is true for “lower-level research methodologies” (p. 130). So these authors somehow tried to eat the cake (take a dialectical perspective) and keep it too (by sticking to traditional scientific methods). In other contexts Baltes, Reese, and Nesselrode (1977) used the term *dialectics* at the same formal level as “mechanistic” and “organismic” (p. 23 ff.), thereby suggesting a specific paradigm (see p. 877 ff.). Yet, as will be shown, I have not only argued slightly differently (see Eckensberger, 1979), but I am still convinced that the assumption of dialectical relations is productive in science and psychology in particular.

### The Action Theory Enters the Scene

Important aspects of action theory can be summarized as follows (Eckensberger, 2001a): Action theory is not a formalized and unitary theory agreed

upon by the scientific community but, rather, a *family of theories*. Like dialectics, action concepts also have a long and complex history, again going back to the “old Greeks” (Aristotle) and existing since the very beginning of the formal discipline of psychology in the last century both in Europe and North America, although it varied in saliency during its history. In the psychology in Germany in 1874, Brentano, a teacher of Freud’s, focused on *intentionality* as a basic feature of consciousness, leading to the concept “*acts of consciousness*.” Ten years later, Dilthey (1894/1968) distinguished between the *explanation of nature* and *understanding the mind/soul*, a duality that paved the way for the ongoing discourse on the *duality of explanation and understanding* (v. Wright, 1971). At the turn of the twentieth century, Münsterberg, a disciple of Wundt and one of the founders of an applied psychology, proposed *action as the basic unit* of psychology rather than sensations. In North America, James developed a sophisticated theory of action at the end of the nineteenth century, which anticipated a remarkable number of action theory concepts (see Barbalet, 1997). These early traditions were, however, overruled by the neo-positivistic *logic of explanation*, expounded by the Vienna circle in philosophy that was quite in line with behaviorism in psychology. They were taken up in philosophy by Wittgenstein’s “language games,” which are assumed to be different in natural science and the humanities. In 1920, Stern criticized the mainstream psychology of the time because it neglected *intentionality* and also *cultural change* as a framework for human development. And it is probably no wonder that Bühler (1927) and Vygotsky (1927) both published on a crises of psychology in the very same year.

### Action As the Basic Unit of Analysis

When seen from our contemporary vantage point, action theory terms have increased in importance again during the last three or four decades. Bruner’s (1991) “acts of meaning” elucidated the difference between meaning and information and focused on contexts. Freese and Sarbini (1985) published on goal-directed behavior, whereas Martin, Sugarman, and Thompson (2003) discussed the question of agency in psychology. In Germany, Boesch (1991) published a remarkable introduction to his Symbolic Action Theory (see also Boesch, 2011). Its development was recently carefully reconstructed by Lonner and Hayes (2007). Groeben

(1986) analyzed the relation between the concepts of action, doing, and behavior (historically as well), and Straub (2006) discussed action theory from a linguistic and cultural point of view and published an interdisciplinary discourse on action theory (Straub & Werbik, 1999), to mention but some of these developments. In fact, the term *action* also has a long and controversial history in philosophy. At least Juarrero (1999) and her discussion of action as a complex system is to be mentioned here, also because some of her concepts will be used in the following as they are quite compatible with my own theoretical orientation.

### ACTION THEORY IN DIFFERENT FIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Although not a focus of mainstream psychology, action theory is also applied (implicitly or explicitly) in a variety of its subfields. This is true for basic science—in theories of motivation (e.g., Heckhausen, 1989; Gollwitzer, 1990; Kornadt, 1982)—problem solving (e.g., Dörner & Kaminski, 1988), ontogenetic *development* (e.g., Oppenheimer & Valsiner, 1991; Brandtstaedter & Lerner, 1998), social psychology (von Cranach, 1991), and particularly cultural psychology (Boesch, 1971, 1991; Cole, 1990; Eckensberger, 1990a, 1990b). It is also true for educational psychology (Bruner, 1996), organizational psychology or psychology of work (Hacker, 1986) sport psychology (Kaminski, 1982), and “applied domains”—for example, in clinical psychology or counseling (Janet/Schwartz, 1951; Eckensberger & Kreibich-Fischer, 1994; Eckensberger & Plath, 2006b; Plath & Eckensberger, 2008).

Particularly the applied domain is of central importance here, because since the very beginnings there has been a conceptual split between general nomothetic psychology and psychology as a means to solve individual and social problems. This tension is one reason for the development of an “ecological orientation” of the 1970s focused on the issue of “two realities” (Boesch, 1971) of real life and the laboratory. Therefore, I have proposed (Eckensberger, 1995a, 2003, 2004) to allocate two different types of actions to these fields (theory building and problem solving) that have quite different criteria and implications. A similar distinction has been made recently by Smedslund (2009), who additionally called for taking problem-solving strategies more seriously in science. But basically I (Eckensberger, 1989a) interpreted action theory as a bridge between theory

and practice, between general laws and contexts (*see also* Eckensberger, 1979, 2003, 2004). In addition, an action-based cultural psychology, for example, becomes an integrated enterprise that is developmental as well as cognitive, affective, and motivational (cf. Boesch, 1976, 1991; Cole, 1990, 1996; Eckensberger, 1990a, 1990b).<sup>2</sup> Considering the breadth of action theoretical frameworks, it is not surprising that neither are the issues studied similar nor is the terminology coherent or fully agreed upon by different authors or traditions.

From an analytical perspective, to *act* does not mean to *behave* (although some authors consider actions as a particular subtype of behavior). To speak of an *action* rather than of behavior implies at least the following features:

1. Broadly speaking, it means that sentences, symbols, but also mental states *refer to* something in the world (Searle, 1980). *Intentionality* basically means *that a subject* (called *agency*) *refers to the world*. Intentionality, therefore, is intrinsically a *relational* concept. Agencies refer to the world by *acting* with reference to the world, by *experiencing* it (they think, feel, perceive, imagine, etc.), by influencing it (actions are genuinely contextual), and by *speaking* about it. The latter is called *speech act*. An *intentional state* thus implies a particular *content* and a *psychic mode* (a subject can *think* that it rains, *wish* that it rains, *claim* that it rains, etc., where rain is the *content* and thinking, wishing, and claiming are *modes*). The *intent of the action* is the intentional state of an action; the *intended consequence* or *goal* its content. This implies what is also called “futurity” (Barbalet, 1997) or future orientation of an action. It follows that actions are not necessarily observable from the outside. If they are, one also uses the term *doing* (Groeben, 1986). However, *intentionally allowing something to happen* as well as *intentionally refraining from doing something* are both actions (von Wright, 1971; Janich, 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, it is assumed that action involves the subjective *free choice* of alternatives to do something (A or B), to let something happen intentionally or to refrain intentionally from doing something. This condition is closely related to the (subjective perception) of *free will*. Although the control aspect is sometimes also expanded to include the *intended effects* of an action, these two aspects should be distinguished, because the effects of an action can be beyond the control of

the agency, although the decision to act itself was controlled by intentionality.

2. Actions in principle are *potentially conscious activities* of an *agency*. But the consciousness of actions is discussed differently by different authors. Whereas some authors claim that consciousness is a necessary aspect of an action (which also implies the methodical possibility of asking actors about their actions), I have claimed that only the *potential* self-reflectivity of an agency (and a specific action) is crucial (Eckensberger, 1979). This not only implies that a self-reflective action may be a rare event (e.g., during a day) but also that actions can turn into automatisms or habits, yet still remain actions. This rather tricky issue was a problem in action theory from the very beginning. In Paris, Pierre Janet wrote his dissertation about *Automatisme psychologique* (Janet, 1889) to deal with non-consciousness in actions. This was the beginning of an elaborated action theoretical system of neuroses (see Schwartz, 1951). Freud (1923) of course chose a different solution of non-conscious actions in conceptualizing a dynamic unconsciousness, but he also postulated a “descriptive unconsciousness” (habits). This implication, however, calls for the analysis of the *development of single actions*. That is one reason why *development* is a genuine and crucial dimension in many action theories (as *micro-process* or *actual genesis*, as *ontogenesis*, and as *social/cultural change*; see Fig. 17.1).

3. Back in 1979, I therefore proposed interpreting action theories as a “theory family” (Eckensberger, 1979) based on the *potentially self-reflective subject or agency* (see p. 881). This position relates to the basic issue of whether *Homo sapiens* have a *special position in nature*, because this species is, as far as we know, the only one that can decide to a certain extent *not to follow natural laws in their actions* but can intentionally and reflexively follow *cultural rules* (e.g., of prudence, of social/cultural conventions, morality, law, and religion) as well, which (s)he also “created.” This intentional rule following implies that although an agency is in principle considered autonomous, actions are not arbitrary. It is important that the term *agency* is not restricted to a single subject here, but it may also include others or even groups (Eckensberger, 1990b, 1996b). Therefore we sometimes speak also of co-agencies or co-actions, which imply shared goals and/or coordinated actions.

4. The tension between autonomy (free choice) and heteronomy (intuitive<sup>4</sup> rule following) is basic to many action theories and is therefore also the focus in the social/cultural context of actions (cf. Parsons, 1937/1968). One can try to resolve this tension, however, by assuming that cultural rules and their alteration are also man-made, although the implied intentionality of cultural rules/norms may “get lost” over time. This is why Smedslund (1984) can understand culture as “the invisible obvious.”

In principle within this theoretical frame, an action links the actor/agency and his/her environment (see James, 1897). Intentionality is not only a core concept for understanding the individual/agency (Eckensberger & Meacham, 1984), but at the same time it is also possible to conceptualize culture as being the result of actions and co-actions (Eckensberger, 1979, 1990a, 1990b, 1996b) or as an intentional world (Shweder, 1990).<sup>5</sup> We (Eckensberger, Krewer, & Kaspar, 1984, p. 99) elaborated on this issue by claiming that actions result in material social and symbolic changes of the environment on the one hand (this is why culture is sometimes understood as “the man-made part of the environment,”; Herskovits, 1948), and they result in the development of cognitive and affective schemata in the subject on the other hand. The specific cultural contents and rule systems constitute both the cultural context, the external medium (Cole, 1996) in which development occurs, and what is in the minds of members of a concrete culture (D’Andrade, 1984). Most importantly:

Both processes are preconditions, which are contextual conditions for further acts. It is this *dialectical interrelational process between material and ideal action contexts* that is the key to understanding cultural change.”

(Eckensberger, Krewer, & Kaspar, 1984, p. 99, italics LHE)

We sympathized then with the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who relied extensively on human action to explain (or speculate about) the development of society (culture). We specified:

(1) Every human act is subject to habituation and each action solidifies into a model; (2) this habituation of actions is standardized reciprocally in the fundamental dyadic face-to-face situation with two actors; (3) if this standardization is communicated to a third member (e.g., socialization), this makes it possible to distinguish

types of actors as well as types of actions and this in turn results in the formation of institutions. Thus institutions have a history, which creates them . . . (but) the logic of institutions does not consist in its external functionality, but rather consists in the way it is reflected by their participants.

(Eckensberger, Krewer, & Kaspar, 1984, p. 100)

Similarly, White (1959) understood culture as a set of extra-somatic symbols (symbolates), which are ossified forms of human activities. This does not mean that all historical changes are intended; they can, of course, also be unintended—an aspect that Graumann (1996) underlined when he interpreted Wundt's early ideas on historical change. So, cultural psychology does not focus on concrete cultures but on the general *concept* of culture and its relevance to psychology.<sup>6</sup> And, as proposed, thereby psychological and cultural concepts are intrinsically and mutually inter-connected.

Of course, this perspective poses a serious problem for understanding psychology as a natural science based on functional or (efficient) causal processes. It was again Boesch (1971) who aptly pinpointed this tension when he formulated: "It is the dilemma of psychology that it deals as a natural science with an object that creates history" (p. 9, translated by LHE). It is evident that this leads to serious (epistemological and methodical) problems, as long as psychology is understood as a natural science, which basically tries to interpret events/processes in terms of causes and/or functions. No wonder that this general action theoretical perspective (in my version of 1979) was strongly criticized. Malpass and Poortinga (1986), for example, argued like Popper (1937) and Hook (1957) by basically understanding psychology as a natural (nomothetic) science and likewise by evaluating the self-reflective paradigm from a mainstream perspective. Consequently, they first claimed that action theory concepts have to be "formulated in *causal* terms." And, in fact, also some philosophers try to explain actions by interpreting beliefs and desires as *causes* of actions (e.g., Goldmann, 1970). But there is more or less agreement at present that actions cannot epistemologically be *explained* by (efficient) *causes* but have to be *understood* in terms of their *reasons* (cf. Habermas, 1984; von Wright, 1971). Juarrero (1999) also criticizes the attempt to apply the deductive-nomological model to understanding actions. Additionally, I (Eckensberger, 1996) have argued that *causality* usually is *empirically defined* by *intentional actions*

(variations in experiments), implying that the relation of causality and finality is exactly the other way around: finality is the precondition for defining causality (von Wright, 1971). But actions cannot be explained by the same rational. Second, Malpass and Poortinga (1986) have argued that "culture as the product of human actions transcends behaviour as studied in psychology" (p. 29). I also have refuted this argument (Eckensberger, 1996a) by showing that behavior alone is too narrow an object of psychology. Even in cognitive anthropology, culture is located in the heads of people (D'Andrade, 1984), and behavior never occurs without a context.

The *course of actions* is particularly relevant in empirical contexts. Analytically, actions are divided into *action phases*. The number and features of these action phases differ, however, according to one's issue of concern. Whereas Boesch (1976, 1991), in following Janet (Schwartz, 1951), distinguishes three main action phases (beginning phase, its course, and end), others (e.g., Heckhausen, Gollwitzer, & Weinert, 1997) later propose four phases (a pre-decision phase, a pre-actional phase, the action phase [doing], and a post-action phase) for Heckhausen's work on motivation. Here, the decision to act plays an important role (Heckhausen uses the metaphor of crossing the Rubicon). We (Eckensberger & Emminghaus, 1982) distinguished a total of six action phases in dealing particularly with "action barriers/impediments" (perception of the situation; attribution of the origin of a barrier, attribution of responsibility for the barrier; estimation of action possibilities; decision to act; post-decision). Kornadt (1982) also used six quite similar phases for analyzing aggressive actions (analysis of the situation, activation of the aggression motive, evaluation of the action, decision to act, act, and action result). For a critique/refinement, see Eckensberger (1988). Within all these phases, there is an *interplay between cognitive, affective (motivational), and energetic aspects* of the action.

## Dealing With the Duality Personality and Culture *Toward a Dialectical Relation Between Personality and Culture*

The sub-branch in psychology that dealt with culture in the 1970s was cross-cultural research. The International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was founded in 1972. Its members followed the experimental logic, which was the methodical ideal of mainstream psychological

research at that time. Therefore, cross-cultural differences were considered a consequence of an experiment in nature. Consequently, culture was understood as an independent variable having (a causal) influence on practically all psychological constructs. Cross-cultural psychology was thus understood primarily as a method (Berry, 1980; Boesch & Eckensberger, 1969; Eckensberger, 1969; Eckensberger, 1973; Whiting, 1954). My own (contextualized) research in a foreign culture (Afghanistan) was also at first undertaken from a mainstream (nomothetic) perspective (e.g., Eckensberger, 1968, 1972, 1973). However, in the long run it resulted in critical reflections on this mainstream approach (Eckensberger, 1979), because I learned more about the limits than possibilities of the traditional research strategies (for a summary, see also Eckensberger & Plath, 2003) in dealing with foreign cultures. So fairly early, I came to the conclusion that to really understand the meaning of data collected in a foreign culture, one should develop a theory *that not only explains ontogeny of an individual but also culture and its development* (Eckensberger, 1979, 2003, 2010). This was in line with Riegel's (1975) demand that developmental psychology should aim at analyzing "the changing individual in a changing world," but it was more than that: it called for a *theoretical inclusion of culture into psychology*—particularly called for also by Boesch (1991), Cole (1990), and Valsiner (1987), whose biographical examination of the culture concept in psychology was carefully reconstructed by Mey and Mruk (1998). He was probably the one who most explicitly argued that culture was not an independent variable (Valsiner, 1988).

To check whether existing theories can meet this demand, I followed and extended the meta-theoretical perspective Reese and Overton (1970) introduced into developmental psychology. It was based on Kuhn's (1969/1970) ideas on the development of science, which is well-known today (see Frezzo, 2004) but was new in those days. Kuhn assumed (based on the reconstruction of physics) that science did not develop by a continuous process of upholding or falsifying hypotheses/theories but rather by a radical change in the perspective (worldview) on the subject matter of the theory. The underlying worldviews in theories define the qualitative features of theory development as well as the questions that can be asked and the methods that can be applied (exemplars). The scientific community follows this paradigm. Kuhn therefore claimed that science evolves by discontinuous

"revolutions" because newly developed paradigms are qualitatively different from or are incommensurable with the former. The same applies to theories, formulated on the basis of the new paradigm. Different theories can therefore not easily be evaluated comparatively; they also cannot be evaluated (traditionally) in terms of being right or wrong from this perspective but, rather, as being more or less fruitful, depending on the issue of concern. It is important to note that the core of Kuhn's argument, the *change* of paradigms in psychology, was neither followed<sup>7</sup> by me nor by Reese and Overton (1970); rather, it was assumed that psychology is a multiparadigmatic science. But the idea of the internal relationship of *model*, *theory*, and *methods* was maintained as well as the notion that science is a *social process*. Therefore, at first more attention was directed at the relationship/incommensurability of paradigms, which were all evaluated according to their fruitfulness in allowing the inclusion of ontogeny and cultural change, and of culture into psychology in the sense that they could be explained by the same theory. In the early analysis, I proposed five paradigms that more or less covered psychology (Eckensberger, 1979). Three paradigms (quantification or multitude and extent [use of measurements and statistics], system theory [e.g., sociobiology], and the model of the potentially self-reflective individual [Boesch's action theory]) were added to the two Reese and Overton (1970) distinguished (mechanistic [learning theory] and organismic [Piaget's genetic structuralism]).

Many of the following arguments basically *start* with the notion of a dualistic position. Therefore, at least a few sentences are necessary to justify this decision because it is true that it became rather unpopular in science for some time, particularly after Dennett published "Consciousness Explained" (1991), in which he even accused the dualistic position of being antiscientific. A similar position is held by Bhaskar (1999), who also "argued against the dualism and splits that dominated the ... contemporary human science", and he proposed to look for "a third subsuming position which could reconcile these stark polarities and oppositions, and which could situate the two extremes as special cases of the more general subsuming position," thereby proposing in principle a dialectic (Hegelian) procedure. Yet, I argue that this does not mean that dualities are generally not a fruitful *starting point* in science. It may be sufficient in the present context only to refer to the detailed discussion of psycho-physical duality

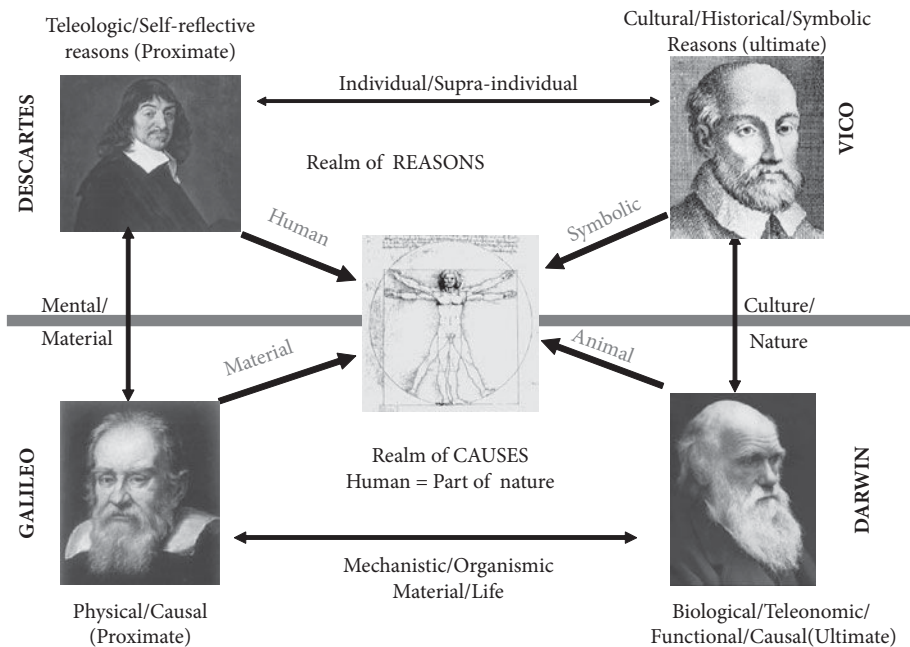
by Meixner (2004). He has even distinguished 11 arguments for dualism (pp. 122–158). Beyond that, the four perspectives in psychology later proposed by Eckensberger (2002a, 2008a, 2009) were compatible with Rychlak's (1993) four “groundings” of *Physikos, Bios, Socius*, and *Logos* in psychology.

So it seems to be quite productive to start with the assumption of dualities and to discuss their inter-relationship by some general principles but by at the same time also keeping them (see p. 930). Beyond all efforts either to overcome dichotomies by *reductionism* or *incommensurability* and *complementation* (Eckensberger, 2002a) or to *eradicate* them by either subsuming one dichotomy under the other by formulating a “more general sublimating position” one easily runs into the danger of getting a solution that in a way is *ontologically empty*. Quantum Theory may serve as an example that demonstrates the attractiveness but also difficulties and dangers in that approach. Quantum Theory seems only to work as a *regulative idea* but not in the reality of science (Görnitz & Görnitz, 2010). I will return to this central problem later.

Figure 17.1 illustrates particularly the four perspectives distinguished as well as their inter-relationship.

- *The physical perspective:* Most historical reconstructions of psychology underline that physics was the most attractive model for this emerging new science at the end of the nineteenth century. This was strongly supported by Kurt Lewin (1931), who, in a classical paper entitled “The Transition from an Aristotelian to the Galileian Worldview in Biology and Psychology,” called explicitly for defining psychology as a *natural science* and choosing physics as the proper model for psychology. To represent this perspective, he chose the Italian mathematician, physicist, and astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1643), who not only came into conflict with the church because he argued for a “heliocentric” worldview but also discovered the law of “free fall.” Reese and Overton (1970) named it the “mechanistic worldview” (e.g., Learning Theory). It represents the *homo mechanicus*.

- *The biological perspective:* In 1980 Norbert Bischof, in his inaugural address at the German Congress of Psychology in Zürich, agreed that psychology is and should be a natural science, but he accused Lewin of having selected the wrong science to overcome Aristotelian thinking. Instead of physics, he proposed *biology* as the proper



**Figure 17.1** Distinguishing the four perspectives in psychology and their inter-relationship. (after Eckensberger 2010a, 2010b, 2011b)

model for psychology and used Charles Darwin (1809–1882) as the key thinker, who published the “Origin of Species” in 1859, in which he claimed that the existence of different species was not the act of God’s creation but the result of a long process of natural selection. Interestingly, Bischof did not refer to the discussion of Reese and Overton (1970). But both perspectives represented a natural science perspective, both of its representatives were involved in conflicts with the church, because their theories and empirical work contradicted the worldview presented in the Bible, and therefore both contributed to the Enlightenment (e.g., the organismic worldview/ Piaget, sociobiology; Eckensberger 1979, 2002a). It represents the *homo sapiens sapiens*.

- *The socio-cultural perspective:* In an earlier paper (Eckensberger, 1979), culture was used simply as a concept that had to be integrated into psychology. Later (Eckensberger, 2002) it seemed justified or useful, even necessary, to distinguish a *cultural perspective* in psychology as a perspective in its own right. This resulted from the conceptualization of a (sub)discipline *cultural psychology* and the emergence of culture-bound *indigenous psychologies*, which became salient in the late twentieth century, although their roots go back to the foundation of modern psychology at the end of the nineteenth century (Eckensberger, 2010a). Ng & Liu (2002) have even spoken of a cultural revolution in psychology. I have chosen Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744) as a representative of this perspective, because he is considered one of the first to have developed a systematic methodic approach to history. He called for an analysis of the “birth” and development of human societies and institutions; proposed the study of language, myths, and tradition; and underlined the symbolic meaning of words. For Vico history was already a source to help understand humans because humans are the ones who *create* history and *form* human rule systems. This is in line, for example, with the anthropologist Geertz (1973), who understood culture as “a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, and instructions for governing behaviour” (p. 44). This understanding also defined the centrality of morality (our second concern) as one important rule system of culture. It represents the *homo symbolicus* (Cassirer, 1921/1922; Deacon, 1997).

- *The perspective of the potentially self-reflective human being:* The French philosopher,

mathematician, and natural scientist René Descartes (1596–1650), who counts as founder of modern rationalism (Cartesianism), was proposed to represent this perspective on humans. He is famous for his dictum “*cogito ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”). Clearly in the present context, his dictum is used because it underlines the importance of the principal ability of humans to be *self-conscious* or *self-reflective*. Although it is argued (Fischer, 2003) that the famous *cogito ergo sum* is logically not compelling because thinking as such is arbitrary in content like meditating or walking. The reflective action should therefore not be thinking but *doubting*. Although one can doubt everything, one can not doubt that one doubts. It is interesting that according to Fischer (2003), Descartes first used the phrase “*dubito ergo sum*” (“I doubt, therefore I am”). It is claimed that under a dialectic perspective, only this self-reflected negation leads to a logically compelling new stage of self-assurance. This topic also led Descartes to distinguish two different substances: material substance (*res extensa*) and mental substance (*res cogitans*). He is therefore often referred to as one of the founders of the duality of mind and matter (thus called “Cartesian dualism”). In any case, Descartes is responsible for an understanding of human nature as radically reflexive, meaning that we are not only self-conscious in the usual sense but uniquely conscious of the fact that we are able to reflect on the contents of our own minds (Taylor, 1989). (Example: action theories, Eckensberger, 1979, 2002a). It represents the *homo interpretans*,

Figure 17.1 summarizes not only the four models of man relevant to psychology but also distinguishes the general relationships between the four perspectives, particularly highlighting the classical splits or incommensurability based on them. The upper and lower parts represent the two cultures, differentiated by Snow (1959/1963) in his famous Cambridge lecture (see also Frezzo, 2004). Whereas the human/cultural perspectives basically deal with created personal and *cultural rules* and therefore constitute the “realm of reasons,” the natural sciences perspective is based on *natural laws* and the “realm of causes”. Mack (2006), with reference to Dilthey (1894/1968), recently distinguished between an “**e**- and **u**-type of thinking” (**e** is based on explanation, and **u** is based on understanding). Within these two domains, in the realm of reasons the split



between individual (agency) and supra-individual (aggregate/culture) objects is evident, and in the realm of causes the difference between a mechanistic and an organismic worldview is illustrated. Additionally, one can see the splits between nature and culture but also the Cartesian split of mind and matter. It is evident as well that the ontologies of the perspectives themselves differ: material (physical) versus symbolic (cultural) and the basic distinction between human (self-reflective) versus animal (biological).

Because the perspectives themselves are understood as ways of looking at the world, they are considered epistemological. Therefore one can, at present, not argue that they represent the *sciences* of physics, biology, psychology, and anthropology/sociology, which are primarily or historically defined by ontological categories, like the three worlds distinguished by Popper (1977). Rather, the productivity of the argument is that one can, in principle, take all perspectives in each science (*see*, in detail, Eckensberger, 2002). Whereas in earlier times ontology was considered to lead epistemology in theory construction (because in empiricism the results of research corrected theories), nowadays, with the increasing relevance of constructivism (Mahoney, 2004), epistemology *leads* ontology in a way, because *theories* determine data collection to a great extent and therefore the data themselves. One can even argue that ontology and epistemology are no longer separated (Gülerce, 1997). As will be seen, however, in the following a contextual constructivism (Eckensberger, 1990) is advocated.

### **Personality and Culture: Action Theory in Dialectics**

In the early paper on the integration of culture into psychology, I argued (Eckensberger, 1979) along the lines of the transformative method formulated by the post Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and described by Buss (1979). Feuerbach's method was developed within his critical thinking about religion.<sup>8</sup> It basically entails reversing the subject and object of a statement, thereby hoping to get closer to truth. I basically used the transformative method in saying that the person is shaped by culture and culture is shaped by persons. So this duality was framed as a *dialectical relation* and it attempted to integrate person and culture. Similarly, Bandura (1997) claimed later that “people are both producers and products of social systems” (p. 6).

The earlier (Eckensberger, 1979) as well as the much more sophisticated later analysis (Eckensberger, 2002) showed that if the inclusion of ontogeny and cultural change as well as the interpretation of agency and culture within the same theoretical framework is aimed at, then only the paradigm of the potentially self-reflective subject seems to meet both criteria, when normative concepts (like morality) and the meaning of culture and cultural rules are of interest. In that early paper, not only the relation between person and culture was called a *dialectical* one because they were interpenetrating each other, but *the human action was located between the subject (agency) and culture*, thereby qualifying what dialectical meant in this duality. Dialectics in this sense means that neither exists without the other. It has been proposed that human action mediates between the individual and culture as a synthesis of that duality.

In doing so, I also chose the *intentional and potentially self-reflective agency* as the *model of man*, which is fundamental to the psychological understanding of the subject as *agency* (Eckensberger, 1979). This qualification of the human being is nowadays called “the human kind” (Danzinger, 1997; Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003; Martin & Sugarman, 2009). Also Smedslund (2009) has recently elaborated a similar model of man that is unique to humans. So intentionality and self-reflectivity were considered the characteristics of the model of man, which I later (Eckensberger, 1993) called the “*homo interpretans*.” Differing from Baltes and Nesselrode (1977), I considered dialectics methodologically as equivalent to causality and functionality in the mechanistic and organismic paradigm (*see* p. 868) inter-relating culture and personality (agency) and not as a metaphor or paradigm.

The relationship of the potentially self-reflective and socio-cultural perspective, just elaborated, is illustrated in Figure 17.2 by using human action as the genuine *unit* of psychology that mediates agency and culture in both directions and thereby synthesizes them. The ring structure (Leontiev, 1977) of Russian activity theory is based on the same theoretical model (Eckensberger, 1995), as is Haste's (2008) theoretical position, which also relies very much on Vygotsky.

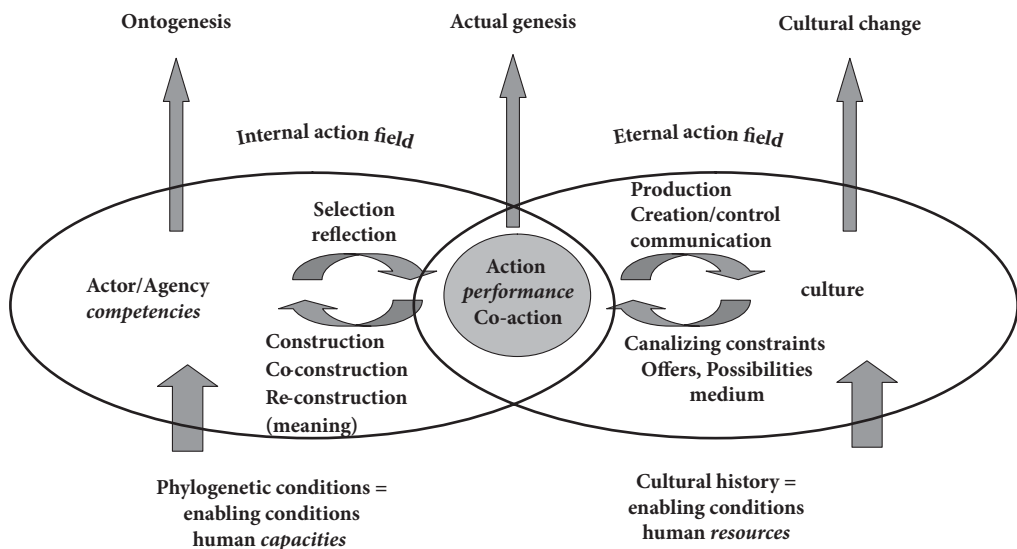
The *interpretation* of agency as a potentially self-reflective being who, in addition to reconstructing the world (*homo interpretans*) and constructing culture (*homo faber*) to a certain extent, also “creates

him- or herself” (thinks of the person he or she wants to be, develops norms about right and wrong, which more or less implies upholding one’s character) calls for the integration of individual as well as cultural *rule* and *interpretation systems* (Eckensberger, 1993a, 1993b, 1996a, 1996b). Humans create and shape culture (material, symbolic artifacts and social rules), which are in turn preconditions for their actions. This is why these conditions are always saturated with teleological structures. This perspective also implies that they can be altered to varying degrees. As mentioned, an action theory that includes culture quite naturally implies a genuinely developmental perspective, because the interrelationship between culture and individual is based on *intentional processes over time*. But development is conceptualized on different levels: On the phylogenetic level (phylogeny), the individual level (ontogeny), the action level (actual genesis or micro process), and the cultural level (history and cultural change). These developmental levels are illustrated in Figure 17.2.

By placing action (co-action) between the subject (agency) and the context (culture), two action fields are formed: the external and internal action field (Boesch, 1976, 1991; Eckensberger, 1990a, 1990b). They overlap and are interconnected by the action, which is part of both, and which therefore acts as a bridge (or a pivot) between them. The internal action field encompasses the subjective

meaning people attribute to a situation, and the external action field or cultural factors include existing shared cultural concepts such as shared interpretational patterns, scripts, and expectations. It is this conceptual status of culture and human action that justifies the term *culture-inclusive action theory*.<sup>10</sup>

This approach not only results in constructions and co-constructions of cognitive and affective (evaluative) schemata in subjects but also implies results in symbolic, material, and social structures in a culture, which in turn form canalizing constraints (ranging from inhibitions to taboos) and/or supporting encouragements or *selective* pressures (ranging from support to duties) given in the cultural context or action possibilities (Eckensberger, 1990a, 1990b; Martin & Sugarman, 1999), which also become part of the schemata. Also Poortinga recently (e.g., 2002, p. 327) formulated this model by distinguishing constraints and affordances quite in detail, although he does so in a different paradigmatic context. Yet in the following the term constraints is kept and the term “affordances” is “adopted” because of its semantic convenience. But these aspects of culture are understood here as parts of a dialectical relation of *emergence* and *selection*: The basic idea is that culture *emerges* on the basis of *human actions* and *reflections* (upward emergence) but also has a *selective function/effect* via actions on humans and their development, which are called “downward selection” in analogy of *upward* and *downward causation* in<sup>11</sup> in



**Figure 17.2** Different kinds and levels of development in an action theory framework. (after Eckensberger, 1979, 1990a, 1990b, 2010a, 2010b).

Complex System Theory (Campbell, 1974; Juarrero, 1999). These terms are avoided here; rather, the terms *upward emergence* and *downward selection* are preferred because the former still suggest a reductionist worldview, which is, however, not intended (Murphy, 2010, suggests *downwards constraints*, but we want also to include downward affordances from the culture point of view, hence we use the more comprehensive term *downward selection*). But the basic dialectical ideas formulated in my early writings are quite compatible with this terminology, which we therefore consider as being more precise than just interpenetration or interdependence. But we are also aware of the fact that both (emergence and downward causation) are not fully agreed upon (Davies, 2006; Stephan, 2002). A detailed discussion of this discourse is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter. We will come back to this terminology and its usefulness later.

### CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

In trying to integrate these concepts, one simultaneously ends up understanding psychology in general as *cultural psychology*, a concept that has regained importance in the last decades. As mentioned, this new branch of psychology (better: renewed branch; see Stern, 1920) is partly rooted in the socio-historical school (e.g., Branco & Valsiner, 1997; Cole, 1990, 1996; Ratner, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Valsiner, 1987; Wertsch, 1985 and Holzkamp<sup>12</sup> in Germany), and it is partly based on Piaget and Janet and even Lewin (Boesch, 1976, 1991; Bruner, 1990; Eckensberger, 1979, 1990, 1995, 2002; Greenfield & Bruner, 1966; Krewer, 1990; Straub, 2006) as well as on some other traditions (Allesch & Billmann-Mahecha, 1990; Gergen, Gülerce, Misra, & Lock, 1996; Price-Williams, 1980; Shweder, 1990). So I have already argued for some time that action theory is not just the most adequate theory for the perspective of the potential self-reflective agency but for cultural psychology *in general*, precisely because it allows one to *synthesize* agency and culture in time (ontogeny and history).<sup>13</sup>

After having examined the role of action theory in the dialectic inter-relation of agency and culture, the role of dialectics in Culture-Inclusive Action Theory will now be elaborated.

### *Person and Culture: Dialectics in Action Theory—Action Levels*

It has been argued that the potential self-reflectivity of the agency as well as internal (individual)

standards and external (cultural) rules are critical attributes of action theory. It is postulated that both are inter-connected in this perspective by the *culture-inclusive action*. In doing so, one also integrates Shweder's (1980) proposal of cultural rules and research on the domain specificity of human cognitions (differentiated by authors like Nucci, Smetana, and Turiel; for an overview, see Eckensberger & Plath, 2006a), which constitute individual standards. They both shape the normative frameworks for actions in the internal and external action fields (Eckensberger, 1990, 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Eckensberger, Kapadia, & Wagels, 2000). It is claimed that both emerge from the same type of action, although culture is ontologically often understood as a supra-individual phenomenon (White, 1959), it is saturated with intentionality. Things are, however, not only more complex but also more productive, because by partly following Janet (Schwartz, 1951) and Boesch (1976, 1991) different *action levels* are distinguished. Not only *primary* and *secondary actions* (Janet, Boesch) are differentiated but also *tertiary actions* (Eckensberger, 1990, 1996, 2003, 2006a, 2010a).

These levels come about because it is quite normal that barriers/impediments occur in every action. One can almost regard them as the condition for or initiator of development (see particularly Boesch, 1976; Eckensberger & Emminghaus, 1982; Eckensberger, Breit, & Döring, 1999; Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Ulich, 1987). These can only be experienced, however, because every action already implies normative frameworks, which serve as standards<sup>14</sup> for determining whether or not the action was adequately accomplished. These barriers lead to reflections, which by necessity occur from a higher level, which *itself emerges through this very reflection*. This is the basic idea of Piaget's (1970) proposal of the notion of reflective abstraction,<sup>15</sup> which is a genuinely *dialectic operation* because the same phenomenon (the action) is at first the subject ("in operation") and then is reflected on as an object (see Kesselring, 1982; Vuyk, 1981). Through this operation, existing structures (levels/stages) are transformed into new ones. So the same phenomena are at first *structure* and then *content*, which is logically contradictory but developmentally plausible. But the three action levels do not only emerge through abstractive reflections (which could end up in an infinite regression), but they additionally have different orientations: *primary actions* are world-oriented, *secondary actions* are action-oriented, and

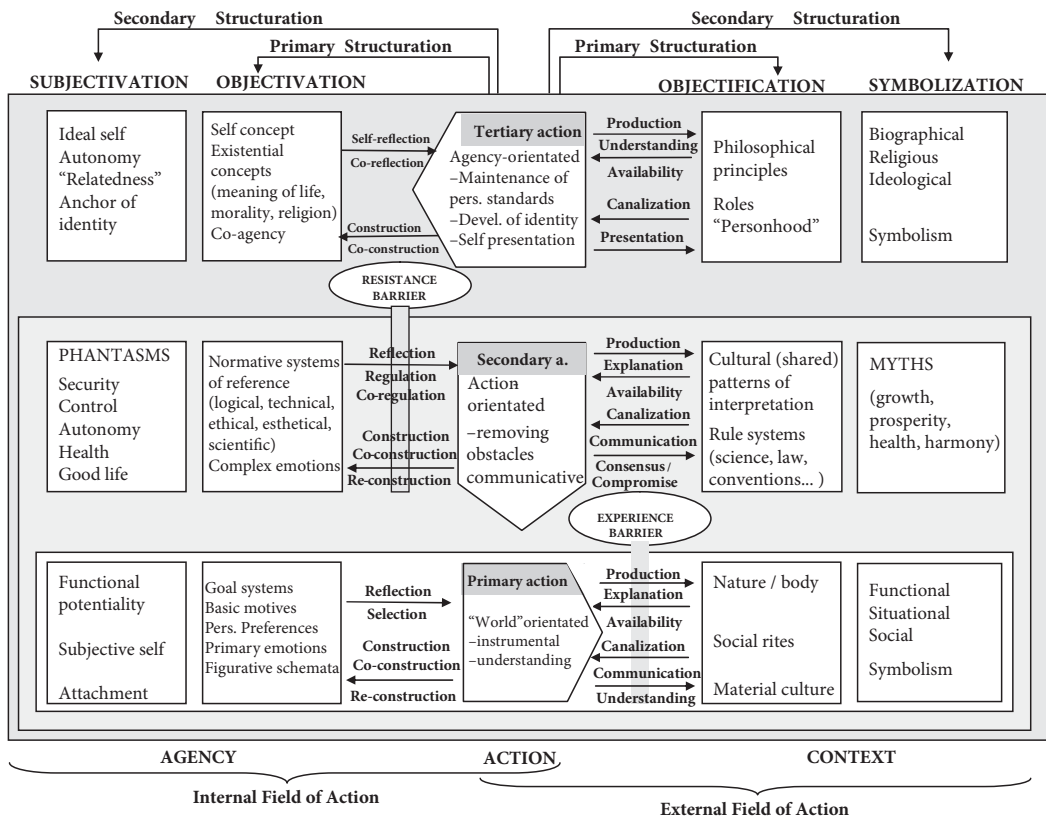
*third-level actions* are agency-oriented. This is the reason that action barriers are of utmost importance for the emergence and development of the action levels (this issue will be taken up in discussing moral development). However, it is again assumed additionally that new action levels do not just emerge through the process of *reflective abstraction* (upward emergence) but that these influence the lower level via downward *selection processes* (constraints and supports) rather than by causal processes. But a possible misunderstanding has to be clarified: As in the case of agency (see p. 873), the reflective abstraction should not be understood as being “firmly fixed on the organism side” and therefore being “fundamentally a-cultural” (Glick, 1985, p. 106). To clarify this point, I tried (Eckensberger, 1990b, p. 48) to apply this term to co-constructions by proposing a reflective understanding and co-reflective understanding, thereby making it cultural or social.

This developmental principle is proposed for both ontogeny (particularly the third level emerges later in development) as well as for actual genesis. Although the action levels are formed in this sequence, it is assumed that the older one gets, the more of these levels are more or less simultaneously active. In general, it depends on the number and kind of barriers that occur in an action. The genesis of the levels is bottom-up, but the interpretation process has to be top-down because all levels are necessary to understand a human primary action. To understand a simple act (primary action like writing a chapter), one has to know the immediate intentions of the writer (to make a particular point within the time span of the deadline given) but also the standards or conventions (secondary actions) in which the chapter has to be written (length, APA format) as well as the fact that the writer is aware of deviating from some other theoretical positions. In addition, this may be essential for the self-identity as a psychologist, and so forth. (tertiary actions). *Therefore CIAT not only helps to understand the proposed dialectics between the subject/agency and culture, but dialectics also help to understand assumed relations within action levels.*

The standards themselves that are the preconditions to experiencing barriers are not only developed during internal processes in ontogenesis, but the experiences of barriers also take place in a specific cultural context, in which different expectations—technical, social, or belief systems (customs, logical, and ethical principles)—set the stage (Eckensberger, 1979, 1985, 1996, 2003, 2010a, 2010b). Thus the

Piagetian model of an active subject is still considered productive, but it has to be complemented by cultural content that appears to become ever more important as the concept of standard increases in complexity in the course of development, as research on Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s theory shows (e.g., Dasen & Heron, 1981; Eckensberger & Zimba, 1997, Snarey, 1985). There is an urgent need to complement Piagetian developmental concepts with more content-orientated concepts of development. This is aimed at particularly by Boesch’s concept of “secondary structures” (see p. 896, but it is also called for by Krishnan’s (1999) proposal to complement it by research in the tradition of socialization processes. These should particularly include cultural rituals of various kinds that are all normative in character.

In the following, the action levels will be described according to their implied structure, interpretation, and experience of standards as well as their concomitant emotional processes. Although the methodological status of the action levels is primarily theoretical they also represent a productive framework for empirical work. They provide a psychologically useful scheme for organizing and inter-relating a variety of psychological concepts; they therefore also enable links to concepts that have not necessarily been defined originally in an action theory perspective. This is not only true for many cognitive constructs but also for motivational and emotional processes and their interrelation (like motivation, emotion, control theories, or self-concepts; see Bettingen, Eckensberger, Gaul, Krewer, Madert, & Prowald, 1993). The reflected action levels were particularly productive in the contextualized research on regional culture (Krewer 1990; Krewer, Momper, & Eckensberger, 1984; Krewer & Eckensberger, 1990), on moral development in the context of education (Breit & Eckensberger, 2004a, 2004b; Eckensberger & Breit, 2003, 2006; Eckensberger, 2002b; Maslowski, Breit, Eckensberger, & Scheerens, 2009; Eckensberger & Chang, in press) and ecological issues (Eckensberger, Döring, & Breit, 2001; Döring, Eckensberger, Breit, & Huppert, 2008; Eckensberger, 1993; Eckensberger, Kasper, Nieder, Schirk, & Sieloff, 1990; Eckensberger Sieloff, Kasper, Schirk, & Nieder, 1992), and particularly on coping with cancer (Eckensberger & Kreibich-Fischer, 1993, 1994; Eckensberger, Kreibich-Fischer, Gaul, & Schnurre, 1990, Eckensberger, Kreibich-Fischer Gaul, Bettingen, Madert, & Prowald, 1993). But these studies also fed back into further developments of the theoretical structure of the CIAT: Figure 17.3 presents an overview of the three action levels distinguished.



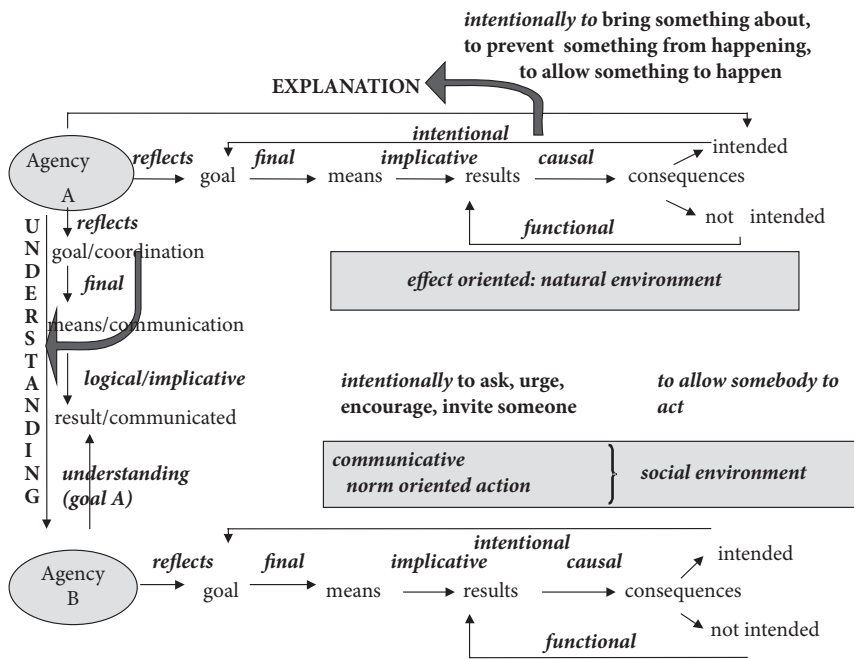
**Figure 17.3** Three action levels: primary (world-oriented), secondary (action-oriented), and tertiary (agency-oriented) actions. (after Eckensberger, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 2010a, 2010b).

### PRIMARY (WORLD-ORIENTED) ACTIONS

Analytically, the *basic structure* of instrumental primary action aims at some *effect* (to bring something about). It is assumed that the *means applied to carry out an action follow rationally (not causally) from the intentions*—that is, they can be justified or made plausible by the agency. They are chosen on the basis of *finality (to reach a goal)*. If they are carried out, the *result* is some change, and this change leads *causally* to some *consequences*. Those consequences of actions that represent the goal are *intended*, others are unintended (to let fresh air into a room [intended goal], one opens the window [does something], after having opened the window it is open [result] and lets [causally] fresh air in [intended], but the room may become cold [unintended]; see Fig. 17.4).

It is useful, however, to at least differentiate *two types of primary actions*.<sup>16</sup> If directed at the *physical/material world*, and aimed at bringing about some *effect* (also “letting things [intentionally] happen,” von Wright, 1971) or *suppressing some effect*, they are called *instrumental actions*. But if

actions are directed at the *social world*—that is, at another *agency B or group*, they cannot (causally) bring something about in *B*, but it is *B* who has to decide to follow or not follow a request/demand by agency *A*, which implies that *B* also has to understand *A*’s intentions. So *A* has to coordinate with *B*’s intentions, means, and even with evaluations of consequences. Thus agency *B*’s intentions have to be *understood* (interpreted) by agency *A*. This presupposes a *communicative attitude* (Habermas, 1984). This type of action is consequently called a *communicative action*. If this orientation not only implies understanding *B*, but also *respecting B*’s intentions, means, and consequences, then this is clearly a *moral action*. Interestingly, in non-Western philosophies/religions (Taoism, Confucianism Hinduism, Buddhism<sup>17</sup>) this adaptive attitude and respect for the non-*A* is extended to include the plant and animal world or even the cosmos. So one can distinguish between two action types that aim at *A*’s *control* of the environment (instrumental and strategic) and two action types, in which *A* aims at



**Figure 17.4** Two main action types: instrumental- and social/norm-oriented action (after Eckensberger, 1993, 1996, 2010b; Eckensberger & Plath, 2006).

*harmonizing* with the environment (communicative and adaptive actions; Sinha, 1996).

This clearly shows that *understanding does not refer to causes but to reasons*. So, basically understanding or communicative actions are appropriate for the social world.

This distinction, however, also depends on the relationship between the agencies **A/B** as defined in the cultural context. If there is no mutual respect (e.g., if agency **B** is a servant who has to follow orders), then this can lead to an instrumental interpretation of agency **B** by agency **A**, called a strategic action by Habermas (1984). In other words, agency **A** interprets **B**'s behavior as something caused by the order, like a natural law without any possibility of deciding not to do it (**B** has to do it). This means that agency **A** treats agency **B** as if(s)he were a part of nature that is governed by causal laws. But the reverse can also occur: a person may speak to his car that is broken and *ask* it not to fail him but to make it for some more miles. Then, in a way, the person treats the car as part of the social world. Hence, the world is *constituted* by the application of the respective action types. Whether or not something is part of the social or natural/causal world is thus a matter of *interpretation* on the part of the agency. Clearly the methodological

status is primarily analytical again. So, agency is characterized by four relations: by being (1) *reflexively* tied to one's goal in the physical environment; (2) orientated at the social world by *understanding* the actions of others; (3) *self-reflexively* related to itself (the "Innenwelt" or "inner world"); and (4) it is related *contemplatively* to some transcendental or ultimate phenomenon (see Fig. 17.4).

In empirical research, these action types enable a methodical distinction that is quite productive for the analysis of data (see Bettingen, Eckensberger, Gaul, Krewer, Madert, & Prowald, 1993, for a manual of data on cancer patients; Eckensberger, Karpadia, & Wagels, 2000, for rules in marriage in India). Empirically these two action types often occur simultaneously (e.g., if somebody asks someone for help), particularly in early childhood, when the physical world and the social world are not totally distinct yet. In developmental psychology, particularly in early childhood, the concept of theory of mind (TOM) is highly relevant to the development of social cognition. Premack and Woodruff formulated this concept in 1978 for chimpanzees, to study the question of whether chimpanzees understand *intentions* or actions of another chimpanzee (see also Boesch<sup>18</sup> & Tomasello, 1998). This concept not only triggered much research with primates other

than humans but also became a broad research program for human infants (understanding intentions of another person is clearly an operation that is the precondition of primary communicative actions; for more detailed information, see Eckensberger & Plath, 2006a).

Actions (goals and means) are selected by the agency from all possible actions on the basis of their personal preferences, called personal concerns in social cognition (proposed particularly by Nucci and Smetana; for detailed references, see Eckensberger & Plath, 2006a). Primary actions form schemata (standards) of technical, logical, and (instrumental) action competence as well as social competencies (social actions). Additionally, they are based on content *knowledge/facts* (what effects can be produced) as well as the effectiveness of means (how can they be produced). So in primary actions, *standards* exist in preferences of goal and means and, of course, in the expectation of action outcomes. Although people relate directly to their nonsocial, material, or natural surrounding, this process also takes place *in a cultural context and/or together with other subjects*. Writing, for example, is inextricably linked to the script that comes with a language—Latin letters differ strikingly from Hindu scripts, both diverge from Arabic ones, and they are all totally different from Chinese characters. Thus, the cultural context already provides shared schemas of writing, including the semantic meanings that refer to the world. On the one hand, these schemas serve as a sort of template for individual and collective experience; on the other hand, humans themselves constructed and modified them in the course of history or, rather, cultural history (upward emergence). They therefore represent the cultural *resources* (cf. Fig. 17.2) individuals can rely on or choose from (fashion, rationality, logic, technology, and economy and their implied standards), which again form the “downward selection” processes of canalizing constraints and affordances (Eckensberger, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 2008a, 2010a, 2010b).

There is considerable agreement among researchers that empirically actions do not just have one goal but many. They can be seen as forming a chain or a hierarchy. To write an article may have the goal of understanding and describing a particular problem and may be considered part of a primary action. Writing individual characters on paper may be taken as subaction or elements of an action (called *actemes* by Boesch, 1991). Yet, writing the article

can also be embedded in a larger set of goals (e.g., to get ahead in a career). These hierarchies are particularly elaborated in instrumental contexts, but they are also relevant to communicative actions.

The following discussion makes use of Boesch's (1976, 1991) distinction of *primary structurations*, which are cognitive, and *secondary structurations*, which represent affective structures/schemata. Yet again this distinction is primarily analytical. But in fact the issue of how cognition and affect interact or merge is probably more important. He presumes that an action (he usually refers to instrumental actions) has *two* components: first, the instrumental component usually studied (e.g., one uses a hammer to drive a nail into the wall) and second, the subjective functional component. Here, Boesch (1976, 1991) applies Lewin's (1951) concept of valence to action elements. Hammering may also be fun—one can let off steam or be proud of being able to hammer successfully. Therefore, Boesch proposes that action results (nail in the wall) lead to two simultaneous feedbacks: one—like in Piaget's theory—is *descriptive* and leads to *cognitive structures* (schemata, formal condensations of similar actions), which represent primary structurations and therefore an objectivation of the action in the agency and of material consequences of actions in the real world (culture), which he calls “objectification” (Boesch, 1991). The other form of feedback is *evaluative* and leads to *affective structures* (*secondary structurations*). They are basically threefold: At this point, he talks about the subject's *functional potentiality*, which is the positive valence for the agency itself. Second, a goal valence is also established, and finally the action means (hammer)<sup>19</sup> acquires an object valence and thus an *idiosyncratic meaning* for the subject, a process called *subjectivation*. However, at the same time, these valences virtually symbolize the action and the *situation*, a process that is therefore called *symbolization*. This topic of *personal meanings* (valences) of objects is notoriously undervalued in psychology, because of its more or less exclusive focus on general laws and principles. Not surprisingly, suppositions in this domain are still rudimentary and have to be developed in more detail in future. But to me the *secondary structurations* and its implications are the core of Boesch's Symbolic Action Theory (1991), and they are probably his most important and unique contribution to the field.

It is evident that these secondary structurations are derived from a depth-psychological body of thought, which is the second source of Boesch's

theory besides Piaget (*see* particularly Simão's [2002] comparison between Boesch, Freud, and Piaget). Therefore, it is also evident that their empirical confirmation presupposes some psycho-analytical competence and should be done cautiously and checked particularly by the inter-rater reliability of competent raters. Boesch's examples mostly refer to successful, positively experienced actions, which are also emotionally balanced and imply emotions of joy and triumph (pride). Eckensberger and Emminghaus (1982) and Eckensberger and Kreibich-Fischer (1993) called these emotions, which are closely related to the flow-concept (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), emotions of fit between the expectancies of the course of action and action experiences (internal equilibrium). But again it is productive to follow Boesch by assuming that actions are also affectively structured and lead to individual superordinate affectively structured goal systems of actions, which Boesch calls *phantasms*. These are not only affective but also content-oriented normative frameworks. On the first action level, they include notions of *functional potentiality*, which means the feeling of being the cause of some event, which not only forms the basis for a subjective self but also for the subjective valence of places and objects. Therefore, this concept goes beyond the concept of self-efficacy that Bandura (1997) coined.

But Boesch's (as well as Bandura's) proposals primarily relate to instrumental actions because his analysis of subject–world relations primarily relates to subject–object relations, which are not communicative/normative but can be interpreted as being instrumental/strategical. Therefore, Simão (2001, p. 487) tried to add *interaction* to Boesch's theory, by treating Boesch's object as a subject (p. 488). But in a way, through this substitution, she remains on the level of instrumental co-actions: coordination and cooperation with others (p. 490). Only the *normative coordination* of actions for the benefit of (all) others would imply true interactions and fall into the moral domain. This leads to my research on morality (which particularly in the beginnings focuses primarily on *primary structurations*) by distinguishing different barriers and reactions to barriers and by reconstructing Kohlberg's moral theory by action theoretical terms<sup>20</sup>. I have also argued in two contexts (Eckensberger, 2001b, 2007b) that, to increase the fruitfulness of Boesch's concept of the *secondary structurations*, its general idea, should also be applied to communicative actions, in which other *persons* obtain their

*idiosyncratic* symbolic meaning for an agency and through which the *affective core* of the agency itself is also developed. This phenomenon is classically explained in psychology by the concept/theory of attachment (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978),<sup>21</sup> which has explicit roots in phylogeny but also in psycho-analysis. I have speculated how attachment to a specific person can also be reconstructed in terms of action theory. Since the beginnings of depth-psychology in the nineteenth century, the empirical status of hypotheses on the dynamics of early child development and mothering has changed dramatically. This can be credited to researchers like Beebe and Lachmann (1994) and Stern (1985, 1995), who all have a depth psychological background, as well as Trevarthen (1993), who is a child psychologist with a biological/systemic approach. Their research and theorizing has focused on early child–mother interactions. They have developed concepts, which can be understood as aspects of *secondary structurations* in early communicative actions. First, all of them do not see the child in isolation; rather, all communicative principles are *mutual* between a caregiver and a baby. Second, they focus on the *course* of the communicative activity (temporal feeling shapes; Stern, 1995). Third, they *integrate* cognitive and evaluative (emotional) aspects of the processes. The “schema of being with” (Stern, 1995), or interpersonal timing as matching and being matched (Beebe & Lachmann, 1994), or the term *affect attunement* (Stern, 1985) between a child and a mother may serve as examples. Fourth, they study children before they are able to speak, beginning shortly after birth. Yet they interpret early gestures and mimicking as communication (Trevarthen [1993] speaks of proto-conversation). At present, the early proto-conversations on the basis of gestures—particularly pointing—are interpreted as the basis for communication and also as foundational for the uniqueness of humans as a species, because great apes generally fail to do that (Janik & Zuberbuehler, 2009; Tomasello, 2001; Tomasello, Call, & Hare, 2003; Tomasello, Carpenter, & Liszkowski, 2007).

These mutual communication processes in a close relationship not only reduce negative emotions (prominent in attachment theory) but also maximize positive feelings, which represent happiness or mutual fit of emotions (not just security), if the attunement/mutual regulation of interaction rhythms works. So the constructed schemata are not



only cognitive but also evaluative and should lead to attributing a *valence* to a *particular person* within an interaction in a situation.

Of course, emotions that accompany actions after early childhood can also be positive or negative, and they occur in different phases of the action. It is interesting in this context that positive emotions are mainly characterized as happiness and being satisfied, but they are not as differentiated in language as negative ones (*see also* Smedslund, 1988).

#### SECONDARY ACTIONS: ACTOR-ORIENTED

As mentioned, during the course of primary actions, almost inevitably obstacles or barriers occur that are accompanied by negative emotions and provoke control efforts and reflections. It is of utmost importance to remember that every definition of a barrier or obstacle in the course of an action implies (analytical as well as psychologically) some *standard* about how an action *should* be carried out. We call these phenomena “action-guiding frameworks” or “normative rule systems” for actions. In conceptualizing the relationship between the objective world (ontology) and the subjective understanding of the world (epistemology), I claimed, however Eckensberger (1985, 1993a, 1995, 1996a), that these barriers (like the interpretation of the world in first-order actions) are intuitively and objectively given in primary actions, but in secondary actions they are reflected and come about through *interpretations in action contexts*. Therefore, these standards are not only preconditions for defining the barriers *as barriers* but also imply different ways of overcoming them that are more or less adequate. Additionally, the different interpretations of barriers also imply different types of *emotions*: Although all these emotions relate to frustrations in a general sense, manifold shades of affects/emotions that emerge as reactions to differently interpreted barriers or experiences are distinguished (cf. Eckensberger, 1993, 1985, 1996; Eckensberger & Emminghaus, 1982). It is not so important that the chosen terms reflect everyday language exactly; the central point, rather, is to distinguish various emotional reactions to frustrations by using different emotional concepts, depending on the barrier’s interpreted source or origin.

To give some examples from the cancer research: These standards may be *technical* (e.g., during the process of cancer, some body function may be at stake or some kind of prosthesis should work), then barriers are called *problems*, and the accompanying

emotion is *anger*, *wrath*, or *fear* and one adequate regulation is to *remove* the problem. But they can also be social; then the standard is social functioning (an unfulfilled expectancy concerning individual or conventional behavior of the social support system of the family, the staff of the hospital, or doctors), these barriers are called an *interpersonal conflict* or *disagreement*, and the accompanying emotion is *embarrassment*, *shame*, *rage*, or *disappointment*.<sup>22</sup> The adequate regulation is *conflict solution* or *communication*. In the domain of *logic*, the standard is *consistency*, the barrier is *contradiction*, and the emerging emotion is *insecurity*. The adequate solution is searching for a *new logical path*. In case of *personal concerns*, the standard is *goal hierarchy*, the barrier is an *intrapersonal goal conflict*, the corresponding emotion is *dissatisfaction*, and the regulation is *subjective re-evaluation*. In case of *morality*, the standards are *duty*, *respect*, and *fairness*, the barrier is an intrinsic (or intuitive) *conflict between different interests, values, or principles*, the corresponding emotion is *guilt* or *shame* (in case of observing a *moral transgression*, it would be *indignation*), and the regulation is *avoidance of harm* or *consensus-orientation*. Although the emotional terms suggest that they are situational, this is not intended; on the contrary, elaborating emotions in action contexts implies that they are automatically understood in time, and they can easily change if the interpretation/meaning of the situation changes.<sup>23</sup>

So secondary actions serve as frameworks to regulate barriers in primary actions, which means they re-establish an equilibrium between the agency and cultural standards. They are formed by *upward reflection* (reflective abstraction), but they also form a *downward selection* of primary actions. Following the fruitful terminology of Janet (Schwartz, 1951) and Boesch (1976, 1991), these regulations are called *secondary actions* because on the one hand they (just as primary actions) basically also have the formal structure of actions—they are future-oriented and have a basic teleological structure (they are goal-oriented because they are supposed to re-establish and adapt primary actions, and they involve decisions and evaluations of outcomes). On the other hand, however, they are not oriented toward the world but toward primary actions. Hence, they are also called *action-oriented actions*. They form normative schemata (conventions, morality, and law) as regulatory rule systems in the agency as well as rules in culture.

A systematic depiction of the most important types of rules, their distinctions, and inter-relationships

is presented elsewhere (Eckensberger 1993b, 1995, 1996). More recently, a systematization in terms of *action types* was even proposed (Eckensberger, 2008, 2010b; Eckensberger, Kapadia, & Wagels, 2000).<sup>24</sup> In a later section, the development of moral judgment in action terms will be considered in more detail.

Of course, action regulations (secondary actions) are not new in psychology; rather, they are similar to coping processes (cf. Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Haan, 1977) or control theories of primary or secondary control strategies (e.g., Heckhausen, 1997). But the control efforts distinguished were internally more sophisticated. Hence, a detailed internal structure of these processes and a scoring manual to define different cases based on the internal structure of actions was elaborated (Bettingen, Eckensberger, Gaul, Krewer, Madert, & Prowald, 1993). To at least give a rough idea, some examples are in order: First, intrapsychic and actional regulations were distinguished. Both can apply to goals and/or means. The regulation of means can involve representations, evaluations, or reflections; they can refer to the social or material world. The goal is either reset or not. Actional regulations apply to doing or not doing something; they also refer to the social or material world. Additionally, it is useful to differentiate whether regulations are orientated *toward* the barrier or *away from* it.

The “social world” certainly also initiates co-regulations (support, help), which in turn influences the emotional evaluation of the success or failure of a regulation (e.g., if one succeeds, one feels pride or triumph, one feels grateful toward others or appreciates their help, etc.; cf. Valsiner, 1987). Apart from knowledge systems, however, among other things, fashions, conventions, morals, and laws as outcomes of time-tested ways of solving problems/conflicts in a culture also exist. For example, in some parts of Africa, local chiefs decide and moderate social conflicts, the West has developed a written law, Islamic cultures operate with the *Sharia* law system, whereas in China a written law also exists, but conflicts there are preferably regulated by mediation (Ma, 1998).

Again in following Boesch, it is assumed that secondary actions are also affectively structured and lead to individual superordinate affectively structured goal systems called *phantasms*. They include general notions of control (or harmony), security, health, and good life. The corresponding *myths* in culture (in the West) are the well-known ideals of

growth, wealth, and health. In the cancer research (Eckensberger & Kreibich-Fischer, 1994), these phantasms are, for example, individual overarching affectively satiated goals of *health*, which are embedded in a whole pattern of subjective theories about one’s own illness (e.g., Phillip & Ferring, 1998) and (corresponding) ideas about the proper means to re-establish health. They are also embedded in the immediate social context (social support system) as well as in cultural myths about cancer, its development (who gets it, and why), and proper treatment (what to do). Thus, all regulations aim at re-establishing or coordinating actions—whether to continue or give up an action and/or how to reinterpret the situation, and so on. Apart from this, as outlined above, secondary actions also differ (just as in case of primary actions) in the affordances and possibilities a culture provides as well as in the canalizing constraints, prohibitions, and taboos (the normative rule systems) that already exist. In cancer, for example, culture offers (besides the traditional medical treatment) a variety of alternative treatments that promise healing. In the cancer study (Eckensberger & Kreibich-Fischer, 1983) practically no patient did without them. So, quite generally, with reference to the social world, phantasms like *security* or *ideals of love* develop.

#### TERTIARY ACTIONS: AGENCY-ORIENTED

It is only consistent to presume—especially when postulating that humans are “*potentially* self-reflective beings”—that impediments to or disturbances of secondary actions inevitably compel the person to reflection or, rather, to *self-reflection* (see Piaget, 1974). One asks questions like, “What goals do I really have?”; “How important is a particular action outcome for me?”; “What does some moral insight mean to me?”; or “Is it important for me to ‘uphold’ my personal convictions or character?” which finally raises the question “Who am I?” or “What is the meaning of my existence?” Once again, the barriers of actions (this time in secondary actions) provide the developmental potential for such questions. They again emerge from upward (abstractive) reflection, and they form downward selection processes onto secondary actions. At the level of tertiary actions, the process of primary structuration leads to role expectations or stereotypes of persons in a culture or society (personhood) and to the development of the subject’s identity and how he or she presents his- or herself to the outside world. These identity structures also possess an action-guiding

potential. They can be considered as developmentally organized types of identity (stages), as outlined by Kegan (1982), Blasi (1985), Erikson (1959), and others. It is the ability to rise to a higher level of evaluation to evaluate possible actions and the motives, emotions, and so forth, involved that allows for the development of moral responsibility, character, and eventually free will. For example, Kane (1989) has argued that when two possible courses of action conflict, the resulting destabilization of brain states allows for genuine free will and that when we act on the basis of such deliberation, we are engaged in self-forming actions that create our character and thus make us responsible in the long run for the people we are.

In the present framework, the *development of agency can itself be considered an action* as a project of identity development, which has a goal and which may fail (Clemens, 2007; Brandtstaedter, 1998; Eckensberger, 2007; Krewer, 1990; Krewer & Eckensberger, 1991). Also Simão's (2005) discussion of self-formation from the perspectives of Gadamer, Boesch, and Valsiner is relevant here. This implies that individuals constantly reconstruct and renew their understanding of their *relationship* to themselves and to the social and material world and thus the relationship between autonomy (independence) and affiliation (interdependence) in the social world. Essentially, the subject reconstructs the balance between fulfilling personal needs and those of others. The relation of the subject to the natural world (aspects of culture) is also located here.

Methodically, it is important to note that individual goals are not as conscious as seems to be suggested here, and they are therefore sometimes rather naively investigated by applying questionnaires that ask explicitly for goals. In the longitudinal cancer research study (Eckensberger & Kreibich-Fischer, 1993, 1994), using the action framework, it became evident that the significance of barriers/impediments is also methodically highly relevant: people do not speak as *spontaneously* about their goals as much as they do about barriers. Empirically their goals, in that sense, often have to be reconstructed from the barriers the subjects experience.

The research on regional cultural identity and cancer may serve as examples for the productivity of the proposed action levels. Although quite different in detail, both tackled the problem of identity development. Usually, in those days, theories on ego, self, or identity development (Fillip, 1980; Habermas, 1976; Kegan, 1982; Lapsley & Power,

1985; Leahy, 1985; Loevinger, 1976) shared the common feature of conceptualizing "the process of identity formation towards higher or more mature stages as a process reflecting increase in abstract and formalized competences or structures" (Krewer & Eckensberger, 1990, p. 216). The other side of becoming more and more complex (structurally) implies, however, that one loses more and more (everyday) content. This assumption not only contradicts daily life experiences, but it also somehow neglects the fact that identity is rooted in the specific biography and cultural context. So our goal was to contextualize identity formation by means of the elaborated three-level action scheme,<sup>25</sup> which included daily life activities (primary actions) as well as action control (secondary actions) and reflections (tertiary actions).

The German region in which the University of the Saarland is located was ideal for such effort, because it has a unique history (at times it belonged to France, at other times to Germany, and it was even a European protectorate), and hence developed a unique regional culture. So daily life contexts relevant for that culture were investigated by my coworker Bernd Krewer in his dissertation (Krewer, 1990): language (dialect) use, preference of regional food, humor, and meaning of historical events of the region. A whole variety of methods was used to really capture the daily life context (biographical interviews, diaries, group discussions, video tapes of language use). On the basis of this research, Krewer (1990) formulated the term *cultural identity anchors* for these cultural features of the region and a *regional cultural identity*, which used these features as symbolic representations of one's identity; this was particularly true for the regional dialect.

The importance of the particular role of self-reflections (third action level) in cancer was quite different. The study was triggered by the observations of a practitioner (Kreibich-Fischer) that many of the cancer patients stated sooner or later, and more or less pronounced, that *becoming ill was good or beneficial* for them. At first this was shocking, but then it was not really so, as it seemed to result from the increased self-consciousness and awareness of the value and importance of every minute of life under the threat of a limited time perspective. Hence, the goal of the study was twofold: to understand this increase in self-reflection (acceleration of self-development) in more detail and to examine whether healthy people might be able to learn something from this attitude.

None of the research programs mentioned was cross-cultural<sup>26</sup> or done in another culture than Germany, yet culture served as a necessary context—that is, a cultural psychology was followed. Rychlak (1993) saw no methodical implications in his distinction of the four groundings, but we disagreed explicitly with this (Eckensberger, 2002). In the contrary, in the cancer study we refused the demand by the Ministry of Technology and Education to use scales and questionnaires; instead we tried to take the *self-reflective active model of man* as seriously as possible also methodically, by treating the subjects with respect, care, and understanding. This was exactly what Smedslund (2009, p. 792) also called for recently. Although data collection and interpretation varied between studies, data collection (sampling) basically followed the model of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and ended up in formulating psychological types (Werbick, 1985). But differing from these authors, the resulting types did not simply emerge from the qualitative data collection; rather, they were, like the sampling, (action-) theory-driven. In this sense, every new person was included in a sample with the aim of testing and, if necessary, correcting the theoretical framework. Data collection allowed the interviewees as much freedom as possible to keep data as authentic as possible. Data analysis was qualitative (hermeneutic), but it was also guided by the action theoretical psychological framework.

To be methodically as unobtrusive, contextualized, and as respecting of the patients as possible in gathering data, no questionnaires were applied; rather, normal counselling sessions were taped and only short (selective) interviews were performed. Of course, the patients had to give their consent and could stop the taping whenever they wanted. But that was extremely rare. The study lasted about 3 years, and in the end, up to 30 tapes existed for every patient over different time spans. Because the patients themselves decided what to talk about (a medical or practical or financial problem, a problem with the family, etc.), the scoring manual had to cover an extremely broad range of topics and yet had to be structured in great detail (Bettingen, Eckensberger, Gaul, Krewer, Madert, & Prowald, 1993). The three action levels served as a framework, and it was, of course, complemented and improved content-wise during the project. The particular question of self-development was mainly covered by an adaptation of Kegan's (1982) theory on the evolving self, which also makes use of Piaget's reflective abstraction.

Although data from 30 patients were collected, only 6 of them were analyzed because the analysis of the material was extremely time-consuming and thus expensive (s. Eckensberger & Kreibich, 1993). But the results were quite promising. First, it was in fact *possible* to score free utterances for every patient in terms of the theory of developmental types and to reconstruct possible qualitative change (this was quite unclear in the beginning). Second, four of the patients oscillated between stressing intimacy and self-control, only one manifested the over-adapted picture, which was drawn about cancer patients (mamma carcinoma) in the literature of the 1980s (Vetter, 1989; Lerner, 1987; Canakis & Schneider, 1989). Third and most important, two of the patients exhibited different developmental changes: one patient, in fact, within 3 years, developed from an intimate self to a reflected egoistic and then to an autonomous self (which was particularly interesting for the question at hand). The other, however, first had an intimate, relational self-concept, but *regressed* to an expressive egoistic self-orientation, which demanded support and attention from her partner (social support system). In both cases, the support systems (cultural setting) were attuned to these structures of the patients. These differences were also discussed in terms of their implications for therapy (Eckensberger, Kreibich-Fischer, & Gaul, 1998), but this discussion is again beyond the scope of the present context.

Secondary structurations were also relevant to the results of both studies: affective bonds were formed to the regional (concrete) culture. This was true for the landscape (homeland), the food, but particularly for the regional dialect. On the other hand, the cancer patients formed phantasms of autonomy and relatedness, which became part of their identity. Although investigated primarily in early mother–child contexts (*see* p. 898), it is productive to assume that these affective structurations are relevant during the entire lifespan (e.g., in love relationships) but also in therapist–client relations (the counsellors in the cancer project remained close intimate friends with the patients for as long as they lived).

One barrier is of utmost importance on the third level, and this is, in fact, the other side of the coin of self-reflection. It is the knowledge of the end of this process—that is, of one's death or existence on earth. Most religions (on the cultural side) offer the hope of an existence beyond biological death (although this may differ qualitatively and quantitatively in

various religions, it can be paradise [Christianity/ Islam] or rebirth [Buddhism/Hinduism] or only moderate pronouncements as in Judaism), thereby outwitting death. Religion thus can be regarded as what most individuals believe so as to create hope for a better state of existence after death. But all religions also encompass rituals and have prescriptive components that regulate social life on Earth (Kimmel, 2010). This is actually an interpretation scheme in its own right; it usually implies an entire theory of the structure of the world (relations among men, animals, and plants) and its creation (created and governed by one or more ultimate beings). It also entails rules of conduct (what is right or wrong, what is a sin). Some kinds of regulation are even prescribed in or afforded by a religion. These may be purifying rituals, prayers, and so forth. Since the Enlightenment, these knowledge and rule systems compete with science. And they still do, as we know from the discourse between evolutionism and creationism. As noted by Oser and Gmünder (1984) or Fowler (1991), religious structures are of an *existential* nature and can also be described as stages (developmental types) that represent human's relation to the ultimate (*see also* Eckensberger, 1993b).

But again, a word of caution is in order: It is not proposed that these various rule systems are reconstructed or detected by the agency alone. Although single agencies can create rules for themselves, they inevitably do so in a cultural context. In our research on the development of understanding precursors of law in children (Weyers, Sujbert, & Eckensberger, 2007), we created group situations (with restricted action means), which by necessity had to end up in distributive justice problems. In an analysis of literally hundreds of video-taped action episodes, only *two* situations were found in which only *one* child created a rule (upward emergence) that was immediately followed by the group (downward selection). But not all rules are created or detected by children alone—to a great extent, most cultural rules are co-constructed in the enculturation process (Glick, 1985) and happen to be reconstructed under “adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, quoted in Valsiner, 1987, p. 107). A very similar concept can be seen in Feuerstein's (1989) proposal of mediated learning, which according to him is even constitutive for humans and forms the essence of culture (*see also* Bruner, 1996). This viewpoint is also supported by psychologists working with chimpanzees, like David Premack (personal communication, 1984) and by

Tomasello (2001). Greenfield's (2002) ingenious work on hand-loom in the Zinacateco Indians, which are *offered* to children in an *age-related increasing complexity* and can be understood as adaptations to the sequence of the ontogeny of cognition *a la* Piaget, may serve as an example.

This kind of theorizing may look idiosyncratic at first glance, but it is not. As mentioned, Russian activity theory also uses action levels (but with a different rationale; *see* Eckensberger, 1995). Recently Molz and Edwards (2011) gave an overview of altogether 11 meta-theoretical approaches that use three hierarchical levels. Those of Bateson (1972), Christopher and Bickhard (2007), Gülerce's (1997), Kitchener (1983), and Sorokin (1958) come close to my distinction of action levels. But Martin, Sokol, and Elfers (2008) also distinguish three levels of reflection in social cognition (from prereflective interactivity through reflective intersubjectivity to meta-reflective sociality). However, here is not the place to elaborate on similarities and differences of these approaches in more detail.

### Dealing With the Duality “Content versus Structure”<sup>27</sup> in Moral Development

If one defines the importance of a theory in terms of the amount of theorizing and research it triggers, then Kohlberg's theory clearly is an important one. Although things have changed much since his death in 1987, his theory is still very much alive and productive (*see* the Association of Moral Development, AME, and the affiliated *Journal of Moral Development*). The amount of work, enthusiasm, as well as criticism this theory provoked (*see* Modgill and Modgill, 1986; Latzko & Malti, 2010 for the German context) is immense. But there is no need to summarize it here. Instead, only our own engagement with the theory will be focused on, which also began in the middle of the 1970s (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1978, 1980) and continues (e.g., Eckensberger, 2006a, 2010b). In this domain, the relation of action theory and dialectics was and is also crucial.

The interest in moral development from the very beginning was also part of my interest in the role of culture in psychology. Morality is clearly one of the most important *cultural rule systems*, and its development in the individual therefore has been central for a psychology that tries to include culture (Eckensberger, 2006b, 2007a). Kohlberg's theory was particularly appealing in this regard, because he claimed (Kohlberg, 1958), during the

value-relativistic orientation of the 1950s, that morality (as *the* exemplar of cultural relativism at that time) itself is a universal phenomenon in that it develops in a transculturally invariant sequence. He holds that developmental progress always occurs in a *non-reversible order*—that is, no stages should be skipped and regression to former stages is theoretically excluded (e.g., Kohlberg, 1976, 1986). This strong claim is not only a strength of his theory but also the Achilles' heel and a challenge. Even today it is difficult for many cross-cultural psychologists to accept that this claim is not based on a biological model (i.e., on biological universals) but rather on the assumption of a developmental *logic* that should apply cross-culturally (i.e., it is based on structural universals; cf. Eckensberger & Burgard, 1983). And this claim came under attack again in the postmodern orientation of the late 1980s.

This assertion was at all possible, however, because Kohlberg sharply distinguished between *content* and *structure* of moral judgments and because his universalism claim referred to structure. This perspective was derived from Piaget's structuralism, which is also not at all agreed upon in social sciences, where values and norms are still understood as content or normative orientations (Nauck, 2010)—these are either assumed as universals or as culture-specific frameworks. Because of its importance, in the following, reference will mainly be made to the content versus structure duality. But it will be shown that this duality has many implications for the whole theory.

### ***Toward a Dialectical Relation Between Content and Structure in the Development of Moral Judgment***

Before starting, it should be noted that it is extremely difficult to do justice to Kohlberg's theory, because it has been modified several times over the last 30 years of his life.<sup>28</sup>

1. *From independence to dialectics between content and structure.* Over time, not only the definitions of *structure* (form) and *content* changed but also the assumptions about their *inter-relationship*. Originally, the stages were defined primarily by the chosen *content*. Structure was only inferred as an ideal type, which connected the normative content favored by the stage (Kohlberg, 1958). Later, Kohlberg was convinced that he differentiated between the form of moral judgments and the content norm chosen. He

applied the complexity of *role-taking* (egocentric perspective, perspective of another, of a group, generalized role taking) as stage *structure*, and decisions in a dilemma as representing *content* (values/norms: life, property, authority, law, etc.). Additionally he distinguished further *ethical positions* (elements like egoistic consequences, utilitarian consequences, ideal or harmony-serving consequences, fairness) as *content*, which also entered the scoring manual (although differently over time). When talking about "holding content constant" so as to examine structure (Kohlberg, 1978, p. 55), structure and content were viewed as independent from one another. In fact, in the final versions of the theory, Kohlberg (1986; *also* Kohlberg et al. 1983) again followed Piaget (1932) by assuming some *mutual reference between content (values/norms) and structure*; thereby he, in fact, assumed a *dialectical* relationship between both.

2. *The centrality of the justice principle:* Beyond this, justice as the chosen ethical principle that guides the theory also came under attack. Gilligan's (1982) formulation of an ethic of care and responsibility has to be mentioned, a criticism which in some sense was supported and even expanded later by cross-cultural research and theorizing (for an overview, *see* Eckensberger & Zimba, 1997). A variety of culture-specific perspectives and principles have been proposed that appear not to be covered by Kohlberg's justice perspective, which also cast doubts on the proper conceptualization of content and structure as well as their operationalization in the manual—for example, the Confucian principle of *giri-ninjo* (obligation), which seems to be close to the Indian *ethic of duty* (Miller, 1994; Shweder et al., 1987). Huebner and Garrod (1991) have pointed out that in some Hindu and Buddhist cultures, morality is embedded in conceptions about the nature of human existence itself. There, especially the law of *karma* (i.e., the adding up of good [*dharma*] and bad [*adharma*] actions that may also have been committed in earlier lives) is regarded crucial. It leads, according to the authors, to types of moral reasoning totally different from the ones defined in Kohlberg's stage theory and manual. The Javanese/Indonesian principles of *hormat* (respect for older people) and *rukun* (harmonious social relations; Setiono, 1994) and the principles of *collective happiness* in the kibbutz (Snarey, 1983) require mentioning. Lei and Cheng (1984) noted that some of their Taiwanese interviews were difficult

to analyze, because their subjects referred to different types of *collective conflict-solving strategies* not mentioned by Kohlberg. Tietjen and Walker (1984) were faced with similar problems in Papua New Guinea. Similarly, Ma (1988) pointed to the Chinese (Confucian) principle of *jen* (love, benevolence, human-heartedness, man-to-manness, sympathy, perfect virtue), and the Indian principle of *respect for all life* (Vasudev, 1986), which lead to the principle of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) in Hinduism.

In fact, a long-enduring discussion exists on the relation between justice and care (Kohlberg et al., 1983) as well as between role-taking and empathy. Here it may suffice to say that one can interpret the tension between both as constituting a thesis and an antithesis. From this perspective, it is productive that Kohlberg, Boyd, and Levine (1986) discussed integrating (synthesizing) both orientations in a new formulation of stage 6, although that theoretical work did not have any consequences for Kohlberg's method either.

3. *Beyond justice operations and A/B – substages:* Additionally, Kohlberg added two concepts that also blurred the relation between structure and content. First he added justice operations (equality, equity, reciprocity) and the balance between the perspectives as a further criterion for structure (Kohlberg, 1985), which is analogous to a synthesis. Second, in following Piaget's (1932) notion of the development from a heteronomous to an autonomous orientation, Kohlberg (1976) elaborated on **A**-/**B**-substages. He saw them "as laying intermediate between content and form" (Kohlberg et al., 1983, p. 43). They referred to the equilibrated (**B**) use of a justice structure. Without going into details, substage **A** was more intuitive, and **B** was reflected and equilibrated. He first distinguished these types by means of elements (egoistic and utilitarian consequences counted as **A**, ideal or harmony serving consequences and fairness as **B**). Later Kohlberg et al. (1983) explicitly used "Kantian" and "Piagetian criteria" (which were not quite independent from one another) to score substages. If most criteria applied, it was **B**; if not, it was **A**.

By doing so, he somehow constructed two developmental paths of moral development (Eckensberger & Burgard, 1986; Eckensberger, 1986): one stage structure in terms of socio-moral role-taking (a *Meadian* path), the other in terms of **A**- and **B**-substages (a *Piagetian* path). But

the status of these substages was rather unclear from the very beginning (cf. Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1980; Eckensberger 1984, 1986). And although some researchers (Tappan et al., 1987) later seemed to conceive these substages as a further refinement of the theory, Gielen (1991) rightly stated that Kohlberg's moral types (**A** and **B**) "*do not exhibit the same logical tightness and inner consistency that his moral stages do since the types intermingle structure and content to a considerable degree*" (p. 34). I have demonstrated (Eckensberger, 1984, 1986) that the substages in the manual are highly correlated with main stages (**B** substages increase and **A** substages decrease continuously with main stages), and I have pointed to the fact that the substage **B** criteria are barely discernible from criteria that define principled (post-conventional) stages. Hence, both the main stages as well as the substages represent an increasing trend toward *autonomy* (see also Tappan et al., 1987), which serves as an integrative concept. Moreover, the incitement conditions for substage **B** development are difficult to discriminate from the ones hypothesized for conventional and post-conventional development (institutions and societies emphasizing democracy, equality, cooperation, and mutual relationships; see Gielen, 1991).

4. *Stages and levels:* As is well-known, Kohlberg not only proposed development of moral judgment (structure) in six (later five) empirical stages but also organized these stages into three levels (stages 1 and 2: pre-conventional; stages 3 and 4: conventional; stages 5 and 6: post-conventional). If this classification has a developmental psychological meaning, then development between and within levels should differ in speed of development or in difficulty. Given the state of the empirical data in those days, this was, however, rather doubtful. The main difficulty in progress seemed to exist from stages 3 to 4—that is, it cut the second level of conventional thinking. In stage 4, a system perspective was involved (Selman, 1974; Kohlberg, 1976); formal logical operations seemed to be a necessary condition for stage 4 rather than for stage 3 (Kuhn, Langer, Kohlberg, & Haan, 1977). The known cross-cultural data (summary in Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1980, p. 100 ff.) of the time suggested that stage 4 was difficult (improbable) in "face to-face cultures", whereas stage 3 was common (particularly Edwards, 1975).

Edwards (1986) and Ma (1988), for example, raised questions about the strict definition of Kohlberg's stage 4 in terms of *law and institutions*. From her investigations in face-to-face societies, Edwards concluded that the *social perspective of an informal understanding of roles should be sufficient for a scoring at stage 4*. Nisan (Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982) also proposed guess scores for a transitional stage between stages 3 and 4 for subjects' reasoning based on either family tradition or relatedness of the actors. Ma's (1988) formulation of Chinese stages of moral development interestingly only began with stage 4 (the first three stages were assumed to be identical in the West and in China) and ended in higher principles of harmony. Later, in following the German sociologist Toennies (1887/1957), Snarey and Keljo (1991) distinguished a community perspective (Gemeinschaftsperspektive) from a societal perspective (Gesellschaftsperspektive).

5. *Stage 4 ½*: Finally, two studies (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1968; Haan, Smith, & Block, 1968) led Kohlberg to formulate a stage 4 ½ (between stages 4 and 5). The reasons were different (regression from 4 to 2, and rescoring of stage 2 as a stage that was post-conventional but not yet stage 5). It was defined in terms of relative egoism and as representing a "personal and subjective choice (which) is based on emotions and hedonism, since conscience is seen as arbitrary and relative, as are terms like 'duty,' 'morally rights,' etc.," (Kohlberg, 1976, p. 17). As similar structures had also been found in studies of adolescence by Döbert & Nunner-Winkler (1975), there was no reason for treating this structure as an abnormality, as was done in the tradition of Kohlberg (cf. Colby et al., 1983), but they could be included in the main-stage development.

6. *Scoring*: Finally in scoring, it turned out that it was not difficult to differentiate between the adjacent stages; rather, sometimes stage 1 was similar to stage 4 (both have a heteronomous core), similarly stage 2 and stage 4 ½ seemed to imply similar structures (after all, stage 4 ½ was the result of rescoring some stage 2 answers in the Haan, Smith, & Block [1968] study). They both had a liberal relativistic core, either regarding actions means (stage 2) or personal choices in values (stage 4 ½). Stages 3 and 5 also had a similar core: focus on common interpersonal expectations (stage 3) and social contracts based on common values (stage 5), so both referred to

harmonious structures but on different levels of social abstractions.

Based on these ambiguities in Kohlberg's theory, we speculated about a different internal order of the stages. Partly following Piaget, we assumed that instead of a one-dimensional order of six stages in three levels, moral development happens like a spiral in two levels of social spheres. The first sphere is called the "personal" or "interpersonal sphere." Here, agencies or conflicting parties are viewed as concrete, more or less real people or subjects. This social sphere encompasses stages 1, 2, and 3. A second sphere, which developmentally follows the first, is called "transpersonal sphere."<sup>29</sup> Here, conflicting parties are primarily understood in terms of roles or functions or even general positions (abstract principles). This sphere encompasses stages 4, 4 ½, and 5. Beyond these social spheres, we have proposed a philosophical sphere of ethical positions. Instead of one post-conventional stage, we (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1980) have proposed three ethical positions: rule ethics, act ethics, and consensual ethics. We have also speculated about *decalages* between these stages from a lower social sphere to a higher one and have assumed a dialectical relation among the three stages on each level (1 and 4 thesis; 2 and 4 ½ antithesis, and 3 and 5 synthesis). But we first did not have a plausible reconstruction for this assumption.

#### CONTENT VERSUS STRUCTURE IN MORAL JUDGMENT DEVELOPMENT: ACTION THEORY IN DIALECTICS

Although some of the cited data were published later, they support the problems we (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1978, 1980) ran into with Kohlberg's theory (in fact, only the last three problem areas—numbers 4, 5, and 6—formed the basis of our earlier discussion). A better understanding particularly of the role of dialectics in moral development was (and still is) called for: (1) a possible *spiral in stage development*, as well as (2) the *dialectical relation* (mutual reference) between *structure* and *content*.

We began (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1978, 1980) with the choice of the structure of an action to define a new criterion for the structure of moral arguments. So a "paradigm shift" from *role-taking* (Kohlberg's criterion of structure) to *goal-taking* was proposed (Eckensberger, 1977; Eckensberger and Plath 2006a). *Instead of the classical social perspective taken on each stage, the perceived complexity of*



the actions involved in a conflict were applied as the leading criterion of stage structures, thereby applying action theory to dialectics. Later it was discovered that in analytical philosophy, a similar logic is applied to the concept of understanding another person, when, for example, Meggle (1993) elaborates “to understand a person means to understand his/her actions.” Meanwhile this paradigm is also increasingly being used in the context of social cognition, where the concept of TOM refers precisely to understanding others’ actions (see p. 893 and, for an overview, see Eckensberger & Plath, 2006a).

We (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1978, 1980) first analyzed Kohlberg’s manuals<sup>30</sup> (which later became the standard issue scoring; cf. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) and then collected empirical (cross-sectional) data (Eckensberger, 1984; 1986; Eckensberger & Burgard, 1984, 1986). The justification of the choice of human action as the candidate for defining the structure of moral arguments was, in fact, simple. It was first based on the fact that the human action is the only way of defining and conceptualizing morality, because it implies a choice between alternatives and therefore a subjective decision, which is the precondition for the conceptualization of *responsibility* as a central moral category (Eckensberger, 1986; Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1980); this is not true for role-taking. Second, it was based on the assumption that the human action is *intrinsically a universal framework* (Eckensberger, 2006b).<sup>31</sup> It is assumed that all humans experience agency, have goals, choose means, produce effects and results by acting, and coordinate actions, although these activities may be context- or culture-specific. So we still imply a *universal framework also for comparison*, which again implies that action theory is a culturally informed theory.

Generally speaking, *any structure consists of elements and their inter-relations*. If this notion is applied to the human action, then the most simple structure of an action can be defined by the *elements* of goals, means, results, and consequences and by different thought processes that form the *relationship* between these elements (see Fig. 17.3): *final* thinking (a means is applied in order to reach a goal), *logical* thinking (the choice of a means implies the result), and *causal* thinking relate the result with the consequences of actions. Additionally, consequences can (at least) be differentiated according to their *intentionality* into intended and unintended ones, and both are also *functionally* related to the results. Last but not least, it has to be remembered

that actions themselves are reflectively tied back to an agency, which is itself potentially self-reflective.

Actions can now be evaluated *in two regards* (see Fig. 17.3). First, they can be evaluated in view of their instrumental/functional adequacy. This means analyzing whether the chosen means are instrumentally adequate to realize a certain end or goal. Actions can, however, also be evaluated from a moral point of view. This is primarily made possible by the criterion of a potential *self-reflexivity and reflection* on the means. Although trivial, it is the principle choice of the means, which implies responsibility for the outcome. Second, the moral evaluation of an action implies analyzing whether different aspects or elements of an action (goals, means, or various consequences) possibly could or, in fact, do interfere with other actors’ interests (goals).

Thus, to define the structure of a moral judgment in this framework:

1. a given moral reasoning was analyzed in the light of the *complexity and comprehensiveness of the action structure* elaborated by a subject (e.g., whether a quasi-mechanistic relationship between ends and means is assumed, or whether the choice of means is considered to be a question of personal choice, and hence, of personal responsibility, etc.).
2. This reasoning was analyzed with reference to *where the subject locates the main conflict* (whether the conflict is located between the goals, means, consequences or entire actions, and/or an existing external rule).
3. A given moral reasoning was analyzed in view of the *standard* (or normative claim) being used by the subject either to prevent, to circumvent, or to solve a given or possible conflict.
4. In addition, to define the two levels, the action elements were generalized to values and principles, partly using Linton’s (1954) distinction between conceptual values and instrumental values or Rokeach’s (1969) distinction between terminal values and instrumental values, the former representing classes/abstractions of goals, the latter classes/abstractions of means. It is important to realize that within this approach, content and structure was not assumed to be independent but norm/value preferences were *intrinsic* to structural (stage) development.<sup>32</sup>

The subsequent higher stages can be reconstructed accordingly with the same dialectical relationship (Eckensberger & Reinshagen, 1980). At the first (stage 1), actions and action rules are

primarily interpreted intuitively and as being quasi-mechanistic. The conflict is located between existing norms and action means, Consequently, unilateral respect is expressed in the moral standard. The moral standard (content) that represents *unilateral respect* and an intuitive *rule orientation* on stage 1 can be understood as a *thesis*. Next (stage 2), the conflict is located between intentions and means, all intentions involved become important, and hence, means to realize all goals are focused on. The standard to *realize all goals* of the agencies and an *instrumental* and *outcome orientation* implied in a dilemma can be understood as the *antithesis*. It is only thereafter (stage 3) that complete actions are analyzed and integrative moral standards are developed. These standards imply mutual respect and *shared goals*. *These integrating* moral standards, which imply like harmony or consensus orientation, represent a *synthesis*.

The subsequent (transpersonal) stages can be understood as follows: First, the concrete social interactions are transformed into a group structure that is regulated by social norms/laws as means (stage 4, thesis). Then this stage is replaced by a standard that calls for efforts to order hierarchically the values involved in a conflict. It is this hierarchical order of the value system as super-individual goals that are used to define what is ethically right or wrong (antithesis). As before, the final stage (stage 5) is basically characterized by mutual respect, which, at this point, is now generalized to all rational human beings and to abstract positions (synthesis). So, altogether both dialectically interpreted internal relations in the stage structure have been plausibly reconstructed by action theory structures: (1) the spiral-shaped development (repetition of a dialectical sequence of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis on two levels of social reality) and (2) an internal mutual reference of action structures and normative orientations (values) in stages.

But these early proposals were supplemented by additional stages between these Kohlberg-related stages that we (Eckensberger, 1984, 1986; Eckensberger and Burgard 1986) formulated on the basis of their own data. They ended up with 11 stages, which, however, did not destroy the basic dialectical relation between the stages.

These data were collected using a different method than Kohlberg's hypothetical dilemmas. Rather than presenting the whole text of a Kohlberg dilemma (e.g., the famous Heinz dilemma), only the nucleus or core of a dilemma is used. For example, "There

is a young man who asks a druggist to get a drug, but the druggist refuses to give it." Then the interviewee is requested to ask more questions about the situation, because not much information has been given yet. Then he may ask, "Why do I need the drug?" It is not immediately explained that his wife is ill (like in the Heinz dilemma), but he is asked in return "Why is that important?" He may now answer, "I am ill," or "I am an addict." Again, one inquires, "Where is the difference?" and so forth. So the subjects *create* their own normative framework and make-up cases, which are all highly relevant for scoring. Only the highest score (in terms of action elements) counts as a stage score. This procedure was developed on the basis of the underlying model of man, the self-reflective human being. By doing so, we again admit Smedslund's (2009) later claim of taking this model serious also in methods.

Mainly for empirical reasons, the 11 stages were "condensed" into two levels on both spheres, which represent a development from heteronomy<sup>33</sup> to autonomy. Therefore, an interpersonal trend from heteronomy to autonomy is distinguished from a transpersonal one from heteronomy to autonomy. There are good reasons to argue that the second dimension of transformation of moral judgments is still best summarized as a move from heteronomous (intuitive reference to external behaviors, rules, simple interests of people) to autonomous moral judgment (mutual respect), as proposed by Piaget as early as 1932. This becomes obvious when looking at the standards (now called norms); the subject applies when discussing a moral conflict. So the claim that in moral development a "horizontal decalage" also occurs between the stages 1 and 4, 2 and 4½, as well as between 3 and 5 on the two levels has been supported. The notion of a horizontal decalage implies that it is not assumed that two different dilemmas are discussed on the same stage, and hence stage regressions from the higher to the lower levels may also occur (Burgard, 1989; Eckensberger, 1989), implying also a weakening of strict (internally consistent) level/stage concepts. We also argue that we escaped the problem Kohlberg ran into with his distinction into moral stages and **A-/B**-substages. The two developmental paths (Mead and Piaget) are integrated in this model.

#### **DUALITIES IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT: DIALECTICS IN ACTION THEORY**

Again, the role of dialectics in action theory as applied to moral judgments will be discussed, first

with reference to the action theoretically reconstructed stages, then for the contextualized everyday types of morality.

#### *Dialectics in Stages Defined in Action Terms*

First, in a later paper (Eckensberger, 1984), a *dialectical relation between the three levels* was even proposed in following Piaget's proposal to interrelate cognition and affect. We interpreted concrete action elements (personal social realm) as a *thesis*, the values on the transpersonal realm as *antithesis*, and principles on the philosophical level as a *synthesis*.<sup>34</sup>

There is, however, a second aspect in which dialectics contribute to the action theoretical reconstruction of moral stages (Eckensberger, 1986). This is, as in the case of action levels, the concept of the principle of *reflective abstraction (upward reflection) that explains the emergence of the stages that can also be applied here*: Every new standard (n + 1) emerges from a reflective abstraction triggered by impediments/problems/conflicts of the standard (n) of the previous stage. Every standard (*structure*), x, is therefore first operative on stage (n) then *content* of the abstraction (n + 1). Again, this is logically contradictory but developmentally plausible. However, once more also the complementary process of a downward selection process is assumed that regulates (re-evaluate) lower stages. These processes were not only speculatively assumed (after all, our data were cross-sectional) but also validated in interviewing. The content of lower stages is explicitly discussed by the interviewer and critically reflected on by the interviewee (Nieder, Sieloff, Kasper, & Eckensberger, 1987).

#### **CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MORAL JUDGMENTS (MORE DUALITIES—FACTS VERSUS NORMS; AFFECTS VERSUS COGNITION)**

Contextualization is one particular feature of dialectics because contextualization can be understood as environment (*Umgebung*) coherence (*Zusammenhang*) (Graumann, 2000). Basically, Kohlberg (e.g., Kohlberg et al. 1983) was a Kantian because he, like Kant (1966), wanted to keep morality free from empirical facts. Kohlberg constructed *hypothetical* moral dilemmas, which were intentionally *decontextualized*, whether he succeeded in doing so or not.

#### *Contextualized "Everyday Types" of Morality: Action Theory in Dialectics*

So, in following dialectically thinking, we also tried to contextualize moral development

(Eckensberger, 2010). After having defined what can be called a *deep structure of the development of moral judgment* by action theory structures, we turned to real-life contexts step by step by analyzing ecological issues (building a coal-fueled power plant, water consumption, following conventional or "green" farming methods) but also issues of education of democracy. In a way moral judgments were re-contextualized in this research. This was realized by the CIAT perspective, which theoretically allows the integration not only of the subject (agency) and context (culture) but also of norms and facts, as well as cognition and affect, because these dualities are part of the three action levels.

In doing so, methodically *biographical data* rather than the dilemma core or hypothetical dilemmas were used as a source of the data. Theoretically the four moral levels (derived from the 11 stages defined by action structures) were combined with the three action levels described above. The results were interpreted in terms of four *types of everyday* morality, which were still prescriptive (deontological) in nature but at the same time they were embedded in the everyday reality of the subjects. Two interpersonal types (heteronomous and autonomous) and two transpersonal types (heteronomous and autonomous) were defined (Breit & Eckensberger, 1998). The definition of these types was based both on the theoretical model and the analysis of data obtained from 180 subjects, who were intensively interviewed about ecological issues in their daily lives. The core of morality was defined by the complexity and normativity of the implied action concept. Additionally the kind of respect implied was used as a moral criterion as was the appreciation of rules (see Table 17.1). Because of the combination of the four types with the three action levels, normative concepts on the three action levels were also added: *risk-taking* on the first level, *responsibility* on the second, and *solidarity* on the third. Additionally, on the first action level (world-oriented actions), the perceived *efficiency* of actions as well as the *perception of facts* was analyzed.

On the second level (action-oriented actions), understanding of *control* in moral contexts was analyzed as well as the dominant usage of *coping* or *defence styles* (Haan, 1977). This was established using a particular text-analytic method (Sieloff, Schirk, Kasper, Nieder, & Eckensberger, 1988). Finally, on the third action level (agency-oriented actions), the basis of *identity* and concepts of

*solidarity* were analyzed. Beyond that the dominant *affects* were reconstructed within the four everyday types. Because affects exist on all three action levels, they differ in complexity. Hence, the dualities of facts and norms, cognition and affects, as well as content and structure were not defined independently (and related to morality in a second step), but from the very beginning they were defined *within* moral structures of the four types. Hence, content and structure were conceptualized as being mutually interdependent: content feeds back into structure (Eckensberger, 1986; Piaget, 1932)—that is, the understanding of facts also contributes to morality, and morality contributes to the understanding of risks (Döring, Eckensberger, Huppert, & Breit, 2008; Eckensberger, Döring, & Breit, 2001). Particular emotions also occurred (dominant) within the types: rage and wrath in Type I, indignation in Type II, the absence of affects (objectivity) was the ideal in Type III, and hope was dominant in Type IV. Hence, the normative structure (morality) shapes/influences the descriptive cognitive structures, but emotions also support both and are themselves triggered by them (Eckensberger, 2006a). In that sense, all these dualities form dialectic relationships, which can be understood in terms of a CIAT. Table 17.1 describes the four types and should be self-explanatory.

#### *Contextualized “Everyday Types” of Morality: Dialectics in Action Theory*

Empirically, the “everyday types” of morality were defined on the basis of data from adults. To be able to claim that they yet can be understood developmentally in terms of an increase in complexity or maturity, again the concept of the reflective abstraction (upward reflection) as a dialectical principle was applied in this context analytically as well as methodically. It is assumed that every type  $n + 1$  *emerges* on the basis of *reflections* on type  $n$ . Also the *downward selection* processes are assumed in type-development by devaluating type  $n-1$ . Additionally in this research, this assumption is used productively in the process of interviewing in that the interviewee is confronted with “lower type” ( $n - 1$ ) arguments as well—that is, s(he) is forced not only into reflection processes but also to re-evaluate the lower type. This method supported our developmental understanding of the types. This is illustrated by the backward arrows in Table 17.1.

## **Future Directions**

In closing this chapter, two aspects of action theory will be discussed, which are quite basic. I will argue that the concept of CIAT is relevant far beyond psychology. Therefore, the arguments would deserve a much more detailed treatment, which would, however, demand a second chapter. Yet, I at least intend to point to possible directions of thinking. The following arguments will be developed on two levels: one that focuses on the epistemological power of the human action (and therefore of CIAT) for *science in general*, and the other that focuses on the four (ontological) perspectives.<sup>35</sup> It will be shown that CIAT not only allows one to synthesize the self-reflective and the cultural perspective within psychology but also allows one to inter-connect all four perspectives, which is not the same as integrating them but is more than treating them as complementary (Eckensberger 2002).

## **The Epistemological Power of the Action Concept**

The first level, from which the four perspectives can be inter-connected by CIAT, may seem a bit exaggerated and rather psychology-centered at the first sight. But, in fact, the argument is quite simple yet also quite evident in the present context: as culture is understood as unique to humans and not only created by human actions but also transmitted by human actions, the same is true for science, because science is part of culture. This is true for the interpretation of nature and culture (*homo interpretans*) as well for the creation of culture (*homo faber*) as *man-made*. Hence, the different sciences can be elaborated on the basis of different aspects of actions (Eckensberger, 1993, 1995, 1996). This idea is not new, however, it is elaborated in detail by Holzkamp (2006) in his book *Science as Action*. During recent years it has been explicitly elaborated in the program of a “methodical culturalism” by the philosopher Peter Janich and his group as well (Hartmann & Janich, 1996), called the Erlangen school. Finally, the “constructive realism” of the Vienna group of Fritz Wallner (Wallner & Jandle, 2006) requires mentioning. They all rest on the early work of Dingler (1936/1987), who differentiated between *pool* (*Bestand*) of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) and *acquisition* (*Aneignung*) of knowledge, a perspective that is equally central in Piaget’s theory. It is compatible with the definition of causality by having an impact on something by actions too, which von Wright (1971) has convincingly demonstrated

Table 17.1 Four Types of Contextualized Everyday Moral Judgments

Morality	Interpersonal heteronomous autonomous		Transpersonal heteronomous autonomous		
<b>Action concept</b>	Intuitive, external flexible understanding and acceptance of other's intentions	additional evaluation of action consequences/ shared goals	Laws as means to secure morality (flexible rule, exceptions)	Consequences for upholding self-respect; consequences for values, recognition of principles as goals	morality and rights are complementary
<b>Appreciation of rules</b>	intuitive acceptance of rules	shared rules	rights and exceptions	Universalized respect (respecting human-kind <i>per se</i> )	
<b>Respect</b>	one-sided	mutual	respecting social and legal systems		
<b>Identity</b>	based on similarity	relationships, tradition	functional roles	good life (virtues)	
<b>A III Solidarity</b>	shared interests	preservation of group standards	experts, power structure	world of potential moral patients	
<b>C Affects</b>	not articulated	not articulated	not articulated	<i>hope</i>	
<b>T Control – cognitive – affective</b>	external, conformity, defense > coping	co-control coping > defense	technological realizability defense > coping	reflection of interests/goals coping > defense	
<b>i II Responsibility</b>	delegation of power	individual responsibility for the group	legal responsibility of "expert-power"	moral responsibility of all people	
<b>N Affects</b>	not articulated	<i>indignation/guilt</i>	"objectivity" (not articulated)	not articulated	
<b>L Perception of facts</b>	important, individual	dependent on group interests	objectivity	reflection of limitations of knowledge	
<b>E Facts/norms</b>	norms as given facts	norms reconstructed as norms	facts dominate norms as institutionalized facts	Facts as such hardly exist, norms dominate and evaluate facts	
<b>V I Risk</b>	individual, to lose property/advantages	to lose one's reputation, lifestyle, group-related	to lose wealth or the power of society	loss of justice for all	
<b>E Efficiency</b>	maximization of benefits, adaptation	exchange, reciprocity	functionality of the system (market, technology)	self-commitment	
<b>L Affects</b>	<i>rage/wrath</i>	not articulated	not articulated	not articulated	

(see p. 876). Causality as one of the core concepts of *natural sciences* can best be determined by producing effects through systematic *intended* variation of conditions or by *intentionally* preventing things from happening *by means of human actions*. So *intentionality* (as a central concept in action theory) is the

*precondition for defining causality* (Eckensberger, 1996). In that sense, the physical as well as the biological perspective are *constructions* based on and derived from *human actions/co-actions*. It is non-trivial that the development of science is marked by outstanding humans (here by Darwin, Galileo,

Vico, and Descartes). That the entire discourse in science nowadays is based more on teamwork and interdisciplinary efforts (co-actions) is not a major argument against the present point of view: human action *creates* science.

Although there is much commonality among the underlying action concepts, there are also differences among the mentioned schools—particularly to CIAT. (1) The culture concept is not as elaborated as it should be, and (2) communicative actions are not considered as important as the instrumental ones. These, however, immediately connote *human science* and *hermeneutics* and *understanding*, rather than explanation and experimental strategies. Symbolic dimensions (secondary structurations) are not part of these theories, hence aesthetics are also not really part of the discussion. (3) Particularly, the three action levels are not distinguished. But doing so would be productive for reconstructing science as well. After all, *all scientific theories* are formulated by humans on the basis of *empirical activities* (primary actions) and their *reflections* (secondary actions), but *self-reflective processes* (identity questions of scientists and *responsibility* in science, tertiary actions) are also highly relevant. This aspect particularly is often neglected or even denied or avoided when psychology is considered a natural science (Smedslund, 2009). But within that perspective, no “research just for the sake of research” exists, because science has a purpose that is bound to human (autonomously chosen) goals, which means that science defined as action by *necessity* implies responsibility. On the other hand, there are good reasons for being cautious about going from “is” to “ought” transformations (called the *naturalistic fallacy*; see Eckensberger & Gaehde, 1993). A good example for holding psychologists responsible is Narvaez, Panksepp, Schore and Gleason’s, (in press) demand for taking an *ethical responsibility* based on the *factual* knowledge on early child development, including brain development. In addition the normative consequences Narvaez (2008) draws from her proposal of *triune ethics* can serve as an example. However, it calls for a note of caution as well because she draws normative consequences from empirical facts that are themselves of a *functional kind*—but functional norms are not ethical norms/principles. It is therefore important that within all action theoretical frameworks, the relation between facts and norms can be fruitfully discussed (Eckensberger, 2006) just as that between application (praxis) and theory (Eckensberger, 1989, 2003, 2004; Plath & Eckensberger, 2008;

Hartmann & Janich, 1996), and this may be symbolized by Dingler’s notion that “*in the beginning was the act*” (Dingler, 1928, p. 73).

Of course, this program is also criticized by critical rationalism (Albert, 1991), which only means that at present, the ongoing discourse is necessary and hopefully fruitful.

### ***Focus on the Four (Ontological Perspectives in a Relational Meta-Perspective***

Overton (2007, p. 156) elaborated on the necessity of relational meta-theory recently when he stated:

“relational metatheories are post-Cartesian and inclusive. Relational metatheories aim to transform classically fundamental dichotomies into dissociable complementarities through the relational principles of holism, identity of opposites, opposites of identities, and syntheses of wholes ( . . . ) Relational metatheories support holism, analysis in the context of synthesis, ontological spontaneous activity, dialectic and necessary change, necessary organisation, additivity/non-additivity, and linearity/non-linearity ( . . . ) there is no privileging of one side or the other, and no privileged explanatory base; inside and outside, and, efficient, material, formal, final explanation all play necessary, not epiphenomenal, roles in the full understanding of any event.”

But as mentioned earlier, these relational meta-theories cannot be formulated easily, because of the danger of their becoming ontologically empty (as already argued with reference to quantum theory). Therefore, the goal of this final section is rather ambitious despite its brevity. In a way, it attempts to square the circle because it tries to *retain all four perspectives*, yet to *inter-connect them by* CIAT as a *synthesizing principle*.

The basic assumption is first specified by the two mutually interacting concepts already developed and applied in many sections of the text. (1) Emerging upward processes (in human competencies the reflective abstraction) and downward selection processes, compatible with Dynamic System Theory (Juarrero, 1999), will be applied to the relationship among *all four perspectives*. (2) Again it is proposed that the *human action* can be *understood as the general synthesizing agent* in these processes. (3) Yet, it is of an utmost importance that one *not* assumes that these processes are of the same kind or ontological nature

(Emmeche, Koppe, & Stjernfelt, 1997). Rather, all four perspectives have a particular *inherent basis for the kind and range of possibilities/facilities, that enable and limit development*. They are therefore characterized by different possibility-concepts or “attractors” (Eckensberger, 2010a, 2011a, 2011b: The species (gene pool) provides the *capacity* inherent in this pool for phylogeny, which was already conceptualized by Mead (1934). But we distinguish additionally the individual body (particularly the brain) by its *potential* for ontogeny. The agency develops *competencies* (cognitive, energetic, and affective) underlying its performance, and culture has *resources* to offer, developed throughout history that can be used in actions. The four perspectives also imply different kinds of interpretations: The species is reconstructed by *ultimate causes*, the body by *proximate causes*, the agency – by *proximate reasons*, and culture by *ultimate reasons*. (4) From every perspective there exist mutual arrows toward the neighboring perspective, which are mediated by human action showing the emergence of these perspectives and a downward selection process.

This argument transcends earlier proposals (Eckensberger, 2002) that treated the different perspectives just as complementary<sup>36</sup>. In a recent paper, Martin (2003) has come close to our intentions.

Figure 17.5 tries to illustrate the assumed inter-relationships.

Figure 17.5 once more shows the splits between the four perspectives and the two cultures of humanities and science. Of course, humans cannot escape being dual creatures, belonging to culture

and nature. This is so because culture is explicitly understood as an *achievement of humans* that transcends their mere nature, it is built onto nature, but is not nature itself (Gehlen [1978] therefore called culture the “second nature” of humans; Dux [1994] speaks of culture as a “connecting organization” to phylogeny). For this reason, the classical perspectives, which represent the natural science perspectives, must also be maintained.

In Figure 17.5, the action (or resp. the co-action) is (like in Fig. 17.3) located in the center but between all four perspectives. This means that the action/co-action is assumed to *inter-connect all four perspectives*, thereby forming a *meta-system* or a *dynamic whole*, in which (upward) emerging processes and (downward) selection processes are active between *all* perspectives. To paint an admittedly speculative picture, it is assumed in Figure 17.5 that no single perspective can be used as a “reductive explanation” for any other perspective; rather, they emerge from each other and feed back into each other, and they do so *via* actions/co-actions.

The relation of the self-reflective and the cultural perspective *via* actions/co-actions has already been described (p. 880). So I will begin with the relation between nature (species) and culture (cultural rules).

Although it is often argued that it is not fruitful to separate culture and biology because they interact, it is not explained how this interaction is to be understood. Instead, cultures are often interpreted in biological terms and are explained by their *biological* adaptation as “man’s peculiar elaborate way of

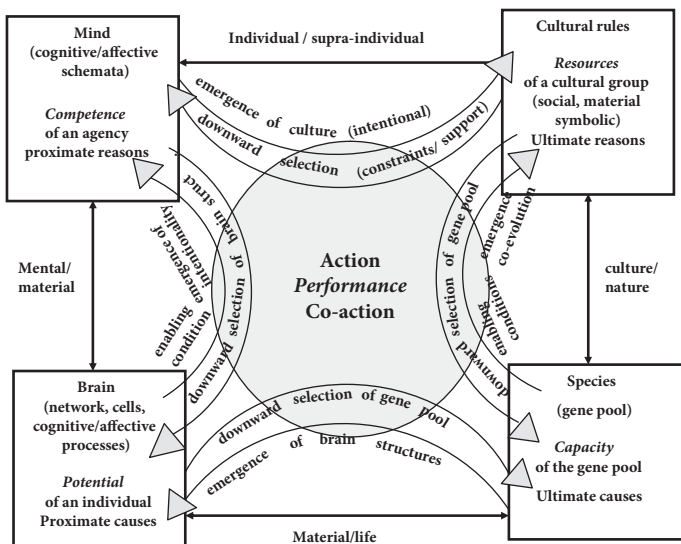


Figure 17.5 Action Theory as conceptual link between all four perspectives.

expressing the vertebrate biogram” (Count, 1958, p. 1049) or as an “epiphenomenon” and as “a product of selfish individuals, who are forced to live in groups” (Chasiotis & Keller, 1994, p. 77, translation LHE). Thereby the specifics of culture(s) as unique to humans is lost. In contrast, it seems to be more fruitful to argue that despite phylogenetic continuity in species, there is a qualitative shift in phylogeny, when it comes to humans (some behavior patterns in animals that look like cultures are rather proto-cultures from this point of view). Although there is no doubt that humans possess a phylogenetic continuity with other species, this does not imply that humans’ achievements and potentialities can be explained sufficiently by ultimate causes, by phylogenetic explanations. In fact, *logically* epistemological continuity does not follow from *empirical phylogenetic* continuity (that humans can be explained on the same level and by the same mechanisms as other species; see Eckensberger, 1978). Whether this qualitative shift is characterized by tool use, language, teaching, or empathy is at present a matter of debate. Even if some of these criteria can be shown to exist in a simple form in animals (Boesch & Tomasello, 1998; Janik & Zurbuehler, 2009), their *quantitative* developments in humans represent a *qualitative* change. Even Dawkins (1976), who can be considered one of the fathers of socio-biology, realized the danger of an exclusive application of this approach to humans, when he wrote at the end of his book *The Selfish Gene*: “Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, *you can expect little help from biological nature*. Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish” (p. 203). Some time later, he formulates: “We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators” (he obviously refers to the genes here) (Dawkins, 1989, p. 201). Psychologically the biophysiological processes as well as phylogenetic processes obtain their relevance only through their meaning in actions, developed and existing in cultural contexts.

So, at some time during phylogeny and the history of the species *homo sapiens sapiens*, killing became homicide, reproduction strategies became romantic love or arranged marriage; eating was cultivated by table manners and cultural styles (like using forks, spoons, and knives, chopsticks, or eating with hands); and simple nourishment was transformed into “nouvelle cuisine” and McDonalds. Yet the species survived and species-specific conditions

were maintained, but killing, reproduction, and nourishment were transformed by culture although nature forms the *enabling conditions* for cultural transformations and variations (upward emergence). However, culture also works on the gene pool by downward selection processes. This not only happens because of human actions of selective mating strategies (based on affiliation to social structure, caste, or religion; Eckensberger, Kapadia, & Wagels, 2000) but also by the process of industrialization and work distribution between man and woman and emerging (intentional) family planning and establishing (intentionally) a legal framework for family responsibilities, marriage and divorce, and by various means (actions) of birth control in history (from killing offspring’s to religious rules/prohibitions and different kinds of contraception strategies, family planning, genetic counseling, etc.). “Culture–gene–pool co-evolution” can only be understood from this point of view.

When we examine the relation between the mechanistic (here restricted to the neurophysiological perspective)<sup>37</sup> and phylogenetic perspective, then it is first clear that the phylogeny of the human brain is a complex process, and its understanding is by necessity still speculative (Learey, 1994). It can neither be separated from environmental conditions like climate change (Calvin, 2000) nor from the development of the body (blood vessels, shape of the skull) nor from the development of the upper limbs—particularly the hand (instrumentality and expression in gestures, leading finally to language; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008)—nor from cultural achievements like hunting and use of fire nor from the development of agriculture and a more and more complex tool use, ending in industrialization (Learey, 1994). The assumption is that these physiological developments probably *emerged on the basis of the increasing flexibility of human actions/co-actions in context* (their biotope and culture) representing the “upward emergence” principle.<sup>38</sup> Davies (2006) considers natural selection in evolution a prominent example of downward causation: “Selection takes place at the level of the organism, but it is the genes (or base-pair sequences) that get selected” (p. 33).

Beyond this, the development of the human species is not only supported by brain development but also by social coordinations via language (communicative actions), which in themselves were probably triggered and supported by cultural development (Deacon, 1997) It is an empirical datum that, apart from a basically similar structure of all



human brains, at present not two brains are identical. In recent discussions in neuroscience, it has therefore been understood that cultural content (experiences of meaning and rule systems) leads to changes in the brain from the very first second of life, which creates the differences in single brains. Therefore, in that sense physiological processes in the brain cannot be separated from culture, and at the same time they are conditions for actions. Even the neurophysiologist Singer recently spoke of the brain as a *social organ* (Singer, 2008).<sup>39</sup> So the *potentialities* of humans allow them to create conditions of living that may or may not be biologically (!) adaptive. In other words: The focus on culture as a unique human phenomenon does not deny the utmost importance of biological- and neurophysiological-enabling conditions for human actions and therefore also for culture.

Consequently, within an action theory approach, I propose that the physical perspective as well as the biological perspective in particular also form the roots as *enabling and limiting conditions* for human actions. These conditions can also be understood as *potentialities* and *capacities*, which set limits and can be exhausted by humans. On the other hand, they can also be controlled and intentionally changed to a certain extent.

Recent neurophysiological interpretations of actions in the context of new brain research, which refer to (biological) proximate causes for human activities (Singer, 2000; Roth, 1997), therefore do not explain cognitive processes as such, although they clearly form their basis. Physiochemical (brain) conditions as *enabling conditions* can also be fruitfully discussed within this scheme—for example, the heated debate on the existence of free will (already mentioned) and its relation to brain structures in physiology (e.g., Libet 1999; Baumeister, 2008; Habermas, 2004; Singer, 2000). Particularly Gustafson's (2007) discussion of Wegner's (2002) book, *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, formulates the important insight that the fact that the subjective experience of will (conscious decision) seems to come *after* physiological activities in the brain (and therefore is not assumed to be the real cause of an action) would only be a problem for action theory, *if actions are interpreted causally*.<sup>40</sup> This is, however, not what I consider as productive: Self-reflection and the free will are, in fact, assumed to emerge from complex brain structures (upward emergence), but they are not of the same kind as the physiological structures (Murphy, Ellis, & O'Connor, 2009).

They form an emergent meta-structure with a unique ontology, which, however, also influences the brain *via* actions in a cultural context (Singer, 2008). In a similar vein, Narvaez (2008) recently discussed the neurobiological roots of moralities and even related these to present moral developmental theories, including Piaget and Kohlberg. Narvaez' paper is remarkable because she first reminds us that physiological brain development leads to a *hierarchical system that is maintained*. In fact, evolutionary older brain structures (reptiles, early and late mammals) are still present (and working) in the human brain. According to her theorizing, they imply particular behavioral systems, which she calls triune *ethics* (*reptiles*: the ethics of security; *early mammals*: the ethics of caring and bonding; *late mammals*: the ethics of imagination). She secondly clearly applies the process of *emergence* (Varela, 1992/1999) to the development of human conduct, and she thirdly very creatively draws *analogies* even to stages of Kohlberg's theory (cf. also Krebs 2005). It remains unclear, however, what these analogies represent *ontologically*. It is claimed here that the causal influence of these ancient brain structures may only dominate in doing, under highly existentially threatening conditions and time pressure (Eckensberger & Emminghaus, 1982), and that they are ontogenetically *transformed* into a qualitatively different ontology by the upward emergent principles. In fact, the present discussion is really only at its beginnings.

## Acknowledgments

The chapter is dedicated to my teacher and "intellectual father," Ernst E. Boesch. Since it deals with the development of Culture-Inclusive Action Theory and research that I conducted during the last 35 years, first in Saarbrücken and later in Frankfurt many colleagues contributed to its theoretical and empirical basis over these years (in alphabetical order): Judith Bettingen, Heiko Breit, Peter Burgard, Thomas Döring, Gabriele Gaul, Elisabeth Kasper, Renate Kreibich-Fischer, Bernd Krewer, Anita Nieder, Heidi Reinshagen, Ulrike Sieloff, Susanne Villenave-Cremer. Heidi Keller and Ype Poortinga basically took a nomothetic perspective on Psychology in long discussions and thus forced me to qualify my arguments in favour of action theory tremendously. I thank Ingrid Plath for her constructive criticism of the chapter and for improving its English, as well as Jaan Valsiner and Nancy Murphy for their very constructive critical comments.

## Notes

1. These authors—particularly Brandtstaedter—also incorporate the cultural context into their theoretical arguments. But this is not accidental, because Brandtstaedter also was a student of Boesch and obtained his degree as well as his PhD in Saarbrücken. But he only turned to action theory in the 1990s.

2. One should remember that a “second tradition” of *Russian activity theory* exists, with Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev as its most famous representatives, which overlaps with Action Theory to a great extent, but also has specifics. This relation cannot be elaborated here (for details, see Eckensberger, 1995).

3. This attitude is particularly cultivated in Taoism.

4. An intentionally *reflected* rule following would be autonomous. Narvaez (2009) recently discussed the role of intuitionism in moral theories and actions critically. I basically follow her criticism. But in following Bastik’s (1982) definition of intuitive judgments as immediate, spontaneous judgments that are certain but not based on substantiated thinking, then our theory allows for intuitive judgments in lower “stages” that are justified (if forced to in interviews) with reference to rules. And additionally we assume that in adults intuitive decisions/judgments also exist, but adults *can* reflect on them (see model of action). In fact, one can also argue that even Piaget describes a lot of intuitive thinking on higher stages of cognitive development as well.

5. Without going into any detail, it may be noteworthy that in the 1970s, German psychology also discussed the emerging field of an “ecological and/or environmental psychology”. So the reflections summarized here, went hand in hand with the discussion of “ecological” approaches in psychology and of the status of “ecology” as *human context*—particularly the tension between ecology (as a biological approach) and culture (Eckensberger, 1976, 1979c; Eckensberger & Burgard, 1977). The paradigms distinguished were also applied in later discussions of environmental psychology (Eckensberger, 2008a). Biological perspectives in ecology were distinguished from human action theories (Eckensberger, 1978, 1979, 2002a; Vogel & Eckensberger, 1988).

The fruitfulness of Action Theory in this context was based on the “fact” that human environment cannot be described solely by “if-then conditions” (causality) but also requires “in order to” conditions (finality). The (cultural) environment is build or influenced by humans with a *purpose*.

6. Later I tried to differentiate indigenous psychologies systematically from cultural psychology within this theoretical frame, although this cannot be elaborated here (Eckensberger, 2010a).

7. This is more or less agreed upon today also in science of science (Nancy Murphy, personal communication, She also pointed to Conant & Haugeland [2000] for this discussion).

8. Feuerbach transformed the statement “God created humanity in his/her image” into “Humanity created God in its own image” (Buss, 1979, p. 3).

9. Of course, this distinction is not commonly agreed upon by all social scientists and philosophers. Martin and Sugarman (2009) summarize and reflect on that issue in a detailed paper and basically agree that the subject matter of social science is unique. Without going into details here particularly the argument that not all actions are reflective, and therefore a legitimate demarcation between natural and social sciences concepts cannot be drawn. Kuhn (1991) is the reason why I speak of the “potential” self-reflectivity of the agency. But I also insist that natural science need interpretation (Eckensberger, 2011).

10. In fact, the decision to use that term is rather recent. Earlier we also used the term *cultural action theory*, which sounds rather clumsy in German. Hence, we borrow this term *culture inclusive* from Valsiner’s (1987) concept of a “culture-inclusive psychology,” which is conceptually equivalent and can also be used in German.

11. In our earlier analysis, we did not accept system theory as a solution to integrating agency and culture, because it contains functional but not intentional processes. Since then, I have come to know “Dynamic Action Theory”, which particularly Juarrero’s (1999) also applied to action theory and *intentions*. Heylighen (2011) even argues that the basic ontological categories for systems theory are *agents* and *actions* (pp. 6–8, italics LHE). It was particularly the discussion with Nancy Murphy on an International Symposium «Research across boundaries. Advances in Theory-building» University of Luxemburg, June 16–19, 2010, which encouraged me to propose the following arguments.

12. Although most of these authors are now known in the English-speaking community, Holzkamp probably is not. But Tolman (1994) provides a good introduction to his work.

13. This basic *integration/synthesizing* of agency and culture *through action* has been pursued in my writings since 1979, but Kim, one of the leading figures in the movement of indigenous psychology, also follows this interpretation now (Kim & Park, 2006).

14. Boesch uses the term “should values” in this context. He kept this term from his early cybernetic orientation. We avoid this term because of its “mechanistic” connotation.

15. So I make extensive use of Piaget’s (1970) theory—particularly reflective abstraction (but also to a certain extent the implied processes of assimilation/accommodation and decentration) is advocated as developmental principle or process that leads to a qualitative transformation of these standards during development in the sense of levels. Reflective abstraction is not just a speculative construct but can be discovered in “real” cognitive transformations; see the documentary movie by Thiel & Schönbein (2000).

16. For pragmatic and methodical reasons, we only apply two types of primary actions in our research. The philosopher Peter Janich (2006) is much more differentiated.

17. Taoism: Lin Yang (1948); Hinduism and Buddhism: Sinha (1996), Ohashi (1994); Confucianism: Ma (1988), Hwang et al. (2003)

18. Christian Boesch, the son of my teacher Ernst E. Boesch (see also chapter on Primate Cultures in this volume).

19. In interviews of 30 hunters, I analyzed whether the gun (which is proverbially the “bride” of the soldier) also has a personal symbolic meaning for hunters that goes beyond its instrumental purpose by asking them what they would do and feel if the gun were damaged. *All of them* would simply get a new one without emotions of sadness or a sense of personal loss. However, they would have exactly these feelings if they were to lose a trophy (deer head or fur). So the emotional personal attachment (in this case) does not develop toward action *means* but rather toward the symbolic representation of action *results*. Much more research is necessary to understand these processes of subjectivation.

20. It is not by chance that Boesch dealt only peripherally with symbolism in ethics (Boesch, 1998), rather emphasizing it in aesthetics (Boesch, 1983, 1993).

21. For a basic critique of the underlying assumptions from a cross-cultural perspective, see Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Myake & Morelli (2000).

22. Depending on the situation and cultural meaning: Bedford & Hwang (2003) with reference to guilt and shame. Kornadt, (2002) with reference to shame/guilt and anger.

23. Imagine a boy sees that his girlfriend is kissed by another guy. This would immediately trigger jealousy. But imagine that he learns that this other guy is the brother of the girl. The emotion would vanish.

24. An elaboration of these recent proposals is beyond the scope of this chapter.

25. The action levels of those days differed slightly, but the foundation of the later scheme was laid.

26. This is one of the misunderstandings of some discussions in cross-cultural psychology: Cultural psychology is not restricted to that sub-branch but represents a different psychology. For a distinction and interrelationship of cross-cultural psychology, indigenous psychologies and cultural psychology see Eckensberger (2010a).

27. The duality facts versus norms and cognition versus affects are only mentioned here shortly; they are extensively dealt with elsewhere (Eckensberger, 1993, 2006).

28. Whereas the stage descriptions published in various tables were hardly altered, central theoretical positions have undergone remarkable changes (Kohlberg, 1976; Kohlberg, LeVine, & Hewer, 1983; Kohlberg, 1986). With respect to the stage assumptions, Kohlberg in a way became more Piagetian than Piaget himself, because in the course of time, his stage concept grew more and more strict. Therefore, deviating from Piaget, a very important criterion for the validity of theory and method is the *internal consistency* of the stages (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983).

Also with reference to his *methods*, he became more and more strict: Although he began with an interview following the clinical method of Piaget rather closely, his interview became more and more standardized over the years, as did his scoring procedures (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, b).

On the other hand, his theoretical arguments, clarifications, and corrections over the years somehow did not “get through” to the empirical level—for example, the *justice operations* that serve to define the structure more precisely in Kohlberg’s later writings did not enter the logic of the scoring manual, nor did the distinction of A- and B-subtypes of stages; they were first included into the manual than removed again.

29. Although this term triggers different associations of transcendental level (Kochetkova, personal communication), this is of course not intended. It was taken from Burgards (1986) reconstruction of Piaget’s terminology to the elaborated stage model of Eckensberger & Burgard (1986).

30. Mainly translated by Uta S. Eckensberger into German.

31. This aspect is interpreted differently by different “schools” (for example, see Wallner & Jandle, 2006). However, we use the structural aspects of actions for humans as *axiomatic*.

32. A similar logic was applied later by Keller & Reuss (1984), but for the first three stages of moral development only.

33. Autonomy and heteronomy are strictly connected to free choice or absence thereof. This implies that heteronomy is not understood as some enforcement by an authority or an external rule. Instead it is the absence of autonomy. This implies that intuitive judgments are also heteronomous because they do not represent reflective free choices. But decisions that follow external rules by free choice can also be autonomous.

34. Much later, this dialectical interpretation of the development of moral judgement was taken up by Minnameier (2001), who based his argument on Piaget and Garcia (1989) distinction of “intra, inter, and trans” (which is quite similar to our dialectical position). But he used perspective taking rather than action structures.

35. This term looks like an oxymoron, but the expression is intended to keep a constructivist attitude (perspective) while holding onto the assumption that the four perspectives differ in their ontological presumptions.

36. It was particularly the discussion with Nancey Murphy on an International Symposium «Research across boundaries. Advances in Theory-building» University of Luxemburg, June 16–19, 2010, which encouraged me to propose the following arguments.

37. I restrict my argument to the neurophysiological perspective, characterized as “physical/causal (proximate)” in Figure 17.1 and summarized as “brain” in Figure 17.5 because also classical learning theory as an example of the “mechanistic perspective” is increasingly interpreted in terms of neurophysiology. A more basic discussion of the principles that explain the “self-organization of matter and the evolution of biological macromolecules (Eigen, 1971) which nullifies the distinction of matter and life is far beyond the scope and level of this chapter. By applying the Darwinian principle of selection to matter, life is explained (reduced) to matter.

38. The anatomist Rolshoven, for example, in explaining the morphological change/development of the tegmentum argued already in the 1960s: “What happens in the periphery [in body activities], you will recognize it in the centre” (personal communication).

39. “Wir müssen das Gehirn als Teil seines soziokulturellen Umfelds verstehen. Unser Gehirn ist nicht nur von genetischen Dispositionen geprägt, sondern auch von unserer Erziehung, den Werten und moralischen Kategorien, die uns vermittelt wurden, und der Wechselwirkung mit anderen Gehirnen. Das Gehirn ist ein soziales Organ – man kann es nicht isoliert von der Umwelt verstehen” (Singer, 2008). [We have to see the brain as part of the social environment. Our brain is not only shaped by genetic dispositions, but also by our education, values and moral categories that we were taught, and the interaction with other brains. The brain is a social organ—one cannot understand it in isolation from the environment.]

40. Where else should free decisions be prepared for, if not in the brain?

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## The Other in the Self: A Triadic Unit

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**Abstract**

In this chapter, the notion of the *other in the self* is proposed as a *triple holistic developmental structure*. This proposal aims to account for aspects that have not been considered for understanding the constitution and maintenance of the self–other–culture processual structure yet. The structure here proposed is a derivation of Herbst's (1995) model of co-genetic logic. Additionally, it takes the self as an actional self (Boesch, 1991) dialogically oriented by the other (Marková, 2003; Linell, 2009). From this perspective, self–other interactions are approached under the focus of how the *triple holistic developmental structure* tacitly (Polanyi, 1966/2009) constrains (Valsiner, 1998) them in a feed-forward process. In this dynamics, new forms of cultural fields for symbolic actions (Boesch, 1991) can emerge. Some concluding issues, an illustrative analysis, and some future developments concerning the *triple holistic developmental structure* approaching the *other in the self* are also presented.

**Keywords:** triple holistic developmental structure, self, other, culture, actional self, dialogism, constraints

“(..) Triste noção tem da realidade quem a limita ao orgânico, e não põe a idéia de uma alma dentro das estatuetas e dos labores. Onde há forma há alma”

“(..) Gloomy notion about reality have those who limited it [only] to what is organic, not putting a soul inside the statuettes and handcrafts.

Where is a form, there is a soul”

—(Fernando Pessoa, 1997, “Livro do Desassossego” [Book of Disquieting], 416)

The main proposal of this chapter is to discuss the psychological notion of “the other in the self,” arguing that it embraces a threefold relationship among *self*, *other*, and *culture*. This relationship takes the form of a holistic developmental structure. As belonging to the realm of developmental phenomena, this structure is characterized for an

ever-changing movement, which makes it an always re-emerging structure.

### **The Threefold Relationship of Self, Other, and Culture**

The notion of the self has a very broad and long history in philosophy and psychology. The

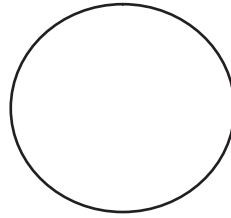
vagueness and ambiguity of this notion can be considered very useful for heuristic purposes. However, precisely because of its fuzziness, it is necessary that one makes explicit the theoretical–conceptual frame in which the term is being used (Stam, 2006). Usually, in the domains of philosophy and human sciences, the notion of self leads implicitly to the notion of someone else, the non–self, who maintains some relation with the self. However, although conceived as partners in a relation, self and other are usually treated as if they were independently separated instances at the organic and/or psychological levels.

Besides, the socio-cultural aspects of the self–other relation is conceived as a something outside of them, as if culture were a kind of independent variable directly influencing self and other, which are consequently taken as dependent variables. Synthetically speaking, this view posits a dyadic relationship among the elements (e.g., self and other as dependent variables, and culture as the independent one); or even a triadic relationship (e.g., self and other immersed in culture; or self and other creating culture as well as being constrained by it). However, none of them accomplish to consider self, other, and culture in a co-genetic threefold relationship, as I am here proposing based on Herbst’s (1995) co-genetic logic.

Taking into account the psychological notion of “the other in the self” requires consideration that the relationship among *self*, *other*, and *culture* is conformed according to one of the main characteristics of the dynamically contextual human functioning. This dynamics can be accounted by a derivation of Herbst’s (1995) model of co-genetic logic. This logic, maybe as an alternative to the classical one, has not been considered for understanding the constitution and maintenance of the self (other) culture processual structure until now. This alternative logic, by putting in relief the distinction among the parts of a structure while, at the same time, keeping them joined as a triadic unit, may give us new ways of understanding the relationships among self, other, and culture.

According to Herbst’s (1995) co-genetic logic, any structure is formed, from its very origin, by a primary process of differentiation among its future compounding relational parts. According to him:

When a distinction is made, a boundary comes into being together with the inside and the outside of a form. What is generated in this way is a triadic co-genetic unit consisting of the inside and outside



**Figure 18.1** The form of primary distinction (extracted from Herbst, 1995, p. 68).

and the distinction made that is represented by the boundary. At this stage, we have nothing more than a form in an empty space. In most general form what has become generated in this way is a unit consisting of not less than three elements (...) In this case, primary distinction that generates the form (the inside) together with the empty space (the outside), and the boundary separating and distinguishing inside and outside, is only one particular realization of the primary distinction (...).

(p. 67)

Figure 18.1 shows Herbst’s form of primary distinction.

The triadic unit so formed has the following properties:

1. *It is Co-genetic*: The three elements that are generated come into being together.
2. *It is Nonseparable*: We cannot take the components apart (...) we cannot have them initially apart and then put them together” (...).
3. *It is Nonreducible*: There cannot be less than three components. If any one component (...) is taken away, then all three components disappear together”.
4. *It is Contextual*: None of the components have individually definable characteristics. In fact, they have no intrinsic characteristics that belong to them. (...) the components are individually undefined, but each is definable in terms of the two others. (Herbst, 1995, pp. 67–68)<sup>1</sup>

## The Threefold Co-Genetic Relationship of Self–Other–Culture

### *The Actional Self*

Instead of being a static, crystallized entity, the notion of self will be taken here as an actional self, who is always in interlocation with someone else: the other, or the I itself, in the I–myself interactions. Therefore, there will always be someone else for me as an actional self: the one who has created the masterpiece that disquiets me, the one who has composed the music that now delights me, the one

who directed the film that made me so anguished yesterday, the one who gave me a gift, who made me angry, who sheltered me. The actional self is, then, someone who is always in companion of someone else, co-creating their cultural world in both time and place. Of course, as highlighted by Boesch (2011), unfortunately this does not always happen in an ethically promising world.

Fortunately, the companionship between self and other keeps the proper tension of relationships among different participants, even when the involved persons can neither realize nor admit their differences, nor feel the thusly created tension. I am using the term *fortunately* in aiming to highlight the fact that thanks to the tension caused by the difference, the other may subvert the self's symbolic actional contribution, and vice versa, may be preventing each one of the presumptions of being the only and sovereign actor in the process of the meaning-making of personal and collective culture (Simão, 2011, in press).

#### CULTURE AND OTHER IN THE SELF

Culture, on its turn, is taken here in a sense that channels our sight to some specific aspects of the social life, which are directly related to the dynamics of the I–Other relationship. The notion of culture is concerned with the interactive social field, which, par excellence, modulates symbolic actions in contextualized time and place. Culture allows some persons' symbolic actions, and prevents others, so engendering a myriad of tensional situations in the symbolic world. In such an extent, the self–other relationships are understood as they act as modulators, and are modulated by, the experiences of the actional self in its cultural field. These formulations are based on Boesch's (1991) notion of culture, which clearly and consistently backgrounds and pervades all his oeuvre (Boesch, 2011).

The relationship between culture and self occurs through the figure of the other, this other being concretely present, distant, or even imaginary but, in any case, always the figure who makes remarks, sings praises, reproves—in sum, acts in a multiplicity of contextual ways, verbally and nonverbally, directly or indirectly. In so doing, the other becomes the representative of, as well as the one who renders concrete, in each particular moment, the affective and cognitive possibilities and limits for the actional self in a given socio-cultural constellation (Simão, 2000, 2008). All this is possible thanks to the nature of the dialogue as an intersubjective field of

similarity and difference, even under the perceptive human laws we are submitted to as belonging to the same species (Crossley, 1996; Boesch, 2011).

The perspective of the dialogism, which presupposes *the other orientation of the self* as a basic assumption in human sciences, is certainly also implied here:

A definitional point in dialogism is the assumption that human nature and human life are constituted in interrelations with “the other,” that is, in *other orientation*. Humans are always interdependent with others, although the degree and kinds of interdependence will of course vary with individuals, cultures and situations.

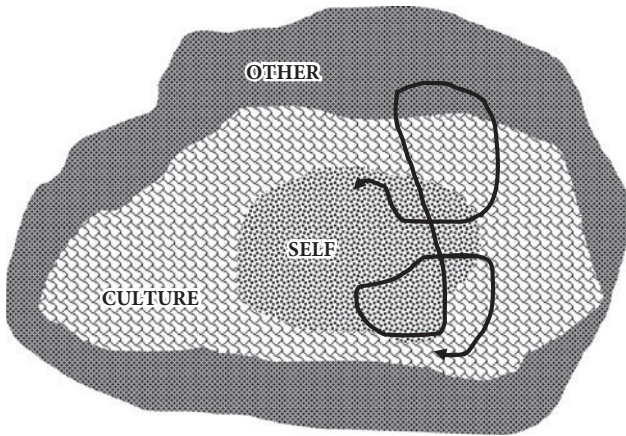
(Linell, 2009, p. 13)

Thus, a relationship of mutual constitutive interdependence is configured among the self, the other—as representative of their culture—and the expectations they have one about the other, their experiences diverging from the expected and the relational meaning among them. In this dynamic field of relationships, the self's and the other's meaning-making will occur according to the extent to which they can position themselves in respect one to the other as someone who gives opportunities for constructing new meanings, as well as supporting them in the social milieu (Simão, 2003).

In such a co-genetic emergent processual structure, the relationships are engendered thanks to the I's symbolic actions in its I–I and I–Other interactions in each particular and temporary socio-cultural milieu. The I's symbolic action, by selectively making distinctions from its experienced world, generates, at each moment and place of its life, diverse triadic units formed by the three elements that come into existence jointly and inseparably: the self, the other, and the relationship between them. *It is in the core of this third element—the relationship between self and other—that cultural objects (in the Boeschian broad sense) are engendered, through negotiations in face of the tensional difference realized by the self and the other as differences between them, as represented by Figure 18.2.*

As far as the social interaction is one of the main sources of self-formation in culture (for example, see Boesch, 1991, 2011; Simão, 2005), and assuming Herbst's co-genetic logic as the way of functioning of the triadic processual structure of self–other–culture here proposed, I will now approach some ways by which this process works in the dynamics of self–other interactions.





**Figure 18.2** The triadic processual structure of self–other–culture, as it emerged according to the co-genetic logic proposed by Herbst (1995), at each time and place in lifetime during self–other relationships.

### *How the Other Orientation by the Self Happens*

By proposing to discuss some ways of other orientation by the self, I will take into account some inheritances from the tradition of Ancient Greek thought, believing that these inheritances are nowadays present in our personal process of *Bildung* (Formation) in Western tradition. As any inheritance, it is not now present in its identical Ancient form but in a transformative way. This presence can be found in the ways we aim and try to establish our interpersonal relationships, as well as in the ways we evaluate and try to change them in everyday life. The same applies to our psychological understanding and explanation about them (Gadamer, 1959/1985; Taylor, 2002; Simão, 2005, 2008).

Among the Ancient Greek philosophers, one of the most disquieting aspects in the nature was *movement*. When they were trying to understand it, they arrived at distinguishing categories that made their conception of movement simultaneously more specific and broader than our modern conceptions of movement. Not one, but four categories of movement were conceived by the Ancient Greek philosophers:

1. the *local movement*, concerning the movement of things from one place to the other;
2. the *quantitative movement*, concerning the increasing or decreasing of things;
3. the *qualitative movement*, responsible for the changes in the nature of things; and
4. the *substantial movement*, concerning the generation and degeneration of things (cf. Mariás, 2004, p. 14).

As far as relationships involve changes (i.e., movement), the quest for comprehension about movement and the consequent differentiation according to these categories by the Ancient Greek philosophers interests us because they can raise some reflections concerning the apprehension and transformation in I–world (other) relationships. These aspects, by their turn, are linked to two inter-related aspects about the triadic structure of self–other–culture here proposed: (1) the ways by which it is formed and tacitly (Polanyi, 1966/2009) constrains (Valsiner, 1998) the self–other interactions in a feed-forward process, and (2) allowing the emergence of new forms of fields for symbolic actions (Boesch, 1991)—that is, new cultural processual structures.

### **The Issue of Transformation and the Self–Other Orientation**

Differentiating movements assumes that things may transform themselves during time, presenting themselves differently than they were. In such an extent, things *are not* (as if they had an *intrinsically immutable state belonged to them*), but they *are temporarily in this or that way*.

Among the categories of movement already mentioned, those referred to as the *qualitative and substantial movements* (more than the other two) lead us toward reflections about temporality, multiplicity, and contradiction inhabiting the self–other relationships.

Moreover, the category of *substantial movement* puts in focus the generation and degeneration of things during time. Differentiating and recognizing this category ends in bringing uncertainty over to the very and real nature of things, also carrying

the issue of how to state relationships with them. Recognizing the inconstancy of things in the world brings disquieting feelings, preventing oneself of ruling lines for self–other relationships that otherwise would be coherent with the tacit belief of stability. Generation and corruption imply that if there will be rules, they can only be addressed to the processes of understanding transformation.

In the ambit of self–other relationships, a relevant issue for human affairs shifts its terms from *what is the real and veritable knowledge about ourselves and the other* to *what kind of relationship we can develop with ourselves and the other at the present circumstances*. This issue poses the incessant quest for disclosing what is believed to be true behind the appearances of the other, who always seems changeable. All this means putting under suspicions the adequacy of self’s and other’s ways of acting, as well as the possibilities of a “real” apprehension of the one by the other. The expectation about the stability of the self–other relationships becomes, then, groundless.

*In the presumption that interpersonal relationships are not safe and regular as they wish or expect, as for the true person’s thoughts and desires may be hidden behind their appearances, self and other try to create relationships that will be patterned and ruled by ways of discovering and holding the unrevealed truth. Culture, as a field is created at the frontiers of self–other relationships, will be then less flexible and more ruling to guarantee the aims of safety in interpersonal relationships.*

In sum, as the self does not quit pursuing the *true knowledge about the other*, aiming to act on an ever more safe ground, the person will then be faced with one of the most important antinomies about the self–other relationships, the one of *stability versus transformation*.

From this antinomy, we can differentiate two versants of *other orientation in the self*. In the first versant that springs from the whole Ancient Greek thought, the *other orientation channels the self*—tacitly or explicitly—according to the conceptions of *illusion, uncertainty, and imperfection* as the hallmarks of self–other relationships. This channeling, as we will discuss, are linked to Plato’s and Parmenides’ philosophical inheritances. The second versant of *other orientation channels the self*—tacitly or explicitly—according to the conceptions of *potentiality and becoming (the time to come)*; it can be linked to the inheritance of Aristotle’s and Heraclitus’ philosophical ideas.

### ***Transformation As Illusion, Uncertainty, and Imperfection***

The pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides (515–440 BC) was intensely dedicated to the fundamental issue of the *thing-in-itself*. He argued that acting in a twofold way is inherent to human kind when surveying the nature of things. Both ways of acting are not excluding each other, leading to different places. On the one hand, there is *the method of thought, the only way for capturing the being in its certitude, uniformity, unity, and veracity*. The way of thought is, however, counterposed by that of the senses, *leading to the uncertain, changing, mutable, heterogeneous, and multiple things*. The way of the senses *leads to grasping the things* as if, simultaneously, *they are and are not*.

For Parmenides, the perception of the aforementioned movements of generation and corruption of things are originated by the apprehension of things through the senses; these kinds of movements are, however, mistakenly understood as true attributes of things, as if one were grasping their *come to be*. It is a way of apprehension that is inherent in the human condition, making the pursuing of the thing in itself tricked by the senses. However, it is an inescapable condition of human beings. In conclusion, for Parmenides, via the senses, the human being goes pursuing something that can be rightly done only by the way of thinking (Marías, 2004).

Putting these ideas under the focus of self–other relationships, the quest for grasping the other in his permanence and unity (i.e., in what that other is in his essence) should be done through the self’s rationality, as the senses would only lead the person to encounter the inconstant and liable character of the other. *Thinking the other, rather than feeling the other, would be the “golden rule” for the other orientation in the self aiming to grasp the other’s essence behind its appearances*. This is the hallmark of a conception of self–other relationship settled in the dualism between *what is* and *what seems to be, but is not*; between *reality* and *illusion, veracity* and *falsity*; a dualism between *relationships ruled by the reasoning of thought* and *those ruled by the emotion of sensibility*. *The cultural field so engendered will value reason to the detriment of emotion*.

Moreover, one of the consequences of this kind of dualism is tacitly creating a synonymy between *transformation and nonessentiality* in the ambit of the other orientation in the self. It is a dualism that opens the ground for self–other relationships exclusively settled in rationality, taken it as the only

essential and desirable via for self–other relationships, whereas those involving feelings and emotions are considered as labile and less desirable. It is worth noting that the desirability of the former seems to be due to the fact that they intuitively believe in the possibility of objective interpersonal relationships, letting self and other free from the onuses of taking different perspectives as valid. Considering the assumption of the impossibility of the complete objectivity, the situation would require negotiation for creating a third or recognizing and validating its impossibility. These situations that imply negotiation would also probably interfere in the already stated knowledge about the state of affairs, which is in focus during the interaction. In other words, the path of negotiation requires recognizing that there is not only one valid apprehension and comprehension of some reality, but many. If so, the co-genetic unit of *self–other–culture* is kept, or is even unfolded in other co-genetic units, by distancing and polarization of its compounding parts. The non-negotiation method, on the contrary, puts the interlocutors in the territory of the emblematic and chimerical world of no tension. It is a world without place for the creative symbolic action as the movement, par excellence, of solving tensions (Janet, 1928, 1929; Boesch, 1993). *In such a way, the co-genetic unit of self–other–culture is broken down, and cultural innovation is prevented.*

The impasses created by the interplay of forces between both ways can be viewed as a inheritance of the *aporia* concerning making compatible the *unity, immobility, and eternity of the thing in itself* with the *multiplicity, variability, and perishing of the being* in Ancient Greek philosophy. This can be viewed as a good inheritance, as for Aristotle suggests that the very point of departure in any inquiry should be an *aporia* (Aristotle, 1979, p. 139, *Metafísica, Da Geração e Corrupção*, I, 8, 325 to 13).

#### THE PERFECTION–IMPERFECTION DUALISM IN SELF’S SEARCHING FOR THE IDEAL OTHER

Concerning the *aporia* here in focus, we can now turn ourselves to Plato’s (427–348/347 B.C.) philosophical ideas. Synthetically, they can be understood as a permanent quest for complementing *the world of things, which is never perfect*, to the *ideas of things, in their perfection* (Simão, 2010). Brought to the issue of the self–other relationships, Plato’s perspective points to the fact that we are always relating ourselves with a world of imperfect others, as the perfection is not lodged in the beings that inhabited

our world; perfection inhabits only in their essence, the ideas of others. The essence dwelled by the ideas are, however, inaccessible through via the I’s experience in our world, so remaining outside the ambit of the self–other relationships.

Moreover, in Plato’s philosophy, the entity—understood as the *thing in itself*—is not only perfect but also independent of its circumstantial predicates, what makes it not changeable according to them. If self–other relationships were framed accordingly, we would have a self that would not be altered by its past or present experiences with the other, nor by its future expectations about the other. The same would be the case for the other. In this respect, self and other would be above of their mutual interference and evaluation; they would be entities exempted from imperfections and differences predicated by their mutual relationships. Here, we have the emblematic perfection in the relationships to which the common sense wisely gives the label of “platonic.” There would be no tension, no necessity of negotiation—in sum, no actual interactive contact. Again, and consequently, the co-genetic unit is broken down; also there is no place for movements of differentiation, preventing cultural innovation in the sense here assumed.

But there is something more to be said: in Plato’s philosophy, perfection exists only in the realm of the ideas, not in the mundane real world of personal relationships. In such a way, self and other can then be mutually affected in their actual relationships. However, this affection still remains captive of the *thing in itself*; as the self will forcefully depend on some previous idea of the other, in expectation or imagination, for realizing its mere presence, the condition for any possibility of relationship. In such a way, the self should act symbolically at the level of the ideal anticipation of the other’s actions, thoughts, and feelings (i.e., at the level of the perfect entity), for having the opportunity of encountering the real other (i.e., the imperfect being). All this leads to the following consequence: what the self apprehends in its relationship with the other is not *what the other is* but only *what the other almost is*.

However, in Plato’s philosophy, the distance between the idea of the other and the real other as encountered by the self gives rise to a further *aporia*: if, on the one hand, for realizing and relating with anything we need previously have some idea about it and, if on the other hand, the idea is an event that cannot come from direct experience in the world, then we will always have access just to things as

imperfect instances of the ideas, never to the entities in their perfection. In such a way, the terms of our former issue derived from the platonic aporia are shifted: Even without the possibility of having access to the other as an entity in its absoluteness, the self needs to track the other at least as an idea in its perfection. This is the only possible way for the self to try grasp the other. As far as it is impossible for the self reaching the other in its absoluteness, it will forcefully reach the other only in its aspect of an imperfect other.

In other words, the quest for perfection, for the essence (the entity), remains conditional to the imperfection of the self–other relationship, the only via for its access to the world, through the I’s symbolic action. It will always be, then, a distance between the idea of other, in its perfection, and the other as the self can encounter it, what gives place to the tension between *what is planned, expected, and desired* and *what is effectively encountered* by the self concerning the other and their relationship. *As culture is a field originated from the core of self–other relationship, it will be always a real (imperfect) construction of the humankind, aiming to solve the gap between perfection and imperfection through symbolic action.* In such a case, the self–other–cultural co-genetic processual structure here proposed could be kept and will always involve a struggle for perfection.

However, as in the Platonic philosophical context, the major issue is the possibility of the human being reaching Perfection and True, the other enters then only as an instrument for the I reaching those absolute values, rather than being the other—interlocutor. This is, indeed, the main role of the other in platonic dialectics (Voelke, 1961; Szymkowiak, 1999; Marková, 2003a).<sup>2</sup> In this frame, identifying and recognizing differences among beings, as between self and other, will only account for displacing them from the ambit of the essentiality of the entities and not for approaching the subject of differences concerning the “real and mundane world.”

#### THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ERNST BOESCH FROM A PLATONIC INHERITANCE: AN ILLUSTRATION OF CULTURE IN PSYCHOLOGY

In this section, I will work mainly with two aspects of Plato’s philosophy inheritance, trying to illustrate the transformative and creative psychological thought about the self–other–culture structural

process. For this purpose, I will analyze some of Boesch’s proposals, as I understood them from my own perspective, taking them as a transformative intellectual construction that contemplates aspects of Plato’s philosophical conception.

At this point, it is worth recapitulating two of the main tenets of Plato’s philosophy as we have brought to our focused subject. First, the I–world relationship happens at the level of *imperfection of things*, if considered the *perfection of the absolute of the ideas*. This means that the self can relate itself just with a world of imperfect others, as the perfection of the essence of beings is not accessible to its worldly experience. Second, as far as the I is imperfect in its humanity, because not naturally provided of the Goodness and the Beautifulness, the self will try to accomplish Perfection through its relationship with the other.

At this point, it is important to listen to Gadamer. He points out that delineating the historic-cultural place of the concept of Beautifulness in hermeneutic (among other aspects) to the tightly relation between the ideas of Beautifulness and Goodness in platonic philosophy, which are sometimes even interchangeable. Moreover, Goodness and Beautifulness are beyond the circumstantial conditions of the things, concerning what is unitary and unconditional in their whole essence. Goodness and Beautifulness are above all world circumstantialities (Gadamer, 1959/1985).

Nevertheless, Gadamer also warns that in platonic philosophy, there is a deeper distinction between Goodness and Beautifulness, as only the latter has the property of being showed by itself. This differentiated character gives to Beautifulness the most important ontological function, that of mediation between idea and phenomena (Gadamer, 1959/1985).

If brought to the focus of the semiotic–cultural constructivism (Simão, 2005, 2007, 2010, in press), these aspects of platonic philosophy appear in important transformative conceptions that are present in Boesch’s thought.

#### *The Beauty of the Sound*

The human experience of questing for perfection is clearly approached by Boesch in his *oeuvre* as, for example, in one of his most important papers entitled *The Sound of the Violin* (Boesch, 1993). Boesch reconstructs there the filogenesis and ontogenesis of the violin and the violinist in their intimate relationship. At the very beginning of his paper, Boesch

explains that the understanding of the term *ontogenesis* he invites us to take in its original sense—that is, the sense of “what comes to be.” This means to take the term in the sense of *potentiality* and *coming to be*, one of William James’ impacts on Boesch’s thought (Simão, 1999; Simão, 2002). In his own words, “Indeed, a violin becomes really a violin only on being played” (Boesch, 1993, p. 72). The potentiality, the come to being of the symbolic object, in its function and meaning, is then actualized only through the relationship with the subject.

But this is not only for the object: the apprenticeship himself has also his genesis as such. The eventual future violinist, through a challenging and painful process, faces himself, at once, with the difference between *the sound he desires the violin produces* and *the sound he realizes he reached that the violin has produced*. The violinist is so confronted by the distance that separates him from *what he is, in his actual relationship with the violin*, from *what he is not yet, what he desires to be and may be will never be*. In such an extent, the relationship with the violin, in the perspective of the violinist’s *comes to be*, confronts him with his own limits, transforming him in some way. Therefore, Boesch brings to discussion the issue of the emergence of symbolism through the subject’s action in his relationship of tension and distension with the object. This is a process where the I (the violinist) searches in its relation with the other (the object violin) for the Beautifulness as near as Perfection, although never reaching them at all.

Boesch enters, then, in a Janetian way (Simão, 2003b), where the antagonism between perfection and imperfection experienced by the self is clearly present. From here comes the micro and ontogenetic value of the quest for perfection, as it instigates the self for continuing to want to be. For Boesch (1993), the reason for the maintenance of the young violinist, usually a child, in the activity as a violin apprenticeship is her *search for her sound*, that sound that *only she can extract from the violin*, that she can *recognize as her sound*; it *affects her, touching her heart in an indefinable way*, producing a *contentment and fulfilling* in the few and liable moments she reaches the violin produces that sound (cf. p. 74). This means, in Boeschian terms, the real cultural quest for perfection, which is always a step further from where we presently are (cf. Boesch, 1993, pp. 76–77).

We are here clearly facing the human search already announced in Plato’s philosophy: the Beauty,

in its perfection, bringing Goodness together; neither, however, is ever attained in their plenitude. On the other hand, in Boesch’s semiotic-constructivist contemporary ideas, there are at least three reconstructive aspects that are far away the strict Platonism, clearly illustrating the transformative process of creation in tradition (Gadamer, 1959/1985; Taylor, 2002), as I would like to bring here in focus.

First, in Boesch, the search for perfection is explicitly recognized as a transformative cultural process in the self, putting the things nearer to Gadamer’s (1959/1985) conception of self-relationship with masterpieces. In Boesch (1983), the violinist’s search for the Beautiful Sound requires a complex and subtle imbalance between the *is value* and *should value* (Boesch, 1991). Managing this requirements will challenge the self (the violinist), if he lets himself be challenged in the process of making art. In a similar vein, for Gadamer, the horizon of the masterpiece *interpellates* who really looks for its comprehension, who lets it be interpellated by it, in ways that the self went out transformed in this dialogue.

Second, the necessity and feeling of fulfillment, which is experienced in the process of a constant search for perfection, is eminently dependent on self-subjective processes. In this sense, Boesch’s propositions seems nearer to the primacy of the self’s inner resources than the mundane-ideal imbalance of forms, maybe putting his/her propositions nearer from Augustine’s than Plato’s inheritance.

Third, according to Boesch’s Symbolic Action Theory, in the self-other relationships, the self not only continuously reconstructs the symbolic objects (the other here included) but also transforms itself, as in this process it experiences its action potential—that is, the experience of can or cannot reaches its covet personal patterns (Boesch, 1991). This aspect puts Boesch’s reconstructive propositions about Beautifulness and Perfection closer to the real self in its lived world. This keeps, at the same time, the self’s present experiences and the desire for transcending its experience at the heart of the self, not in an external world. In such a way, Boesch reaches to keep both worlds—the present and the desired, imagined—together inside the self, rather than platonically interdicted in their communication.

### ***Transformation As the Potentiality of Coming to Be***

In the domain of Ancient Greek philosophy, it will be Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) who refused the

synonymy between transformation and nonessentiality, inherited from Parmenides' thought, attributing a special place for the issue of mutability of the natural phenomena.

Nevertheless, as highlighted by Marková (2003), it is important not to forget that despite the fact that it was Aristotle who opened the place for the pair of opposites *potentiality and actuality* in Ancient Greek thought, he still remained faithful to the canon of non-contradiction in Ancient Greek philosophy. In such a way, potentiality and actuality remain as mutually exclusive in Aristotle's philosophy, an inheritance that will preponderate in European thought until the advent of Hegel's dialectic but has never completely disappeared until now (see Marková, 2003, pp. 34–37).

Although keeping this aspect in mind, we can reflect about some particular implications of Aristotle's philosophy for the understanding of the self–other–culture processual structure proposed. The character of the other enters in Ancient Greek philosophy only when Aristotle takes the phenomenon of friendship as paradigmatic for the comprehension of human relations. For Aristotle, friendship is an event that touches the live beings (humans and other animals). The condition for considering that friendship exists in a particular relationship is that the involved persons should be capable of recognizing that they are the objects of the other's attachment, as well as being capable of retribution (Szymkowiak, 1999; Voelke, 1961). Therefore, Aristotle's conception of friendship implies a preponderantly symmetrical self–other relationship. It is settled in the equalized apprehension of the nature of the ongoing relationship by the involved persons, as well as their explicit reciprocity.

This conception of friendship is clearly founded on the Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in which he postulates that for each category of entity there is a set of essential properties and availabilities without which that entity ceases to exist. Variability from the essential properties is, by its turn, assumed as the different circumstantial modes through which essentiality can concretely be effective in each particular case. Among these modes by which variability can express itself, two pairs of modes are especially important for our discussion: first, the pair *veracity* and *falsity* (respectively, when the being shows his own nature and when it shows a nature that does not belong to it); second, the pair *potency* and *act* (respectively, when the being manifests something

about its come to be or when it manifests what it presently is) (Marías, 2004).

The importance of these pairs of modes to our focus is that they address to dual forms of self–other relationships as, for example, the true versus false friendship. These pairs of modes also address, consequently, the self's acts aiming the construction and maintenance of the true friendship, which according to Aristotle's thought, is the main way for accomplishing the human potential of being happy in life.

In fact, the Aristotelian most important moral value is the human constant search for the sovereign Goodness of happiness. In Aristotle teleology, this is the supreme goal, under which all other are subordinated as means for reaching it (see Voelke, 1961). Searching for happiness, in Aristotelian terms, should be understood not as if it were an exceptional occurrence but a natural one. It is the natural way destined to the existence of the human beings in their world, which should be reached through their effective actions. Bringing this philosophical frame to the self–other relationships, the cultural value of friendship will be the principal method for the self's attainment of happiness.

The range of uncertainty will, then, fall over the issue of skillfulness and perfection in the search for happiness—in other words, I's virtue in acting for the perfect self-realization of coming to be happy, the natural way for the human beings. However, according to Aristotle's philosophy, even the virtuous person is not self-sufficient for her self-realization in happiness, as the self never can prescind from the other in this pursuit. In self's search for being happy, different interconnected roles are reserved for the other.

Insofar as the attainment of happiness depends on a continuous activity of the self in searching it, as uninterrupted as possible, its questioning is at the level of the self virtues. According to Aristotle's philosophy, it is easier to be virtuous in companionship than alone, as the other, through its actions, feedbacks the self's attitudes and paths.<sup>3</sup> Besides, as far as the other is someone who is demanding in the very convivial relationship, the I needs to make use of his virtues for being convivial with the other, what makes him better by practicing a more enriching activity concerning social interaction. Last but not least, the relationship with the other allows the I to exercise him-/herself in love. In Aristotelian philosophy, love is a Good in itself, as it touches to happiness and self-accomplishment, natural destinies of the human beings.

As should be expected, in face of the weight of the other's role, this other must be someone who fulfills some requirements to give the best opportunities for the exercise of virtues by the self and should be someone who can give the best opportunities for a virtuous self–other relationship. As such, the other must also be virtuous.

At first sight, then, the undifferentiated and, in some sense, self-centered figure of the other, that one who is “someone but not me” will become, in Aristotle's proposals, a very special other, the fellow. However, the other as friend is still a self-centered figure, as he should be “someone as similar in Virtues as possible to the self,” an alter-ego. The other as friend will be, indeed, reduced to a subcategory of the self, a kind of self detached from the I, with whom the relationships must be similar to those hold by the I with the self.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, according to the Aristotelian philosophy, the human life is something naturally good and nice. It consists of feelings and thoughts that are actualized in activities, especially those about which the human being is conscious. We will desire to live if our consciousness is informing us that we are accomplishing our natural function of having a nice and good life. The conscious activity is, however, more difficult when turned to oneself than when turned to another, to the friend, that “myself detached from the I,” with whom the relationships are very similar to those of the virtuous I with himself. The friend, the alter ego who amplifies the self-consciousness and its living, will be, therefore, so necessary to the self-accomplishment (Voelke, 1961).

Besides, and maybe more relevant for our discussion, the person's consciousness about that alter ego allows him/her, by contemplating the other's virtues, to contemplate the virtues in his-/herself easier than he/she could do if he/she had only him-/herself for contemplating; to see oneself in the mirror is easier than without it. In few words, the virtuous man will need friends who resemble him in virtues to contemplate himself.

If the self needs the other for activities that allow him the search of Perfection in living—that is, for his self-accomplishment—this other should be a virtuous friend as the self, an alter ego to whom the self can have a perfect and veritable friendship. Therefore, in the Aristotelian philosophy, the access to Goodness does not happen against a background of diversity but of similarity with the other; does not happen against the background of difference and alterity but against that of the other as an alter ego.

Moreover, if the other as an alter ego is the mean for knowing oneself, then that other must be similar and apprehensible by the I— as much as it is, the best the I can fully know and feel itself and fully live. Happiness, then, is brought by similarity with the other, accompanied by its consciousness.

These possibilities of self–other relationships as a way for the self-awareness and self-accomplishment is settled, in a great part, on the Aristotelian metaphysics about knowledge, where the fundamental character of *empeiria* is to allow a kind of knowledge that cannot be taught to another by the knower; the one who knows can only give conditions for the other to have similar experiences. Brought to our context of discussion, the self–other relationships would allow the *empeiria* to the self, through the individual, particular and circumstantial experience of getting knowledge about oneself in the familiarity with the other. It will be, then, through the mediated experience in self–other relations that the human being will search for the wisdom about himself, for the *sophia*.

As already noted by Cuvillier (1938), the basis for the Aristotelian conception of friendship is analogy in its strict sense of the mathematical proportion. However, in its extended sense, it concerns a kind of reasoning in which one goes across some established similitude to other not yet established. Additionally, Marías (2004) explains that in the Aristotelian sense of analogy, many different things are connected thanks to a common aspect in their nature.

In fact, for Aristotle, in a perfect friendship the attitudes the self has toward the other are analogous to those he would have toward himself (cf. Voelke, 1961). This means that I would not conceive the other as identical, but analogous to itself; anyway, it would always be a process of construction of self–other relationship by similitude, not by contraposition. Besides, as the direction of the process is preponderantly from the self to the other—and not bidirectional—it transpires some omnipotence of the self in the course of the relationship.

In Aristotle's view, individualism and utilitarian attitudes make unviable the attainment of the perfect friendship. However, friendship can embrace imperfect aspects. In this case, because of its combination with altruism, the result will be that the very friend would like to be useful and give pleasure to the other (Voelke, 1961).

The perfect friendship will also embrace the interplay between altruism and individualism in the

context of approximation or distancing from suffering. The paradigmatic situation in Aristotelian terms is the one in which, if Friend 1 is suffering, the other (Friend 2) will try to share such a suffering with him (Friend 1), believing that his attitude can relieve his friend's pain. Almost paradoxically, Friend 1, on his side, trying to be a real friend of Friend 2, would try to avoid that such sharing because it could bring pain for his Friend (2).

In a coherent way, in the Aristotelian solution for this impasse, reason must prevail upon feelings. According to this criterion, the very friendship among human beings will be distinguished from the vital communality among other animals, as well as from the loving relationship. The way of reason will allow that the very friendship constitutes itself not through the identity fusion, but through rational reciprocity. Reciprocity presupposes the vice versa, whereas rationality presupposes the awareness of reciprocity in the relationship. As such, the very friendship, although lived at the affective level, will be known at the thought level (Voelke, 1961).

Aristotle gives, then, an integrative destiny to the dichotomies of *perfection–imperfection* and *individualism–sharing*. The attributes that make the friendship perfect or imperfect (altruism vs. utilitarian feelings and self-pleasure) become, through the way of rationality, a whole hierarchically more complex than the former forms of relationship, which preserves the primordial character of perfect friendship. This, however, makes it something hybrid, less pure, and maybe more real, as it also embraces some utilitarian attitudes and the pleasure in the relationship with the other. Imperfection, by its side, becomes less imperfect in this new arrangement, because it is at the service of a virtuous relationship, through altruism.

This reorganization may open the doors for transformation of the self and other involved in the friendship. However, in face of the Aristotelian presumption of the other as an *almost myself*, where the pleasure of the self and the other are barely distinguished, that process, in principle a reorganizing process, ends in configuring a situation where, if no one loses, also transforms himself.

About equality and inequality, the Aristotelian perspective is that of proportional equality, in which the merits of each person involved are contemplated: the most powerful, for example, should receive honors proportional to the extent he/she has helped the weakest (Voelke, 1961).

It is, then, a conception of self–other relationship where complementarities become synonymous

of symmetry and equalization, and the purposes of each one should be convergent to the other's. Divergences will be indicative of imperfection and lack virtuosity in the symbolic actions that construct the *self–other–culture* relationships.

### *Heraclitus and the Unity in the Tension*

Heraclitus' (approx. 550–480 B.C.) philosophy inherits mostly the issues brought about by Parmenides' philosophy, which had installed the antinomies of *being* and *not being*, *unity* and *plurality*, *stability* and *changing*. As we already mentioned, these antinomies touch to another issue, that of the transformation of things, *to the one that becomes the different*. Heraclitus' metaphysics relies on the idea of movement, of mutable reality, according to which everything flows. This mutability expresses itself in the duality of the being, who, as a creature of the world, *while actually being, is already in a movement of coming to be, of being no more what it just was*.

According to Bréhier (1931/1988), there are four basic and inter-related themes in Heraclitus' meditations. These themes are directly related to our discussion about transformations in the processual triadic structure of self–other–culture.

The first Heraclitean theme is war, attributed by Bréhier to the fact that Heraclitus lived in a time of great civil catastrophes in Greece. In those times, the birth and the conservation of beings were dependent on an imbalance of opposite forces in conflict. In such a perspective, the absence of conflict would cause the cessation of the universe. Conflict, therefore, is taken in its aspect of fecundity, where opposite forces harmonize, "as the forces that maintain the tension of the strings of a bow" (Bréhier, 1931, p. 62). We are, then, by other ways, very near to Boesch's *The Sound of the Violin ...*

The second theme in Heraclitus' philosophy is the unity of nature and of everything that inhabits it. This unity is, however, hidden behind an appearance of multiplicity, making the former evident only through the intuition of the laws that rule transformation. In such a sense, wisdom means to grasp the general formula of the world changes, especially the ones related to the temporal cycles (see Bréhier, 1931, pp. 62–64).

The third Heraclitean theme—and probably the most known—is the perpetual flowing of things, from which the being cannot be divorced. Bréhier (1931) explains it by giving its paradigmatic circumstances of manifestation: "[T]he young becomes aged; life gives place to death, the



vigil to sleep; cold things come to be hot and the wet dries” (p. 63).

Finally, the fourth theme of Heraclitus’ philosophy concerns the fact that the things embrace the opposite of what they reveal about themselves. Grasping their opposite side depends on the perspective according to which one’s take them (Bréhier, 1931, p. 63).

Among the fourth themes, it is the second that interests us, especially in the present discussion. Apprehending cyclical changes involves more challenges in approaching the phenomena than could appear at a first glance. It involves the conception of the Cosmos, which is a constant come to be and perishing, a kind of primary background from which everything comes and returns to. However, the so conceived Cosmos is not something out of the being, as a kaleidoscopic spectacle to be watched. On the contrary, the Cosmic event passes throughout the being, it is linked to its soul. The human being is a Cosmic being that should orient its life according the Cosmic spirit—that is, the logos (cf. Jaeger, 1933/1942). In such a case, the constant mutability of the human life is not a matter of individual option but an unavoidable natural fact, as the being is part and parcel of the cosmic whole. The issue to be put is, then, about the orientation the person can or cannot give to her life toward the logos, integrating herself more or less harmoniously into the Cosmic unity.

Orienting one’s life toward the logos cannot be reduced, in Heraclitus, to the sense of logic-rational understanding concerning some phenomenon external to the self, relating to which the self should take a position. Orienting oneself toward the logos is, otherwise, a constant movement of fighting between *being* and *coming to be*. This movement can be done only through self-investigation. It is, indeed, an inner movement. In other words, aside from sensitive intuition and rational thought about the world perceived as external of the self, the investigation toward the logos means a self-investigation about inner experiences. To apprehend the logos is, therefore, mainly of an *imagetic* nature (cf. Jaeger, 1933/1942). However, although it requires turning to oneself, contemplating the self’s particularities, the way toward the logos cannot be tread out as an idiosyncratic individual search. As the logos is unity and communality, this kind of search would end in putting the self away from the logos, breaking the unity of the Cosmos (cf. Jaeger, 1933/1942).

Among the philosophical perspectives here focused, Heraclitus’ philosophy is indeed the one that opens possibilities for thinking the self–other relationship as a dynamic structure between genuinely different parts producing a third member, the cultural field, which will be also active as symbolic field for action. The metaphor of the intense and conflicting relationship in war is paradigmatic; there, tension and conflict have a restructuring power, generating a new relational unity. Moreover, Heraclitean ideas also point to the fact that the relationship among different beings installs itself in the core of the proper I as a dual being in a constant movement of coming to be. This is the natural condition of the self in its constant flow. Simultaneously and successively, the self *is* and *it is not*; it is *itself now* and *its come to be*. The impossibility of such a duality is the impossibility of the existence itself.

The same is true for the relationship among different selves in the self–other–culture triadic processual structure: the relational unity depends on the duality, without which the proper sense of relationship is voided. The conception of duality in Heraclitus’ philosophy also has important implications for the issues of meaning-making and contextual understanding in self–other–culture relationships. Hans-Georg Gadamer approaches this issue in his reflections upon aesthetic and religious experiences, when talking about his comprehension of *sign*:

[A sign] is not something that everyone has been able to see, not something to which one can refer, and yet, if it is taken as a sign, there is something incontestably certain about it. There is a saying of Heraclitus that illuminates this matter very well: “The Delphic god neither reveals nor conceals, but gives a sign”. One needs to understand what “giving a sign” means here. It is not something that takes the place of seeing, for what distinguishes it precisely from all reports or from its opposite, silence, is the fact that what is shown is only accessible to the one who looks for himself and actually sees something there.

(Gadamer, 1977/1986, p. 152)

In such a way, the constructive character of duality in Heraclitus allows us to think that a message is born from something that, at the same time, *is not* (*does not reveal*) and *is* (*does not conceal*), generating a third thing, the meaning (the sign). Maybe it is not a coincidence that, curiously, Heraclitus was called, at his time, *the obscure*.

But in Gadamer's Heraclitus, there is something more: The comprehension of the sign will be possible only if, at the beginning, the person who is faced and confronted by the duality quests the unity of the meaningful third in her horizon; in other words, only if the self has the unity of the meaningful third as a pre-comprehension. *If we take this third part as the cultural productions emerged from the core of self-other relationships, cultural demands, prescriptions, and possibilities should be, by a process of Bildung (Formation, Gadamer), as personal pre-comprehensions. In short, living in culture, as living in the level of self-other core productions, demands the person's availability for relationships with the other, which will be, of course, always selective relationships according to the person's ever reconstruction in culture.*

### Some Concluding Issues

From what we discussed until now, one main issue emerges—that of the conditions under which self-other relationships can develop. This main issue, by its side, unfolds in other that of the possibilities for relationships among different selves, which allows cultural diversity.

From Parmenides' and Plato's philosophical conceptions, as here discussed, emerges the suspicion about the possibility of real relationships among different selves. Even if this possibility is admitted, it still remains the question of the validated status of the ways by which that relationship happens, touching the status of the proper relationship. In this scenario, thought and rationality appear as safer ways for the self apprehending the essence of the other, whereas senses and sensibility would allow the self to apprehend the other only in its inconstant and runaway character. *Culture will be, in very schematic ways, a predominantly rational matter.*

In such an extent, a dualism between *true* and *false* in the apprehension of the world and, more particularly, the other, is then installed. It means a dualism between *what is* and *what appears to be, but is not, because inconstant and mutable*. In such a way, some questions can arise as, for example, "When I have a relationship with myself as well as with other person, am I relating myself with the essentiality of the other, with my essentiality, or just with something transitorily?" or "Can interpersonal relationships be real, truthful, or just illusory?"

The already mentioned synonym between *nonessentiality* and *transformation* pervades the self-other relationships, in which core cultural objects (in Boeschian sense) are engendered. From Aristotle's

and Heraclitus' philosophical conceptions, as we have discussed here, the conditions for self-other relationships will happen in very different ways.

From what we discussed about Aristotle's philosophy, we could say that the idea of the "good form" (in the very later Gestalt sense) prevails. The self-other relationship will reach the "good form" if there is reciprocity between self and other. In the symbolic action field (culture, Boesch), engendered in the core of self-other relationship, the alter ego will be the ideal other, with whom the self will preferably develop symmetric and virtuous relationships. *In very few words, culture will be the field of harmony and virtuosity.*

With Heraclitus other possibilities for considering self-other relationships were opened. The unavoidable tension between opposites, which can be co-present or successive, allows a self-other relationship that is in itself a process for solving that tension. In this process, self and other transform themselves in their search for mutual understanding in an always nonsymmetrical relationship (Marková, 1997; Rommetveit, 1979, 1991; Linell, 1995). It is the self's search for the unity of *the time to come* in its relationship with the other, never reached at all.

Talking about self, other, and culture can bring in its core a tricking statement. As far as culture is understood as people meaning constructions, which channels the person's symbolic actions, we fall in a vicious cycle, instead of arriving to a productive circle, as we can arrive through the ideas of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer), as well as in the idea of the circle of knowledge (Boesch). The idea notion of a productive circle includes a movement of interchange among self-other and culture from which a new structure or state of affairs emerges. This new structure can be more complex than the former or not; the important feature is, however, that there is some change. In this sense, the productive circle involves—and makes more dynamic—the process of differentiation and de-differentiation according orthogenetic principle proposed by Werner and Kaplan (1956).<sup>5</sup> According to this principle, human development happens in ways of formerly nondifferentiated elements to their differentiation. Such a process of differentiation produces systematization, integrative hierarchical transformation and articulation among the involved parts, giving more autonomy to the system as a whole respect to its context. This process is possible only through movements of distancing and polarization of the involved parts. All this means that development

implies de-contextualization, concerning a multi-linear process, resulting in qualitative reorganization of the whole.

Bringing to the frame of the subject's relationships in culture, the proposition here developed not only keeps the advantages of above referred models, even because it is in part based on them, however strengthening more the figure of the other. This alternative puts culture as a co-genetic construction, avoiding explanations that can fall into a vicious cycle. Thanks to the premises of the co-genetic logic (Herbst), the unity of self–other–culture comes to the existence at once, by the relationships among the three elements, so preventing that one can explain the other in terms of its previous existence.

Besides, the co-genetic model here proposed allows for understanding how different relationships can bring about different cultural constructions, from the self–other feelings of great similarities between them to the self and other feelings of dissimilarities that can cause stress, pain, and disquieting.

In sum, the possibility of relationship between self and other, mutually perceived as different one from the other, allows the eternal mutability in the search of the unity, bringing the constant re-creation of their relationship, from which core culture emerges. Difference, tension, polarization, and distancing should be part of the processes of social life, requiring negotiation in self–other relationships, which opens doors for cultural channeling and cultural innovation (Boesch, 1991; Valsiner, 1998)<sup>6</sup> In schematic terms, from the core of this nature of relationship emerges some unity, a provisional solution for the tension that can be understood as

a momentary field for symbolic action—that is, a cultural field—in Boesch's sense. This is what was intended to be represented by the Figure 18.2 presented at the beginning of this chapter.

### *An Illustration of the Character of the Triple Processual Structure Here Proposed*

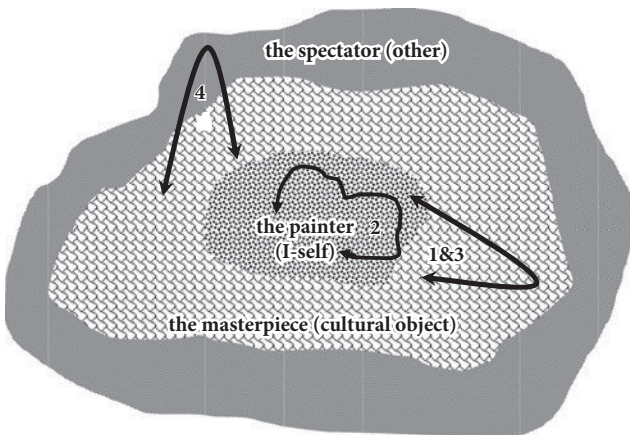
In what follows, I present an illustrative analysis of a specific context of cultural production, taking advantage of some reports by the French plastic artist Pierre Soulages, when he talks about some aspects of his own work (Soulages, 1950/2009). Soulages' reports were chosen for mainly because they offer a rare and consistent published material of self-reports by someone who creates culture through reconstructions of a tradition in which—as all of us—he is immersed, and most importantly, which directs him to the other as an active fellow in his cultural construction.

It is worth emphasizing that the aim of this illustrative analysis is not to access or analyze Soulages' reports about his creative process in itself but to offer an opportunity for thinking about if and how the triadic processual structure of self–other–culture here proposed (Fig. 18.3) can help to highlight some important aspects of the psychological process of cultural creation emerged from I–self and self–other relationships.

#### **Excerpt 7:**

*(1)8 The problems posed for a painter do not precede their solutions. They are born from the oeuvre, together with it.*

*I do not believe that I can learn what I look for but by painting; (2) this does not exclude that my painting*



**Figure 18.3** Representation of the analysis of the excerpt according to the proposed triple holistic developmental structure.

can be preceded by a desire, a need of some kind of form more than other, (3) yet it is not but in painting that those forms let me know about that desire. It is the moment when I draw the changes, the details that seems to me necessary, and also the next forms that oblige me to replace the former in question again. As an artist, I believe in a continuous intervention: the artist comes and goes of his creative impulse to the interrogation about the form presented by his creative impulse to himself. Truly speaking, the matter is not the isolated forms which are added one to the other, but the elements that takes, step by step, the non disso- ciable character of a synthesis: the accomplished canvas.

(4) In this way of painting, in which the artist's liberty is each moment at stake, the canvas itself is a whole engagement, a poetic testimony of a world where the validity is abandoned to the spectator. He is not asked for re-finding a history, a landscape, a still life, characters, animals or fragments of them; not even a state of soul experienced by them in front of the canvas, in brief a romantic or an expressionist anecdote, or whatever. (5) There is nothing required from the spectator: a painting is proposed to him, which he sees all at once according to his whole liberty and necessity. (6) Yet, in this painting the spectator also finds himself naturally engaged as a whole. The position adopted by him in front of this kind of canvas depends on and answers his general attitude in the world; and this is so much strong that the painting does send him to nothing that is external to himself.

N.B.: The painting as the highest I see it is not a «pure art» opposed to a «realist art». There is no gratuitous art; moreover there is no pure play of forms. It is a walk that engages all at once the man and the world. The man as the spectator and the artist as well. (Soulages, 2009, pp. 12–13)

The triple holistic developmental structure here proposed can be circumstantiated in **Excerpt 1**, as well as the Excerpt can us to understand the dynamics of the structure functioning.

In (1) Soulages put the métier of fine arts at the level of the artist's quest, in which there is no precedence of the problem or the solution either. They are born together, and the solution comes as far as he searches for it. This way by which things happen in everyday life of people interacting to themselves and others (as Soulages' report clearly illustrates) is what I am proposing to grasp and trying to understand (at the psychological level) with the above presented and discussed triple holistic developmental structure.

In (2) we see a proactive symbolic action from the artist's self, settled in its desires and necessities, which gains clearer contours while the self acts; yet, these contours are always changing and never completely achieved in the sense of completely fulfilling the artist's desires and quests (remember here Boesch's *The Sound of the Violin . . .*).

In (3) Soulages interacts with a cultural symbolic object (the canvas) at two intertwined and mutually feeding levels. There is an objectified level of the canvas, the *tempera*, or whatever he will use as instruments in their materiality for working. Yet, Soulages uses them for producing his work that which makes them subjectified in his canvas, his *tempera*, and so forth. On the other hand, the subjective level in which the painting comes to the existence by the artist's symbolic actions, becomes objectified in its materiality, allowing some relationships between him and his ongoing painting. During this relational process, insofar as he is painting, changes may happen in the artist's self. In such a way, there is a symbolic personification of the white canvas, as it asks for a symbolic action from the artist's self, the very condition for the dialogue between the artist and the canvas. This means a circumstantiation of the self–other relationship with the unknown (the white canvas asking for some action on it), which becomes, step by step, more familiar (less unknown) while the artist goes on painting in it. The canvas is then becoming transformed in a painting. A symbolic cultural object emerges, then, from the heart of the relationship between the artist's self with the canvas as other (a symbolic object) in the perspective of the artist's *come to be*. The noncompleted painting channels the artist's self-symbolic actions, in a back-and-forth movement, as referred by Soulages himself (remember here Boesch's *Culture–individual–culture: the cycle of knowledge*).

Passage (4) gives us the report of the unavoidable moment in which the artist abandons his painting, in a kind of donation to the spectator. Here (as we also see clearly later), the matter is not the self getting rid of its symbolic production but allows it to try to survive outside the isolation of the self–myself relationship. It is “as . . . if” the artist's self knew from the beginning that there were always a third person (Marková) waiting for acting in their horizon (Gadamer): the spectator. It will be him, by his interactive symbolic action with the painting, that can validate it—or not—as a cultural object in its full sense. This requires an openness from the painter's self to the otherness of the spectator, letting him

talk to the former through the art object. In such an extent, the spectator is, in fact, a participant. Besides, as we shall see below, the artist's self can move—and usually does—from the author's self-position (Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon, 1992) to the self-position of a privileged spectator of his own painting.

However, I will keep here the term *spectator* to avoid diverting our attention from the main focus of this chapter.

Letting the spectator's self talk requires neither talking for him nor inducing him to talk. It implies a necessary but not easy attitude of leaving aside the idea of asking someone for symbolically acting in this or that way. This is the attitude reported by Soulages in passage (5). He wants to let his painting say something—if it can—to the spectator, which depends on the spectator's willing of being touched by his painting.

In terms of our proposal, a painting is a potential cultural field for channeling symbolic actions. However, as Soulages' himself suggests in passage (6), the real symbolic actions will depend on the spectator's self ongoing constructions about and in the world. In other words, we have here a circumstantiation of the process of bounded indeterminacy (Valsiner) in self–other–culture relationships. What will really happen in this relationship varies not only from one spectator to another but also from the different moments or occasions for the same spectator.

Being the painter consciously of all that, in the sense that his self-report is a testimony of his concerns and even provisional answers about the process of art creation, we can say that it indicates the ways in which the *other in the self* is present in the process of cultural construction. Here also is involved the process of distanciation and polarization in development, allowing the emergence of more complex structures (Werner & Kaplan, 1956). This more complex structure, in the present case, is the proper emergence of the masterpiece from the painter's production through the symbolic action of the spectator. *The painted object will come to be art only when interacted with the spectator.* In Soulages' own words:

I am the spectator of what I do. I do realize that I am a very particular spectator, very committed to what I do. Yet I paint firstly for myself; I have no fear to say that; it is what makes my life possible. I paint because I need to paint. But I consider that my

painting does not become art but from the moment when it is viewed, it is saw by others; it is how it becomes a masterpiece, that is, a thing that others see and live in their own way.

(Soulages, 1973/2009, pp. 41–42)<sup>9</sup>

## Future Directions

Some future directions for semiotic-constructivist research in psychology can be foresighted from the ideas here proposed and discussed.

First, we need to develop theoretical-methodological ways of better apprehending and comprehending the dynamics of how cultural constructions emerge in the core of the relationship between self and other, according to the co-genetic model here proposed. This involves accounting for, among other aspects, the great diversity and differentiation in the contemporary societies (Simão, 2010). In face of what we already have discussed about Herbst's co-genetic logic, and also considering that social interaction is one of the main sources of self-formation in culture, it may be productive pointing to some further implications of the self-other-culture co-genetic process here proposed. As culture is a field originated from the core of self–other relationship, it will be always a real (imperfect) construction of the humankind, aiming to solve the gap between perfection and imperfection through symbolic action. In such a case, the self–other–cultural co-genetic processual structure here proposed could be kept and even increase in complexity, according to Werner's and Kaplan's (1956) orthogenetic principle.

Lawrence's and Valsiner's (2003) metaphorical model of "membranes of meaning transitions," accounting for the intra- and interindividual selective movements of meaning-making in psychological process should also be very promising integrated in the theoretical-methodological framework here in focus.

Second, we cannot lose our ethical sight from the discussions that can be unfolded from the proposal here focused. As already noted, the main characteristic of the structure here in focus concerns the fact that, from each instance of its occurrence, other more complex structures can unfold from the present one. These new structures are never identical to the former, not even necessarily similar, but more complex in some sense. Their greater complexity, however, does not mean that self, other, and their cultural co-construction will allow accounting for values and goals that are more engaged with

ethical and social issues than the former structure (see Boesch, 2011).

Third, the issue of temporality is now accounting for the co-genetic model here proposed for the self–other–culture relationships.<sup>10</sup> Temporality embraces a movement of dual interplay between the intersubjective time and the subjective duration, bringing about by the other to the self. In such an extent, it brings in its bulk the dual co-presence of the I and the other, in which the other inserts itself in the I's subjective life, demanding the duration to be transformed in time and vice versa, in face-to-face relationships and through cultural traditions as well. In such an extent, otherness requires changes in the mediational strategies of expression and communication by the subject, pushing him to create alternative forms for expressing his new experiences about temporality. These latter, on their turn, are partially created exactly by the new forms of mediation brought about by the otherness.

## Notes

1. Concerning this fourth characteristic stated by Herbst (1995) it is worth noting that I am using the model of his co-genetic logic respect to the *self* as one of the elements of the triad. I am not referring to the *I*. The discussion about the relationships between I and self according to Herbst's co-genetic logic certainly also merits to be done, but should be kept for other opportunity.

2. This point is related to the important issue of Love in Plato's philosophy which, however, will not be approached in this chapter.

3. Being alone with oneself, however, is not the same of isolation, as in Aristotle, existence includes the companionship of oneself, which means otherwise the complete accomplishment of living in Virtue (cf. Aristotle, *Ética a Nicómaco*, Nicomachean Ethics, Book IX, 4, 1166a-b).

4. In the symbolic action space of culture, the value of the "selected friendship" and the friend as alter-ego will lose importance during the Middle Ages for regaining its strength in the Renaissance period, especially in face of the increasingly rupture between public and private spheres (Ariès, 1986 / 2006, p. 12).

5. For a discussion about the genesis of Werner's ortho-genetic principle, remounting to Goethe's biological ideas, see for instance Valsiner (2005) and Van der Veer (2005).

6. About the relationship of the issues here put in discussion to some of our proposals about the notion of otherness, see, for instance, Simão (2007); Simão and Valsiner (2007); Simão (2011, in press).

7. The original text in French is:

« Pour un peintre les problèmes que se posent ne précèdent pas les solutions. Ils naissent de l'oeuvre, avec elle. Je ne crois apprendre ce que je cherche qu'en peignant; cela n'exclut pas que ma peinture soit précédée d'une envie, d'un besoin de certaines formes plutôt que d'autres, mais ce n'est que peintes que ce formes me renseignent sur cette envie. C'est à ce moment-là que j'en tire les modifications, les précisions qui me paraissent nécessaires, et aussi les formes suivantes qui m'obligent à remettre

les premières en question. Je crois que la part de l'artiste à une continuelle intervention: va-et-vient de son impulsion créatrice à l'interrogation de la forme qu'elle lui apporte. À vrai dire, il ne s'agit pas de formes isolées qui s'additionnent les unes aux autres, mais d'éléments prenant peu à peu le caractère indissociable d'une synthèse : le tableau achevé.

Dans cette manière de peindre, la liberté de l'artiste étant à chaque instant en jeu, le tableau lui-même est un engagement total, témoignage poétique du monde dont on abandonne la validité au spectateur. On ne lui demande pas de retrouver une histoire, un paysage, une nature morte, des personnages, des animaux ou de fragments de ceux-ci, ni même un état d'âme éprouvé devant eux, bref une anedocte romantique, expressionniste ou d'un autre ordre. (5) On ne demande rien au spectateur: on lui propose une peinture qu'il voit à la fois en toute liberté et nécessité. Mais dans cette peinture le spectateur lui aussi se trouve naturellement engagé en entier. La position qu'il adopte devant un tableau de ce genre dépend et répond de son attitude générale dans le monde, et ceci avec d'autant plus de force que la peinture ne le renvoie pas à quelque chose d'extérieur à elle-même.

N.B. : La peinture telle que je l'envisage plus haut n'est pas un « art pur » opposé à l'« art réaliste ». Ce n'est pas un art gratuit, surtout pas un pur jeu de formes.

C'est une démarche qui engage à la fois l'homme et le monde. L'homme, autant le spectateur que l'artiste » (Soulages, 2009, pp. 12–13).

8. The numeration in the excerpt was inserted by the author of this text.

9. The original text is French is:

« Je suis spectateur de ce que je fais. Je me rends bien compte que je suis un spectateur très particulier, très compromis dans ce que je fais. Mais je peins d'abord pour moi; je ne crains pas de le dire, c'est pour que ma vie sa possible. Je peins pas que j'ai besoin de peindre. Mais je considère que ma peinture ne doit de l'art qu'à partir du moment où elle est vue, où elle est regardée par d'autres et où elle est comme une oeuvre d'art c'est-à-dire comme une chose que d'autres regardent et vivent à leur manière » (Soulages, 1973/ 2009, pp. 41–42).

10. Research Project supported by the National Council for the Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil – CNPq (Process 302890/2009–2).

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## Dialogical Theory of Selfhood

Tiago Bento, Carla C. Cunha, and João Salgado

**Abstract**

Dialogism is presented as a relational paradigm in which intersubjective and communicational relationship is considered the most appropriate to further explore and understand selfhood. In abandoning the paradigm of self-awareness for the comprehension of selfhood, dialogism attempts to elaborate on the importance of the intersubjective relationship to the constitution of the psychological domain. For that, the relationship is grounded in the postulate of radical otherness. This means that the irreducible asymmetry and difference between Self and Other is considered to open an ontological relational space with logical and pragmatic qualities within which processes of subjective and intersubjective meaning construction take place. The characteristics and processes inherent to this external communicational and intersubjective space are considered to mold the internal domain of selfhood that is seen as being structurally and functionally continuous and dependent on such external relational space and processes. Selfhood is then conceived as a product of the continuous dynamic processes that are established between the I (as center of experience), the other-in-me (as the background from which the I experiences the world), and internal audiences that shape the specific positioning of content and processes of subjectivity in the experiential and communicative moment. On this basis, the future challenges faced by dialogical theory of selfhood are addressed.

**Keywords:** dialogism, dialogical self, alterity, selfhood, subjectivity, intersubjectivity

In the recent decades, we have been witnessing an important discussion, across humanities and social sciences, about the limits of modern epistemology for the conception and comprehension of human processes. In psychology this has led to the development and consolidation of new meta-theoretical configurations, such as social constructivism (Valsiner, 2007), *social constructionism* (Gergen, 1985a, 1985b, 1994), or *dialogism* (Marková, 2003; Linell, 2009; Salgado 2006; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007; Salgado & Valsiner, 2010), and to the exploration of the contrasts that emerge between them and other traditional frameworks (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006; Hibberd, 2001a, 2001b; Marková, 2003). Although these recent movements do not share all assumptions, they are generally united

through an intellectual framework and orientation that emphasizes a social/relational and discursive/semiotic construction of reality and human phenomena and also reinstates the need to (re)situate and contextualize psychological knowledge. These pluralistic movements have elicited prolific epistemological, theoretical, and methodological reflections and discussions that defy the scientific assumptions, goals, and perspectives of traditional psychological science. From these movements emerged a common growing interest in the importance of social, communicational (e.g., Marcos, 2001; Mendes, 2001), hermeneutic (e.g., Bamberg, 2006), and intersubjective processes (e.g., Bråten, 1998; Stolorow, Atwood, & Braudchaft, 1994; Zlatev, 2008) to the constitution of the *psyche* in a multicultural world,



with expression in several areas of psychology like developmental psychology, psychology of self and identity, developmental psychopathology, psychotherapy, feminist psychology, or social and cultural psychology.

In this context, central to the dialogical approach to subjectivity and selfhood is the critique of the traditional approaches that tend to assume that subjectivity *is* manipulation of symbols and that think of human relations as something based on aprioristic and isolated selves. On the one hand, we consider that any perspective stressing that subjectivity (and intersubjectivity) is based on a prioristic and asocial mind endorses an unnecessary and misleading separation between mind and the process of relating with the world, a typical mistake of some traditional theoretical frameworks of psychological tradition (e.g., cognitive models of information processing); on the other hand, to assume the linguistic domain of signs and symbols by themselves as the foundational basis of human mind cuts the very possibility of discussion of a subjective mind, avoiding the discussion of problems such as experiencing an individual agency or freedom of choice, while human relationships become a matter of sign-exchange devoid of any subjective element. Dialogism appears precisely from the discussion on the limits that arise in these kind of approaches (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006; Salgado & Hermans, 2005).

### Arguing for a Relational Metatheory

In the field of psychological science, the proposal of dialogism is for the development of an approach to human psychological domain based on a relational ontology. In this context, the relationship within the communicational space becomes an invaluable notion because it is assumed to be the only relationship able to prevent a return to representational thought and to the figures of representation (subject, concept, being; Deleuze, 1994, Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) as the main or foundational matters of subjectivity and selfhood. Without disregarding the notion of representation, it is assumed that “referring to the world through representations” is part of the human mind, but it is not its fundamental or unique ontological element. Even if we would consider the human mind as constituted only by representations (perceptions, memories, symbolic symbols, etc.)—and this is the most common way of thinking about psyche—an acceptance to explain the mind based on its elements would mean to take the mind as a self-explanatory concept or an

explanatory principle. In our view, it is the purpose of psychology to explain the human mind and not only to take it for granted and to use it as an explanation for itself. To explain the mind, we need to take into account not only its constituents and their relations, but the transaction between the mind and the surrounding environment. In line with this, we follow Marcos (2001) in stating that “the figure of the ‘relationship,’ in its logical complexity and in its openness to novelty, is today the more appropriate to think of rationality [and selfhood]. It is the only way to prevent the affirmation of any absolute (ontological or ethical)” (p. 23).

Within this context, the developments for the dialogical theory of selfhood suggested here are based on an *interval ontology*—on the communicational processes that take place on the space (interval) between individuals. To be a self is a matter of relating and contrasting with the social and material world. Therefore, this ontology is rooted in the notion of irreducible difference between the Self and the Other, which is taken as *the* instituting and epigenetic operation of the psychological domain. The delivery and birth of a human mind is metaphorically and literally something involving and contrasting at least two different people in relation within a social and material world that is even larger than them.

### Beyond Sameness

Deleuze (1994) has argued that representational thought necessarily brings us to frameworks in which sameness tends to acquire an ontological sense. The existence of something would be granted by its intrinsic or essential features, following the Aristotelian logic of identity. In that sense, what can be said to exist is what remains unchanged. This highlights the fundamental problem of selfhood theories that, despite emphasizing relational and intersubjective processes, consider the symbolic or representational activity as the ontological basis of human beings. In other words, the representational (or linguistic) ability would be *the* intrinsic and defining feature of the human mind—implying consideration of the mind as defined by a specific and self-contained property. Relations with the world exist, but they are not defining features of the main substance (the mind and its symbolic activity). Dialogism is one of trends that refuses that ontological reasoning. Dialogical approaches attribute otherness an ontological sense. Along with other trends of thought in the twentieth century,

the human mind is, first of all, a matter of relating with others. As George Herbert Mead put it in his symbolic interactionist stance:

“[W]e do not assume there is a self to begin with. Self is not presupposed as a stuff out of which the world arises. Rather the self arises in the world.”  
(Mead, 1992, p. 107)

Thus, the mind and its symbolic activities, important as they are, will remain contingent on intersubjective processes that shape them. In this type of account, the relation with the world and, most of all, with other human beings becomes the origin of the self. Difference becomes a cornerstone notion for dialogical approaches to selfhood precisely because it suggests the need of something other than individual subjectivity for the understanding of its constitutive processes.

In recent decades, arguments have been put forward regarding the need to move beyond a linguistic or symbolic criterion for an intersubjective view of human beings (e.g., Habermas, 1992; Jacques, 1985, 1991). In psychology, it is in the field of psychological development of newborns that this approach seems to express itself more clearly, moving from a linguistic emphasis to a relational emphasis. Trevarthen (1998) describes the theory of intersubjectivity proposed in this area as follows: “It is a theory about how human minds, in human bodies can intuitively recognize impulses from each other, *with or without cognitive or symbolic elaborations*” (p. 17, emphasis added). It is this project that, we believe, should be pursued in other areas of psychology, and we will elaborate on that throughout this chapter.

### ***Relation, Experience, and Meaning***

The relational and communicational constructivism that characterizes dialogism (see Linell, 2009) as a consequence of its focus on the interplay between Self and Other does not imply that we abandon meaning-making as a central feature of a psychological understanding of subjectivity and selfhood. Nevertheless, dialogism also stresses that “to put communication in the domain of sign (linguistic, philosophical, theological or otherwise), is to set it up as an intellectual object, independent of the act that confirms it as relationship, as alliance, and as commitment; it is to isolate it and fix it as a mere representation, as a saying that does nothing” (Martins, 2001, p. 98). The question is not “What is language (or signs, or representations)?”

but “What do we do with signs?” The answer is: We relate, we communicate, and this relation is something that transcends language itself (even if it is partially enabled by language). The task is to obtain strong substantive theoretical and practical consequences from the postulate that human beings are relational beings.

What is suggested here, then, is that meaning-making processes must be conceived in continuity with the elementary structure of experience that is considered intrinsically relational in its constituent terms and processes. It is in line with this that, throughout this chapter, communication and meaning are elaborated as two asymmetric but interconnected axes, invaluable and fundamental to any discussion on subjectivity and selfhood.

### ***Alterity and Tension***

The Self–Other relationship has a tensional nature. Alterity or otherness processes involve the simultaneous presence of different interpretations in confrontation. The underlying assertion is that the “tensional nature of communication is its condition of possibility” (Marcos, 2001, p. 22).

It should be emphasized here, on the one hand, that to communicate is to share, co-reference, co-invest, and make sense with relational space. To coordinate with others, we need to achieve some mutual understanding. However, this coordination is something that people struggle to find, and even when it is achieved, mutual understanding is never “perfect.” It should be emphasized that this understanding does not take the form of two minds merging into one—to dialogism, this dream (or nightmare) is never accomplished: the difference between agents is the very possibility of their contact.

Thus, on the other hand, this relational space is always indeterminate. We must keep in mind that the intersubjective relationship follows a principle of *exotopy*, in the words of Bakhtin (1984). As de Man (1989) has noted, Bakhtin expresses with this notion the principle of radical otherness, taking it as the principle of reality. Creating an analogy with Freudian notion, de Man has argued that it is within the relation with others that a person confronts the world—a socially articulated and regulated world (including its material dimension)—to which the human subject is “subjected.” The intersubjective relation and the real that is built and negotiated within it depend on the irreducibility of its participants. It is the indeterminate condition of the relational space that makes it possible the emergence

of dialogical products of coordinated activities (cf. Shotter, 1997). The disorderly and unfinished background of communicational and meaning-making processes opens the possibility for unique variations and novel associations to emerge and be elaborated in the relational processes. Also, its unfinished condition feeds forward this constant movement of novelty emergence because the determined, finalized remains static and stable.

Furthermore, dialogism—although emphasizing the role of the Other—does not mean to suggest nor elaborate on an imagined, represented, or generalized Other with general expected qualities (the Other as role or trait). As Marcos (2001) has noted, this second position consists in “representing difference as a function of sameness. It consists, basically, in assigning not a difference but an indifference” (p. 77) to the role of the Other. Similarly, the words of Jacques (1991) are equally clear: “As long as the fact of difference invites us to take a monadic Self as our point of departure, the other will be constituted with a meaning that refers back to the Self” (p. xxii). As we will see later in this chapter, our proposal is the recognition of a real Other unavoidably different from the Self and, despite that, present and active in the psychological space of the Self (see Salgado & Ferreira, 2005; Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006).

### ***Dialogism***

As we have noted, our proposal for the establishment of a post-rationalistic framework to the description of psychological domain is based on the instituting nature of the intersubjective relationship and on the correlative notions of difference and tension between two persons as their conditions of possibility. These are the organizing themes of a meta-theoretical framework that we must now systematize and lay out in its general terms.

*Dialogism* as a meta-theoretical framework is far from a robust systematization, and only recently have some approaches to this issue emerged (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007). Nevertheless, the principles established by Salgado and Gonçalves (2007) allow us to lay out the key themes of this perspective (see Linell, 2009, for an expanded discussion on the axiomatic assumptions of dialogism).

### **RELATIONALITY AND BOUNDARIES**

The first of these principles is the *relational principle*. Here, the ontological position of the

relationship is stressed by stating that all human processes (cognitive processes of knowledge construction, emotional and identity processes, etc.) are essentially relational in their origin. As a relationship involves at least two elements in interaction, this issue is directly linked with the need to define contrasts (1) between subjects; (2) between each subject and a context or environment; and (3) between the constituent elements of this context, and so on. In this proposal, all human processes involve the presence of a figure-ground kind of relationship (see Holquist, 1990) that implies a contrast that simultaneously unites and separates the elements in relationship.

Following the implications of this notion of contrast, we claim that a dialogical relation implies (1) different elements and (2) a zone of contact between them. Thus, this contrast demands a membrane (Salgado & Valsiner, 2010): a space of contact between the elements in relation that not only contrasts but also establishes a functional contact. Like a cell, there is not only a mutual constitution of the person (the interior element) and the environment (the exterior element) but a zone of exchange between them. These boundaries delimit those elements, and these limits are specific of the relational moment of those elements. As the relationship unfolds through time, boundaries may change, and as they change, they also define the elements differently within the relationship. In this sense, dialogism makes use of this notion of boundaries to underline that dialogical relationships are constituted through a process that, in putting elements in relationship, both unites and distinguishes them.

### **DIALOGICALITY AND MONOGICALITY**

The second principle is *dialogicality* (see also Salgado & Valsiner, 2010). Human beings not only relate with the surrounding material environment—more important, they also coordinate their actions with social others. It is through the development of joint activities that we become capable of establishing a minimal mutual understanding with others, enabling the development of actions that are social in their origin. Even instrumental actions are developed through social guidance and, therefore, involve this coordination. It is our claim that such a scenario illustrates precisely the principle of dialogicality—that every human action, in its material and semiotic dimension, has always a communicative basis, placing

it as a form of social relation with others. Therefore, everything we do is dialogical:

But if people are not simply putting their ideas into words, what can they be said to be doing in their talk? Primarily, I suggest, they are materially responding to each other's utterances in an attempt to link their practical activities with those of the others around them; and in these attempts at coordinating their activities, people are constructing one or another kind of living social relationship.

(Shotter, 1997, p. 11)

With utterances and/or with practical activities, we are constantly producing something with potential social meaning, and therefore, through those words, we are constantly addressing others. Signs play an important role here, as it is through signs that we reach others—signs are placed at the membrane of contact between Self and Other. These signs, by their turn, stand for something else (they refer to other objects) and stand for someone else (they are addressed to social others and have a meaning potential to others). Therefore, it is through sign-mediated activities that we reach others and the world. However, this does not mean to reduce the dialogical relationship to the sign properties; it is the dynamic of sign-mediated activities that are relevant here, the constant process of relating and mutual positioning of Self and Other (Hermans, 2001a; Leiman, 2002, 2004).

Dialogicality must be taken as a constant process. However, in the tradition of Bakhtinian dialogism (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986), a distinction between dialogical and monological relations is often emphasized (e.g., Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). However, this adds some confusion to the field that needs to be clarified. As we will argue, this distinction does not depend on the nature of the components involved (which will be always relational). It refers mainly, as the authors point out, to the nature of the relationship established between the elements—that is, to the communicative responsiveness and intersubjective engagement of elements. Usually, this notion is used to distinguish types of communication: dialogical and monological forms of communication. In dialogical communication, the agents remain open to the otherness brought to the situation by the interlocutors, and the dialogue evolves by a joint and common effort, whose final result is created by all parties. Thus, a dialogical relationship,

first, demands knowledge and active presence of other elements external to the object and to the relationship of knowledge (subject–object) so that it may arise and be described; second, it involves indeterminacy and originates what Bakhtin (1984) termed “surplus of vision,” the emergence of novelty and of a more general framework involving Self and Other's *visions*. In monological communication, one party tries to dictate his or her particular worldview, without considering the other in his human full capacities. However, even when this happens, there is a mutual relation, and therefore, a monological orientation still entails the principle of dialogicality (it is addressed and it calls for an answer, even if faked). Linell (2009) has a similar point:

All kinds of communication and thinking are arguably dialogical in terms of responsivity, addressivity, and genre-belongingness. At the same time, there are many monologizing (“undialogizing”) practices in the world, in which a speaker, author or sender tries to formulate a mono-perspectival message which is aimed at imposing one specific type of response from the addressee, in terms of his or her interpretation and responsive action. One might summarize the point by claiming that there are monological practices in our dialogically conceived world.

(p. 408)

This apparent paradox is, then, solved with this distinction between two basic ways of approaching communication: as a two-way, bidirectional activity between parties or as a single-way process of transmission. Thus, it is possible to treat the other in a monological way, just as it is possible to think about communication in a monological way. However, communication, even when monologically oriented, is always communication and, therefore, dialogical. As previously stated (Salgado & Valsiner, 2010), we should not mix “orientations to the dialogue” (that can be monological or dialogical) with the general principle of dialogicality (that is pervasive and extends itself even to monological forms of communication).

#### **OTHERNESS AND COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Involving the relationship in the ontological debate, dialogism is constituted by a third principle—that of *otherness*. Any human action (behavioral, intellectual, emotional) is always addressed to an Other.

The Self and the Other are, therefore, two essential poles for the emergence of any human process. It should be made explicit that the claim here is that there is no Self without an Other nor an Other without a Self, and it is in their figure-ground relationship that the possibility of emergence of a subjective psychological space is opened. Nevertheless, this emphasis on otherness and *relationality* does not intend to maintain the figures of relation and intersubjectivity at a purely conceptual level. On the contrary, dialogism establishes that these notions and the processes they circumscribe are on the basis of every particular action or cognition and should be directly applied to their understanding.

In line with this, dialogism tends to endorse a *communicative constructivism*: “[W]hen we construct the world, it is a question of intersubjective co-construction with the help of others and artifacts” (Linell, 2009, p. 19). Basically, dialogism assumes the world is not even there to be constructed for an isolated mind in any substantial psychological sense, nor would it be possible for such a mind to relate with it. Therefore, the Other assumes a vital role.

At the same time, it should be highlighted that under the notion of constructivism, we are endorsing the tradition of thought that integrates action upon the world with the representation of that world, without giving primacy to any of them. The long philosophical debate around action and reflection as the basis of our living in the world is dissolved here: We act upon the world, and through that action we create an “image” of that world that guides our future actions. Our constructions are ways of acting upon the world that seek our adaptation to the future circumstances. Communicative constructivism adds something to the cognitive constructivism (e.g., Piaget, 1955), affirming the role of the Other in this process of construction.

#### CONTEXTUALITY AND MEDIATION

The fourth principle of dialogism developed by Salgado and Gonçalves (2007) is the *contextuality* of dialogical processes. Human actions, being addressed, are also involved in a specific cultural matrix and depend on the semiotic tools available in this matrix. These semiotic tools are considered to be the means by which it becomes possible to contact with and know others and the world. Linell (2009) stresses that “our understanding of the world come to us in a necessarily mediated form, never immediately” (p. 19). Our relations with others and the world are never direct, immediate but indirect

and *mediated* by signs. This also explains why we place the relation between Self and Other at the center of our reasoning—it does not imply that the material is irrelevant, it simply means that the experiencing of the world is regulated by the social coordination of the human subject with social others. The world is “revealed” or “touched” through signs (see Leiman, 2002, on the “epiphanic” quality of signs), and these symbolic tools are not passive or “neutral vehicles” (Linell, 2009) but, rather, active elements in those relationships. At the same time, they are also involved in forms of interaction, in which they gain their value and are not limited to the linguistic or semiotic realms. In fact, as we have seen, any dialogical relationship refers both to itself in its constituent terms and to the exterior of itself. It is this reference to the outside that brings out a contextual environment to which it becomes dependent in terms of its processes and meanings.

#### *Moderate Holism and Dynamism*

Dialogism therefore commits itself with a contextual, interactional, and interdependent approach to psychological processes. Generally, as Linell (2009) has noticed, this moves dialogism toward a *moderate holism* in the sense of it assuming a “commitment to preserve the integrity and complexity of phenomena, such as the context matrices, situations and activities, in which constituent acts or the use of semiotic resources are embedded” (p. 18). This creates a constant tension between the particular, local, and momentary and the global, contextual, and developmental levels. Both levels are considered to be essential for an appropriate approach to phenomena that preserves their integrity as such. This also highlights dialogism movement toward complexity as it resists homogeneity, rigidity, and closure of phenomena.

Simultaneously, this focus on otherness and relationality separates dialogism from a conception of phenomena as static, stable, or constant. Open to what is external to them and dependent on it for their constitution, psychological phenomena are not defined on the basis of their identity, internal properties, or characteristics but, rather, on the basis of the dynamic processes of constant change and transformation that they undergo. It is the process of transformation and the dynamics inherent to it that is considered to be indicative or revealing of the nature and characteristics of phenomena rather than predetermined properties they may be assumed to have.

By the same token, this openness and constant interaction with external elements also makes phenomena permeable to those external elements or other phenomena. The dynamics inherent to the interactional processes determines how permeable the frontiers between them are. These changes in the border of a phenomenon are what define the phenomenon itself. This explains why dialogism resists and tries to transcend oppositions and dualisms (see Marková, 2003) such as *individual versus social* or *culture X versus culture Y*. The point is that culture X will appear in one way in relation to culture Y and in another way in relation to culture Z. Therefore, culture X will be attributed different qualities depending on which other culture with which it is compared. It is the specificity of the global pattern of its different qualities in different relations that defines culture X as culture X.

### The Dialogical Self Theory

Originally, the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) subscribes this relational framing by turning to the notion of *dialogue* to rethink the Self. We will now characterize this theory by elaborating, first, on the pioneer work of Hermans and collaborators (cf. Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 1996). These contributions have been extensively debated in several special issues in psychological publications (Hermans, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2008; Hermans & Lyddon, 2006; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2008; Stam, 2010).

### Sources for the Dialogical Self Theory

The first formulations of the DST (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) had four main sources of inspiration:

1. The work of William James (particularly his distinction between I and Me).
2. The metaphoric and narrative nature of cognition (highlighted by authors such as G. Lakoff and M. Johnson) and human life (particularly by T. Sarbin and J. Bruner).
3. The approaches that underlie the multiple and multifaceted nature of the Self.
4. The dialogical thinking of Mikael Bakhtin.

Combined together, these influences originate a notion of identity as something that is constructed from the dialogical engagement between different “voices” or positions of the Self. In this sense, although the multifaceted and narrative nature of

identity is recognized, something more radical is reinforced: not only do we construct multiple self-images or a diversity of stories where several roles and actors play their part, we are also multiple authors, involved in internal and external dialogical processes.

To reach this conception so distanced from the monadic version of identity, so long disseminated in psychology (cf. M. Gonçalves, 1995), Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992) depart from the classic distinction of William James (1890/2007) between I and Me. To James (1890/2007), the Self has a dual nature. On the one hand, there is the I (or *Self as knowing*) that refers to the agent responsible to a sense of experiential continuity, distinct from others and the world, with the consequent sense of volition and autonomy (Hermans, 1996). In other words, according to James, the I is associated to the construction of a subjective continuity through time, from which emerges a sense of personal identity as a unique individual (Bertau, 2004; Hermans, 2001a). On the other hand, the Me (or *Self as object*) is related to the construction of a self-image and the inclusion of objects/others in the world that become part of the Self in a physical and symbolic extension of what we are, what completes us, and what we call our own (such as objects in the world, significant others, and personal history; Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Through these two dimensions—I and Me—the Self conjugates two fundamental properties: a differentiation between Self and world and the construction of identity in time.

In this sense, for James (1890/2007), identity is constituted simultaneously from pairs of mutually inclusive opposites: We are producers of images and narratives of ourselves (as products of our semiotic activity), but these self-images and self-narratives end up feeding our own subjective process. The image of myself in the world (Me) is the base that allows the I (as subject) to be guided in action and semiotic activity in the world. Furthermore, what one thinks about oneself (as products or part of Me) reveals one’s own reflexivity and subjectivity—that is, the I as agent.

This original distinction between I and Me was later retrieved by Sarbin (1986) under the narrative framework. In this view, identity is seen not only as a form of reflexivity but also the achievement acquired in the act of interpreting ourselves as social, historic, and contextual beings. As we exist in a given socio-historic-cultural context, identity appears as a

narrative project (O. Gonçalves, 2000) that we share and co-construct with others. According to this, the I of James is seen as an author that organizes experience through a socially articulated narrative structure, from several biographic episodes where the Me is both actor and protagonist (Sarbin, 1986).

Given these influences, Hermans and collaborators (1992) have conceived the Self as a specific organization of socially articulated meanings deriving from experiences lived in a temporal sequencing of episodes, events, and actions. These narratives are both subjective and social products, because they put symbolic, discursive, and material resources into play. Similarly, we can say that the initial movement of sense-making is both metaphoric (because metaphors use something to [re]present another), imaginative (because imagination allows us to construct what is not yet present and project something into the future), and relational (because sharedness allows the co-construction of meaning).

These original works from the beginning of the 1990s have traces of the zeitgeist of the moment. The emphasis on the complexity and multifacetedness of the Self, from a cognitive view, was also a marked influence on the earlier versions of the DST, because they were current efforts to surpass the traditional monadic, coherent, and stable view on the Self (cf. Linville, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Khilstrom & Cantor, 1984). Similarly, the movements within “the linguistic turn” sought to deal with the phenomenon of the multiplicity of the Self (especially the social constructionist movement).

Despite the reference on these cognitive and narrative influences in the early works upon the DST, they became less present in subsequent works (cf. Hermans, 2001a, 2004a). The main reason is that narrative appears as an insufficient concept in this theory, as we have argued. Thus, according to Hermans (1996), self-narratives, as products of discourse that usually privilege the temporal sequencing and coherence of episodes, do not fully consider the dialogue and the voices that become alive, therefore diluting the narrator in detriment to the story that is told. In other words, more important than the narrated content is the relationship between the author and the audience, established through the narrative. Moreover, according to Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992), the more adequate way to acknowledge the question of the multiplicity of the Self is through the use of the polyphonic metaphor and the notion of co-construction—that is, narrative cannot be more prevalent than the act

of narrating, which puts the Self (as interlocutor) facing an Other as an audience (either present or absent, real or imaginary). In these suggestions, the influence of the Bakhtinian thought becomes clear and demarks its difference.

### *The Emergence of an Alternative View on Selfhood*

We consider that four central notions in the DST constitute it as an independent, unique alternative, distinguishing it from other perspectives on selfhood:

1. The centrality of dialogue and polyphonic metaphor applied to the Self, both of Bakhtinian heritage.

2. The dynamic notions of *positioning* and *repositioning* of the Self in time and space and in relation to something/someone (in internal/external dialogues that place the interlocutor in a specific relationship).

3. The role of difference and tension in dialogical processes (both in the differential power acquired by parts of the Self and in the relationship between the Self and the world) for the construction of stability and sameness and the creation of innovation and novelty.

4. The polyphonic metaphor that Bakhtin applied essentially to distinguish the literary works of Dostoevsky, where the author is no longer presented as an omniscient entity narrating the story. On the contrary, it is presented as multivoiced and internally controversial, by being habited with multiple voices that defend different perspectives and worldviews in contrast with each other (Hermans, 2001a).

Inspired by this, Hermans and collaborators (1992) have claimed that the Self—more than an internal multiplicity that results from different roles and contexts—is a dialogic polyphony, where several voices are contrasted translating multiple experiential positions that co-exist in simultaneity. In this sense, the Jamesian view is radicalized: not only the stories are multiple, but the agent that constructs these stories is also diversified. Thus, even if self-narratives appear as a form to construct coherence and cohesion in identity, they no longer guarantee the personal unity and continuity given that we live with multiple authors that constitute our Self.

How to explain, then, identity and sameness? The answer proposed arrives from the notion of dialogue: through the dialogical articulation achieved

between different “voices” of the Self and from our interpersonal engagement with others in a cultural world (Hermans, 1996). Furthermore, a voice translates a specific point of view that emerges from a given existential position from where the world is experienced and perceived, forming a unique gestalt of experience (Holquist, 1990). In this line of reasoning, the dialogical Self is conceived as a tensional and dynamic multiplicity of self-positions that are occupied in an internal dialogical space that feed distinct and independent voices, within the same person:

... we conceptualize the Self in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I positions in an imaginal landscape. [...] The *I* has the possibility to move, as in space, from one position to the other, in accordance with changes in situation an time. The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions. The *I* has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story. Once a character is set in motion in a story, the character takes on a life of its own and thus assumes a certain narrative necessity. Each character has a story to tell about experiences from its own stance. As different voices these characters exchange information about their respective *Mes* and their worlds, resulting in a complex, narratively structured *Self*.

(Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992, p. 28)

According to the Bakhtinian “law of placement,” the Self is always involved in these dynamics of positioning and repositioning, expressing voices that are related to spatial and temporally specific positions, from which emanate idiosyncratic views of the world (Holquist, 1990). Voices express meaning-making processes on experience, which are emotionally grounded (Josephs, 2000) and embodied (Fogel, Koeyer, Bellagamba, & Bell, 2002; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992). This dynamic movement of the Self between voices and positions emphasizes the role of internal alterity given the contrast between other (former and potential) voices or positions different from the voice of the experiential position that is occupied by the Self in the here and now (Valsiner, 2002).

In sum, the dialogical Self does not have a clear frontier with its external surroundings. Its borders are highly permeable. In fact, the outside world is also inside the Self in the form of external positions

(parts of the world that are identified with the Self; e.g., we can carry voices of significant others within ourselves or even internalize specific generalized cultural voices upon a given subject) that contrast with internal voices (relating to different roles or parts of the Self).

Although the DST attempts to surpass old dichotomies in psychology (e.g., Self–Other, Individual–Social), given the acknowledgement of the constant trades and interconnections happening through the flexible and permeable frontier of the Self, according to some authors (Bertau, 2004; Salgado, & Hermans, 2005), it is precisely in this social and cultural landscape of selfhood that we find the constraints in the movements and multiplicity of the Self. Salgado and Hermans (2005) are not as optimistic toward the versatility of the Self as the original definitions might convey: The potentialities of movement in the dialogical Self are generally linked to the possibilities allowed in a given society, which are always limited within certain confinements (e.g., constrained either toward the compliance and conformism or toward opposition and rebellion directed to the socio-cultural milieu).

### ***Moving Forward: Critical Elements to the Dialogical Self Theory***

Despite the developments that have been occurring within the DST, it is also necessary to recognize that some issues require a special analysis and further development. In our view, there are several aspects that should be clarified and problematized if we want to keep dialogism as the epistemological and ontological reference frame to the DST.

#### **EXPLORING THE IMAGINAL LANDSCAPE AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE SELF**

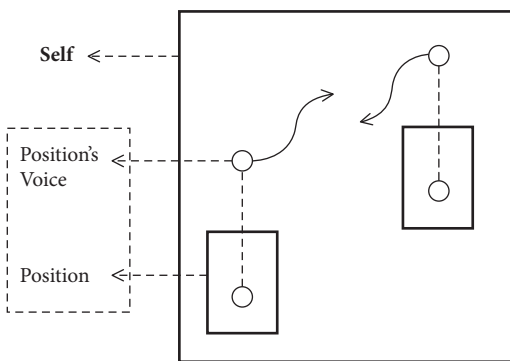
If we resume Hermans’ initial proposal of the DST, we may now state that in DST, the dimension of experience is usually conceived as an *imaginal landscape* in which different positions of the Self, or I-positions, move and relate to each other by means of dialogue. The imaginal landscape and the positions of the Self are therefore the structural elements of the experiential domain. As dialogism emphasizes *addressivity* as a fundamental characteristic of selfhood processes, the location and movement of I-positions in the imaginal landscape of the Self are considered to be a function of the correlative position of each one of them to the other I-positions in the system of Self.



It is considered that as two I-positions address each other, they become juxtaposed, one in relation to the other. This process of juxtaposition has been metaphorized as a dialogue (in opposition to a monologue). For an I-position to communicate with another I-position and the world, it is endowed with a voice that later becomes inter-related with other voices immanent from other I-positions, as in a dialogue. These narrative voices constitute the other dimension of meaning-making that is conceived to be dependent on constant positioning and repositioning of I-positions.

In another way, we could say that the dynamics inherent to positioning and addressing constantly sets up an experiential and narrative configuration that defines the relevance and salience of certain experiential and narrative contents in detriment of others that are elaborated and exchanged in dialogue with others (see Fig. 19.1).

As can be seen in Figure 19.1, the most frequent configuration of the dialogical Self assumes that the audience of each I-position is another I-position (e.g., Georgaca, 2001; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Raggatt, 2000). This leads to a conception of selfhood that is centered on the dialogical relations between I-positions, usually as dyads. However, the possibility has been explored that “instead of a dialogue between an I-position (a voice) and another, each I-position has dialogical relationships to its addressee(s)” (Leiman, 2002, p. 232; see also Leiman, 1992). This opens dialogism to other, more complex, and dynamic perspectives on selfhood (see Ferreira, Salgado, Cunha, Meira, & Konopka, 2005, for a comparison of several dialogical approaches).



**Figure 19.1** Dialogical relations between positions of the Self as dyads.

## THE PROCESS OF DIFFERENCE AND THE OTHER AS AN IRREDUCIBLE ONTOLOGICAL ELEMENT

The *process of difference* needs further exploration. We need to develop implications from the argument that the human psyche is ontologically based on the difference between Self and Other. As mentioned earlier:

The dialogical perspective is based on the fundamental assumption that human life is permanently an addressed existence. It therefore attributes a fundamental role to the Other in the constitution of the I - human existence is co-existence or is not human. Therefore, difference - the radical asymmetry between any two persons - simultaneity - the necessary co-presence of I and Other without which neither of them may exist - and tension - emergent from the simultaneity of insoluble differences - become invaluable concepts for the dialogical project. [...] Relationship, elaborated upon those concepts, is conceived to be previous to (id)entity: there is no previous I and no previous Other to the relationship that makes them an I to an Other and an Other to an I.

(Salgado, Ferreira, & Fraccascia, 2005, p. 13)

In fact, the process of difference is revealed as the basis of the genetic code of human psychological processes, with simultaneity and tension as the parameters that guide them on their trajectories. It is the conception of the relationship as consisting of these components that distinguishes the dialogical approach from others that stress the importance of relational processes. The figure of the relationship emerges as a gestalt, a configuration of the interactive processes of the elements that constitute it, and not as an object of study, a property, or a trait. However, we believe that this process of difference has not yet been fully developed.

Difference, we would say, is also related with continuous tensional process between Self and Other. However, we need to ask: *What are we talking about when we talk about an Other?* Traditionally dialogical proposals in psychology have assumed that the Other could be conceived as a represented other (Hermans, 2004a); a person, a group, or a community (Marková, 2003); a socially indexed fictional narrative (Wortham, 2001); or a part of the Self (e.g., Hermans, 2001a). The status of the Other seems rather unclear, and this vagueness may reach a point that sometimes seems confusing, if

not misleading. Moreover, this also represents a difficulty in taking into account otherness as a constitutive element of otherness.

On this basis, the remainder of this chapter further elaborates a dialogical proposal to attempts to contribute to a more full development of a dialogical approach to selfhood processes.

### ***Redescribing Selfhood from a Dialogical Perspective***

In previous sections, our elaboration on the ontological value of the difference between Self and Other led to the proposal that dialogical relations are constituted by: the Self, the Other, and the relationship between them (Holquist, 1990).

Dialogism defends the relation between Self and Other as the realm in which those two poles of communication emerge as two distinct, yet bounded, agencies (Marková, 2003). Therefore, this implies defending an “*exteriority*” of the Self, because the subjective experience of oneself is correlative with the Other with whom the person relates. However, this does not lead dialogism to claim, as some social constructionists have been doing, that we should avoid descriptions and explanations of the inner experience. Our claim, here, is that a dialogical account preserves this distinction between inner and outer realms and that subjectivity is brought to being in the borderline of contact of these two domains. Take an emotion, for example. On the one hand, an emotion is an inner and private experience. On the other hand, it also brings an outer expression that if the person does not make an effort of dissimulation, it will be apprehended by the surrounding people given its communication value. It is inner and it is outer. The production of an emotion, in itself, is based on some interpretation of the present situation based on the previous personal history of socialization that took place within contextual and historical specific backgrounds. Thus, if we ask, “What is the self-experience of this person at this moment?” and the answer is, “This person is feeling a strong feeling of rage against his boss,” we are connecting the interior and the exterior, the personal and the social, self and other. An emotion, then, is a bodily-sign—referring to something else, involving a joint interpretation of its meaning, while giving an embodied felt sense of the agent’s needs or wishes. To describe it only as the activation of a self-schemata of inferiority, for example, would be to cut the relation between self and other and to describe the

human mind in a self-encapsulated way. To describe it as an emergent social performance without inner qualities would be oblivious to the compelling attributes of inner experience of emotions. We propose to recycle these notions, articulating them simultaneously. Therefore, dialogism argues that the only way to look inside the Self and at the same time preserve its dialogical integrity is precisely by taking into account dialogical processes that occur inside and outside the Self.

Under this perspective, a communicational act implies: “(1) a speaker who is simultaneously addressing, (2) an object and (3) the subjective world of the listener” (Salgado & Ferreira, 2005, p. 145). This means that the act of addressing is not a simple movement from the Self to the Other (or from one position of the Self to another) but actually a twofold movement from the *world of the Self* to the “*specific world of the listener*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282) and, simultaneously, to the “*world out there*.” This Bakhtinian heritage has been brought up by dialogical approaches to selfhood both within clinical psychology (Leiman, 2002, 2004; Leiman & Stiles, 2001) and social-cultural psychology (Marková, 2003; Valsiner, 2007; see Ragatt, 2010, for a general analysis of this issue).

In this context, we will develop in the next sections our previous attempts of giving a dialogical account of selfhood. We will defend the description of a triad of communicational agencies within the inner realm of selfhood: *I* (as a center of experience), the *other-in-me* (as the constructed and addressed Other), and *internal audiences* that shape the specific positioning of the moment. Moreover, this Self inner dynamics is always connected with the external dialogical activity in the world, in which we encounter real others and real objects.

#### **THE FELT I**

As Jacques (1991) writes, “[T]o the person, being is a process of self-production by a gradual self-identification. It is a process that acts directly on the Self, an activity which refers to itself in order to prevent us from making a substance of this self-activity” (p. 22). As we observe the approach of Jacques, it is close to that proposed by Damásio (1999), for example, in the sense that both have as primordial and elemental matter of identity the feeling that “whatever is happening is happening to me” (other authors would call this the experiencing self; Greenberg & Safran, 1987). Thus, the Self, the

feeling of being an I, does not emerge from the use of the personal pronoun as suggested by the discursive approaches. This feeling that “what happens, happens to me” sets up an experiential center that positions itself correlatively to the other elements of the structure of experience. The spatial metaphor here is not insignificant.

### THE OTHER

Returning to the previous question about the Other—What are we talking about when talking about the Other? First, as previously discussed, it is necessary to remember that the Other is *not only* a representation—it is another human agency that transcends the Self. We are talking to you, and our words come in touch with your inner realm, and in that way, we are an Other to you. We may be somehow represented by you, but our words have an element of strangeness that does not fit completely your representation. And this leads us to the second point: The Other remains separated from the Self. We feel the Other, we address the Other, but the real Other always remain partially alien. However, it is in the dance between Self and Other that they become mutually defined: If the operative principle is radical otherness, then we are led to the need of considering a real other to know and describe a particular Self and assume its positioning in the internal space of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, it is also true that Self and Other communicate by exchanges of signs or chains of signs. Therefore, the voice of these two bounded and separated elements comes in material forms that transports each stance regarding some specific objects—words, gestures, and signs that carry the perspective and purposes of the agents. Look to these words: You do not need to be here and now to hear what we are saying—we will read this in someplace else and in an unknown future to us. Therefore, signs are the media through which Self and Other relate with each other, and this enables the possibility of relating with unknown others.

Who or what is this Other? We come close to Marková's (2003) definition: a person, a group, a community—a communicational agency. However, familial values, cultural norms, fictional characters, social discourses, and so on, often assume the function of an Other and are not directly linked to a particular person. We could name them “collective voices” (Hermans, 2001a). Additionally, the representation of the Other created by the Self never exhausts the real Other, introducing

constant novelties and tensions within the space of the Self.

### THE OTHER-IN-ME

Another issue that needs further clarification has to do with how the Other gets in touch with the Self. We have just claimed their continual separation but in a way that maintains their mutual bond and definition. Then, the question is: From the perspective of the Self, how is possible to reach that Other?

A usual solution is to postulate representations of significant others. However, this has the problem of suggesting a self-enclosed mind. This happens in different theoretical postulates, like the notion of internal objects in psychoanalysis (e.g., Klein, 2002) or the possible selves in cognitivism (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1987). Therefore, we think that this does not completely answer the question of how the Other is elaborated by the Self. Without denying that we do represent other people, in accordance with the framework, we have been advocating here representations are only means to relationships. More important, to have a representation of something does not entail, by itself, the possibility of having a communicational joint activity with that something.

In our view, this demands a semiotic stance, defending that it is through signs or chains of signs that people get a mutual minimal coordination that enables meaning-making. The possibility of joint activity between two people implies the elaboration of signs that they may trade. Consequently, communicative action becomes possible, and Self and Other relate to each other. Signs or chains of signs are vital tools for the dialogical involvement.

Therefore, in every communicative action—and every action is communicative, as it is always leaves a trace or a sign waiting to be interpreted—there is an agent semiotically addressing the Other. Initially, and whenever we engage in some activity with other people, there is a real Other. However, when these sign-mediated actions become internalized, we no longer need a real Other. We use signs “as-if” there was a real other waiting on the other end of our actions, utterances, or gestures. Many times, there is no one there.

We will say that from the perspective of the Self, the Other is always that *potential addressee* of his or her semiotic activities. At the same time, it is also an Other *constructed* by the Self—it is an Other-in-me. As a potential addressee, this Other-in-me

can take varied forms: It can be the interlocutor of a sign exchange taking place (“Tell me, where have you been this morning?”); it can be the same person, talking to herself or himself (“How stupid I am!”); it can be nobody—in that case, we would say that it is a virtual Other, an addressed agency lying in the other end of the message (e.g., leaving a book you like in a public space to let someone else read it); and we also admit that this Other-in-me can be a material object, constructed in an anthropomorphic way.

The way this Other-in-me is based on matching together what is happening in the moment (e.g., utterances from another person) with the personal previous experiences of similar circumstances that create a specific pattern of expectations around particular objects or themes. Returning to a Piagetian reasoning, we may call this patterned activity a “relational scheme,” in which this social circumstances activates specific purposes (needs, wishes) and expectations, guiding our social action (e.g., Safran, & Muran, 2000). This scheme is associated with specific implicit or explicit images of the Other, but it is not a static element—its value lies in its potential dynamics (creating needs, wishes, strategic moves, etc.). However, there is something more: This scheme is always matched with the “incoming” response from reality—the sign-mediated account about what is happening in the moment. Thus, there is always a possible mismatch between the “expected” Other and the “incoming” signs, generating a dialogical activity of positioning and repositioning.

Therefore, we postulate the existence of an Other-in-me: a process of continuous re-elaboration of the potentially addressed Other, which is put in motion by the articulation of a relational scheme (forming the “expected Other”) with the sign-mediated account of the reactions coming from the world (forming the “incoming Other”). In situations in which the Other-in-me is no real human agency, we may have no real answer, but we still have effects, and these effects are interpreted as socialized signs. They are understood given previous relations with real others. In simple terms, the Other-in-me is the addressee of the communicative actions of the agent.

In sum, we are assuming that within the Self inner space, there is a place to otherness. This opens a developmental route to accomplish a process of self-relating based on this other: If the Other-in-me is a half-constructed and half-alien addressee,

then there is no absolute limit to what forms this addressee may take—it may be virtual, fictional, or even the own person. Therefore, this Other-in-me is the opposite end of the road that leads the process of inner dialogicality.

#### INTERNAL AUDIENCES

The Other-in-me is the constructed and addressed Other. However, the person may have other audiences interfering with the addressed one. For example, our addressee may be a dear friend in whom we trust but who also has a very intimate relationship with someone we deeply distrust—Will we tell him our personal secret? This third party will be highly influential in the course of events, but it is not the addressee of my actions. Thus, we need to take into account third parties in every situation, beyond those that might be involved in the situation. We have been calling these third parties *internal audiences* that constrain internal dialogicality and the actual intersubjective and communicational process. As we stated elsewhere, these internal audiences are conceptualized

as the global context of the subjective realm. In our view, its development is probably rooted in personal and cultural history of each human life. It has to do with the accumulating experiences of being in contact with the world, especially, the intersubjective experiences. In some sense, it has to do with culture, with all the semiotic devices that we come in contact with. However, it is deeply idiosyncratic, since every utterance, sign, or exchange with someone or something else immediately creates a specific positioning of the experiencing I.

(Salgado & Ferreira, 2005, p. 149).

These internal audiences are compounded by all Others’ responses, beyond the ones coming from the addressee. Therefore, their presence within the inner realm of the Self creates a complex dialogical space, in which the person is polipositioned at every moment—not only socially but also internally.

#### *Progressive Differentiation of the Selfhood Domain*

As we have been referring, the real other has this function of generating the difference between the Self and the Other. In this, the Other simultaneously constitutes herself or himself as an I for himself and an Other to another I. This person also occupies a place in the system of Self, becomes an *Other-in-me*, generating the internal difference and

dialogicality of selfhood. The process of interpersonal relationship, or external dialogicality, is continuous with the elementary structure of selfhood and its intrinsic dialogical processes.

It is in this difference between Self and Other, and therefore in the interplay between internal and external dialogicality, that the possibility of self-consciousness and meaning (both personal and shared) is opened—as has been proposed, for example, by researchers in newborn development (e.g., Hobson, 1998). Progressively, real others generate increasing internal differentiation of selfhood as new relationships are established, bringing with them new meanings, new ways of relating to others and objects in the world, as well as new subjective states. This increasing internal differentiation of subjectivity simultaneously makes possible the intrinsic dynamism of its processes and also the participation in and intentional use of cultural semiotic systems.

Moreover, from an ontogenetic point of view, we argue that it is within interpersonal relationships that more complex forms of inner relations are developed, such as thinking through symbolic manipulation. Assuming a Vygotskian perspective, the tools that will enable self-reflection—the ability of using signs and afterward the use of self-referential signs, enabling self-identification and self-differentiation—are established through the social guidance and constraints introduced by caretakers. The developing child climbs the ladder of the successive zones of proximal development introduced by Others and then becomes capable of internalizing these tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Valsiner, 2007). When internalized, it becomes possible to use those tools to guide self-observation or any other form of self-consciousness.

### ***Dialogical Relations: Interobjectivity and Intersubjectivity***

Bakhtin (1981) has emphasized *double directionality* of any utterance. He has also emphasized that the words used in an utterance are half authored by the speaking subject and half given, as they carry with them the history of previous usages carried out by other persons. This idea of double directionality, emphasizing that utterances carry traces of the Other, not only suggests that the Other is brought inside the Self but also that the Self is constantly addressing, referring, to something outside of it. This delimitates a central process of selfhood: the constant interplay between centripetal (away from the Self or internalizing) and centrifugal (toward

the Self or externalizing; see Valsiner, 2007) movements, occurring simultaneously. The movement of addressing is, of course, a centrifugal movement, but as the Self addresses the Other and the world, she or he brings back traces of them that are incorporated in one's own experiences and narratives (as meaning contents) and serve as basis in future references to the Other and the world.

The Self is therefore moving and positioning simultaneously in two different domains: one is its relation with the objects in the world, and the other is its relation with the Other. On this basis, perhaps we could name the dimensions of the relation with the world as *interobjectivity* (Moghadham, 2003) and the dimension of the relation with an Other as *intersubjectivity*.

The double directionality of the Self generates those two simultaneous and necessarily connected life dimensions. Objects are always constructed by the person as semiotic objects, and because they can only become semiotic objects in the context of dialogical relations with others. Thus, interobjectivity is a realm achieved through the development of joint activities. The domain of intersubjectivity is mutually and reciprocally generated. Self and Other, in their process of positioning toward a specific object, are also positioning themselves toward each other. It does not imply an explicit commentary on the other party, but at least implicitly each human agent reveals himself or herself in the positions assumed toward something else. Thus, the Self obtains a “surplus of seeing” through the Other—specifically, through the positions he or she assumes toward the object of the joint activity, something is revealed about the Self.

Thus, objects are placed at the core of the dialogical relation. Each rejoinder in a social activity assumes a position toward that object that positions all the others involved in a certain way. These others will respond to this position with another position around that object, introducing a new perspective about it or introducing some new object that refracts the previous one. And the dialogue keeps on and on.

### ***Spatiality of the Self***

In the Bakhtinian tradition (Bakhtin, 1984), a spatial metaphor is used as well as the notion of position. If we assume that Self, Other, and the objects of their attention are disposed in a space, we may say that they have a co-relative position toward each other. This metaphor thus defines the impossibility

of two identical perspectives regarding the Other or the world and the impossibility of a subject simultaneously occupying two positions toward the world. However, it may happen that multiple social others are involved, and in that case the same position of the Self toward an object will create multiple co-relative positions I–Other. For example, if someone defends a friend against some threatening stranger, this person is assuming one single position but implying two antagonistic I–Other configurations (protecting the friend, and attacking the stranger). In other words, the specific position of the Self is determined by the combination of the several co-relative positions I–Other involved.

Thus, it seems that the DST gives the wrong impression when insisting in the polyphonic self. On the one hand, it is true that throughout time we may assume different positions regarding the same objects; on the other hand, the Self only occupies a position in any single moment.

## Conclusion

As we emphasized throughout this chapter, dialogism attributes to difference-in-itself an ontological status (very much in the same sense philosophers of difference like Deleuze do) and takes it to have a function of bridging opposing and asymmetric elements. Therefore, dialogism frequently considers antinomies to have an explanatory value by themselves instead of trying to favor one of their poles in detriment of the other (*see* Marková, 2003, for an elaboration on this topic).

The debate pertaining to the openness and closure of Self is, in DST, a function of two proposals: that the Self is bounded by a membrane that separates Self from non-Self, interiority from exteriority, and that the elements that internally and externally constitute the Self are mutually dependent and connected through referential semiotic processes. In this sense, DST endorses neither an individual constructivism nor a contextual or social constructivism. Both Self and the context in which it is immersed are co-constructed, and DST is focused on the processes by which it occurs and on what it involves.

The *experiencing-here-and-now-I*, as Valsiner (2002) phrased it, is always configured as “I, Other-in-me, and internal audiences” and draws always a separation between itself and its environment. The basis through which the Self draws this separation and addresses the Other and the objects is a specific configuration of those elements. This configuration

supports and expresses a given position of the Self toward its environment. Thus, we do not mean to suggest that the Self is permanently multipositioned, revealing different simultaneous positions toward the world. The Self does not *possess* multiple positions, even if throughout time it *becomes* a multiplicity of states and tendencies that are enacted in different relational contexts along time. Therefore, these positions (or configurations) of the Self are global self-states constituted by affects and thoughts, desires, signs, cultural values, and practices that are aggregated in a semi-stable global organization.

Temporality and spatiality appear in DST related to the functional and structural characteristics it attributes to selfhood. Although we are well-aware of the perils of such distinction (structure and function) and we recognize that it is not a clear-cut distinction, it serves a descriptive purpose. However, despite this, it has led to an overemphasis on the description of the components of selfhood in detriment of the development of its dynamic and temporal dimension. So, the relation between temporality and spatiality of Self is still underdeveloped. Moreover, it is not an easy question. DST does not favor a perspective on temporality that considers it as being continuous and a unified process. Both because DST is focused on the relations between elements of Self and considers relations with different natures at different levels, there will probably be several temporal trends involved in selfhood. However, generally, DST emphasizes Self to be oriented toward the future. The present does not exist as an extended and stable time; it exists only in its relation to the future and to its history and, therefore, its past. The present of the Self is an unstable moment in its process of becoming; it can only be apprehended by conceptually discontinuing a group of processes that are constantly on the verge of change and becoming different.

The debate around the unity or multiplicity of the Self is the last point we would like to stress. To summarize what we just argued throughout this chapter, we could say that in DST the Self is neither one nor several, neither single nor multiple. It is considered to be a decentralized and heterogeneous multiplicity. This means that there is not a central organizing element or a hierarchical chain of elements of different orders; no predetermined process is thought to decide which positions will emerge across time or how they will organize in relation to one another. This way, Self is like a *rhizome* in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari (2004)

have described rhizomatic entities: The several positions that come to constitute the Self throughout its history constitute centers of significance and subjectification. These functions of significance and subjectification are distributed across positions and are not dependent on any process besides the ones inherent to internal and external dialogicality of the Self; they are not subject to any pre-determined paths nor hierarchy.

These antinomies to which we just alluded to also help us to position dialogical perspective on selfhood in the global context of selfhood theories. Traditionally, theoretical models of Self tend to emphasize one the poles of each one of these antinomies while criticizing their competitor models for positioning on the other pole. Sometimes, they may accept some minor characteristics of the other pole but still emphasize that Self is essentially open or closed, for example. Dialogism, in stating that selfhood is constitutively relational in its processes and elements (even when we are referring to the phenomena of individual thinking), sustains that Self is essentially open and closed, temporal and spatial, constructed through narratives and dependent on non-narrative processes. In this sense, dialogical theory of selfhood is a positive and heuristic project in that it accepts and integrates constitutive characteristics and processes of selfhood that usually remain in opposite sides of the academic and scientific debate.

### **Future Directions**

Major changes in DST have taken place since the initial proposal of Hermans and colleagues. Some recent versions of it have made a long way from the scheme of I-positions involved in mutual relations within the landscape of the mind and contain some promises of reshaping the way selfhood is conceived within a dialogical framework. This has happened as dialogism has evolved and been articulated further as a global system of thought and as researchers have applied it to conceive specific phenomena. Although these two forces have been promoting further developments in dialogism and DST, their potential to generate novelty in the way psychology approaches and conceives human phenomena is also potentially hindered by the use of concepts like voices or positions in ways that may have lost their relation to dialogism. A major global challenge to DST, therefore, is to maintain itself as dialogical. As further developments and applications of DST are presented, it is important for it to maintain the

integrity between the worldview in which it is based (dialogism) and its conceptual and methodological dimensions.

In this context, several general questions are yet to be addressed. Two of them appear to be fundamental at this point. First of all, we argue that current descriptions of the dialogical self are still static descriptions in the sense that they are focused on structural and dimensional parameters describing the system of selfhood. But how does this structure behave in motion? It is the question of changes in its configuration over the course of experiential and communicational time facing us. Specifically, it is also, for example, the question of the self-and heteroregulation in the Self. Although these are still overly conceptual questions, they stimulate researchers to expand DST into a more comprehensive model of human psychological domain and to reach clear applications of DST throughout subdisciplines of psychology. In time, these developments will show the limits of dialogism, as a meta-theoretical framework, and will orient researchers to new theoretical developments and, most of all, to new synergies between dialogism and other general frameworks.

Second, the present descriptions are constructions derived theoretically. This gives rise to several methodological issues that relate essentially to the need to specify the properties of the constituent elements of the Self and the processes involved in their relations and the problem of access to the domain of experience. Specifically, this final issue will result in questions like: Is it possible to identify internal audiences, for example, in all activities (whether behavioral, cognitive, or emotional)? Hopefully, these questions will press researchers to develop dialogically sound strategies and methods of analysis of dialogicality inherent to selfhood without returning to traditional ways of conceiving phenomena and doing research that are hardly compatible with a strong dialogical framework. Because within dialogism, theoretical and methodological developments have evolved at different rates, this discrepancy between theory and method runs the risk of becoming a conservative force to dialogism innovative potential. Specifically, because the discussion around what would be dialogically informed research practices is still incipient.

### **Acknowledgements**

Preparation of this chapter was supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology grant PTDC/PSI PCL/103432/2008 (Decentering and Change in Psychotherapy,

2010–2013) and PhD grants SFRH/BD/30880/2006 and SFRH/BD/48266/200.

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# Narrative Scenarios: Toward a Culturally Thick Notion of Narrative

Jens Brockmeier

## Abstract

This chapter investigates the role of narrative in the relationship between individuals and their cultural worlds. Drawing on assumptions of interpretive cultural psychology and a Wittgensteinian concept of narrative as a cultural form of life, it proposes a culturally thick notion of narrative. At the heart of this notion is the idea of narrative as a cultural practice, a practice of meaning construction. This argument is developed in discussions of five traditions of research that have explored the nature of narrative (1) in contexts of cultural traditions and (2) socialization, (3) as a “form of life,” (4) with respect to fictional and nonfictional genres, and (5) as an instrument and practice of folk psychology. The resulting outline of a culturally thick notion of narrative is further elaborated by arguments from narratology, discussions on narrative in the light of evolutionary anthropology, and interpretive approaches to narrative in philosophy and the social sciences.

**Keywords:** narrative, narrative psychology, narrative practice, meaning, intentionality, socialization, folk psychology, narrative as a form of life

## Introduction

An inquiry into the nature of narrative that aims to situate its subject in the context of culture and psychology reasonably draws on two different families of theories. One is a family of cultural approaches to human psychology, the other a family of psychological approaches to culture. Essential to both is the effort to understand the relationship between individuals and the cultural worlds in which they live. In this chapter I make the case that language—particularly narrative—plays a crucial role in this relationship. I therefore also consider a third family of theories, namely, theories of narrative that emphasize its cultural nature and allow us to conceive of the great variety of narrative practices to be found in all human societies as a variety of cultural practices.

There is a twofold reason why narrative practices play a central role in humans’ cultural existence: they

are pivotal in binding the individual into a cultural world and in binding the meaning of this world into the individual’s mind. To explore this dialectic is the main purpose of my inquiry.

To do so, I first need to qualify the meaning of culture and narrative. As both are subjects of high complexity, it is not surprising that they come with an array of different conceptual definitions reflecting diverse points of view from which they can be considered. The point of view underlying my discussion is that of a cultural psychology. Cultural psychology investigates the relationship between individuals and their cultural worlds from a perspective that, in some respects, differs from, say, cultural or social and psychological anthropology. It also is different from sociology or social psychology, cultural studies, narrative studies, and hermeneutic philosophy. At the same time, however, cultural psychology draws on all of these traditions and uses

their resources—and they all are, in fact, part of the theoretical landscape that I want to survey. What is more, the understanding of cultural psychology that I bring to bear on this relationship is not that of a clear-cut disciplinary economy but rather that of a point of view, a perspective that cuts through several disciplines and that will become sharper as my discussion proceeds.

The qualification of culture and narrative, outlined in the second section of this chapter, leads to what I call a culturally thick notion of narrative—a notion of narrative as cultural practice and performance.<sup>1</sup> The notion of narrative as a cultural practice takes up Geertz's (1973) suggestion that an interpretive study of humans' cultural reality is to be based on experience-near concepts. Such concepts, sometimes called *emic*, are as close as possible to the experiential discourse of the individuals whose, in this case, narrative practices are at stake. Of course, "closeness" to experience is relative. All human experiences are generalized, but some are more and some are less so; some echo common sense and conventional everyday psychology, others give way to more reflected, individual, and deviant ways of meaning-making. The important point here is that emic concepts are concepts of a cultural world seen from within. They reflect the subject's point of view, the perspective from which people themselves consider their experiences to be meaningful. On the other hand, we have experience-distant "or *etic*" concepts. Etic concepts are used in the description and analysis of emic experiences—for example, by psychologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and narratologists.

When, in everyday life, people tell stories about themselves, they are typically concerned with issues that matter to them, with things they did, or with events affecting their actions, thoughts, feelings, and relationships with others. In telling their stories, they are arguably not concerned with the distinction of "story" and "discourse," as important as it may be in narrative studies, or the way their "storylines" and "plot structures" unfold and (together with other narrative, discursive, grammatical, and semantic registers) are shaped by and give shape to their sense of "narrative identity." Giving center stage to experience-near concepts not only enables us to become aware that people engage in very different stories about themselves (which is to say that there is no single "narrative identity" narrative)—irrespective of the fact that these narratives can be subject to the same categorical distinctions of "story," "discourse," "plot," and so forth. It also makes us more attentive

to the "local" specifics of the cultural models and vocabularies of self and identity on which these narratives draw. Further, we may recognize that their narrators do not necessarily have "a sense of having a narrative identity," perhaps not even a sense of having a personal identity at all. To be sure, even most people in traditions as obsessed with self-talk as European and North American ones would use a different language than that of "narrative identity" to talk about themselves.

Yet the proposition of a culturally thick notion of narrative does not only rely on the multidisciplinary resources just mentioned. There are more traditions of knowledge and thought that have contributed, in one way or another, to a notion of narrative as a cultural practice, which will be reviewed in the third section of this chapter. But before that—in the second part, after this Introduction—I outline three assumptions about culture and narrative that orient my ensuing discussion of the scholarly and scientific traditions relevant here.

The fourth section then takes a closer look at what is the quintessence of the notion of narrative put forward in this chapter: the idea of narrative as a cultural form of life. This idea centers on an emic notion of narrative that, rather than postulating universal components or ontological characteristics of storytelling, is based on a culturally situated mode of meaning-making. This notion also comprises how people give meaning to what they consider to be a "story." The fifth and final section offers an anticipatory look at important developments in the field: prospects of a culturally thick notion of narrative that permits us a fuller understanding of the intricate relations between the actions and minds of individuals and the cultural worlds that they create, populate, and change.

## Culture and Narrative: The Basics

### *Culture As Perspective*

In recent years, our concepts and theories of culture have undergone radical changes that also affect our understanding of the cultural charge of narrative. People have always been viewed as cultural beings, yet today many theorists have come to emphasize that people do not just live in *a* culture, but in a *variety* of cultural worlds. They are simultaneously embedded and entangled in distinct cultural realities, and these realities are often divergent and conflicting among each other.

Take people in a so-called "individualist culture" who, irrespective of this label, can live in a

very social and relational way—they may have a supportive family, a close network of friends, and be good team players at work. Whereas people in a so-called “collectivist culture” may not only work on their own and are without a family, but they may also behave and think in a self-centered and egoistic way. In addition, social realities can be experienced differently by different people within the same cultural world and even by the same people in different situations. Obviously, “individualist cultures” and “collectivist cultures,” terms widespread in cultural and cross-cultural psychology (for example, see Kitayama & Cohen, 2007), are prototypical experience-distant, or etic, concepts.

Moreover, although in the history of anthropology the existence of cultural traditions was long viewed as constitutive of a culture, there can be circumstances that exclude the formation of traditions. A good example, elucidated by Mintz (1974; Mintz & Price, 1992), is the socio-cultural world of the Caribbean in the extended period of conflict between colonial and postcolonial regiments. In this period many previous traditions came to an end without comparable new cultural continuities establishing themselves. Mintz’s findings have also confirmed a general observation: cultural experiences are typically contested. Interlaced with divergent powers and interests, they are subject to controversies and conflicts of interpretation that are often at the very heart of societal life.

All of these conflicts and complications, as well as their underlying political forcefields of power and economic interests, tend to be neglected when culture is meant to refer to a monolithic and bounded context—a meaning that has been, in fact, pervasive (not least, in quarters of cultural and cross-cultural psychology). One reason for this is that psychologists and social scientists in general, when describing and investigating culture in terms of a homogenized social unit, typically approach their subjects with concepts and models that reflect their own cultural worlds or, more precisely, the hegemonic theoretical assumptions of these worlds. This argument has been much discussed in the wake of two influential books by George Marcus, one written with Michael Fischer (1986), the other with James Clifford (1986). Marcus has argued that anthropologists have organized their observations of and thoughts about the people they study according to categories of their own cultural traditions. Many anthropologists and cultural theorists, discarding the idea that all people in any one society

experience “their culture,” have thus come to prefer a view more sensitive to the polyphonic, fractured, contingent, and often disharmonic ways of life and experience, a view that is more able to bring to the fore what Valsiner (2007) calls “the heterogeneous multitude of human dramas of everyday lives” (p. 87). Repudiating the imposition of a marked-off unitary culture concept on a group of people, a society, or civilization (typically alien and different from the investigator), many theorists now tend to conceive of social order as an unstable accomplishment that may be enforced, explained, legitimized, and exploited by some members of a society and, at the same time, questioned, rejected, and resisted by others.

On this view, today’s cultural worlds are increasingly open, inter-related, and fleeting. Sociologists speak of “liquid realities” (Bauman, 2000). Cultural worlds are permanently under construction. They extend on trajectories that link the local to the global. They are dynamic both in terms of internal differentiations and contradictions, and in terms of external (inter- and multicultural) relations. They are made up of processes whose dynamics go far beyond the idea of general laws, structures, or rules. Instead, to use the language of cultural theorist Appadurai (1996), they consist of emergent, fractal, and fragmentary configurations that follow nonlinear ways on which they temporarily overlap, interpenetrate, and again diverge.

Drawing on these discussions, the understanding of culture that underlies my approach to the inter-relation between individuals and their cultural worlds is neither substantialist, nor does it depend on generic terms or collective categories of culture. At stake, then, is not what is defined as culture by traditional anthropology (and *mutatis mutandis* by psychology in the wake of Wundt) as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). Rather than based on the assumption of such a “complex whole,” my understanding of culture (and, as I will explain in a moment, my ensuing understanding of narrative) is epistemologically and hermeneutically motivated. I propose comprehending the role narrative plays for our cultural being in the world by using the “cultural point of view” as a perspective. This perspective allows me to view human action (and, in the wake of Wittgenstein and Vygotsky, I also count language as a form of action) and other material and symbolic practices

in a context without which they would remain unintelligible.

It is important to see that the idea of the cultural as a point of view on the world does not imply culture as an institution, a force, or a power—that is, as “something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed,” to put the matter in Geertz’s terms (1973, p. 14). At stake is a context in the sense of a frame, a perspective within which certain phenomena can be intelligibly (or “thickly”) described. On this view, culture loses all folkloristic color. It turns into an epistemological, hermeneutic, and semiotic perspective: a way of interpretation that allows certain phenomena to gain meaning that otherwise would remain enigmatic. Geertz (1995) speaks of a ground against which a figure becomes visible, meaningful, understandable.

### CULTURAL WEBS OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is called the “cultural context” of a phenomena thus refers to a symbolic fabric, to a meaning context—that is, it is not ontological. It does not have, for example, a materially manifest existence like a castle, church, or parliament building. To say it is of semiotic nature means it is mediated by signs—that is, it is neither of ecological, socio-economic, ethical, or political nature, although all these contexts (and many more) are relevant here. Geertz (and, before him, Weber and Cassirer) has used a compelling metaphor for this cultural meaning context: that of humans as animals suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun. My point now is that if we view the cultural context of human action and mind in this sense as a semiotic construction, as “the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 145), then the most complex and comprehensive sign system, language—and especially the most complex and comprehensive form of language use, narrative—plays a pivotal role in spinning these webs of significance.

I should mention that the concept of language (and, by inclusion, of narrative) that underlies this argument is a Wittgensteinian notion of language as an open and fleeting form of life. This notion suggests a discursive and performative understanding of language as mingled with a broad spectrum of other practices of life, which is in contrast with an understanding of language lodged within an exclusively linguistic arena. The idea of language as a

form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953) defies a number of exclusionary oppositions, such as those between the verbal and the nonverbal, between linguistic and communicative practices, between speaking and acting (including bodily acting), and between linguistic and material action. With this in mind, let me qualify my point. On the one hand, I argue that without narrative, these cultural webs of meaning cannot be spun, which is to say that without the use of narrative, human beings cannot communicate, interpret their experience, and guide their actions, except in a restricted way.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I propose that without narrative, we cannot investigate these webs and the way they are spun—that is, without the use and the analysis of narrative, we cannot scientifically and scholarly interpret people’s cultural self- and world-interpretations.

The hermeneutic circle inherent to this approach has often been explicated as unavoidable part and parcel of every effort to understand human action and mind (e.g., Gadamer, 1989; McDowell, 1994; Ricoeur, 1981), and cultural life at large (Rorty, 1979). Against the backdrop of this philosophical tradition of reasoning, the study of cultural worlds cannot proceed like a nomological and experimental science in search of laws but must be “an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). This idea of human beings as “reaching for meaning,” which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Brockmeier, 2009), has long been established in the human sciences. It also became the springboard for Bruner’s (1986, 1990) vision of narrative psychology as a core area of cultural psychology. Bruner, one of the pioneers of cultural narrative psychology, saw this endeavor from the very beginning as closely connected to cultural anthropology.<sup>3</sup>

### *Functions of Narrative*

What then, more exactly, is the general role of language in the unfolding and understanding of cultural meaning contexts? And what is the particular role of narrative, especially, when we bear in mind that an essential assumption of the just mentioned project of a narrative psychology is to understand narrative practices as cultural practices? To explore this question, I take a socio-evolutionary and anthropogenetic vantage point. What characterizes human activities on a socio-cultural level as specifically human is that they are mediated through increasingly sophisticated forms of social sharing, collaborative action, and cultural learning. For Tomasello (2008), human beings have evolved

to coordinate complex activities. These activities comprise culturally essential forms of shared intentionality such as “reading” the intentions of others, emotional interaction, pretending, playacting, and gossiping. It is because they are adapted for such cultural activities—and not because of the cleverness of their individual minds—that humans are able to do so many exceptionally complex and sophisticated things. There is a hub to all these complex and sophisticated things that make human beings unique: this is joint sign-mediated meaning construction and interpretation, with language being the evolutionary and socio-historically most developed constructive and interpretive mode (Lock & Symes, 1999; Nelson, 1996; Tomasello, 2003, 2008). It is in this sense that Jakobson (1960a) pointed out that language “serves as a foundation of culture. We may go even further and state that language is the necessary and substantial foundation of human culture” (p. 107).

#### NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Yet this is not just about language or linguistic practices. The more humans’ social and cultural activities have become complex, both on an evolutionary and socio-historical plane—that is, the more they are socially inter-related, are based on shared intentionality, involve extended action sequences, and demand planning and anticipating—the more they involve complex linguistic practices. Why do we call these linguistic practices complex? Because they afford humans the possibility to navigate spatial and temporal scenarios that go beyond the here and now and encompass multiple events in several forms of past and present. Moreover, they allow us to look forward to and imagine future scenarios and hypothetical—subjunctive—events (Carrithers, 1992; Grodal, 2005; Nelson, 2007a). The overarching form of discourse in which such complex linguistic practices are organized is narrative. A great ape may communicate, “I want that banana.” However, a language at the complexity level of narrative is needed for the following sequence (taken from an ongoing conversation between a young couple): “I want that banana, but only if it is not from the fruit shop where you got those disgusting bananas yesterday—probably because you thought, ‘Wow, this is an eco shop, the first one in our neighborhood, terrific, terrific, and we must support it, and so on and so forth.’ We really should throw those mushy bananas in the trash before they start to rot.” Narrative, to make a long story short (and to foresee

some of what follows), combines and condenses all options of language and, in doing so, creates novel syntheses of meaning. No other sign system could handle and communicate the complexity of these syntheses in such a comprehensive, economic, and effective manner.

There is little doubt about the evolutionary advantages of narrative, even in its most elemental form as preverbal language of enactment, as Abbott (2000) has stated (on the evolutionary origins of narrative, see also Abbott, 2001, and Boyd, 2009). Performed storyworlds (i.e., enacted narrative scenarios) might have dominated an early evolutionary stage of narrative, which then, at the same time, would also have been one of the early stages of human cultural and intellectual history. Narrative, for Abbott (2000), “is not a product of grammatical language, but a preexisting condition for it that was later absorbed and enriched by language” (p. 255). Once fully developed, narrative becomes one of those capabilities whose evolutionary and cultural advantages so easily escape our attention because we are, from early childhood on, used to taking them for granted. We are immersed in it: we breathe it. It has become our element. Borrowing an analogy from evolutionary niche theory suggested by Hutto (2009), we can say “that narratives are a distinctive and characteristic feature of human cultural niches, just as dams are for beavers” (p. 27).

#### FOUR BASIC FUNCTIONS

To get a clearer sense of this unique capacity, we can distinguish several basic functions of narrative; all of which are at work in the example just quoted. All of them are functions of action—that is, they are in the service of human activities, which explains why they are as variegated as the forms of life which they realize. Building on Wittgenstein, we can view narrating as a way to do things with words. However (and here this view diverges from that of Austin’s [1962] famous founding question of speech act theory *How to do things with words?*), narrating is not only a way to do things with words; it also involves an array of other linguistic and nonlinguistic means, of media or semiotic environments, and of social and institutional constellations. It thus may be more appropriate to approach it as a means, or action, to carry out certain functions under certain circumstances, rather than by universally defining some structural properties or basic elements. I will come back to this idea of narrative as action in a moment, but first let me spell out narrative’s four basic functions.

First and most importantly, narrative, as already indicated, is crucial in enabling developed forms of social sharing, coordinating joint actions, and intersubjective understanding. This is narrative's communicative function. Second, narrative is a force to express and push forward particular views in the service of particular interests. Narrating is humans' most powerful means to make one's case—to explain, persuade, and defend something—against the case of others. This is the rhetorical function of narrative. Third, narrative not only allows people to share their emotional and intentional states with others, but also to make sense of the emotional and intentional states of others as well as of themselves. That is, it affords them to become aware of, reflect on, and regulate their feelings and other mental (and bodily) states. This is its empathetic or emotional function. And fourth, narrative has a cognitive function, a term I use as a shorthand for its manifold intellectual (or reflexive) and imaginative potentials.

The cognitive function is manifest in narrative's capacity to make sense of experience, to operate as a way of problem solving, and to give shape to the most intricate thoughts, visions, and imaginings—in fact, to have many of them come into existence in the first place. The cognitive function comprises special forms and capacities, such as ability (quite prominent in the quoted example) to construe multilayered temporal scenarios and gestalts of time, be they real or fictive, realistic or fantastic. These temporalizations go far beyond the sequential ordering of events and individual actions; they extend to the lifetime of individuals and the historical visions of communities. Narrative thinking enables us to follow a flow of events both in the here and now of our social and societal life, and within the broader temporal horizon of history and evolution. Perhaps the most powerful way, Bruner (2002) remarks, to distance ourselves from the immediacy of events and experiences is to convert what we've encountered into story form. And not least, the cognitive function allows us to give shape to and reflect on the cultural dynamics mentioned above, the dynamics ensuing from the fact that people live in more than one cultural world, which is especially manifest under conditions of modern globalization.

#### THE CASE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

An illuminating illustration of this aspect comes with the thorny question of how we understand, under modern and global conditions, an individual's

cultural identity. An essential element of one's sense of cultural belonging is the inter-relation between social inclusion and exclusion. Although the desire for belonging seems to have developed one of the oldest, not to say archaic and most deeply rooted form of bonding, there have always been diverse, even contradictory forms of belonging: practices of simultaneously localizing oneself in several cultural narratives and symbolic spaces of identity (Brockmeier, 2001). For most people, the wish of belonging to a society leads to what Valsiner (2007) has called "a real effort at an impossible task," simply because a modern society has become too decentralized and too heterogeneous a field to allow for unambiguous identification. What further complicates matters is that most modern social and personal identifications refer to fictional units. A prime example is the nation state which, according to Anderson (2006), only exists as an "imagined community" because the members of this community cannot possibly know each other.

That cultural identity fans out in a network of often conflicting relations to other identities (and to other social networks) becomes particularly patent in the case of individuals' sense of national identity. In much of today's world, a sense of national belonging means balancing a difficult to entangle array of plural identities that reflect a multitude of inclusions and exclusions. One and the same Belgian can be a Flame and a Huguenot, a native speaker of French and Portuguese, an employee of an U.S.-based multinational company who lives in the Netherlands and is married to an immigrant from India. We are all familiar with such or similar identity constellations that can be lived out in many different ways and described in terms of many different but inter-related personal and collective identities (Straub, 2002). But, and this is my point, if they are to be articulated from a first-person point of view (perhaps in view of life as a whole, as subjectively meaningful gestalt, or as the search for such a gestalt, in a word, as a relation of figure and ground), then it unavoidably takes the form of narrative. In such a story, the four basic functions of narrative merge. We still may call it a personal (or first-person) narrative and also a narrative of an "impossible task," or a story that is supposed to impose order and coherence on the inherent instability of a post-modern "messy self" (Rosner, 2007), yet we should bear in mind that "the personal" here is a highly cultural arrangement—and so are the models and conventions of storytelling and autobiographical

narrative that bring about this arrangement. These models range from literary, philosophical, psychological, and political genres to popular and everyday genres of narrating; they encompass the entire range of what has been called “narrative folk psychology” (Bruner, 1990; Hutto, 2009).

### *Narrative As Action*

In line with most social scientists, psychologists have been interested in narrative first of all as a method or methodology, as a way to find out, as a means to an end. The stories people tell in research settings such as interviews are conceived of as providing access to either a given social or psychological reality or to the experience of such a reality. Specifically operationalized narrative methods allow researchers to “collect data” and objectify them through coding systems and other elaborative techniques. This sort of research proceeds on the assumption that narrative represents social or psychological reality, that it offers a window on such reality. What makes this assumption so persuasive is that it is well-articulated not only in the social sciences, but also in narrative studies and criticism. Many influential investigations of literary narrative have privileged nineteenth-century realist novels, generalizing their role of mimesis (i.e., of simulation, imitation, or representation), whereas they neglect the non-mimetic nature of much narrative discourse, as critics like Richardson (2006) have argued. In more general terms, this view piggybacks on an understanding of language as representation of reality or as the representation of the experience of this reality. Irrespective of a long tradition of critique, this paradigm of language as a mirror of the world (Rorty, 1979) has proved to be most resilient and continues to flourish not only in common sense, but also in many quarters of the social sciences and humanities, from psychology to narratology.

One problem resulting from the focus on narrative as representation is that it misses out much of what else narrative discourse is about. Let me give prominence to just one further use to which narrative can be put. As with all language, narrative not only represents (or re-presents, or reflects, or expresses) reality, but also creates reality. It is a way not only of organizing experiences but also of making new experiences. Rather than simply mirroring the world, it also invents the world; in fact, it evokes many worlds, storyworlds—be they fictional or factual, told by the liar, the poet, the visionary or by the accountant, the judge, the

documentarian. Using an expression by Goodman (1978), narrative has been conceived of as a “way of worldmaking” (Brockmeier, 2005a; Bruner, 2001; Herman, 2009a). What Whorf (1956) wrote about the “background linguistic system” of each language in general also holds true for the narrative registers of each language, namely, that it “is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade” (p. 212). Meanings are neither incorporated in the material world nor an inherent quality of words; they are, as Wittgenstein pointed out, negotiated in interactions within a cultural community. Wittgenstein put particular emphasis on the language games emerging in these interactions, with narrative as one particular language game (1953, § 23).

It is from within such a “cultural grammar,” an idea echoing both Wittgenstein’s and Whorf’s thinking, that we mentally organize our being in the world. “The categories and types,” Whorf (1956) wrote, “that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds” (pp. 212–213). I take narrative to be one of these Whorfian linguistic systems, even if we might be more reluctant today in using the term “system” for such an open and fleeting form of life. Wittgenstein’s concept form of life also helps us to discern another essential quality of narrative discourse: its interwovenness with all kinds of actions, linguistic and not. As ecological and cultural linguist Harrison (2007, p. 205) has put the matter from the perspective of an empirical field researcher: languages exist and evolve to interact, convey information, and shape meaning “within a specific cultural matrix” that influences and permeates every level and aspect of them; they thus “must be studied holistically and in their natural – that is cultural – context.” When languages die off, Harrison maintains, entire reality-models (most prominently, those embedded in the lexical resources of a language) are lost forever (Harrison, 2011).

It is against this theoretical and empirical background that my cultural-psychological perspective gives center stage to narrative as action, as a cultural practice that is wider in scope, more differentiated



and powerful than what could be captured by a cognitive, linguistic, narratological, or critical focus alone. What could be seen as weakness turns out to be its strength: that the borders of a culturally thick notion of narrative are fuzzy because it is interlaced with many other cultural practices, linguistic and nonlinguistic.

Another way to understand narrative as action is to see the point of storytelling not as a mode of representing but of construing meaning. And this is an important difference. It is the difference between an idea of narrative as a reified entity (something Rom Harré and I have expounded as the “ontological fallacy”) and the idea of narrative as a discursive or cultural process, as a mode of meaning-making (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). Taking Bruner’s point about narrative as meaning construction a step further, we have argued that a more appropriate way to study the discursive reality of this mode than classifying narrative structures or components is to examine the ways in which people engage in the very business of meaning-making and, in the process, use stories. There are no forms of narrative that exist as universal templates to be made concrete; instead, they are constrained to take the forms they do by the exigencies of the particular cultural situations in which they occur. Rather than conceiving of narrations as given ontological (or cognitive, or linguistic, or metalinguistic) entities, we have described them as *modus operandi* of some of our discursive practices or performances (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001, p. 53). The question, thus viewed, is not how people use narrative as a means to a representational end, but what are the concrete cultural conditions under which they tell stories and in so doing implicitly define what they take to be narrative. This may also comprise a view of narrative as representation.<sup>4</sup> It is in this fashion that the cultural study of narrative practices becomes *emic*, in the sense outlined at the beginning: it is based on experience-near stories of what people, at a certain point in time, consider to be meaningful in their lives.

### Exploring the Cultural Matrix of Narrative: Traditions

In the last section I have sketched a culturally thick notion of narrative, localizing it on three different maps: as a mode of interpretation through which people try to understand their being in the world, as a cultural practice realizing several (communicative, rhetorical, empathetic, and cognitive) functions, and as a form of action. In this third

section, I flesh out this sketch by reviewing five traditions of scholarship and research concerned with the relationship between culture and narrative. All of them have made, in one way or another, a significant contribution to the study of the cultural nature of narrative and the role of narrative within humans’ cultural worlds at large. Although some of these traditions have a remarkable history, which would be a valuable subject in its own right, my interest is not primarily a historical one. Rather, I view these approaches as shedding light on important aspects of the cultural matrix of narrative I have set out to explore.

### *Narrative and Cultural Tradition*

One of these aspects is the role of narrative in creating, preserving, and transforming cultural traditions—that is, its importance as a bond of intergenerational and historical continuity. Within the context of anthropological approaches, the study of this role goes back to Edward Sapir’s (1949/1933) idea of narrative as a “culture-preserving instrument.” Sometimes, the origins of this line of thought are even traced back one more century to the linguistic and philosophical work of von Humboldt (e.g., Jahoda 1992). To view publicly circulating stories of a community—myths, fables, fairytales, religious and historical legends, and other folk stories—as part of what Wundt (and Lazarus and Steinthal before him) described as *Völkerpsychologie*, was not unusual among literary and cultural-history scholars in the first half of the last century, the time of Sapir and Whorf. In the 1920s and 1930s, classicists examined the transmission of ancient Greek narratives in a world of orality (e.g., Parry, 1971) and early ethnographers of narrative and folklore such as the Russian Formalists (e.g., Propp, 1968) investigated what they saw as culturally canonical patterns of folk tales. Many works of the period were inspired by similar interest in the cultural nexus among social life, language, narrative, and other semiotic environments. Much discussed examples are Benjamin’s *Archades Project* (1999), never completed because of his death in 1940, about the cultural world of Paris he called “the capital of the nineteenth century,” and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1993) studies from the 1930s and 1940s about the Renaissance and “Rabelais’ world.”

Over the last decades, linguistic anthropologists and ethnographers of narrative in the wake of Sapir and Whorf have extended the view of narrative as a “culture-preserving instrument.” The new,

extended view is meant to encompass not only the function of narrative for a cultural tradition but also the function of a cultural tradition for narrative or, more precisely, for the specific organization of narrative “speech events,” storytelling performances, and other linguistic practices and discourses (e.g., Bauman, 1986; Hymes, 1964; 1974; Duranti, 2006; 2009a). The idea of narrative practices as cultural practices has led to the analysis of language-specific and culture-specific narrative forms, such as genres, semantic and grammatical resources, indexical systems, situated contexts of communication, and language socialization.

### ***Narrative and Socialization***

As we have seen, the interplay between narrative and the cultural world can be approached from two different angles: whereas narrative practices appear to be shaped and guided by cultural traditions, they simultaneously play an important role in establishing and transforming these very traditions. To participate in social life it thus is essential for each individual to become a culturally competent storyteller, which is encouraged by members of a cultural world who are deeply concerned with children’s able participation in social life and command of cultural knowledge. Central to both is language and the skillful use of its registers, from grammar to narrative, conversational turn-taking (Ochs & Taylor, 2001; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2006) and other forms of “streetwise” language use (Zentella, 1997). How an individual learns to actively participate in the narrative language games of his or her cultural world is the central issue in a second field of research that I review in this subsection. This field has emerged from the study of language socialization and the developmental psychology of language. Influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1987)—another contemporary of Sapir, Whorf, and Wittgenstein—it has drawn attention to narrative and narrative practices as an important way of integrating different strands of linguistic socialization. It is in fact a synthesis of a broad spectrum of linguistic and psychological aspects of language development that is realized in narrative discourse. More than that, the implications and consequences of narrative development affect the entire cultural socialization of the child (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Miller, Fung, & Koven, 2007; Nelson, 2007b). Learning how to tell and understand stories in early childhood is a process that combines linguistic, social, and psychological (cognitive, emotional, and moral) development

processes and fine tunes them, in a variety of intersubjective practices, to culturally canonical requirements (Brockmeier, 2004). For Rogoff (2003, p. 282), the focus on this “guided participation in cultural endeavors” is at the heart of the Vygotskian vision of human development.

Why is entering the world of narrative discourse such a crucial cultural endeavor? It induces the child into discovering a new experiential space, a space that opens to a symbolic universe with unprecedented social options, as Nelson (2004; 2007b) has argued. In learning the rules of narrative language games, children not only find out that stories can fulfill several functions that all extend their horizon of agency, but also that the same event can be told in different ways from different perspectives. This narrative multi-perspectivalism comes in tandem with a multicentered “theory of mind,” if we want to use this term to refer to the social and pragmatic skills of what, in an alternative view, has been called humans’ “interpretive mind” (Brockmeier, 1996; Ricoeur, 1981). The multiple perspectives, and the need to interpret them, that emerge in narrative interactions help children to understand that different stories often reflect different people with different minds; they articulate different beliefs and points of view on the world, and this includes the worlds and minds of others. Ultimately, understanding—interpreting—different stories is to understand different minds. And this is not little. It requires, Nelson (2007b) writes, “understanding the sources of differences among people—their background, personalities, relationships, histories” (p. 219). There is abundant evidence from a variety of empirical fields suggesting that narrative is pivotal for the emergence of this folk psychology of social understanding (e.g., Herman, 2009c; Hutto, 2008, 2009; Nelson, 2009; Ornaghi, Brockmeier, & Grazzani, 2011).

Drawing on Vygotsky’s theory of human ontogeny as based on social-interaction, we can say that language and, by inclusion, narrative can be conceived of as the pivotal hinge between the child and the cultural world within which he or she develops. Not least in view of narrative development, Nelson (1989a) has noted that we owe to Vygotsky the most profound explanation of the role of language in the development of the child—especially as far as his or her culturally shaped sense of self is concerned. Language, for Vygotsky, is characterized in a twofold way. It is operative as a societal semiotic system and, in and through the process of its individual

acquisition, as a mode of social, linguistic, and cognitive development that allows novices to enter a linguistic and cultural community. In Vygotsky's psychological semiotic, language is essential for all forms of what he called "higher mental or psychological functioning," by which he referred to mental processes that are mediated by tools, especially "psychological tools" or signs, that is, cultural signs.

This process gains a new quality as soon as children begin to understand and use narrative discourse practices because it is these practices that offer them access to the manifold storyworlds of a cultural community. The child is entering what Nelson (2007b) calls a new experiential space: a community of minds. Acting as a member of this community means "we learn to tell the stories that our social world values, and our storied thoughts come to confirm to the models of our society" (Nelson, 1996, pp. 184–185). In Nelson's Vygotskian view, this community is the core of cultural life. It encompasses cultural environments in which the child begins to explore the intersecting complexes of communication, narrative, conceptual knowledge, and memory. In these experiences,

the child begins to encounter and engage with cultural knowledge systems beyond the personal range . . . Practices in cultural environments common to life in the preschool years may be particularly significant: symbolic play and games, and cultural narratives—stories, myths, folktales . . . and so on—all contribute to narrative consciousness and thus to becoming a member of the community of minds where these practices originate.  
(Nelson, 2007b, p. 212)

The implications of this view are far-reaching. To assume that during their first 10 years children are developing toward membership in a human community of minds challenges the traditional concept of theory of mind. It broadens the concept from something that children (in a developmental "milestone event") invent for themselves or that emerges from their cognitive development to a "cultural conception of what it is to be a person within a human community" (Nelson, 2007b, p. 219). The point at issue is no longer a single mind and its theory but children—persons—and their minds, their interactions, and interpretations according to the cultural conventions of a community.

Whereas research in the first tradition, outlined in the previous section, has concentrated on cultural narratives, the Vygotskian approach has been

mainly concerned with personal stories (as a particular variation of cultural stories) and the discursive and social contexts of interaction in which they are told, performed, and interpreted—as in the classic studies by Miller (1982), Nelson (1989b), and Ochs (1988).

### *Narrative as a Form of Life*

Traditionally, developmental psychology has revolved around the individual child, and from this perspective, it also has viewed the development of an individual's linguistic and narrative "competence." Yet Vygotskian perspectives, socialization theories, pragmatic approaches, and other culturally oriented investigations have shifted emphasis: from the autonomous individual and his or her mental or cognitive life, to the intersubjective, contextual, institutional, and socio-economical realities of human development. In this way, narrative too has been increasingly examined as a form of communication and co-construction of meaning. At the same time, it has served as a method of investigation. This trend has been undergirded by disciplines and theories from distinct backgrounds. Notably, parts of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, ethnography, discourse studies, auto/biographical studies, life story research, and action and practice theory have all contributed to the formation of a field that, by now, can be marked as a third overarching research approach to the cultural nature of language and narrative.

Bolstered by one of the most influential paradigms of modern philosophy of language—the non-representational notion of language as communicative and intersubjective form of action, unfolded by Pragmatism, Wittgenstein, Austin, Davidson, Habermas, Rorty, and others—many sociolinguistic and social-scientific-oriented studies have begun to explore narrative as a mode of interaction and, in the process, cast light on its culturally situated nature. Yet it is not only the orientation toward the contextually and culturally situated nature of narrative practices and the understanding of these practices as ways of meaning-making, it also is the recognition of their ubiquity in many cultural worlds that is a common feature in this field. The notion of narrative emerging here might therefore be best dubbed in a Wittgensteinian manner as a cultural form of life—or, to use a different expression, as a language game "consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven" (Wittgenstein, 1953, §7).

There are several more currents of research that have developed conceptual and analytical tools for the investigation of narrative as a cultural form of life. Let us begin with discursive psychology that studies narrative as a form of intersubjective action or, to be more precisely, as discursive intervention in ongoing events (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Harré & Gillett, 1994). A case in point is positioning theory. It foregrounds the ways narrators carry out various actions by attributing certain positions to characters in their stories, to the audience of their storytelling, to themselves, and in respect to the cultural world at large (Bamberg, 1997; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Harré et al., 2009). In a similar vein, other authors have emphasized the inherently intersubjective dynamic of storytelling—of “narrative in interaction”—especially in everyday encounters and conversational events (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Similarly, in the wake of Sacks (1992), sociolinguistic and conversation-analytical approaches (e.g., Aronsson, 2001; Norrick, 2000, 2007; Quasthoff & Becker, 2005) have developed what could be called a *narrative pragmatics*—a term originally coined by Chatman (1981).

It is amazing in what a short period of time the use of narrative and discursive approaches in the social sciences has become business as usual. From an exotic outsider and underdog, narrative inquiry has transformed into a respected member of the academic club—a taken-for-granted part of the standard spectrum of ethnographic and other qualitative methodologies (e.g., Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2008; Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007; Elliott, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, 2009; Horsdale, 2011; Quinn, 2005). For some time now, it has been safe to say that narrative inquiry in the social sciences has entered a “post-polemical phase,” as Freeman (2001) put it. The time Freeman made this comment, the very beginning of the twenty-first century, can indeed be seen as a watershed. Since then, “[r]ather than *proposing* to do the desired work or proclaiming the need for such work, it is simply being done, constructively and vigorously” (p. 284).

In the process, social-scientific narrative research has become more differentiated, shifting from text and story-oriented paradigms to action and performance-oriented paradigms and models of pictorial narrative (Brockmeier, 2005b; Hydén & Brockmeier, 2008a; Kohler Riessman, 2007; Mattingly, 2007; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). It also has become wider in scope. Narratives are studied in institutional

and conversational or face-to-face settings (including those constituted by ethnographic and psychological research interviews) that involve cultural contexts such as development and socialization (as just reviewed), home and family life (Heath, 2009; Ochs & Taylor, 2001), the workplace (Fasulo & Zuccheromaglio, 2008), health and illness (Hydén & Brockmeier, 2008b), psychotherapy (Fasulo, 2007), politics (Andrews, 2007; Duranti, 2009b), cultural memory (Brockmeier, 2002), law (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000), science (Harré, Brockmeier, & Mühlhäusler, 1999), and sport (Smith & Sparkes, 2009), to mention a few.

On a conceptual and epistemological plane, however, this differentiation and diversification has come at a price. The more social-scientific narrative research has established itself as a major player, the more it has become elusive—at least it seems so if viewed through the lenses of traditional methodologies that typically are appealed to in order to warrant the scientificity of inquiry. “Unlike many qualitative frameworks, narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points . . . ; there are no self-evident categories on which to focus, as there are with content-based thematic approaches, or with analyses of specific elements of language,” as Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou (2008) explain the dilemma of many social and cultural scientists.

In addition, unlike other qualitative research perspectives, narrative research offers no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best level at which to study stories. It does not tell us whether to look for stories in recorded everyday speech, interviews, diaries, TV programs or newspaper articles; whether to aim for objectivity or researcher and participant involvement.

(Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 2)

That being said, the same picture has also been linked to an increasing fine-tuning of narrative research to a changing understanding of humans’ social and cultural reality, a reality that is intimately mingled with narrative discourses which, however, in order to be grasped, demand a new, more open and flexible view of narrative—that is, a second narrative turn.

## TWO NARRATIVE TURNS

Approaching the field from a historical point of view, Gubrium and Holstein (2008, 2009) have distinguished two narrative turns in social research. They discern the first narrative turn early in the last

century, launched by Propp (1968) and other social researchers of narratives and folklore. The tradition of narrative ethnography initiated here also led to efforts to study ordinary peoples' "own stories," as manifested in interviews and personal "documents of life" (letters, diaries, files)—material viewed as a window on distinctive social and cultural worlds. In the "Chicago tradition," dominated theoretically by George Herbert Mead (1934), early classics such as W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's (1958) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* on the immigration experience in Chicago after the end of World War I were followed by a stream of ethnographic case studies of particular social and cultural communities. Although such analyses concentrated on the content of participants' narrative accounts and on the social and cultural life they depicted, this interest widened in what Gubrium and Holstein (2008) called the second narrative turn. This turn, within which Gubrium and Holstein associated their own work, shifted the attention to the very practices of storytelling and the social and cultural circumstances in which they occurred; we might add that this second narrative turn already started in the 1960s and 1970s with ethnolinguistics, conversation analysis, and sociolinguistics entering the scene of language analysis. It reaches beyond the first narrative turn in that it brings to the fore the interplay between the content and internal organization of narratives, and the concrete social and cultural conditions, the "narrative environments," that regulate the production, distribution, and circulation of narratives.

Although there is no strict line of demarcation between . . . stories and storytelling, we need to know the details and working conditions of narrative occasions if we are to understand narrative practices. These details, in turn, can only be discerned from direct consideration of narrative environments. Stories are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, with a variety of consequences for those concerned. All of this has a discernable impact on what is communicated and how that unfolds. A life story might be told to a spouse, to a lover . . . , to a therapist, to a son or daughter, or to a fellow team member, among the huge variety of audiences to which narratives are conveyed. The occasion might be a job interview, part of a pickup line, a confession, or a recovery tale. The consequences might be amusing or life threatening.

(Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, p. 247)

It is, as we can conclude with Gubrium and Holstein, the social, institutional, and cultural environment of storytelling that impacts on the content and internal structure of narrative, just as the strategies of positioning influence the social profile of storytellers and the narrative scenarios within which they carry out actions. Thus, many narrative researchers have come to understand the performance and social organization of the storytelling process as meaning-making activity in its own right. "Meaning-making," write Gubrium and Holstein (2009), "is a practical activity that transpires in particular circumstances and puts into play the available resources for constructing stories" (p. 57).

### ***Fictional and Nonfictional Narrative***

The study of the relationship between narrative and culture in the three traditions mentioned so far has paid much heed to oral narrative practices. This is not to say that writing does not play a role in the sphere of oral narrative; in fact, it does. Under conditions of cultural literacy, structure, usage, and understanding of language is profoundly influenced by the existence of writing and its various semiotic media, including those that have come into being in the digital age (Brockmeier & Olson, 2002). Still, psychological, social-scientific, and sociolinguistic research on narrative has been concerned primarily with oral storytelling and their discursive or narrative environments. In contrast (as if in an odd division of labor), written narrative has been the subject of a distinct tradition of scholarship. The terrain of this tradition is the storyworlds of fictional and nonfictional literary narrative, complemented by the storyworlds of play and opera, film and television, photography, graphic novels, and digital or virtual environments. Roughly, the distinction between dominantly written and dominantly oral storyworlds corresponds to what Hyvärinen (2006, 2010) has described as the two families of narrative studies: one, rooted in the humanities, represents narratological and critical scholarship, the other has emerged with the narrative turn (or turns) in the social sciences. Hyvärinen notes that despite the common interest in narrative, there are only very few encounters between these two families.

I use the terms *storyworlds* and *literature* to mark this fourth tradition of narrative research because I think they are more appropriate for a discussion of the cultural nature of narrative than the more common term *fiction*. From a cultural point of view,

the distinction between fictional and nonfictional genres of narrative (and the derivative distinction of genres such as creative or narrative nonfiction and docufiction) appears to be problematic for several reasons. One is that there are many forms and genres of narrative that simply ignore the borderline between fictional and nonfictional narrative and cannot be understood by these categories. Consider “subjective” genres such as autobiographical narratives or first-person life stories, as we encounter them, for example, when people review their lives in hindsight (Freemann, 2010). If the criterion for nonfictional narrative is taken to be its truth value (Lejeune, 1989), or its reference to the real world (Cohn, 1999), or that it is falsifiable (Abbott, 2008), what are we to make of, say, an autobiographical narrator who offers possible interpretations of events in his or her life, events that so often happened coincidentally? The narrator may be fully aware of that but still might try to make sense of these events, perhaps by the help of Christian or Buddhist or Marxist or Existentialist assumptions. Who then would be able to judge, and by which standards, the truth value of these interpretations? And whether they refer to the real world? And are falsifiable?

But the questions that ensue from a cultural perspective for the fiction–nonfiction distinction are also evident in “objective” genres such as travel narratives. Pratt (1988) has noted that European landscape narratives evoke a cultural system of representation that works across the fiction–nonfiction line, which, in the traditional view, is supposed to separate genres such as the novel from a nonliterary genre like travel writing (what today would be called creative nonfiction). However, as Pratt has shown, from at least the sixteenth century on (i.e., during the epoch of colonialism), the two genres have completely interpenetrated and mutually determined each other. Drawing on a narrative analysis, “which decenters the question of truth versus falsehood, fiction versus nonfiction, literary genre versus nonliterary genre, and focuses instead on generalized strategies of representation,” Pratt (1988, p. 22) has found that what at first sight presents itself in both genres as a neutral and realist narrative—in fact, as a landscape description—functions as discourse of domination. The landscapes described within both literary and nonliterary narrative scenarios are part of a widespread cultural system of values in which nature is viewed first and foremost as a commodity, as something to be conquered and dominated. Fictional and nonfictional authors alike employ the

same linguistic repertoire in arriving at a cultural code of aesthetic, moral, and political values.

A second reason why a clear-cut borderline between fictional and nonfictional narrative is problematic is that the very idea of such a distinction itself is a cultural one. It emerged as a convention whose rationale and scope has depended on specific discursive and narrative environments. Even within Western traditions, it has undergone considerable change. For years, indeed centuries, these traditions did not specify any distinction between history and fiction. Even well into the eighteenth century, history was a literary art and historians were considered good historians because of their imaginative and inventive abilities, their qualities as writers of narrative prose (Burrow, 2007). That empirical evidence had to play a critical role became an academic conviction and culturally established rule only in the nineteenth century.

The storyworlds of all three areas of literary fiction, nonfiction, and those narratives that defy and go beyond this opposition are surrounded by discourses that meander in many public spheres. They also comprise a vast literature that is critical, philosophical, and sometimes even narrative itself. This literature interprets and reflects on exactly the interfaces between life and language, tradition and the individual, and action and interaction where we have situated narrative practices as cultural practices. This makes it even more difficult to understand why social-scientific research has almost entirely ignored the resources of critical knowledge that have been accumulated in a long tradition of narrative scholarship. My argument is that the storyworlds of fictional and nonfictional literature and the surrounding discourses of interpretation and critical reflection constitute the thickest narrative layer of our attempts to cultural self-interpretation. In these attempts, we can explore in much detail what it means that narrative binds the individual into a cultural world while it binds the meaning of this world into the individual’s mind.

#### THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF LIFE AND LITERATURE

Narrative prose realizes functions of all three fields outlined above: the historical and intergenerational, the individual and developmental, and the discursive and intersubjective. It furnishes the discourses in these fields with genres, plots, storylines, and models of reality, mind, and imagination, whereas it, in turn, continuously soaks up the

linguistic and experiential resources of these discourses, as well as those of everyday life in general. What makes this mutual enrichment of life and literature possible is that literary prose serves a variety of cultural purposes.

Taking a closer look at these cultural purposes we find, not surprisingly, that there is first an aesthetic intention. This intention and the way it is realized is studied in poetics, stylistics, and criticism. One could go as far as to argue that the explicit or implicit aesthetic intention, the artistic vision of literary narrative, is the distinctive feature that sets it apart from the rest of narrative. But then, its aesthetic component is only one among several; which is to say, there is more to literary prose than its poetic dimension. On the other hand, there also is a poetic component to everyday language, in fact, as Jakobson (1960b) said, to all language, even if this component is rarely dominating. But it is enough to assume a continuum of poetic qualities that reaches from ordinary to literary narrative. Whether it is poetry or an everyday exchange on the bus, language inherently has an aesthetic dimension, and so have all cultural practices of narrative.

Another cultural purpose of literary narrative becomes evident when we consider it as strategy of persuasion, as a way to convince others, and sometimes even the tellers of the tale themselves. I have already alluded to this as one of narrative's basic functions. In the humanities, this is the subject of rhetorical analysis. Like notions and standards of aesthetics, notions and standards of persuasiveness are strongly culturally defined.

Further, literature sets up processes of mutual interpretation between author and reader; this, too, piggybacks on an elemental function of narrative. In the realm of literary studies these processes are examined in reception-(or reader response)-theoretical, discursive, interactional, pragmatic, rhetorical, and cognitive narrative inquiries.

Next, narrative sets up processes of mutual interpretation among texts from various cultural worlds, present and past, real or imagined, conjuring up what cultural semiotician IUri Lotman (1990) has described as the textual "semiosphere," the interconnected signs systems that as a whole constitute the cultural sphere. Within a semiosphere, distinct narratives unfold networks of meaning relations among each other: through semantic and stylistic similarities, explicit cross-references, ironic comments, sarcastic allusions, friendly dialogues, and furious clashes. This kind of intertextual interaction among

narratives is also investigated in traditional philological and critical studies and in newer deconstructionist approaches.

Finally, there is a special focus on the interpenetration of narrative literature and the general cultural dynamic beyond literary discourse. For many literary and cultural theorists, the only way to fully appreciate a literary work is to examine the cultural world that it reflects and is embedded in, and this comprises the ethical value system, the "narrative judgements" (Phelan, 2007), which the literary work (in fact, every narrative) implicitly asks its audience to adopt while reading or listening to it. Greenblatt (1998) thus views what he calls "culture as a complex whole" as both continuously articulated and transformed by literary texts. According to Greenblatt, an important task of cultural literary criticism is to investigate the rules of the cultural power games upon which literary works are predicated. This understanding, he believes, must begin with the acknowledgement that each cultural order organizes what appears to be opposite things: constraint and control versus mobility and openness. Both are pervasive cultural forces that have become internal operators of literary dynamics.

#### BAKHTIN'S NOVEL

A case in point of the cultural charge of narrative prose is the genre of the novel, especially as understood by Mikhail Bakhtin. In Bakhtin view, the novel is a polyphone creation that comprises, on the one hand, all potentials of literature and, on the other, all spheres of social and psychological life in a given epoch. Like a human being always changes and is never fully realized or fully known, neither to himself or herself or to others, so are language and cultural life never fully realized and remain boundless and interminable in their potentials. This makes the novel the prime venue to grapple with what Bakhtin calls the unfinalizability of human life, for the novel is fundamentally concerned with all three: the individual and his or her experiential world, language, and humans' cultural existence.

Bakhtin saw literature as the semiotic dimension where an epoch comes to the most comprehensive and sophisticated notion of itself. This capacity is due, not least, to the heterogeneous and open character of novelistic discourse. The interplay in which the novel realizes the totality of language as a social system and, in this way, captures the totality of a particular historical world was the stage of the cultural dramas Bakhtin examined.

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious language, language of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphasis) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types . . . and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions . . .

(*Bakhtin*, 1981, p. 263)

In studying the modern novel as the narrative amalgamation of a manifold of languages and stylistics that “orchestrate” a multivoiced cultural universe, Bakhtin developed a theory of narrative as a hinge between the individual and his or her cultural world. Each voice in this cultural universe is taken as a particular point of view on the world, a point that, at the same time, also reflects (and contributes to) the consciousness of a particular individual. Both consciousness and cultural world are interlaced in a text of sorts, a peculiar cultural “text of the mind” whose workings are at the core of Bakhtin’s investigation (Brockmeier, 2005a).

Such a comprehensive philological and cultural-historical approach to narrative prose can be viewed as part of the project of a cultural narratology (or cultural narrative theory).<sup>5</sup> Currie (1998) has put forward two arguments in favor of a cultural narratology. One is narrative’s ubiquitousness in the contemporary world, a point already emphasized above. Currie remarks that narratives are so commonplace that it would be difficult to consider any cultural form or practice without encountering a narrative context. Similarly, Jakobson (1960a) has stated that “the principal way of diffusion for cultural goods is through the word, through the medium of language” (p. 103). We may add that the more these cultural goods are complex and semiotically mediated practices and artifacts, the more their diffusion involves the language of narrative. This leads to Currie’s (1998) second point, according to which

our cultural worlds not only contain narratives but are contained by narrative “in the sense that the idea of culture, either in general or in particular, is a narrative” (p. 96).

I take the arguments outlined in this section as supporting the claim that the storyworlds of fictional and nonfictional literature and the surrounding sphere of critical discussion and reflection constitute an unrivalled enterprise of cultural self-interpretation. Again, we may conclude that almost always the efforts of coming to terms with the cultural conditions of our existence transform into narrative efforts. And again, it is these narrative efforts that permit us to scrutinize the multifold interactions through which we are bound in a cultural world and in which we create what makes up the meaning of our life.

### *Narrative and Folk Psychology*

In envisioning the meaning-constituent dimension of narrative, a further, final current of research comes to the fore. Emerged only recently, it has highlighted that narrative practices (and all the more the traditions to which they belong) involve not only linguistic and other symbolic and physical activities, but also an accordant mental disposition, an intentional orientation. Often this is called *folk psychology*. Bruner (1990) described folk psychology as a cognitive system in the service of cultural functions, a system that regulates how human agents do things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, strive for goals, cope with trouble, and get a sense of themselves. Folk psychology is about people organizing their experience of, and knowledge about, the cultural worlds in which they act.

All cultures have as one of their most powerful constitutive instruments a folk psychology, a set of more or less . . . normative descriptions about how human beings “tick,” what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on.

(*Bruner*, 1990, p. 35)

For the most part, Bruner’s cultural-psychological explanation of folk psychology dovetails with Geertz’s (1983) notion of common sense as a cultural system. But the intellectual history of this tradition is longer. Bruner (1990) himself aligns the cultural-psychological concept of folk psychology with early twentieth century anthropology, the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel (1967) and Heider (1958), and



the phenomenological sociology of Schutz (1967). Still, Bruner's own work is especially relevant here because it gives center stage to one specific feature of folk psychology: that it is organized in a narrative rather than conceptual or logical way. Narrative, in Bruner's picture, is particularly important in mitigating between the exceptional and the culturally ordinary. It links the normal with its break, the rule with its violation. Folk psychology is about the culturally canonical. It states not simply how things are but how they should be. "When things 'are as they should be,'" Bruner (1990, p. 40) writes, "the narratives of folk psychology are unnecessary." That is to say, not only is most of folk psychology laid out in narrative, stories also are the central instrument for folk psychology's normative and regulative authority. Although a cultural world must contain a set of norms, "it must also contain a set of interpretive procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful"; these procedures of "explicitating deviations from the ordinary in a comprehensible form" are narrative (p. 47).

The assumption of an intrinsic link between narrative and the cultural templates of folk psychology has been taken up by researchers in several fields. It has been elaborated, for example, in terms of a socio-cultural developmental psychology of children's acquisition of folk psychological narrative by Nelson (2007b; 2009), reformulated in the context of philosophy of mind debates as the "narrative practice hypothesis" that helps us to understand the socio-cultural basis of how people make sense of intentional actions by Hutto (2008, 2009), and integrated into a narrative-theoretical alternative to mentalist explanations of "theory of mind" by Herman (2008; 2009c).

To conceive of people's ideas about what makes human beings tick and what their own and other minds are like—that is, their theory of mind—as integral to an overall cultural system of folk psychology supports the claim, delineated in the last section, that the distinction between fictional and nonfictional genres of narrative dissolves when approached from a cultural point of view. Some recent developments in "post-classical" narrative theory have further elucidated the common ground of both types of narrative, lending more narratologically refinement to a culturally situated notion of narrative. Because my argument here is that this common ground is essentially the cultural fabric of folk psychology—with stories, at the same time, serving as the principal instrument of folk

psychology—these developments are particularly interesting.

#### THE CULTURAL SCOPE OF POST-CLASSICAL NARRATIVE THEORY

In contrast with classical narratology that was dominated by structuralist linguistics and its concern with the code structures of written and literary text, post-classical narrative theory has freed itself from both structuralist and philologist constraints, extending its space of inquiry to the study of cultural phenomena beyond the boundaries of literature. In this way, a more comprehensive view of the inter-relations between narrative and the mind has emerged, elaborated especially in the work of narrative theorists who have explored how understanding literary prose requires making sense of how human minds work—both the minds of fictional and actual characters (e.g., Herman, 2009c, 2011a; Fludernik, 1996; Palmer, 2004, 2010; Alber & Fludernik, 2011). This view complements the reverse assumption (underlying, among others, my line of argument) that everyday narrative practices continuously absorb resources from literary, dramatic, and filmic discourses and from the popular arts. This exchange works so smoothly and indeed typically escapes our attention because it involves on both sides the same basic psychological abilities and practices.

If we thus assume that a large portion of our experience is mediated through narrative, then Fludernik's (1996) suggestion to consider narrative as a particular mode of experience or, as she calls it, of human "experientiality" appears as an obvious next step. Narrative, on this view, is not so much a plot or the representation of a sequence of events as a human form of experiencing the world that has more to do with how our consciousness works than with linear, causal, and closed story structures. And how does our narrative consciousness (or narrative mind) work? My answer to this question is that it works by entangling us with the cultural world in which we live; that it entraps us in a human—that is, intersubjective and interpersonal fabric web of concerns—of meanings, thoughts, intentions, and emotions (Brockmeier, 2007). It is in this context that I understand Fludernik's view that narrative centers on a human experience and that it operates by means of a "projection of consciousness"—the consciousness of the character in a story, of the narrative voice, or of the narrator or listener/reader. Hence I find it plausible, within the cultural and cultural-psychological scope outlined in this chapter, when

Fludernik (1996) describes the crucial point of this narrative projection in terms of “human immundation” and “situational embodiment.” The important element in the context of this chapter is that the equalization of narrativity as experientiality spans across a continuum of narrative practices from the everyday oral, performative, and pictorial to the most sophisticated forms of written literary prose.

In building on an argument that Herman (2011b) has put forward in favor of a unified approach to either literary and everyday narrative, we might say that the vision of narrative as a psychologically fundamental practice of human meaning construction that cuts across the putative divide between fiction and nonfiction allows us to bring to bear on the study of this practice the full battery of investigative tools being developed in literary, narratological, art-theoretical, psychological, and anthropological research on the cultural nexus of mind and narrative. To be sure, much of post-classical narratological research on this nexus is not overly interested in situating its subject within a cultural framework; significantly enough, drawing on analytical philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and evolutionary psychology, it has become known as *cognitive narratology*. I believe, however, that the scope of issues being investigated here exceeds the somewhat narrow limits associated with the cognitive focus in psychology. There is no doubt that it can enable us to fuller comprehend a pivotal point: that at the base of both literary and everyday processes of meaning construction are the same narrative operations, realizing fundamental processes of human understanding and intersubjectivity, including affect and empathy (Keen, 2007). What is more, it permits us to extend the implications of this comprehension toward a culturally rich notion of narrative.

Consider Herman’s analysis of the inherent link between narrative and human intentionality. Storytelling operations, he says (2008, p. 240), are “irreducibly grounded in intentional systems,” which is to say that in understanding these operations we employ concepts of intentionality that are part and parcel of “culturally transmitted folk-psychological templates” (p. 256). Now, how are we to understand “intentional systems?” Herman takes great pains to explain that they are all but merely cognitive constructions, introspectively to be localized in individual heads like “mental models.” Rather, intentional systems are intersubjective contexts of operation: “intentionality in narrative contexts is built into

the doing, the activity structure, of storytelling and interpretation” (Herman, 2008, p. 256). More precisely, we face contexts of interaction that encompass the story (in a particular medium), its narrator(s), and reader(s) or listener(s) or observer(s) involved in efforts of mutual interpretation. We have to be aware, then, of what I would call an extended cultural framework of interpretative intersubjectivity, if we want to understand how narrative and intentionality are interlaced. While narrative is grounded in cultural patterns of intentionality, as Herman (2008, pp. 240–241) puts it, “intentional systems are grounded in storytelling practices.”<sup>6</sup>

Viewed in this light, the study of the narrative microstructures that interweave intentionality and folk psychology opens a direct route to a culturally sensitive notion of narrative. It has been from this perspective that I have discussed this approach to narrative and folk psychology, as I also have explored in this section four other traditions that have queried narrative practices—in contexts of cultural history, contexts of socialization, as a form of life, and with respect to the common ground of fictional and nonfictional genres. I have selected these five traditions because they have contributed, in different ways, to the study of both the cultural nature of narrative and the role of narrative for humans’ cultural life. Hence, my overview has foregrounded aspects of these traditions that provide investigative lenses for this project. Using these lenses, I turn now to a more specific qualification of what is at the center of this project: the very notion of narrative as cultural practice, its ways of application, and implications for further research.

## **Narrative As a Cultural Form of Life: Applications**

### ***The Principle of Narrative’s Singularity***

Considering the five traditions reviewed in the last section that have enriched the culturally motivated understanding of narrative that I want to carve out in this chapter, we face this situation: both in the humanities and in the social sciences, narrative practices are conceived of as important cultural practices. But as these practices are so multifarious, they are investigated by a perplexing multitude of different methods and techniques, developed in a great many distinct disciplinary contexts and from a wide range of theoretical approaches and perspectives. Is there a method to come to terms with this large variety of narrative methods?

I believe it would not only be difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about the nature of narrative and the methods that involve narrative, or examine it, or aim at both; it would be highly problematic to do so. There is an implicit presumption in many discussions in literary theory and narratology, and this might be of even greater significance for psychology and social research: the methods of each narrative investigation are to be sensitively fine-tuned to its subject, a subject that is always particular. Particularity has indeed been claimed to set narrative apart from general explanations (Bruner, 1990; Herman, 2009b). And it seems that it has been this sensitivity for the particular that has made narrative attractive not least for the social sciences, from the very beginning of their narrative turn.

But then cannot general explanations also be formulated in a narrative form? And does not narrative have many techniques and devices to present the particular as the general and the general in the particular? Hence I think, within a culturally reflected conceptual framework, we must go further and recognize narrative as something genuinely *singular*. One could call this the principle of narrative's singularity, and I take it to complement the principle of narrative's cultural ubiquity.

In a momentous analysis of a literary text, Barthes (1974) made the case that stories are singular, in fact, individual events. They are as individual as their narrators and the situations in which they are told. More than that, each narrative comes, in principle, with a multitude of individual interpretations; these interpretations are not added to a story, but are an essential part of it. The focus on singularity thus implies confronting the world as a field of differences—a vision in which Geertz (2000) recognized the essence of anthropology: “If anthropology is obsessed with anything, it is with how much difference makes” (p. 197). Translated into narrative methodology terms, this is to say that the question of what investigative procedure and analytical focus is appropriate can only be answered *vis-à-vis* of the concrete narrative and the cultural environment in which it occurs and within which certain interpretations take shape.

Of course, the principle of narrative's singularity raises another question—namely, what is (if there is anything at all) common to all those innumerable cultural practices that are referred to by the fickle term *narrative* and approached with such manifold methods and techniques? Obviously, the term narrative itself has a metaphorical side. But does it also

have categorical and analytical rigor? If all stories are singular events (in the language of methodology, single cases), and if the world is a field of differences, are there any general characteristics at all that justify the use of a common category of narrative that is more than a metaphorical label? This is the question I discuss in this section.

### ***Good Stories and Bad Stories***

It is fair to say that everyone working with and on narrative has a working definition of narrative, as intuitively and rudimentary as it may be. In view of the absence of a more than occasional dialogue between the humanities and psychology (and the social sciences in general), it is all the more surprising that there is widespread agreement in both literatures on what counts as narrative. I already mentioned the axiom of narrative as representation and some of the problems resulting from it. Further, most authors concur in assuming at least three structural or inner characteristics of narrative. These three elements constitute, to use a term coined by Leitch (1986), a minimal *narrative ontology* defining the essential components that make up a story. First, there is the idea of narrative as a sequence of action or events, which, second, is organized in time and which, third, constitutes some kind of inner structural coherence. The sequentiality of narrative means that the succession of action or events implies some kind of logical or intentional or psychological causality; the temporality of narrative means that the sequence is temporally organized; and the coherence of a narrative implies that it is told as a sound and plausible fashion story. Contributing to narrative coherence are not only the first and second features, sequentiality and temporality, but also the closure of its plot structure. At stake in this view, then, is the notion of a “good story,” with a marked beginning, middle, and end—as it is classically defined as *narratio* in the Aristotelian tradition of poetics.

This reference reminds us that we deal here with a tradition of literary poetics that has influenced not only classical (structuralist) narratology, but also most of sociolinguistic and social-scientific narrative research so far. Its criteria of a well-structured story—reflecting the composition of classic Greek tragedy, the ancient dramatic art form that underlay Aristotelian poetics—have been canonized in a long and venerable history of drama, poetry, and narrative. Now, this tradition faces a serious problem. Although the notion of narrative is modeled

on a “good story,” a well-structured *narratio*, not all narratives are good stories. That is, not all narrative practices produce Aristotelian plots.

The problem is a historical one. It emerged in modernity—particularly with modernism—even if it became manifest only later in the twentieth century. In Modernism, literary narrators began to employ new, non-Aristotelian forms and techniques of narrative, especially in discourses of consciousness. Later in the twentieth century, narrative research followed and also went beyond the borders of the traditional literary canon to examine narrative practices created not primarily with aesthetic intentions but as part of naturally occurring everyday discourse. More precisely, then, the problem is that neither the modern and postmodern narrative forms developed in literature, film, theater, and other artistic venues, nor the narrative practices embedded in the cultural contexts of ordinary life can be captured by the traditional model of a “good story.” Typically, our everyday narrative practices do not aim at closed and well-structured stories. Forms of action that serve many purposes, they have, as already noted, fuzzy borders. Often, “they are undecided, fragmented, broken, narrated by voices struggling to find words” (Hydén & Brockmeier, 2008a, p. 2). Ochs and Capps (2001, p. 3) call them the country cousins of well-wrought narratives. Not surprisingly, these country folks do not bother about a proper narrative ontology (and likewise unsurprisingly, most narratologists have excluded them from their terrain). So what do they bother about? Why do we tell stories, even if they are bad stories?

The reasons that we narrate are as variegated and as good and bad as the reasons why we act and live. We are entangled in countless narratives and narrative events, and only rarely do these produce the monologic, well-structured, and coherent stories that are the subject of standard definitions both in narratology and the social sciences. If we would rigorously apply these scholarly classifications and their implicit narrative ontologies, we would have to conclude that most of the time we tell bad stories, or weird stories, or failed stories, or do not narrate at all (Medved & Brockmeier, 2010).

This is all the more the case when we interact outside of institutionally regulated cultural and narrative environments such as schools, law courts, health facilities, and so forth. Take an incidental encounter. We may tell a story to get in touch with someone, trace some trouble that we can't get

a handle on, or pose a question to which we don't know the answer. Or we narrate because we try to hide embarrassment, insecurity, shame, or regulate other emotions and mental states. We tell a story, as Mark Twain once put it, because we don't have anything to say. We also may share a story to crack a joke, to make a point, or comment on last night's TV show; or because we want to ridicule a politician or superior, pass on gossip, or excuse ourselves for being late. All of these discourse genres, and many more, make use of narrative forms that we have to add to the traditional list of established narrative genres, the “good stories,” with which the “bad stories” are, of course, interlaced in manifold ways. Borrowing from them, challenging and cannibalizing them, sometimes the bad ones just want to be good ones. Still, whatever they are or are not, it is not because they comply or do not comply with any general “narrative ontology.”

In those narratives that I have described as a form of social action, another precarious aspect of the narrative ontology assumption comes to the fore. Often there is no clear line between the narrator and the listener or reader of a story, as it is known from genres of monologic storytelling. As a consequence, the notion of a story continues to blur, and its putative ontology becomes even more elusive. Not only that the audience (the listeners and readers of a story) always construct in their individual receptions their own versions of the original story; as we know, the story told by a narrator is rarely identical with the story that takes form in the listener's perception and imagination. To put it again from a Wittgensteinian perspective, there is no meaning of a narrative without the uptake of the addressee or, in Duranti's (1986) terms, without “the community's testing and approval” (p. 240). For his part, Duranti has argued that it is especially in storytelling where “the form and content of talk is continuously reshaped by co-participants” (1986, p. 242). Often the audience already influence what is told during its very articulation. In turn, envisioning the possible (desired or undesired) reception of the local addressee, the narrator can fit the narrative to the reaction of the listeners, be it manifestly demonstrated by their behavior and reactions (as in an oral narrative environment) or imaginatively anticipated (as the “implied reader” in the writing of a story). Finally, narrators and co-narrators can operate with different common sense notions of stories that they use as conversational (or rhetorical) acts: “This is not the story here . . .” (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006).

All this comes together in what Norrick (2007, p. 127) has called genuine conversational narrative:

Genuine conversational storytelling is always interactive, negotiated, and not simply designed for a particular audience by a single teller; indeed, it is often hard to determine who is the primary teller, especially when the events were jointly experienced or the basic story is already familiar. Conversational stories may be deeply contextualized, diffuse, and not easily detachable from the local conditions that occasion them.

This is most apparent in situations Bakhtin (1981) called polyphonic, where a non-hierarchical narrative community acts at the same time as an interpretive community that, claiming the same storytelling rights as the teller, is interrupting, evaluating, and co-narrating. Norrick elucidates this as “many-voiced narration” in cultural contexts where no single participant can control the course of the story, “and multiple voices vie for the right to formulate its point” (2007, p. 128). This brings us back once more to the question: What, then, is the story? And how can we tell it from the contributions of the other voices in this polyphonic discourse?

### ***Narrative and Meaning***

Numerous arguments have been put forward to challenge the idea that there are universal components of a discourse genre “narrative” that exist prior to and independently from a culturally situated narrative event. Rather than assuming the existence of an abstract entity called “story,” the attention now has shifted to the concrete contexts of action and interaction in which a linguistic or otherwise performed action sequence is perceived as a story. Thus, the question of what distinguishes a narrative from other discourse genres, as Leitch (1986) concluded his review of possible distinctive criteria, is not to be answered by reference to the inner structure of a story as such, but depends on how a discursive sequence is understood in a given situation. What counts as a narrative arises from “the audience’s perceptions, projections, and reintegrations” of the sequence (Leitch, 1986, p. 130).

In this view, narrative is not constituted by a set of given structural features such as sequentiality, temporality, and coherence; rather, it takes on its form in a context-dependent process of meaning attribution or, in Bruner’s (1990) terms, in an “act of meaning.” This links to the argument, made above, to see narrative not primarily as a

mode of representing but of construing meaning. What is taken to be a convincing story in one circumstance may be an incoherent, embarrassing, or failed attempt at storytelling under different conditions. The joke told by the boss is confirmed by his employees as a “funny story”; the illness narrative told by the patient is not registered by the doctor but immediately translated into “medical data”; whereas the one-word sentence of the toddler is commented on by her parents as a wonderful little story. Likewise, imagine how a school teacher would mark a narrative essay of a student written in the experimental style of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and—as we are in a thought experiment—also imagine how Joyce might have retold the teacher’s report. Many traditional narratives by North or South American aboriginal people were long classified by anthropologists as lists of names, descriptions of kinship relations, or ritual reports. Only recently, ethnographers have questioned the appropriateness of Western concepts of narrative to understand fundamentally different, non-Aristotelian ways of storytelling—a problem that is further complicated by the fact that many aboriginal narrative performances cannot be isolated from the presence of a specific local geography and from particular cultural occasions (Basso, 1996; Chamberlin, 2004; Cruikshank, 1998). Often these occasions are spiritual or even sacred in a markedly non-Western, indigenous sense (Benham, 2007).

What all these examples have in common is an implied notion of narrative that is only comprehensible if it is viewed in connection to a multitude of other stories. In the realm of written and literary stories, this phenomenon is known as intertextuality: each narrative text refers to other narrative texts, in this way widening its horizon of meaning and interpretation. In oral storytelling, a comparable intertextual framework is evoked by the cultural and historical traditions to which a story belongs. I already expounded the role of narrative for cultural traditions; at stake now are narrative traditions and, in tandem with them, the issue of the historical rootedness of all symbolic meaning constructions (Straub, 2005). In the case of the Joyce-inspired student, these traditions comprise literary modernism. In the case of the doctor’s version of the patient’s illness narrative, we face the institutional and linguistic constraints of the medical apparatus. And in the case of aboriginal storytelling traditions, we are confronted with non-Western forms of life, both narrative and non-narrative. Isolating

a story from its living context and reducing it to an autonomous narrative structure means losing a constituent dimension of its meaning. For Gee, it is exactly this being steeped in cultural meaning traditions that distinguishes narrative from other forms of discourse. A narrative, Gee (1991) wrote, becomes “meaningless apart from a surrounding narrative context, connections to social memory, and the resources of a system of themes that can create (what counts in a given group as) a coherent (satisfying) pattern” (p. 13).

#### BEYOND NARRATIVE ONTOLOGY

Viewed in this way, there is no need—indeed, no basis—for a normative model or a universal ontology of narrative. In resisting this idea, as powerfully as it has been elaborated in the narratological literature, the focus shifts from the noun “narrative” as a monument of stable categorical identity to the “adjectival ‘narrative’ as an element of ongoing processes,” as Hyvärinen (in press) puts it. What shapes the adjectival perception of a linguistic or otherwise symbolic action as a story depends on local cultural environments and traditions in which the rules and meanings of narrative practices have been formed, where “particular audiences have accepted particular discourses as stories” (Leitch, 1986, p. 25). Rudrum (2005) makes the same point on Wittgensteinian grounds when he argues that the “form a narrative ultimately takes—and, hence, the properties by which one would attempt to define it—is as mutable as the uses to which it is put, making the task of neat definition a practically hopeless one” (p. 200). To be sure, the hopelessness of defining narrative fiction is not a new experience. Rudrum himself builds on the work of Iser (1989) who pointed out, “the more fiction eludes an ontological definition, the more unmistakably it presents itself in terms of its use” (p. 267).

Narrative, then, is not an entity that can simply be found in the everyday reality of our lives, not even in a linguistic or textual reality. “As such,” state Ochs and Capps (2001), “narrative bows to no simple generic blueprint that sets it apart once and for all from other forms of discourse” (p. 8). In a similar vein, Herman (2009b) has observed that whatever counts as a “prototypical story” is perceived “in a gradient, more-or-less way, and emerges from the strategies on which people rely in their everyday narrative practices” (p. 6). Because narratives “are both structured by and lend structure to the communicative contexts in which they are

told,” their analysis cannot but give center stage to what Herman has described as their situatedness in specific “narrative occasions” (2009b, pp. 37–74). “Narrative occasions” is taken in a double sense as communicative (or narrative) environments “shaping how acts of narration are to be interpreted, and, reciprocally, as contexts shaped by storytelling practices themselves” (Herman, 2009b, p. 37).

As a consequence of all this, even the concept of a “prototypical story” appears more and more difficult to pin down—except as another narratological projection. Perhaps we should keep in mind an important Wittgensteinian point of which Herrnstein Smith (1981) already reminded us many years ago: concepts such as “story” and “narrative” represent distinctions that “are drawn, not discovered, by narratologists” (p. 228).

Interestingly enough, despite poor communication between literary and linguistic narratologists, and social scientific and psychological narrative researchers,<sup>7</sup> they sometimes come to similar conclusions, as when Gubrium and Holstein (2009) have suggested a “loose commonsensical” understanding of narrative “as a basis for unpacking and paying empirical attention to how story and storyteller are discerned, defined, and responded to in practice” (p. xviii). In other words, what stories amount to and what other discourse forms (description, account, list, etc.) they may absorb and transform cannot be defined axiomatically. It is a result and not a precondition of narrative analysis—that is, of cultural narrative analysis. Patently, in this argument, the principles of narrative ubiquity and of narrative’s singularity are joined.

#### *Narrative Dimensions*

If we view narrative as a quality attributed under particular circumstances to discursive practices (which also include enactive or performative practices), several aspects of storytelling are cast in a new light. This light makes narrativity appear as a relative quality that is displayed in numerous dimensions to different degrees and in different ways. Ochs and Capps (2001) have distinguished five such narrative dimensions that structure what I have described as culturally situated perception of narrative. Ochs and Capps’s approach is especially fruitful if read from a cultural perspective because it promises to do justice to both narrative principles, that of singularity and that of ubiquity. Moreover, it offers a non-reductive way to come to terms with narrative’s bewildering cultural flexibility and adaptability.

Ochs and Capps (2001) propose to examine a sequence of discourse that is conceived of as narrative—as genre and activity—in terms of a set of narrative dimensions that the sequence takes on along a spectrum of graduations. The first of these narrative dimensions is *tellership*. It refers to the extent and kind of involvement of different protagonists in the actual recounting of a story. The question here is: Who tells the story? The second dimension is *tellability*, which is related to the question of how tellable and convincing a story is. How much is it in accordance with the local cultural notion of narrative? In everyday interaction, personal narratives can take different qualities of tellability, from high to low. If a discourse goes below a certain level of tellability, then it is not perceived as a story any longer. A third narrative dimension is marked by the *embeddedness* of a story in surrounding discourse and social activity, its being rooted in an narrative environment. This environment can be shaped by institutional constraints. Yet it can also be shaped in a more narrow discursive sense. For example, the extent to which a personal narrative is told and perceived as a structured whole unto itself or as part of ongoing conversation is related to the organization of turn-taking (i.e., the sequence of the contributions) in a conversation, its subject or theme, and the way it is rhetorically structured. *Linearity* is the fourth dimension. In personal narratives, it concerns the extent to which events and actions are organized along a single, temporal, causal, and closed path (as it is characteristic for an Aristotelian storyline with a clear beginning, middle, and end) or, alternatively, in a nonlinear, intermittent, fragmentary, and open order.

Finally, the fifth dimension: the *moral stance* that a narrative conveys. Typically, personal narratives do not pretend to present objective accounts of events or experiences but rather perspectives on events and experiences. Central to these perspectives is the moral stance of the narrator. There is no story that does not offer a perspective, if not several perspectives, that explicitly or implicitly expresses judgments and evaluations. The moral stance, the sense of right or wrong and good or bad, gives personal narrative its punch, its urgency, and its commitment. Ochs and Capps refer to Taylor's (1989) philosophical conception of narrative as a moral framework for understanding human comportment: "Making sense of my present action, when we are dealing with . . . the issue of my place relative to the good, requires a narrative understanding of

my life, a sense of what I have become, which can only be given in a story" (p. 48).

It is not difficult to see that these five narrative dimensions enable us to categorize storytelling along a broad range of culturally situated discourse formats. These formats range from social activity to a textual reality, from oral to written discourse, from virtuoso verbal performance to mundane everyday exchange, from naturally occurring conversation to literarily composed prose. To view in this way narrative activities as a heterogenous gamut of cultural practices underscores once more the argument that there is no boundary between everyday and literary narrative discourse. Both are inter-related in a myriad of ways, displaying the same narrative dimensions of tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance. Steeped in the same cultural world, both take part in the same never-ending circulation of language; both have a say in the endless conversation of storytellers.

## Conclusions

I started this inquiry with the claim, ensuing from an interpretive cultural psychology, that narrative practices are pivotal for human existence because they bind the individual into a cultural world while binding the meaning of this world into the individual's mind. I have explored this interplay in developing a culturally thick notion of narrative—of narrative as a form of life—that builds on Geertz' cultural anthropology, Bruner's narrative psychology, and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language (which I zoomed in on narrative as a particular language game). To this end, I have traced this notion from three different angles: as a mode of interpretation through which people try to understand, and give meaning to, their cultural being in the world; as a cultural practice realizing several (communicative, rhetorical, empathetic, and cognitive) functions; and as a form of action.

My outline of a culturally charged notion of narrative did not start from scratch. It has emerged from the discussion of five research traditions that have examined the nature of narrative: as an instrument of cultural traditions and of individuals' socialization; as a form of life, with respect to fictional and nonfictional genres; and as a form and practice of folk psychology. One conclusion drawn from these discussions I called the principle of narrative's singularity, which complements the principle of narrative's cultural ubiquity. The principle of singularity means that the ways narrative scenarios are to be

investigated are to be sensitively adjusted to the particular cultural (i.e., local) circumstances of their occurrences. This also goes for the very understanding of what counts as narrative, an understanding that likewise depends on the contextual conditions under which the meaning of narrative is attributed to a discursive sequence. For this meaning—and this is the important point here—is not given. There is no such thing as a universal and pre-cultural definition of narrative.

But make no mistake, there is an imposing concept or category of narrative, and this is solid and stable enough. Well-established in countless discourses, it has foisted upon a vast variety of fluid forms of life an illusionary identity and an ontological weight that, as Rudrum (2005, p. 201) has remarked, narratives themselves, as dynamic acts of meaning, do not have. Hence, if we want to avoid falling in this ontological fallacy, we have to take a radical stance and understand each narrative as a singular phenomenon, as an individual act of meaning in its own right. This inference is all the more stringent because each narrative practice is carried out within an intersubjective context of interpretation. To be sure, this view challenges not only the idea of a narrative ontology but also research methodologies in psychology and other social sciences based on principles of generalizability and nomological validity. But then, as we have seen, even within today's social-scientific narrative inquiries, more and more attention is allotted to the concrete cultural contexts of action and interaction in which a discursive action sequence is perceived as a story.

After narrative ways of knowing and inquiring fell from favor early in the twentieth century's social sciences, they have begun to re-emerge over the last decades as a legitimate and highly successful way of investigating humans' cultural existence (Hyvärinen, 2006; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988). Providing another strand to the post-positivist paradigm and a further refinement of interpretive methodology in the human sciences, they can be seen as propelling a shift that promises to overcome longstanding reductionism and open up a more comprehensive, differentiated, and humanistic view of our being in the world. All of this could also be framed in political terms; indeed, as already emphasized above, it would be an unjustified reduction to see the cultural sphere without the forcefields of power and political and economic struggle that underlie most cultural dynamics—dynamics of which narrative is not

only a seismograph but in which it also is a most momentous factor.

With this in mind, Rom Harré and I have argued that the culturally sensitive study of narrative unveils a particularly flexible and open structure of action and human agency; it allows us to explore precisely these fundamental aspects of human life, its openness, and its flexibility – which often also means its messiness – that are, for the most part, neglected by human sciences (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). The practices of narrative are fleeting constellations of forms of life that can serve us as a guide to the variable and fluid nature of human reality because they are, in part, constitutive of it.

### **Toward a Culturally Thick Notion of Narrative: Future Perspectives**

Much of what I have outlined is work in progress—a research agenda that is, however, already well underway in the shaping of a culturally rich notion of narrative. I want to end with offering three questions, delineating desiderata but also offering prospective vistas on further research in this hard-to-contain field. The first prospect is of narrative as a cultural way of meaning-making. In repudiating a narrative ontology, the question of what makes up a narrative has not dissolved; rather, it has shifted to an *emic* question: what do people do when they understand, in a specific cultural situation, a discursive sequence as a story, regardless of the Aristotelian definitions of “good” and “bad” stories? What practices does it take to constitute—and to perceive—a narrative scenario? More exactly, how is a narrative act of meaning in which something takes on the meaning of a story carried out? To indicate the routes possible answers to these questions might take, let me sketch three minimal conditions for an act of narrative meaning constitution. With each of these three conditions, different, although interrelated, answers to the issue of what we do when we tell and understand stories come into sight. For one, we bring a perspective to our experience, knowledge, thought, imagination, and much of our emotional life, a perspective (the term is closely related to what narrative theorists call “point of view”) that organizes how we face the world in which we live and how we position ourselves and others in this world. Second, we connect (not least through this perspective) several distinct elements to each other as to constitute a whole—that is, we create a synthesis of meaning, a gestalt that is more than the sum of its isolated elements. And finally, narrative is a way



to do things. It is discourse in a strong sense, a mode of action and performance inextricably entangled with what Wittgenstein called the grammar of our cultural world. In a nutshell, a discursive sequence is configured as narrative in so far as it operates as a perspective, a synthesis, and a form of life. To investigate these elemental conditions of narrative meaning-making, as well as their interconnection, along a number of different “dimensions” (Ochs & Capps, 2001), will significantly deepen our knowledge of the narrative meaning construction of narrative.

From here, the second prospect follows. It hinges on the question of how the meaning-making options of narrative differ in various languages and linguistic communities. After all, languages are the background systems of our cultural worlds, and the world’s thousands of distinct languages open up thousands, at least in part, of distinct cultural worlds. There is a first generation of pioneering studies, some referred to above, tackling the implications of this variety for narrative discourse. Yet there can be little doubt that we will gain a fuller understanding of the cultural fabric of narrative, mind, and social life when a new generation of multilingual researchers, aware of the novel insights associated with the narrative turn, go about these issues—especially, in examining the make-up of narrative scenarios in non-European languages. In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned Benjamin Lee Whorf, who persuasively argued that there is an intrinsic connection between “multilingual awareness” and the “culture consciousness” that he saw as necessary for the study of the relationships among language, thought, and reality (Darnell, 2006). This, I believe, holds particularly true for the cultural nature of narrative.

A third prospect has emerged only recently with the increasing interest in the nexus of narrative and the mind in psychology, philosophy, narrative theory/cognitive narratology, narrative medicine, and related areas. Now, imagine a close and persisting dialogue—if not a joint investigative effort—would unfold and a bridge would span between this promising new area of research and the culturally oriented narrative inquiry with which this chapter has mainly been concerned. Would narrative not be a uniquely appropriate subject to overcome some longstanding borderlines, questionable as they are anyway—such as those between the cultural and the mental, as well as between psychology, the social sciences, and the humanities?<sup>8</sup> It would not be hard to envision the outcome of this joint effort: an unrestricted and

unreduced access to the cultural nature of the narrative mind.

## Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Molly Andrews, Alessandra Fasulo, David Herman, Lars-Christer Hydén, Matti Hyvärinen, Maria I. Medved, and Jaan Valsiner for helpful comments on earlier versions.

## Notes

1. Throughout this chapter, I use the terms *practice* and *activity* more or less interchangeably; *performance* refers to a particular cultural practice or activity.

2. This is not to say that these constraints—as in individuals suffering from diseases (e.g., Alzheimer’s), injuries (e.g., neurotrauma), syndromes (e.g., autism), and (genetic) neurological disabilities—do not allow for specific forms of communication and meaning construction. Of course they do. Yet the discussion of these forms is beyond the scope of this chapter.

3. For Bruner (1996), “The historical separation of anthropology and psychology, whatever may have caused it, must surely be counted as one of the most stunting developments in the history of the human sciences . . . In spite of their staking out separate territories of inquiry, the two disciplines were never able to ignore each other” (p. xiii). Bruner goes on to argue that the “cultural study of man” requires a “consortium” of psychology and anthropology. On Bruner’s long and close relationship with (social, cultural, and psychological) anthropology, see Mattingly, Lutkehaus, and Throop (2008).

4. The claim that an action- and performance-theoretical concept of language resonates with the culturally thick notion of narrative put forward in this chapter does not reject the idea that narrative has a representational side or can be used as a representation (e.g., a particular “representation” is offered as part of a discursive or rhetorical move) and that, under certain circumstances, this side can be the dominant one. Understanding narrative as a mode of representation seems to have been particularly plausible in contexts of literary, media-theoretical, and traditional narratological reasoning, where most cases of storytelling fall within the “scope of narrative viewed as a kind or category of text,” as Herman writes (2009b, p. 6); although the understanding of narrative as representation is also widespread in the social-scientific literature. In fact, for narratologists from Genette (1980) to Herman (2009b), representation is the “most universally accepted feature of narrative” (Ryan, 2007, p. 25; for a critical discussion, see also Rudrum, 2005). Although in investigating narrative as a cultural form of life I privilege an action-theoretical view of storytelling, this does not exclude the idea of narrative stretching along a continuum from action to representation, from text to performance, and from the storyworlds of fiction to the life worlds of everyday interaction—an argument that will be discussed in more detail in what follows.

5. Whereas in the past, the term *narratology* was mainly used in the context of structuralist narrative theory, today narrative theory, narratology, and narrative studies have become synonyms in much of the theoretical and critical literature, as in my discussion.

6. Note that this view does not need the idea of narrative representation. Herman (2008) makes clear that the understanding of what a story is about (i.e., its representational or referential

aspect) depends on the interactional context of communication and interpretation in which the “intentional stance” of storytellers as well as the entire “intentional system” of their stories are grounded. It is this cultural context of communicative and interpretive practice—which I have pointed out in terms of an action-theoretical concept of narrative—that gives shape to the representational side (or use) of narrative. Hence it seems to me more appropriate to view the representational side as an aspect of narrative “worldmaking”—that is, of cultural meaning constructions grounded in intentions, communicative interaction, and acts of interpretation that always remain defeasible.

7. There are only a few theorists who, like Jerome Bruner and David Herman, have systematically drawn on both fields of research and scholarship.

8. Perhaps the current study of literary narrative could serve as a model. James Phelan (2006, p. 86) notes that narrative theory has so productively developed along various theoretical lines because the distinct approaches have remained in dialogue with broader trends in theorizing the human condition. Consequently, it is not dominated by a single view but, rather, is marked by a range of approaches: formalist, structuralist, phenomenological, cognitive, rhetorical, psychoanalytic, feminist, marxist, and others. “What is especially striking about this variety,” Phelan remarks, “is that it has produced relatively little conflict. Instead, practitioners of the different modes are generally happy to learn from each other, and to use the insights of one approach to enhance the quality of their own investigations and reach of their own conclusions” (2006, p. 86).

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# Culture in Action: A Discursive Approach

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## Abstract

The overall aim of this chapter is to discuss an approach to studying culture by drawing on the project of remembering and reconciliation from a discursive psychology perspective. I demonstrate discourse analysis from research using a case of the Anglo-Japanese reconciliation. I provide a brief overview of the development of discourse analysis and discursive psychology and highlight key philosophical foundations and theoretical assumptions on which discursive psychology and practice of discourse analysis are based. As the examples of discourse analysis, I will demonstrate how culture can be studied as a topic of members' concern. In this view, culture is not a matter of the researcher's concern to handle as a causal factor or independent variable. Discursive psychologists study culture as a resource for the participants. Finally, I will discuss the implication of the discursive approach and its far-reaching challenges for advancing the methodology of studying time-relevant phenomena of people's experience as a matter of duration and transformation.

**Keywords:** discourse, culture, discursive psychology, cultural psychology

## Introduction

Since the discursive turn in social sciences, discourse has become a common currency. For one thing, critical movement in psychology and other social disciplines promoted a rapid development of discourse theory and discourse-based studies. There are many versions of discourse-based studies and discourse analysis at present. Those include namely, but not exhaustively, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), Sociocultural Discourse Analysis (e.g., Gee, 1999; Gee & Green, 1998), Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (e.g., Burman, 1996; Hook, 2001; Hook, 2005; Parker, 1997; Parker, 1999; Parker, 2002), and other discourse theories (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981). Because of its large variety of discourse studies and analysis, I shall not attempt to chart comprehensively the variations in these discourse-related approaches.

The overall aim of this chapter is to introduce a concept of discourse and discuss an approach to studying culture by drawing on a project of remembering and reconciliation from a discursive psychology perspective. I shall demonstrate discourse analysis from the research using a case of the Anglo-Japanese reconciliation (Murakami, 2001a, 2001b, 2007; Murakami & Middleton, 2006) and discuss the relevance, implications, and challenges of discourse analysis for research in exploring the relationship between culture and psychological phenomena. In the following, I will provide a brief overview of the development of discourse analysis and discursive psychology to highlight key philosophical foundations and theoretical assumptions of social sciences disciplines on which discursive psychology and practice of discourse analysis are based. Using examples of discourse analysis, I shall demonstrate how culture can be studied as a topic

of members' concern using an analytic concept called "membership categorization device" (Sacks, 1989, 1992). Membership categorization device is a discursive resource for the participants in talk-in-interaction to do social action and perform social accountability. Therefore, culture is not a matter of the researcher's concern to handle as a causal factor or independent variable to bring about differences in behavior, perception, and attitude—discursive psychologists study culture as a resource for the participants. Finally, I shall discuss the implication of the discursive approach by referring to other approaches that forefront culture as a main research object and its far-reaching challenges for advancing the methodology of studying time-relevant phenomena of people's experience as a matter of duration and transformation.

### ***The Project of Remembering and Reconciliation***

Toward the end of World War II, 16 British prisoners of war (POWs) died in a labor camp located in the mountains of central Japan. The cause of death derived from illness induced by malnutrition, severe climate, and living conditions in the previous camps in Singapore and Thailand. Initially, British soldiers were captured by the Japanese army in Singapore in December 1941 and worked on the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway from 1942 to June 1943. Three hundred British POWs were then transferred to Japan to work in a copper mine until the end of the war in August 1945. During the captivity, a grave for the dead POWs was built by fellow British POWs. After the war, local Japanese villagers refurbished the grave and erected a memorial. In October 1992, 47 years after the war, 28 former POWs and their family members returned to Japan and visited this grave on a reconciliation trip.

In the spring of 1999, I set out to interview surviving POWs and family members who took part in this reconciliation trip. The key interview question was: Why had they decided to go on the reconciliation trip? This question was designed to elicit their accounts of wartime captivity and post-war experiences of living and coping with difficult times—war-related illnesses and disease, trauma, and presumably any other medical problems. Also, the interview invited them to share their views on reconciliation with the troubling past. The occasion of the interview created a participatory framework of revisiting the past. That is, the participants, being engaged in a conversation with a Japanese

interviewer, were doing the remembering of the past events and actions. Such remembering is a socially organized communicative action situated in an inter-/cross-cultural social setting. To study this inter-cultural phenomenon within the project of remembering and reconciliation, I use discourse analysis using the perspective taken from discursive psychology.

### **Discourse Analysis**

The term *discourse* has been used in a number of different ways within the community of discourse analysts and scholars of social sciences (Heath, 1997; Potter, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The general consensus is that discourse analysis is a study of language in use and refers to a field of research encompassing a broad range of research drawing on the philosophical and methodological traditions in linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology and cultural and literary studies. For discursive psychology, the term *discourse*, in a least limited sense, is used "to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7). Discourse analysis deals with naturally occurring talk and text, including interview transcripts and other forms of both spoken and written communication.

Discourse analysis, a method of analysis of *discourse*, was born out of a synthesis of contemporary critical movements in psychology—particularly social, cognitive, and experimental psychology as well as other social science disciplines. Discursive psychology might be construed as one of those separate strands as the application of discourse theory to the classic questions of psychology, but discursive psychology itself has grown to be a complex field, upheld by a multiplicity of different ideas and arguments (Edley, 2001). For the purpose of this chapter, rather than offering an account of the various latest developments within discursive psychology, I shall underline key features and assumptions for grounding the ensuing discourse analysis that I shall present as the illustration of how culture in psychological phenomena can be studied.

### ***Language as Social Action***

Among the principal features of interview as social practice of reconciliation, action orientation to talk, joint construction of meaning, social actions of blaming, justifying, forgiving, and apologizing are performed. Rather than treating reconciliation



as an interior psychological phenomenon of conflict being resolved, reconciliation is researched as the social relationship, as a practical interactional business that interview participants attend to and accomplish. Similarly, the central focus on studying reconciliation rests on the intercultural communication, how cultural differences are brought off as a problem or posed as an obstacle for achieving reconciliation, and these cultural issues were analyzed as a members' practical concern that was accomplished interactionally.

There are several principal features of discourse analysis that are relevant to the study of inter-/cross-cultural communication in an Anglo-Japanese reconciliation practice. First, discourse analysis is concerned with the content of talk, its subject matter, and with its social organization rather than linguistic system, structure, and grammatical rules (e.g., syntax, phonetics, semantics). Second, discourse analysis has a threefold concern with action, construction, and variability. Simply put, in talking (and written communication), people perform social action. Third, discourse analysis examines the rhetorical organization (argumentative) of everyday talk and thought, revealing the dilemmatic nature of discourse attending to potential versions of argument (Billig, 1997; Billig et al., 1988). Finally, discourse analysis is concerned with the cognitive issue of reality and mind—particularly with how cognitive issues such as knowledge, belief, fact, truth, and explanation are handled in talk and text. This reflects its origins in the sociology of scientific knowledge (e.g., Mulkay, 1979) and the reworking of psychological categories of memory, attitude, learning, and so on (e.g., Harré & Stearns, 1995; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The development of discourse analysis centers on language as a main focus of psychological investigation. It derives from philosophy, linguistics, and literary and cultural studies as to how we view and understand the function of language. The discursive approach is premised on an action orientation of language, especially on the language use in context and materialized in social relations, within which such a context allows. Therefore, language is not treated as merely a tool or medium to represent the inner states of the mind. Language takes up a larger and more central role in our everyday communication and social interactions, and it is in the social interaction where the remembering and

reconciliation is achieved and how language in use is observed.

To further explain the discursive approach to language as social action, let me now trace the contemporary development of linguistics and philosophy of language. Chomsky's theory on the nature of language development and acquisition features what is termed as *generative grammar*, a set of underlying linguistic rules that innately exist in the form of deep structure (Chomsky, 1965). Among the critique of Chomsky's theory and its approach to underlying cognitive psychology is that it tries to separate the issue of linguistic competence from linguistic performance. Linguistic performance and competence are not easily separable, being intricately related to one another. Chomsky's empirical work is taken from speech data that is idealized compared with ordinary speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Such data are so far removed from the natural speech, with errors, hesitations, self-corrections, and so forth, that they do not capture the interactional features of natural speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In contrast, discourse analysis attends to the performance of naturally occurring speech to determine how people use language in the course of different kinds of interactions.

The second feature of discourse analysis pertains to the way in which the relationship between the object (reality) and language is accomplished (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Silverman, 1997, p. 115). This point refers to the notion of sign (the signifier and the signified) as to how such an arbitrary relationship between the object and the linguistic labeling is established. This notion of sign derives from a Saussurean approach to signification and semiology and heavily depends on the larger structure of society. Whereas discourse analysis is interested in the local production of meaning and knowledge, Saussurean linguistic approach links its analysis to an abstract level of social structures and other broader concerns of the society such as power, hierarchy, class, race, gender, and so forth. In semiology, theory of society is generated independently from what meanings are locally produced within a given linguistic and cultural community. In other words, semiology does not necessarily account for the local meaning making process as it "tends to produce . . . static idealized analysis" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 31). The emphasis is placed on "looking at structure ("la langue") rather than specific uses ("parole"), along with a focus on examining meaning at a

single instance rather than processes occurring over a period of time, ruling out a number of important and interesting questions” (Potter & Wetherell, p. 31). For the discourse analysis, this means that it should focus on how members in a particular cultural community establish the social relations and moral order of the group using language (Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis aims to explicate the process of producing and changing meanings at the time of their occurrence.

Studies of the function of language from linguistic philosophy are also concerned with examining the processes of labeling and pointing as language functions, how the meaning (a set of relations between the object and the language) is produced over time. Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1975 [1962]) moves away from the idea that the primary function of language is to describe some state of affairs, some aspect of reality. The most useful distinction Speech Act Theory makes on language use is between doing and stating, specifically the ways in which people use language to perform social actions. To illustrate this point further, let me use some modified examples cited in the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987). For example, the sentence:

*I declare war on terrorism.*

is not a description of the world that can be seen as true or false. Rather it accomplishes some practical action and brings about specific consequences when uttered in appropriate circumstances. This example illustrates an action-orientation to language—that is, language is performing an action: request, declare, agree, disagree, and so forth. This view of language underlines the key foundation of discourse analysis.

One of the main difficulties with Speech Act Theory, however, is that it tends to deal with idealized linguistic phenomena or “made-up” sentences taken outside the context of use or highly ritualized speech forms. This problem is common to the Chomskian approach. Studying these idealized, made-up examples poses another challenge. Often we hear a single utterance that performs a number of acts at once, or acts may be spread out in more than one sentence including a question and response sequence. As Potter and Wetherell argue, “[i]n practice the decision about what act an utterance is performing is often made by referring to the response rather than to any features of the utterance itself” (1987, pp. 29–30). Speech Act Theory does not consider the sequential feature of interaction as

a way of validating their categorization of speech acts. This shortcoming is complemented by the perspective developed by ethnomethodology and its branch entitled conversation analysis, by which the ensuring discourse analysis is influenced.

Discursive psychology acknowledges and draws on contributions made by Vygotsky and Wittgenstein, as they both emphasized an importance of the role of language in the development of knowledge, thought, memory, and cognition. Vygotsky’s theory, or what is known as Socio-Cultural Theory (or other labels of cultural-historical theory), forefronts concepts such as mediation and cultural tools and artifacts and their relation to human activity (Harré, 2011, Chapter 9; van der Veer, 2011, Chapter 3). The theory influenced the early development of the discursive movement. Equally influential to the contribution to development discourse analysis is Wittgenstein in his famously known notion of “language-games” (Wittgenstein, 1968 [1958])—the role of language in shaping thoughts and other cognitive functions and the action-orientation of language. He states, “[T]he term ‘language-games’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (para. 23). Regarding the problem of categorization in social sciences, he comments:

When philosophers use a word—“knowledge,” “being,” “object” (etc.) . . . —and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must first ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?—What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use?

(Wittgenstein, 1968, para. 116)

Wittgenstein’s critique, similarly applied to semiology, refers to a problem of our understanding of the relationship between language and context. It reveals the taken-for-granted nature of social scientists’ producing arbitrarily constructed operational definitions of phenomena without ever studying the “language-game” in which the phenomenon has its everyday home (Wittgenstein, 1968). Discourse analysis, in line with Wittgenstein’s critique, problematizes the analysts’ production and superimposition of their categories on the social phenomena. In its distinct epistemological position, discursive psychology’s practice of discourse analysis aims to explicate how members produce them and make them relevant in talk.

The aforementioned points suggest that analysis should be focused on the language in use, not on excavating formal rules embedded in language and the underlying cognitive processes. This means that the study of language does not confine itself to formal linguistic analysis as in the transformational grammatical approach and analysis of sentences that the analyst himself/herself generated to prove their point. Nor does it mean a diachronic approach of studying the history of the word meanings and explicating the process of change. Drawing on the arguments by Wittgenstein, Austin, and Vygotsky, discursive psychologists point out that language in use, including communication and interaction, is itself a form of practice. Language is used to do things in everyday communication—giving orders, making promises, and thinking and arguing. From this view of language, reconciliation comes to be understood as something that is done or accomplished in the course of social interaction, in which discourse is observed. In this view, language is a tool to be used for the accomplishment of social action (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 36), steering away from the notion of the representational instrumentality of language seeing versions of events as pragmatically variable accomplishments.

### **Discursive Psychology: Principles for Discourse Analysis**

Discursive psychology is the culmination of a number of independent developments in psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. More specifically, it was born out of the critiques of traditional psychological methods—behaviorism and positivism (Gergen, 1978; Harré, 1979) and also the critique of psychological theory, cognitivism, which favors explanation in terms of mental states or processes. Roots of discursive psychology go as far as a number of independent developments, including the work of Mead and Vygotsky (Harré & Gillet, 1994). In particular, it incorporates contemporary movements such as ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel, 1974; Heritage, 1984), social constructionism (e.g., Gergen, 1997; Shotter, 1990; Shotter, 1991), and ethnogenics. Edwards and Potter (1992) have profiled key features of discursive psychology in terms of action-orientation, construction of knowledge about reality, and variability of versions of reality. The focus of discursive psychology is the action-orientation of talk and writing. “For both participants and analysts, the primary issue is the social actions,

or interactional work being done in the discourse” (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 2). Moreover, its interest is the nature of knowledge, cognition, and reality as to how events are described and explained, in the forms of factual reports, or narratives, and how cognitive states are attributed. Instead of assuming the speaker’s (or writer’s) underlying cognitive states in such discursive constructions, they are “examined in the context of their occurrence as situated and occasioned constructions” (p. 2).

### **Action Orientation, Construction, Variability in Mundane Settings**

The view of language as social action is also commonly shared in the sociological tradition of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). It refers to “the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent on-going accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life” (p. 11). As the term suggests, *ethnomethodology* is concerned with the study of (-ology) ordinary people’s (ethno-) methods. It is the study of the methods that ordinary people use to produce and make sense of everyday life. Ethnomethodological research seeks to learn about the activities of everyday life as phenomena in their own right. According to Sacks and Garfinkel (1967; Heritage, 1984), founders of ethnomethodology, talk is considered as an activity and “doing” talking provides ways of understanding as to how common sense views about the world and practical reasoning in a given situation get produced and shared.

The treatment of language as action is a common concern for discursive psychologists and ethnomethodologists. This implies that language is a constructive medium that people use resourcefully to accomplish things. The discourse analysis is aimed at explicating “the constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves become a central topic of study” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 35). The present study of identity and accountability fully exploits this feature of language. It also follows that our position on the role of language allows us to see the variability of people’s views and opinions in talk (and texts). Ethnomethodology’s concerns with the way members’ knowledge and understanding get produced reflect discursive psychology’s interests in people’s pragmatic use of language in terms of talk as action as practical accomplishment. Thus, the focus on variability yields analytical resources for studying accountability.

In the next section, I shall show what makes discourse analysis a viable approach for the concerns of the research on remembering and reconciliation. In doing so, I shall elaborate on the features of action orientation, construction, and variability to identify a body of influence—namely, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis—which would lead to another important notion called accountability of social action.

### **Accountability**

The project from which the discourse analysis was conducted makes a major emphasis on the centrality of accountability for making sense of the participants' discourse. Mainstream psychologists also have paid close and systematic attention to one level of accountability, specifically where people attribute responsibility for events. Another level of accountability is that of the speaker who is producing the report, or the description of the world, from which the causal inferences are supposed to be drawn:

[T]he discursive approach where versions of events, things, people and so on, are studied and theorized primarily in terms of how those versions are constructed in an occasioned manner to accomplish social actions.

(Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 8)

Conversation analysis (CA) helps translate this perspective to systematic analytical procedures in studying naturally occurring conversations. Conversational analysis is focused on the sequential organization of conversation—the ways in which people take turns in conversation, the management of repair, and the analysis of the topic organization. The meaning and interpretation of the first speaker's utterance is examined in the second speaker's utterance. Heritage (1984) terms it as *intersubjectivity* and explains as follows:

[S]ome analysis, understanding or appreciation of the prior turn will be displayed in the recipient's next turn at talk . . . Conversational interaction is structured by an organization of action which is implemented on a turn-by-turn basis. By means of the organization, a context of publicly displayed and continuously up-dated intersubjective understanding is systematically sustained . . . It is through the "turn-by-turn" character of talk that the participants display their understanding of "the state of the talk" for one another.

(Heritage, 1984, p. 259)

The contribution of CA to discursive psychology is that CA provides evidential basis, or a proof procedure of how speakers establish intersubjectivity, shared understanding of reality in interaction. The analysis of the interview talk is empowered by the conversation analytic principles, and relevant issues to illustrate the performative nature of identity and constitutive process of accountability as action were examined.

The aforementioned features of discourse analysis and discursive psychology—action orientation, construction, and variability—have important implications for studying culture in terms of cultural membership in the project of remembering and reconciliation. The discursive approach (i.e., the umbrella term for the methodological approach used in discourse analysis) attends to the particular analytic concerns—our identities and culturalness arising out of interactions with other people. Cultural identity or what it means to be a particular member of a culture is constituted in interaction, and it resources to perform social actions such as invitations, agreements and disagreements, blamings, displays of neutrality, and so forth. Thus cultural membership is achieved discursively by mobilizing the members' knowledge and understanding of social categories (e.g., class, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.)—what it means for the participant to be a member of a given community. The discursive approach does not take these categories as provided by the analysts without looking at what is actually produced in talk. People orient to these categories in talk and construct what they mean to them, rather than how those categories are shaping the way they think about their identities. The constitutive process of cultural membership is important to the studies of social remembering and reconciliation. People do not consistently produce the same version of the past when accounting for a problematic past, especially when the events relate to violence and other unpleasant acts committed during the war. People fashion talk (and texts) about the wartime past, orientating to identities of the speakers and the hearers and perform social actions in making his or her claim of the past. Hence, a multitude of discourses are constantly at work constructing and producing our identity. Variability of views, opinions, and identity descriptions, therefore, work to be the analytical resource for discourse analysts.

### **Discursive Approach to Studying Culture**

Language users engage in talks and texts not only as speakers, writers, and listeners or readers but also

as members of groups, professions, organizations, communities and societies, and cultures. As members of given groups, they interact in complex combinations of social roles and cultural identities. In participating in discourse, members (i.e., language users) display roles and identities, which become visible for discourse researchers as a dynamic, flexible category that the participants use. Thus social categories such as gender, age, class, and ethnicities and cultural background alike are relevant resources for members to use to accomplish social action. Power dynamics and asymmetries can be observed in a given interaction as part of the participant's concern and orientation to the talk at hand and work within the interactional order and hierarchy of power positions (Linell & Luckmann, 1991). Below I will present a few extracts and demonstrate the discursive approach to analyzing interview materials, especially how a cultural marker (whether one is British or Japanese) is treated as a member's topic of concern, rather than an independent variable assigned by the researcher. The analysis is guided by the analytical concept of membership categorization and ethnification processes, which I discussed earlier. The analysis will illustrate the ways in which the participants' claim of difficulty with a rice diet is addressed in the interview where participants' and the interviewer's orientation to culture becomes an issue. Let us now look at the examples of such talk.

### ***Culture and Membership Category***

What does it mean to say one is treating culture as a topic of its "members?" Discourse analysis examines the member's notion of culture and seeks to address how the concept of culture is put to use in talk in interaction and negotiate and forge meaning to it. With this approach, culture is considered as a dynamic concept, not a fixed, stable category that members in conversation/interlocutors use. Culture is always on the move and in action. I shall hereby present an example of discourse analysis from previous research that examines the ways in which people talk about others of different culture or ethnic origin (Murakami, 2001b).

I analyzed interview talk of the British World War II veterans about their experiences of captivity in the POW camp in Japan and their recent activities of reconciliation nearly 50 years after the war. Proposed is a discursive approach (a discourse analysis by discursive psychology) to the study of culture and cross-cultural communication. This approach is sharply contrasted with work drawing

on cultural models in cultural anthropology (e.g., Holland & Cole, 1995), cultural script in pragmatics (e.g., Nelson, 1981, 1986; Wierzbicka, 1994) and ethnographic conversation analysis (e.g., Moerman, 1973). The discussion is guided by two analytic concepts—membership categorization and ethnification processes. The analysis concludes that the ways in which cultural knowledge is socially constructed—negotiated and shared—are discursive accomplishments of the veterans' social action of accounting for the wartime past and their dealing with the problem attributed to cultural differences and misunderstanding.

### ***Ethnification As a Topic***

This particular example analysis explores the notion of ethnification: how people ethnify others in talk in a cross-cultural context (Moerman, 1973). Taking a discursive approach informed by discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter 1992), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), and conversation analysis (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), I will look at how cultural otherness is marked, constituted, and put to use in talk. Also, I will show ways in which a particular cultural aspect of others is made to be a topic of concern in interaction and establish its relevance to accomplishing social actions. Discourse examples are taken from interviews with British World War II veterans, who were taken as POWs by the Japanese. During the interviews, they gave accounts of the wartime past and shared their views and experiences of reconciliation. The analytical task is twofold: first, to illustrate how rice is rendered as a member's category relevant to the interview talk and how it becomes a discursive resource; second, to examine a process of ethnification, defined as "ethnic identity as a situated accomplishment of interlocutors" (Day, 1994, 1998; Moerman, 1974). Finally, I will discuss the methodological payoff of the discursive approach as a way of studying culture and cross-cultural issues.

### **ETHNIFICATION PROCESS**

I now introduce the analytic concept of "ethnification processes," with which the use of identity categories in ethnic (and linguistic) group categorizations have been explored (Day, 1994). Ethnification processes are defined as "processes through which people distinguish an individual or collection of individuals as a member or members respectively of an ethnic group" (Day, 1994, p. 154). Arguably Day's study takes a discursive

approach and views “ethnic identity as a situated accomplishment of interlocutors” (Day, 1998, p. 151). The important distinction is that the discursive perspective does not ask how someone’s ethnic background shapes or determines what they say, but, rather to ask how this ethnicity becomes a resource for them—and others to use (Day, 1998). Within this view ethnicity, identity is a topic in its own right, and its relevance for interlocutors becomes an empirical question (Day, 1998).

From a systematic observation of a large corpus of data gathered for the study, it became clear that certain topics and experiences were recurrently talked about by the veterans in the interviews. Such topics included food and eating practices in the camps, especially a rice diet in the Japanese camp. Their experiences related to rice were central to the life as POWs, and rice was emblematic of the culture of the camp. The topic of food and hunger during any war is a universally poignant theme. For example, the autobiography titled *The Railway Man* by Eric Lomax (1996) depicts the eating regime in the prison camp—not only rice but any eating incidents—at length and with fine details during his captivity in Singapore and other locations in Asia during World War II. The selected extracts used for this chapter concern conversational topics of rice and a rice diet. The discourse analysis reveals a nuanced way of talking about their problem of a rice diet. The ex-POWs’ accounts of rice and rice diet mark the Japanese as cultural other and display their understanding of the Japanese people and their cultural practices in the interview while they recall how the POWs viewed the rice diet at the time. The aim is to produce some empirically grounded analysis and discuss how the topic of rice and rice diet is constituted as a culturally emblematic category of membership and used to accomplish specific social actions—that is, to claim and account for their difficulty with a rice diet in the POW camp.

### ***Marking the Cultural Other: An Anthropological Approach***

I consider two studies in anthropology to see how culture is studied in various social science disciplines. Ohnuki-Tierney’s work on rice as self (1993) is the most relevant work on rice here. It typifies an anthropological approach to cultural knowledge and the symbolic representation of self through food. She takes a view that food is a way of marking cultural other and examines collective representations of self, change, continuity, structure

and transformations in relations to other peoples” (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993). The work is based on the notion of “a presentation and representation of the self, using food as metaphor of self” (p. 4) and explores how the Japanese people use the metaphor of rice to think about themselves in relation to other peoples (e.g., ethnic groups or nationalities). It aims:

to show *how* the Japanese notion of the self has taken on a different contour as a different historical other has emerged and rice and rice paddies have served as the vehicle for deliberation, although not always conscious, in these process.

(Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993, p. 5)

She acknowledges a methodological challenge in studying collective representation of consciousness as follows:

In a broader framework it is a question of the development of a powerful representation of the self by the people themselves, on the one hand, and of how to reconcile a dominant representation with apparent multiplicity within a culture, on the other hand.

(1993, p. 6)

The discursive approach differs from her approach, focused on representation of self through the object such as rice. Instead of looking at a multiplicity of voices, selves, and variability of people’s views, opinions, and positions as something to be reduced to a model or fit to a conceptual category as a manifested form of collective representation, the discursive approach views them as a members’ topic, discursive resources for the purpose of achieving social actions such as arguing, justifying, agreeing and disagreeing, and claiming differences and similarities in representing culture of their own and others. Therefore, tensions between individual and collective representations and between heterogeneity and homogeneity are not treated as a problem and are to be resolved in terms of contested or negotiated meanings and symbolic interpretations in studying culture and self. In this vein, the task here is to show and demonstrate what people “do” with culture, the ways in which they make cultural difference an issue, and attend to the issue of self-representation vis-à-vis cultural others. This analysis proposes that the discursive approach provides a basis for showing people’s (members’) moment-by-moment and here-and-now sense-making of their culture, and others, in relation to the past, present, and future.

### Culture As Local Production of Meaning

Equally relevant to the present chapter is the ethnographic and conversation analytic study of Thai culture by Moerman (1973). Writing of his approach, he comments that “culturally contexted conversation analysis tries to limit the ingredients of interpretation, the components of meaning” (Moerman 1973, p. 7). This is a modified adaptation of the ethnomethodological stance, which “treats members’ inquiries as locally occasioned, managed and accomplished, within and with reference to the ‘here-and-now’ circumstances of their production” (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 2). Branching off the orthodoxy of conversation analysis (e.g., Schegloff, 1992), Moerman analyzes talk between villagers and an official and highlights some instances of locally triggered significance of cultural systems in which rice (and other food) as an identity marker or a member’s category do the business of labeling ethnicity. Also the interactional use of the category “rice” invokes social relations of power and authority of state, which constitute the dominant and dominated in a particular social setting (Moerman, 1973). Such conversation analysis permits us to see the active situated use of cultural ideas and local production of meanings accomplished in interaction. In what follows, I shall illustrate discourse analysis and its approach to studying culture as discursive accomplishment by using the research on remembering and reconciliation.

### Interviews With British Prisoners of War Veterans

Two extracts were selected from a transcript of a 5-hour recording of a group interview with those veterans who agreed to take part in the research. They were asked to share and discuss their views and post-war experiences of reconciliation with respect to their captivity in the POW camps in Thailand and Japan. The interview was conducted in a participant’s home in a northeastern city in England. The participants included four former POWs who took part in the reconciliation trip in 1992 and two of their spouses. Two spouses did not accompany their partners on the reconciliation trip. The interviewer was the researcher herself.

#### *Analysis: Rice in the Prisoners of War Camp*

#### TALK OF RICE AS DISCURSIVE RESOURCE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY OF ACTIONS

Extract 21.1 below exemplifies an analytic view that rice is a members’ category with which the

### Extract 21.1 Souvenir from the Camp

1.	Ted:	I’ve got all sorts of souvenirs.
2.	Int.:	Hummm.
3.	(.)	
4.	Ted:	>got a< little or- a little box of that we used to you know.
5.		We got breakfast out o’ a little brown bowl (2.) pap rice.
6.		[(.)a uh and it was rice (.) crushed ((clapping sound))=.
7.	Charlie:	[aye.
8.	Int.:	=um huh.
9.	Ted:	in water (.) and they called it like porridge [you know.
10.	Int.:	[Yeah
11.	Ted:	Just a little brown bowl like that. That’s what we got.
12.		That was at five o’clock in the morning.
13.		[was it six o’clock about.
14.	Charlie:	[ye that was six o’clock.
15.	Ted:	at six o’clock then you went.
16.		[( ) then you got a (.) your little box (.)
17.	Int.:	[hummm.
18.	Ted:	your <i>bento</i> , was it?
19.	Int.:	hum, lunch [box.
20.	Ted:	[and they used [to put rice in there.
21.		(((clapping noise)))
22.	Int.:	[uh huh≠
23.	(.)	
24.	Ted:	and maybe if you’re lucky a little bit of uh Soya sauce or.
25.		something in it.
26.	Sidney:	aye if you were lucky.
27.	Mary:	°(hhhhh)°.

**Extract 21.1 (Continued)**

28.	Int.	if [you're lu(h)cky(h).
29.	Ray:	[(the first time) the first [time (when).
30.	?:	... [lucky.
31.	Int.:	... [( ) just plain rice.
32.	Ray:	The first time we got those boxes they had been varnished.
33.		or something [hadn't they.
34.	Charlie:	... .. [( ) they were quite.
35.	Sidney:	... .. [no they hadn't.
36.	Ray:	You couldn't eat the rice.
37.	(.)	
38.	Charlie:	[O≠hh
39.	Int.:	[( )

(Italicized words are of Japanese origin; names used are pseudonyms.)

participants display their cultural understanding of rice and a rice diet and establish its relevance in talk. Prior to this interview segment, they trace their experience of being transported from Thailand to the camp in Japan. They speak of a drastic change of diet. What is demonstrated here is that the participants used rice as a category, which is emblematic of life at the Japanese POW camp. Rice, as being central to the life at the camp and to the very basic need for survival, is brought up as a conversational resource, whereas the participants account for what it was like to be in captivity and live and work in a Japanese POW camp. The ex-POWs' work of managing accountability entails the presentation of a rice diet as an unfamiliar cultural practice of the Japanese, as well as a claim for the POWs' difficulty with such a diet.

The analysis of this extract focuses on the ways in which cultural otherness is constituted through telling about items that the POWs used to use in the camp and later brought back to Britain as memorabilia and produced as souvenirs (line 1). The word "souvenirs" refers to the things they brought back and they form the object of remembering the camp days. Stories produced about these items give rise to

both personal and shared meanings of the past in the present interactional circumstances. A tangible object such as a lunch box, which represents a particular past at issue, becomes an aid for recalling past events that are relevant to a particular conversational setting and organization of social relations. In other words, the objects work as discursive resources for entering into a particular moment in the past and establish its relevance in interaction. In this extract, "rice" is treated as a common reference point, and the talk about rice establishes a mutual understanding of what it was like to live with a rice diet and other related cultural practices that were markedly different from and unfamiliar to their own.

In this extract, "rice" deserves a term that denotes something more than a simple reference point. I suggest that it is a membership category. The membership category refers to classifications or social types that may be used to describe persons in its original definition (Sacks, 1992), but it is later extended to collectivities and non-personal objects (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Descriptions of objects and events provide for the accountability of actions; they are used to generate excuses and generally deal with "attributional" issues of cause, intention, and responsibility (Edwards & Potter, 1992). A fine-grain analysis of the organization of turn-taking and uptakes unveils the ways in which various descriptions as to how rice was cooked and served in the camp are produced *in situ* interactionally. These descriptions ascribed to the category "rice" constitute a claim for the participant's difficulty with a rice diet, and they are subsequently formulated as a problem.

**THE CULTURAL PRACTICE OF A RICE DIET IN THE PRISONERS OF WAR CAMP**

In the opening sequence, a reference to souvenirs is specified in Ted's utterance, "a little box to put in a little brown ball (2.) pap rice and eat with" (ll. 4 & 5). He gives a detailed and animated description of what the box is and how it was used for eating rice (ll. 4–6 & 9). The term *souvenir*, as referred to things that the POWs brought back from the POW camp, seems to be ironic considering the context in which the interviewees reflect about their experiences of captivity and reconciliation. "Souvenirs" are, in a conventional sense, a reminder, a token, or memento of a place one visited in the past, but in this case the experiences may not necessarily be pleasant. Rather than speculating the intention of the speaker, Ted, let us look at how



this is received in the next turn. Does the interviewer treat this as irony? Here, the interviewer's receipt and the brief pause (l. 3), albeit not actively, solicit and encourage the speaker Ted to continue. The descriptions make reference to a mealtime and crockery with which to serve rice, including details as to how rice was prepared and how it was served and eaten in the camp. For example, the exact mealtime is debated among the participants, Ted and Charlie, marking some significance of the time of breakfast (ll. 12–15). This exchange makes a point (and even a complaint) of how little and infrequent the POWs ate at the camp. Issues dealing with food shortage, scarcity, and constant hunger are talked about later in the same interview (see the discussion in Extract 21.2).

### ***Ethnification and Shared Understanding of the Past***

Let us look at how the researcher–interviewer's identity as Japanese is marked and made relevant in talk. In line 18, Ted actively seeks the interviewer's response by checking his memory of a Japanese term for lunchbox that is at issue (ll. 16 & 18). First, after the debate over the breakfast time, Ted refers back to the topic "little box" in line 1. 16 ("then you got (.) your little box (.)") and a brief pause at the end for his pursuit of the interviewer's response. Then, in line 18 he specifically asks the interviewer to reply to his question ("your bento, was it?"). This formulation needs unpacking. Along with the pronoun "your" predicated to the lunchbox, the way to which this is responded by the interviewer indicates that Ted's question, using the Japanese word "*bento*" has a direct relevance to the interviewer and therefore interactionally nominates the interviewer to take the next turn. The Japanese word *bento*, the English equivalent of lunchbox, ethnifies the interviewer as Japanese, someone who is assumed as culturally informed and linguistically competent on the topic in progress. Joint construction of what *bento* means is interactionally accomplished: The interviewer displays her knowledge by offering a gloss in English (l. 19, "hum, lunch [box]"), which is completed by Ted with his embodied action (l. 21). This joint construction of what *bento* means not only ethnifies the interviewer but also constitutes a mutual understanding of the particular past at issue (ll. 16–23).

#### **CLAIMING DIFFICULTY WITH A RICE DIET**

The talk in this extract illustrates how Ray's problem with a rice diet is worked up, which warrants

another example of discursive accomplishment with a resource of the membership category "rice." The difficulty of eating rice is discursively formulated by the description of the box, a container used to serve and transport rice at the Japanese camp. In addition to the descriptions given by the participants with reference to how the box was used, the speaker's embodied action—for example, the clapping sound of simulating a packing of rice in the box (ll. 6 & 21)—demonstrates a cultural practice of what to do with rice in the Japanese camp.

Now I would like to focus on the latter part of the conversation (ll. 24 onward) and discuss how talk of the box mediates further telling of difficulty with a rice diet and affords the speaker Ray's claim of difficulty with rice (l. 36, "You couldn't eat the rice"). How is this claim formulated as being sensible and legitimate without making an explicit blame? Clearly, the generic pronoun "you" is used to distance the speaker from the claim of difficulty with a rice diet. The problem is attributed to two features of rice and its cultural practice. First, the tastelessness of rice is invoked in Ted's description in line 24 ("and maybe if you're lucky a little bit of uh Soya source or something in it"). This formulation seems to be ironic, for "maybe if you're lucky" orients to the opposite of being lucky, and it is offered as a mitigated claim of the extremity of hard conditions in the camp. This claim is endorsed and warranted in the way in which Ted's utterance is duly picked up—that is, the affiliational uptakes of the other speakers such as Sidney's recitation of the utterance (l. 26), followed by Mary's laughter (l. 27), and the interviewer's recitation and interpolated laughter (l. 28). The interviewer's summation in line 31 ("just plain rice") displays her understanding of the nature of the problem and aligns herself with the other speakers.

The second feature of the difficulty is the unusual appearance of the box. This is registered in Ray's description of the box in line 32 ("The first time we got those boxes they had been varnished or something hadn't they"). The emphatic reference to the rice holder as being "varnished," as well as the rice being served in a little box, exoticises the cultural practice of how rice was eaten. All these allusions as to how food was prepared in the Japanese camp have bearings on the speakers' normative expectations of how to prepare food in their own culture. Ray's claim of difficulty with the rice diet as something legitimate and warrantable is achieved by how he describes the preparation of the rice. In the ensuing

section, I further examine the ways in which this claim of difficulty with rice is handled interactionally and discuss the interactional consequences of it. To this end, I will use an analytical concept of membership categorization device (Sacks, 1992). I will argue that culture is treated as a topic of talk and a members' concern, rather than it being presumed an *a priori* concept. I will then consider the usefulness of such a concept in analyzing discourse.

### *Rice As a Membership Category*

In the next extract, the participants are discussing their experiences of and displaying their knowledge of rice. Various descriptions regarding the category "rice" have emerged and are attributed to a particular ethnicity or culture of other. In Sacks' terminology, describing can be considered a "category-bound activity" (1972). Sacks notes many activities are common-sensically associated with certain membership categories (1972). Considering that the interview pertains to the war-time events such as captivity in a POW camp, what has been brought off as part of a members' category can be highly consequential to the future trajectory of interaction and become a source of potential conflict among the interlocutors. We now look at how those categories and descriptions are introduced and worked up and identify what are interactional upshots as part of managing a delicate nature of the interaction.

This extract is rich with a collection of descriptions (or subcategories) regarding the category

#### Extract 21.2

40.	Ray:	Cos anyway, all our cooks didn't know how to cook rice did
41.		they?
42.	Charlie:	Well er:: they're quite ... -
43.	Ted:	no::: [(unless)]
44.	Charlie:	[ they're] quite- canny.
45.	Ray:	Some of the rice was er:
46.	(.)	
47.	Charlie:	Not as good as the Japanese rice (.) the rice (.) Japanese
48.		is flaky (a bit) innit, [you know.
49.	Int.:	[um ummm

50.	Charlie:	But we got inferior rice as the prisoners of war.
51.	Int.:	oh ye[ah?
52.	Ted:	.[oh:::h
53.	Charlie:	We didn't get the best rice.
54.	Int:	hu[mmm
55.	Ray:	... [well the first rice you got it had been treated with lime
56.		hadn't [it? Really for sowing.
57.	Charlie:	..[it ha:d aye
58.	Ted:	We had lime rice (.) I think it
59.		[was used for plantin' the rice.
60.	Int.:	[what's that?
61.	Int.:	Oh.
62.	Ted:	a lime rice and what was that the other one? (.)
63.		°Lime and something else°
64.	Ray:	The lime (was to:) with the preserve it er::
65.		[as: a: seed rice you see?
66.	Ted	[(it was another kind) and it was a [horrible
67.	Int.	[It's a brown rice?
68.	Ray:	Pardon?
69.	Int.:	Brown rice? It's like uh (.)
70.	Ray:	Oh yeah [( )
71.	Charlie:	... [with the rusk on you mean
72.	Int.:	[Not- not refined rice
73.	Charlie:	[ah we used to get that sometimes
74.	Ted:	We used to fight for rice polishers (.) didn't we
75.	Charlie:	[aye
76.	Sidney:	[rice polisher(h)
77.	Ted:	You know when you polish the rice- the-

(Italicized words are of Japanese origin; names used are pseudonyms.)

rice—the Japanese rice, flaky rice, the inferior rice, the best rice, rice for sowing, lime rice, planting rice, seed rice, brown rice, and unrefined rice. How do the varying descriptions of the category rice work in relation to Ray's earlier claim of the difficulty with a rice diet in the camp? The focus of the analysis of this extract is to ask how Ray's claim is handled in the interaction. Let us focus on the ways in which the speakers (Ray, Charlie, and Ted) bring up the category rice and see what they accomplish interactionally. The problem of a rice diet is formulated as a legitimate problem for the POWs. Here the ex-POW speakers do not make an explicit criticism of the Japanese rice diet, nor do they implicate the interviewer into the problem of this cultural practice.

In the opening sequence, Ray goes on to elaborate on his problem with a rice diet. By formulating in this way, Ray implies that a rice diet is not just his problem but that it is also problematic for the other prisoners, including experts such as cooks (ll. 40–41, “all our cooks didn't know to cook rice did they?”). Here, as the speaker is normalizing the problem, he offers further descriptions of rice (l. 45, “some of the rice was er:”). This is followed by a brief silence (l. 46), indicating his pursuit for comments from others. Charlie takes over from Ray, providing a description of rice that elaborates on Ray's point. Here, two descriptions of rice become available (ll. 47–48): one is the rice that was eaten by the POWs (“not as good as Japanese rice (.) the rice (.) Japanese is flaky (a bit) innit”), and the other is Japanese rice that, by implication, is of better quality and is presumably eaten by the Japanese. This contrasting set of descriptions of rice made by the speakers suggests that the problem of a rice diet is linked to their being British POWs. What is more, the problem of a rice diet, originally attributed to the food having no substance and taste (from Extract 21.1) is now being reformulated as implicitly having to do with a differential, possibly discriminatory, treatment at the POW camp.

Let us examine line 49 onward to see how the participants and the interviewer handle this statement. In doing so, we can examine how multiple categories of rice, brought off interactionally, contribute to accounting for the troubling past. In Charles' statement (l. 49, “but we got inferior rice as the prisoners of war”), the use of “we” as a collective voicing of the problem of discrimination is now attributed to the discriminatory practice of being fed the inferior rice. Charlie implicitly blames

the Japanese at the camp for their differential treatment of the POWs. In addition, he suggests that it may have been done deliberately on the part of those Japanese who treated the POWs. The ascription of the rice with the adjective “inferior” appeals to the morality (or lack of by the Japanese) in such treatment and thus makes the criticism legitimate. With all the possible ways of talking about differential treatment, this could be said, for example, to be “different” rice rather than “inferior.” The point here is that the analyst is making a judgment about how it should be said, or in this case, what adjective should have been used. It is the way in which the category rice was used to perform a social action of blaming the Japanese at the camp and how such a recollection was shared and established as to what happened at the camp.

The interviewer responds to this problematic attribution as a dispreferred answer, seeking further explanation (l. 51, “oh yeah?”). Ted's emphatic response in line 52 overlapping with the interviewer also seems to attend to Charlie's problematic statement. Charlie's reformulation (l. 53, “we didn't get the best rice”) is elaborated by Ray, who offers more category-related terms: “treated with lime” and “rice for sowing” (ll. 55–56). Additional categories mitigate Charlie's charge (and suspicion) that the POWs were served with the inferior rice on purpose. Following from Charlie's agreement (l. 57), Ted endorses this category (l. 58) and offers another category “[rice] used for plantin' the rice.” The descriptions of both speakers, Ted and Ray, in lines 62 through 65 seem to be ensuring that they stay on the topic of the lime [rice] with preservatives and seed rice. The upshot of these categories hearably works as a repair of Charlie's earlier problematic formulation, by emphasizing the technical properties of rice, rather than judgmental or moral attribution.

Not only the ex-POW participants but also the interviewer participate in talk about rice. How does the interviewer handle the series of formulation and reformulation of the problem? When Ted speaks of lime rice in lines 55 through 56, the interviewer actively seeks an explanation (l. 57, “what's that?”) and acknowledges Ted's explication (l. 59) as a news receipt (l. 61, “Oh”). The category that the interviewer offered, “brown rice” (l. 67), matches up with a collection of categories for rice—rice for planting and sowing, or seed rice. The interviewer makes claim to her understanding of rice served in the camp by producing the category brown rice as

part of the collection of category rice. Brown rice is accepted by Ray in line 70 and Charlie with his reformulation as “[rice] with rusk on you mean” (l. 71). The interviewer has another go at producing “not not refined rice” for reassurance, and this is ratified by Charlie (l. 73). As shown here, the interviewer produces a few categories, displaying her cultural knowledge that is relevant to the topic of rice. She is not a passive hearer of the talk about rice but takes part in the ongoing talk, signaling her participation. The turn-taking and production of categories of rice illustrate the ex-POWs’ work of accountability to addressing the difficulty of the rice diet in the camp—what it was like to live in extreme circumstances, in which food and eating become a crucial, daily concern for survival. The interviewer’s role is noteworthy here; her participation in the talk about rice collaboratively accounts for the problem of the rice diet. The ex-POW participants manage to talk about the problem vis-à-vis the Japanese interviewer without becoming hostile and making an overt criticism of the cultural practice of eating rice.

### ***Summary of the Analysis***

The extracts analyzed in this chapter illustrate the way in which cultural issues were addressed in the research interview between the British veterans and the Japanese researcher concerning the rice diet at the Japanese POW camp during WWII. The Japanese rice diet emerged as a key conversational topic in the interview with the ex-POWs, and in the unfolding interaction the veterans expressed their views and experiences of reconciliation. As demonstrated in the analysis, a close examination of talk allows us to see what people do with a seemingly mundane conversational topic such as a rice diet and how the unfolding talk brought about a cross-cultural tension in this interactional setting, where the groups of two different nationalities talked face-to-face. The rice diet was discussed as seemingly mundane but then was elevated to different kinds of rice, which led to an implied criticism against the Japanese for discriminatory practice at the camp. The problem with the rice diet was constructed as such that it linked with the way in which the POWs were treated in the camp. This discursive process of construction was guided by the analytical concepts of ethnification and membership category. The analysis illustrated the ways in which a culturally emblematic category of rice was made use of by the ex-POW participants as an interactional

resource. Certain descriptions and properties of rice and the rice diet were predicated and established as legitimate interactionally. This was done as performing accountable actions, accountability—claiming the participants’ difficulty with the rice diet in the Japanese camp. Notably, rice itself is not bound to an intrinsically fixed symbolic meaning, as shown in the participants’ talk about their experiences of rice and the rice diet. Cultural anthropologists would treat rice in terms of a symbolic representation of self and society at large. The researchers subscribing to the cultural model/script might look for an underlying cultural model implied in the rice and rice diet. Here, however, rice is treated as a member’s concern and is used as a discursive resource in performing social action with which interlocutors orient to what it is to live in a culture of others. Cultural otherness is constructed through such talk.

Rice and its related activities are central to the life of the POWs and therefore are emblematic of the culture of the camp. The talk offers a reference point and context, in which the participants discursively manage the sensitive issues of talking about difficult experiences without having to be hostile or aggressive to the interviewer, who represents the nationality of the perpetrator. This point is evidenced by the ways in which ex-POW participants and the interviewer display their understanding and affiliation to an argumentative position *in situ* as discursive accomplishment. The analysis takes place at a microlevel, focusing on turn-taking and how sequential organization unravels the ethnification process by which the participant ethnifies the interviewer and seeks her alignment to undertake work on a potentially problematic statement and claim. In turn, the interviewer’s accommodation to the ethnification is registered as part of the interactional upshot, collaborating to the interviewees’ accountability work.

Production of cultural knowledge and its development and dissemination is often a principal academic concern for some anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists. Their academic endeavors are invested to explicate forms of cultural knowledge in terms of folk theories, folk psychology, and cultural models. Discursive psychologist Derek Edwards states that “approaches to categories and categorization are closely linked to notions of cultural knowledge” (1997, p. 250). Cultural knowledge is considered in “the ways in which ordinary people categorize and understand

things and events, including human actions and mental experiences” (ibid.). Edwards argues that much of the analyst’s discussions on these forms of cultural knowledge are based on analytical categories in which analysts themselves conceptualize the culture they are set to investigate (ibid.). Consequently, “important features of common-sense understanding are systematically obscured, such that we are left with nothing but abstracted cognitive sense-making to explain the data” (ibid., p. 251).

Drawing on this discursive approach to studying culture, I argue that the ways in which cultural knowledge is constructed, established, and shared is a discursive accomplishment. Discursive psychologists and discourse analysts are concerned with explicating how cultural knowledge becomes available to people—the ways in which the participants in conversation topicalize culture and work with categories and categorization in interaction. A discursive approach provides an analytical tool to investigate what it is to be (or not to be) a cultural member of a community in a given moment and setting. It does not impose the analyst to generate conceptual categories beforehand and apply a standardized coding technique to analyze the data. This approach provides an empirical basis for studying the constitutive nature of emerging forms of cultural knowledge. This epistemic stance is one of the most distinctive features of the discourse analysis that sets it apart from other forms of qualitative analysis. In the following, I take this point further by discussing two bodies of work pertaining to studying culture within psychological phenomena.

### **Whose Culture?**

As demonstrated in the above analysis, the rice diet and eating regime in the Japanese POW camp is one of the topics that were most commonly to be recalled and reminisced by those ex-POW veterans. I showed that within the interview talk on Anglo-Japanese reconciliation, the members’ (former POW British veterans’) main concern over the hardship and other difficult experiences of the prison camp in Japan was addressed as an issue of intercultural communication difficulty and lack of knowledge about rice as a normal Japanese diet. The above discourse analysis demonstrated that the issue of intercultural communication was discussed in the specific cultural practice of a rice diet in Japan. In appraising the significance of this analysis, I refer to two other popular approaches to studying culture and intercultural communication.

### ***Cultural Scripts and Cultural Models***

The body of work pertaining to studying inter- or cross-cultural communication (including miscommunication) has well-established traditions and perspectives that are commonly taken by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists. Nelson (1981) and Wierzbicka (1994) are well-known for their work on the concept called “cultural script.” The objective of their research is to extract the cultural script in cross-cultural communication—and it can involve miscommunication. According to Wierzbicka (2004), “[c]ultural scripts are formulae written in very simple words that attempt to articulate, on the basis of linguistic evidence, tacit cultural rules” (p. 576). Also, cultural scripts are formulated in words that have the exact semantic equivalents in all languages.

Similarly to cultural script, cross-cultural psychologists and cognitive/psychological anthropologists have devoted themselves to producing a cultural model in a context of the practice. For example, the cultural model of success (Kim, 1993) is focused on the adaptation pattern from a migrant/immigrant of Korean background to a successful person integrated into a mainstream American culture. This cultural explanation is a strategy of attributing the success or failure of people to cultural compatibility and discontinuity. Then they break the model down to constituent categories such as cultural values and communication styles as part of operationalization. Rooted to cross-cultural psychology, the cultural explanation relies on Confucian tradition, and so forth, as a background to this psychological phenomenon of adaptation and integration. To what extent do we move inward and outward from a person/individual? How does the social matter in working up to a cultural model and cultural explanation of successful integration? In the following, I will discuss a socio-cultural perspective, a perspective similar to the cultural model to understand the major body of work in studying cultural issues within psychological phenomena.

By tracing the changes of the word meaning over time, the socio-cultural discourse analysts insist that cultural models are not fixed but are open to modification, expansion, and revision by members as they interaction across time and events. This perspective also suggests that “cultural models (whether local or broader framing models) constitute a set of principles for actions in particular cultural domains and for particular cultural processes” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 124). And “the dynamic process involved

in constructing a cultural model can be seen if we consider how notions of ‘coffee’ have changed in the last decade” (Gee & Green, p. 124). The idea that the cultural model is constantly changing strikes a chord with the key assumption of the discursive approach, but the socio-cultural perspective indicates that the socio-culturally informed “cultural model” perspective needs to design research that incorporates an empirical task of examining changes over time.

Both approaches to studying culture by focusing on cultural model and script—a socio-cultural perspective or cognitive anthropological—tend to emphasize the importance of cultural models/scripts as the researcher’s pre-established object for investigation. The discursive approach differs on this ground. Evaluating my analysis presented in this chapter, I am not suggesting that those participants did not learn the norms and routines of the camp because of the lack of a cultural model (or script) relevant to the context of the camp. Neither would I suggest that the interaction in the interview is devoid of the cultural model. I question how the cultural model is generated and by whom. The difference in approach between discourse analysis and the other research traditions I referred to is epistemic. This epistemic stance leads to another aspect of discourse analysis regarding how to treat the context of the research.

Within the discursive psychological community, to what extent does the analysis presume and take in and foreground the context and any other available information beyond what is represented in the transcripts? Some are more vigilant about the importation of the context and other ethnographic information and argue that the analysis should refrain from considering a larger context and the circumstances. However, I would say that the context of the interview as well as the history in which those British men in captivity endured a deprived and extreme condition and were subjected to forced labor is important. Within the discourse analytic community, including that of ethnomethodological and conversation analytic orientations, there is an ongoing debate about what constitutes the context and to what extent the analysis takes it into consideration (Billig, 1999a, 1999b; Schegloff, 1997, 1999; Wetherell, 1998). The debate allows me to nestle my analysis in a spectrum of positions, whether the analysis should look at only the utterances or at the immediate context of the interviews as a background. In addition, the other end of the spectrum

might have a view/position that the context and history of the events involving this case of Anglo-Japanese reconciliation over World War II should be foregrounded. If those men had been made familiar with a rice diet as the norm of the Japanese diet and that the diet they were exposed to was inevitable under the time of war, would their life in the prison camp be remembered differently? Although discursive psychologists would not pose such a question, as it is beyond their remit of studying culture as being a topic of concern of the participants, some linguists and cognitive/psychological anthropologists would find this issue of intercultural communication quite important. In the following, I review the alternative approach to studying culture-related phenomena for a cultural script or cultural model.

### **Future Directions: Implications for Discourse in Culture and Psychology**

Studies of culture and cross-cultural communication have traditionally concentrated on classifying and interpreting features of data taken from a particular culture. The researcher then puts forward a universal model, script, or set of explanations of the culture through his or her theorizing cultural phenomena and the application of researcher’s criteria and categories in abstracted cultural models or cultural scripts. In contrast, the discursive approach commits to explicating locally produced and situated meaning in the making—illustrating the ways in which members handle cultural issues and establish their significance interactionally. The discursive approach employed in this analysis provides a viable tool, as it makes visible the very moment-by-moment process in talk where people’s cultural understanding and knowledge are displayed, shared, and established as relevant. Membership categories such as rice are discursive resources used to achieve social actions of accountability of the past in social practices of reconciliation and other socially organized sense-making activities.

I suggest that the discourse analysis produces a theoretical critique to a notion of culture and its methodological orientation regarding how to study culture. Also pertinent is culture and its role in psychological research. Culture demonstrated in the discourse analysis in this chapter is treated as a topic for the participants (i.e., the veterans and the research interviewer); cultural difference and intercultural understanding is central to discursive reconciliation—the argument I put forward is that reconciliation is not a static concept in which

opposing, multiple views are unified and harmonized, and differences between persons are to be extinguished. In talking about rice, the British veteran participants' views on rice as a cultural issue at the time of their captivity in a Japanese prison camp as a POW is brought off as a relevant topic of concern, rather than as a cultural script, so as to iron out and erase differences between two national groups.

In the remaining section, as I draw this chapter to a close, I wish to address far-reaching implications and unresolved challenges and issues for studying culture in psychology and offer a call for a special and, if possible, concerted effort to advance the discourse-based methodology. It is becoming clear that culture has “the constructive openness in using it as an intellectual catalyst in psychology continues” (Valsiner, 2009, p. 7). Despite many breakthroughs in recent years in psychology and other social sciences, understanding culture in psychological phenomena continues to pose challenges to psychologists and researchers alike. The discursive approach acknowledges culture as a dynamic, unstable category for the interlocutors as it is in the social interaction where the meaning of being in a given culture gets nominated, accepted/disagreed, and negotiated to reach a consensus (albeit it is not permanently settled). This implies that the research on culture in psychology is fundamentally designed to be impossible because of “[t]he Bearable Vagueness of Culture” (Valsiner, 2009, p. 7). The research and the researcher's position and his/her value system affect the way the research questions are phrased around the issues of culture. Culture then seems to be inflected in the inception of the research as “the projection of social values into the term—*culture is not a neutral term*” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 7). Research on culture in psychology therefore is a value-laden, moral project of the academics (*see* a similar argument in Brinkmann, 2006, 2009).

Following the above, it may be fair to say that our quest for methodology, whether via discourse or otherwise, continues. One far-researching challenge I see at present is how to approach discourse beyond the research object. The metaphor river might better describe our relationship to discourse, which moves and has some properties, patterns, and rules so that we can make them visible and therefore be able to describe them. Yet, the minute we capture the phenomena, it becomes already obsolete, as the experience we capture is in irreversible time (Sato & Valsiner, 2010). How can we come to understand a

phenomenon in duration while the same phenomenon is constantly in motion and defies the notion of stability and permanence?

To understand any experience such as the POW's experience of captivity and post-war experience of struggle and reconciliation over decades in this chapter, it is imperative for the researcher to sensitize himself/herself to different conceptions of time and to consider a methodology that uses an account of transformation of the British veterans. The idea that the cultural model is constantly changing (like a river) resonates with the key assumption of the discursive psychological approach to discourse analysis. Furthermore, the socio-culturally informed “cultural model/script” perspective seems to require a research design that incorporates an examination of changes over time. But what interval of time is appropriate to be able to observe changes as discernable and significant to the researcher? The decision over a research time has been somewhat underexplored by the socio-cultural and cross-cultural psychologists as much as the discursive psychologist tends to see instances of turn-taking and overlooks a longer time frame. Culture might be considered as the ecology in which psychological phenomena such as people's transformative experiences can be studied in terms of a dynamic flow of meanings.

## Appendix

[	Overlap begins
↑↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythm of speech.
Underlining	Signals vocal emphasis
°I know it°	“degree” signs enclose obviously quieter speech
( )	Inaudible, indecipherable utterance, uncertain hearing
(0.4)	Pause (in seconds and/or tenths of a second)
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
((text))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g., gesture, context or intonation, comments by the transcriber

(Continued)

she wa::nted	Prolonged syllable or sound stretch
hhh	audible aspiration or laughter
.hhh	audible inhalation
bu-u-	hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound
>he said<	“greater than” and “lesser than” signs enclose speeded-up talk.
<he said>	the other way round of the sings enclose slower talk.
solid.= We said	latched utterance (no interval between them)
Sto(h)p i(h)t.	Laughter within speech is signaled by h’s in parentheses, audible aspiration within a word

## Note

The transcription convention used in this paper has been developed by Gail JEFFERSON for the purposes of conversation analysis (see ATKINSON & HERITAGE 1984). The exact transcription notation employed in the extracts is listed in the appendix.

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## Social Representations As Anthropology of Culture

Ivana Marková

### Abstract

The Theory of Social Representations studies formation and transformation of meanings, knowledge, beliefs, and actions of complex social phenomena like democracy, human rights, or mental illness, in and through communication and culture. This chapter examines the nature of interdependence between social representing, communication, and culture. It first explains differences between mental, collective, and social representations with respect to culture and language. It then focuses on two meanings of social representing: first, on representations as a theory of social knowledge and second, representations as social and cultural phenomena and as interventions in social practices. Rationality of social representations is based on diverse modalities of knowing and believing shared by groups and communities; it is derived from historically and culturally established common sense. This perspective justifies the claim that social representations should be treated as anthropology of contemporary culture. Finally, the chapter discusses main concepts linking social representations, language, and culture.

**Keywords:** two meanings of social representations; rationality of social representations; polyphasia in knowing, believing and communicating; figures, metaphors and myths; communicative and cultural themata.

In this chapter we explore interdependencies between social representing, language, communication, and culture. In contrast to individual representations, social representations are dynamic phenomena that are embedded in culture and formed and transformed in and through language and communication. The researchers of social representing aim to understand how citizens think, feel about, and act on phenomena that are in the center of societal, group, and individual interests and discourses, be they political, health-related, environmental, or otherwise. Such phenomena pose significant challenges for social psychology generally and social representing specifically. Their understanding cannot be fitted within narrow and static frameworks, which still dominate large parts of social sciences. Instead, the study of social

phenomena requires researchers' and practitioners' creativity in broadening and deepening the scope of their disciplines. This involves a scholarly interest in the ways in which traditions and novel ideas enrich each other, in the ability to understand how the relatively stable and new phenomena struggle for dominance and transform one another and how these tensions and conflicts are reflected in thought and language. The Theory of Social Representations, we shall argue here, provides researchers and practitioners with the means of coping with such challenges and so ensures the credibility of social psychology as a scientific discipline.

Because the concepts of "representation" and "representing" are used in different fields of social sciences and psychology, the study of social representing must dispel confusions between social and

individual representations, the problem of rationality and irrationality, and misunderstandings of meanings of concepts linking social representing with cultural anthropology. Such issues also pose challenges for social psychology as a social scientific discipline: Can we make it theoretically convincing and useful in practical interventions?

## **Representation and Culture**

During its long history in European scholarship, the meaning of representation has undergone considerable changes and diversification. Today, there are three main meanings of representation in human and social sciences and in philosophy. They stem from diverse epistemological traditions, address different levels of analysis, and imply contrasting relations with respect to culture and language.

### ***Mental Representation, Culture, and Language***

The first meaning refers to mental representations. It has been associated, at least since the seventeenth century with philosophers René Descartes and John Locke, with glorification of the cognition of the individual and with mirroring of the objective reality. According to this tradition, the self's cognition is the only source of certain knowledge or representation of reality.

The concept of mental representation as a mirror of objective reality has nothing to do with culture. The proponents of this perspective attribute any mistaken representations to the influence of other people and, indeed, of culture. As Descartes (1637/1985) put it, true knowledge cannot be pursued by an "example and custom." Whereas Descartes did not say much about language, the philosopher John Locke (1690/1975) argued that the perfection of knowledge could be hindered or facilitated by incorrect or correct use of words. Although views of these philosophers were highly original in the context of philosophy and science of the seventeenth century, they have become a hindrance in social sciences of the twenty-first century. Their variations with respect to representations, culture, and language still play a significant role in contemporary cognitive sciences and in philosophical traditions based on foundational epistemology (for criticism of foundational epistemology, see Rorty, 1980; Taylor, 1995). Reflecting on views of foundational philosophy, the anthropologist Gellner (1998, p. 3) characterizes them by saying: "We discover truth alone, we err in groups." In his

influential book *Reason and Culture*, Gellner (1992) claims that human reason is innate and universal and that it exists independently of culture. On the one hand, it can be argued that this idea expresses an essential presupposition that all humans have the same potential for rationality and for the development of intelligence and so that it mitigates racism. Gellner insists that culture and common sense knowledge hinders this universal human potential: "reason is latent in us all," but "most cultures fail to promote it" (Gellner, 1992, p. 53). On the other hand, we shall see later, to ignore culture in the growth of human intelligence leads to a paradox: any human individual always belongs to one culture or other, and it remains questionable what it could possibly mean to claim that reason can be explored independently of culture or that culture fails to promote reason.

### ***Collective Representation, Culture, and Language***

A different meaning of representation was held by the sociologist Emile Durkheim who, despite remaining philosophically within the framework of Descartes and Kant, dramatically altered the concept of representation. First, Durkheim (1898) sharply distinguished between individual and collective representations. Individual representations are of physiological and neurological nature and do not have much to do with knowledge. In contrast, collective representations do not originate in single minds but arise directly from social structures. They are generated in social life and in social groups, institutions, and cultures. For Durkheim, representing referred to various forms of thinking—whether scientific, religious, social, or ideological—rather than to specifically defined objects. Such meaning was fully in agreement with the French use of the word representation in arts, literature, and daily discourse as well as in social sciences.

Collective representations are social facts, and as such, they form the basis of all understanding, knowledge, and logic. Durkheim's ambition was to develop the idea of collective representations as a theory of sociological knowledge. Being social facts, collective representations impose an irresistible pressure on individuals who yield to their coercion, internalize them, and so perpetuate specific forms of thinking, feeling and acting. For something to be knowledge, it must be stable. Durkheim held the position that representations change very slowly during the historical journey of mankind from

religion to science and from less to more adequate representations.

In Durkheim's time, social and cultural phenomena were understood as intertwined and Durkheim's concept of collective representations formed an interface between culture and society; he used the term social both for social and cultural systems. Representations included religion, normative constraints of society, moral orders, social solidarity, as well as systems of beliefs and knowledge. Being social facts, collective representations are external to individuals who acquire them through internalization. Language, too, is a social fact. It circulates in society, forms the individual's social environment, and imposes itself on the individual. When the individual acquires language, he/she adopts the whole system of social thoughts, their classifications, and evaluations. Words fix ideas and transmit them from generation to generation. Therefore, language is a social thing (Durkheim, 1912/2001; Marková, 2003/2005).

### ***Social Representations, Culture, and Language***

Having considered relations between mental and collective representations with respect to culture and language, in the rest of this chapter we turn to social representations.

Building on the ideas of Durkheim and Piaget, Serge Moscovici has proposed an original Theory of Social Representations and developed it, both conceptually and empirically, in *La Psychanalyse: Son Image et Son Public* (Moscovici, 1961/76). This book was published in English as *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and Its Public* (2008). This classic explores transformations of professional and scientific knowledge of psychoanalysis into everyday thinking and discourse of various social groups, and the mass media reporting, in a specific socio-political culture in the late 1950s in France. But we need to make a general point: it would be a mistake to understand the transformation of professional and scientific knowledge into everyday thinking as a naïve form of thinking and developing simplified lay theories. Instead, these transformations into common sense thinking and knowledge are accomplished and enriched through different means of communication and images; they involve arguments based on trust and distrust of others, collective memories, conscious and unconscious beliefs, myths and metaphors, fears and hopes. Following the publication of *La Psychanalyse*, social representing has been studied

in various social, political, health-related, and other kinds of phenomena preoccupying the minds and discourses of general public (for a comprehensive review, see Wagner & Hayes, 2005).

### **THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF SOCIAL REPRESENTING**

Moscovici's social representations, in contrast to Durkheim's collective representations, are dynamic: they arise and are maintained and transformed through interaction and different forms of communication between the established social structures—for example, traditions, on the one hand, and the individuals' and groups' mental and social activities and social practices on the other. From the inception of the theory, language and communication have been vital features of representing, and this is already expressed in *La Psychanalyse*. As Moscovici explains, a representation is always directed at others: it speaks through pointing something to someone; it communicates through mediating meanings and symbols to someone. Representing and communicating is jointly generated by human subjects and groups that have different histories and experience. Their interaction does not follow the Durkheimian path of the progress from less adequate (e.g., religious representations) to more adequate (e.g., scientific representations). Arising in traditions, social experience, and communication, social representations are discontinuous; emotions, contents of beliefs, and images are sensitive to socio-cultural changes and to tensions and preferences of the *Zeitgeist*.

In contrast to collective representations that refer to various ideas and forms of thinking, social representations refer to specific objects or specific social phenomena. For example, the way citizens think, feel, and act (or represent) democracy depends on their historical and cultural experience as well as on their knowledge of, beliefs, and images about contemporary socio-political circumstances as well as of their expectations of the future. What is important to emphasize, however, is that it is not the object that is social. On the contrary, social representations arise from the fact that objects or phenomena are socially shared (Moscovici, 1988; Wagner, 1998; Wagner et al., 1999).

Unlike Durkheim's time, contemporary meanings of the notions "social" and "cultural" are not synonyms, although the boundaries between them are not always clear. The notion social ranges from usages in social sciences and their subdisciplines (e.g.,

economics, sociology, social psychology, politics, etc.) to professional fields like social security, health services, social work and social practices, among many others. Numerous attempts and failures to define culture as an entity point to inherent difficulties of this notion, and these difficulties also transpose themselves with respect to their relations to social representations (Duveen, 2007). These problems are raised by Jodelet (2002) in her article, "Social Representations in the Field of Culture." The author draws attention to the changing relations between psychology, anthropology, and culture in the course of the last two centuries, arising both from diversifications within human and social sciences and from the more recent cognitive revolution, among other factors (*see also* Valsiner, 2003).

During the five decades after the publication of *La Psychanalyse*, the explorations of social representations have become widely differentiated. A large volume of research has been carried out in different social and cultural conditions. Individual researchers have subscribed to divergent underlying epistemologies, and numerous studies have been performed on different topics, contents, and structures. As a result, some researchers (e.g., Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner & Hayes, 2005; Palmonari & Emiliani, 2009) speak about social representational approaches—or schools of social representations—rather than about a single theory. For example, these authors refer to the Aix-en-Provence school based on structuralistic approach that emphasizes central nucleus and periphery of representations (e.g., Abric, 1994a, 2001; Flament, 1994a, 1994b; Guimelli, 1994), whereas the Genevean school of Doise specifies organizing principles of social representations (Doise, 1985, 1986). Jodelet's approach is anthropological and cultural (e.g., Jodelet, 1989/1991, 2002, 2006a, 2008); Wagner, Duveen, and their collaborators (Wagner et al., 1999, 2000; Duveen, 2007) bring to attention the role of social construction and discourse; and Valsiner draws on the role of semiotic mediation and social experience (e.g., Valsiner, 2003). In addition, one can hardly discuss social representations and culture without foregrounding language, communication, and, more specifically, dialogicality as a major feature of the relation between social representations and culture (Marková, 2003/2005; Valsiner, 2003).

Within these diversities in focus, we can nevertheless distinguish between two fundamental meanings of the concept of social representations that underlie all approaches (Jodelet, 1989/1991;

Duveen, 2002; Marková, 2003/2003). First, the Theory of Social Representations is a theory of social knowledge. As such, it establishes networks of concepts and figurative schemes that are generated in and through tradition, common sense, daily knowledge, and communication and that are shared by particular groups and communities. The theory of social knowledge enables the researcher to define research problems. Second, social representations or social representing refers to concrete social phenomena and to forms of apprehending and creating social realities in and through communication, experience, social practices, and interventions (Jodelet, 2006a; in press) and semiotic mediation (Valsiner, 2003). This also enables the researcher to understand problems posed by the theory and to attempt their answers. Let us consider these two meanings in some detail.

#### **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AS A THEORY OF SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE**

There is a fundamental difference between what is considered by knowledge in cognitive sciences and in the Theory of Social Representations. In the former, building blocks of epistemologies are knowledge and justified beliefs arising from the cognition of the individual. In parallel with this, in social sciences, epistemologies are often considered as paths from beliefs to knowledge, implying a gradual progress in intellectual development (for a historical account of these ideas since ancient times, *see* Lovejoy, 1936). Such was the position, for example, of Jean Piaget whose epistemology focused on transformations of less adequate patterns of thought to more adequate ones. In his studies of moral development, Piaget (1932) conceptualized this path as a gradual transformation of beliefs into knowledge or as a transformation of the morality of constraint to the morality of cooperation. Asymmetric relations—say, between a child and an adult—imply constraint and, therefore, only the possibility of belief or compliance resulting from the authority of the source. In contrast, symmetric relations in terms of social status and influence between individuals allow for co-operation and, therefore, for the mutual construction of knowledge (Duveen, 2002). As we have already seen, Durkheim's ideas concerning the transformation of less adequate to more adequate collective representations throughout human history take a similar path. The Piagetian and Durkheimian way of progress in the intellectual development relies on classical—that is, the Kantian form of—rationality.

This means that the action of reason and of intellect excludes partly or totally those actions based on motives, desires, or emotions—that is, on irrational activities (Kant, 1788/1873). The Piagetian rationality (1970), like the Kantian rationality, is universal. All children pass through the stages of operational development, and through these stages they acquire, step by step, higher forms of intelligence.

Although informed and inspired by Durkheim and Piaget, Moscovici takes a different route:

The proper domain of our discipline is the study of cultural processes which are responsible for the organization of knowledge in a society . . . In parallel more attention should be paid to language which has not until now been thought of as an area of study closely related to social psychology.

(Moscovici, 1972/2000, pp. 55–56)

But how can one link, epistemologically, culture, language, and knowledge, in and through social representations?

#### *From Taxonomic Psychology of the Ego-Object to Representing Through the Ego–Alter–Object*

Moscovici's (1970, 1972/2000) analysis and criticism of what he called a "taxonomic" social psychology is instructive. It will lead us to overcoming problems of taxonomic psychology and to understanding the fundamentally important link between culture, language and knowledge. The study of the relation between the Ego and the Object in social psychology refers to no more than classification—or taxonomies—of stimuli or variables. For example, in taxonomic social psychology that is undertaken in numerous laboratory experiments, the Ego is treated (or classified) as undifferentiated and undefined; it is a subject without culture. The aim of such experiments is to discover how social stimuli affect classes of variables like perception, attitudes, judgment, and so on. But humans live in societies and are differentiated from one another in many ways; they live in cultures and they communicate. Therefore, "others" are not "other subjects" with whom humans compare themselves—for example, as in Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory—in order to reduce uncertainty with respect to what is right and wrong, or good or bad; neither are they subjects whose presence facilitates the Ego's activities, as in Zajonc's (1965) social facilitation theory. Instead, the Ego and the Alter communicate and jointly generate knowledge and social representations. Therefore, we must substitute the dyad

Ego–Object, in which the Ego is taxonomically undifferentiated, by the triad Ego–Alter–Object. Once we introduce the Ego–Alter, we are immediately in the realm of language, communication, and culture. The Ego–Alter are not undifferentiated and undetermined subjects; they interact, communicate, and speak. As it is already clear in *La Psychanalyse*, representing takes place in communication. If knowledge is generated neither by the Ego nor by the Alter alone, but jointly by the Ego–Alter, then the minimum unit in the formation of knowledge cannot be expressed as a relation between the Ego–Object but as a triadic relation, the Ego–Alter–Object (Moscovici, 1970, 1972/2000, 1984; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Marková, 2003/2005; Jesuino, 2009). But who is it that stands behind these abstract notions, the "Ego" and the "Alter?" Although in this generalized model the "Ego–Alter" could mean an interaction between any kind of the self and other(s), in concrete and contextualized dialogical situations, there is always the specific Ego and the specific Alter (or the self–other[s])—for example, "I–you," "minority–majority," "I–group," "group–another group," "I–culture," and so on. Indeed, these specific Ego and Alter are embedded in other dyadic Ego–Alter interactions. For example, a mother–child interaction (Ego–Alter) takes place in a specific culture; this means that we can conceptualize this mother–child dyad as the Ego within a particular culture (Alter), or that this same dyad can be conceived as the Ego within a specific social group (Alter), and so on. Or a conversation between two individuals is not just an exchange of words between I and you that takes place in a specific here-and-now, but it has its past, present, and future. Moreover, parents, leaders of political groups, friends, the "generalized other," and so forth, speak through the mouth of each conversational partner. All these social and language-based interdependencies make the dyadic relations between the Ego–Alter dynamic, with implicit and explicit meanings affecting their discourses and contributing to transformation of representations in all dialogical participants. They all contribute to different dialogical perspectives and create tensions among them.

Language and communication as a point of departure in epistemology of social representations has yet another implication: to communicate means to take diverse routes, leading once to intersubjective understanding between individuals or between groups or cultures, once to conflict; to negotiation, to compromise, or to a firm self-positioning.

Therefore, communication does not necessarily lead to a better understanding and “true knowledge.” In contrast to the ascent theory of knowledge toward science and true knowledge that was adopted by Durkheim and Piaget, the Theory of Social Representations does not presuppose progress toward higher forms of knowledge or toward more adequate representations. Instead, it presupposes transformation of one kind of knowledge into another one; transformation of different kinds of knowledge is pertinent to specific socio-historical and cultural conditions. This is why the triangularity of the Ego–Alter–Object forms the basis of linking language and communication, culture, and social representation.

#### THE DIALOGICALITY OF THE EGO–ALTER IN MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

We can arrive at the triangularity of the Ego–Alter–Object from a different theoretical perspective, like the dialogicality of the Ego–Alter in Voloshinov’s (1929/1973) and Bakhtin’s (1981) approaches to language and communication. For these scholars of the early part of the twentieth century, alike, social knowledge and social reality is jointly created by the Ego–Alter. In Voloshinov’s and Bakhtin’s work, too, the Ego and Alter dialogically co-constitute one another in a dynamic figure-ground set-up. I am using the term *dialogicality* to characterize the fundamental capacity of the Ego to conceive, create, and communicate about social realities in terms of the Alter. What the human individual has become through the work of the past, and what his/her prospects are for the future, results from dialogicality (Marková, 2003/2005).

To my mind, these two epistemological approaches, the one stemming from Moscovici and the other arising from Bakhtin (1981, 1979/1986), enrich one another and provide potential, in the Theory of Social Representations, for a more focused study of relations between knowing, believing, language, and speech. In both epistemologies, the Ego and the Alter transform one another’s representations in and through dialogical and symbolic interactions. The concept of transformation in both approaches is characterized by tension and by multifaceted and heterogeneous relationships between the Ego and Alter. There can be no single mind without other minds: they dialogically co-constitute one another. Neither for Bakhtin nor for Moscovici can dialogue be neutral. Neutrality can be only artificially imposed but daily speech is

always judgmental, evaluative, and orientated to creating new meanings.

Bakhtin expressed this idea pertinently in his analysis of Dostoyevsky’s novels. Consciousness must be in interaction with another consciousness to achieve its proper existence: “justification cannot be *self*-justification, recognition cannot be *self*-recognition. I receive my name from others, and it exists for others (self-nomination is imposture)” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 287–288).

#### *Social Representations As Phenomena and As Interventions*

The second meaning of social representations refers to the ways in which humans apprehend, interact with, and create their social reality. As they attempt to orientate themselves and create meanings of events in their lives, humans form representations of complex social phenomena that are in the center of social life and social disputes, whether they are political, ecological, or health- or community-related. Resources for generating social representations are phenomena that disrupt routines, turn them upside down, and call for action. Specifically, firm or irresistible beliefs (*see below*) concerning, say, democracy, management of banks, social responsibility, mental illness, distrust, freedom of speech, and so forth, are sources of action, and they instigate social change. Complex phenomena obtain their specific and multileveled meanings in interdependence with culture and in relation to other representations within that culture and community. For example, the representation of freedom of speech would be related to other social representations and actions within that particular culture, like political protests against terrorism, expressions of abuse of the dominant political Party, censorship of any dissent, of the media, and the like. Thus, freedom of speech would have different meanings in relation to different semiotic networks and social phenomena. Two points should be mentioned as fundamental with respect to culture: social representations are phenomena in the making and representing can take part of action and intervention.

#### SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ARE PHENOMENA IN THE MAKING

In emphasizing relationships between social representations and communication, Moscovici (Moscovici & Marková, 1998, pp. 393–394) draws attention to viewing them “in the making, not as

already made.” This characteristic is essential both historically and developmentally. Social representations are not quiet things (Howarth, 2006); being phenomena in the making, social representations are formed and transformed in and through asymmetries, conflict, discontinuities, and tension. Representing, like communication, requires commitment. For example, one cannot study influence and innovation processes between majorities and minorities by removing tension and engagement: “Whether in conversation or in influence processes, one deals with change, with negotiation between two opposing partners—one cannot exist without the other” (Moscovici & Marková, 1998, p. 394).

Interdependencies between communication and different social groups can be illustrated by Duveen’s analysis of communication systems in Moscovici’s (1961/1976) *La Psychanalyse: Son Image et Son Public*. Specifically, Duveen (2008) analyzes Moscovici’s thoughts about social groups in relation to different communicative systems through content analysis of the French press. Focusing on different types of social groups in relation to the three genres of communication—that is, diffusion, propagation, and propaganda—Duveen identifies specific forms of affiliation corresponding to each communicative genre and consequently also to different representations of the members of the in-group and the out-group in each instance. He characterizes diffusion as the voluntary association of the members of in-group who possess a skeptical intelligence, whereas the out-group embraces forms of dogmatism. Duveen describes this kind of group in terms of sympathy. Propagation, on the other hand, refers to groups in which a central authority sets limits to creativity or intellectual curiosity. The out-group does not share the belief in the legitimacy of such authority or the relevant ideology. Duveen calls this kind of group a communion. Finally, propaganda is used by groups whose political commitment and organization defines the way of conduct of in-group. In contrast, the out-group is either committed to a different kind of ideology or simply does not share the ideology of the in-group. Duveen characterizes such group in terms of solidarity. His analysis shows that commitment to a particular kind of ideology elicits a particular kind of communicative genre. It illustrates that communicative genres of groups are part of their particular cultures and that, therefore, representing, like communication, is never a neutral exchange of information. Moreover, if we attempted to remove tension from communication, “it would

become a kind of dead psychology” (Moscovici & Marková, 1998, p. 394).

Thus we arrive at an important feature of representations as phenomena in the making: Social representations are structured semiotic mediators that are constantly in the process of innovation, created in and through conflict and tension (Valsiner, 2003). In experiencing tension, humans attempt to construct a predictable world out of great diversity and regulate their conduct. Referring to Moscovici’s back-and-forth movement between experiencing and representing Valsiner (2003, p. 73) concludes: “representing is needed for experiencing, while experiencing leads to new forms of representing.”

#### REPRESENTING AS ACTION AND INTERVENTION

Another feature of representing, Valsiner (2003) maintains, is its implication for action and social change, or its function as intervention. Jodelet (in press) characterizes intervention as a practice involved in an “explicit and intentional project of a deliberate act of change.” Intervention encourages transformation of knowledge and behavior of individuals and groups toward better standards of living. Jodelet specifies three forms of activities interconnecting social representations and intervention: first, social representations can modify thinking of individuals or groups about a practical issue; second, they can transform practices, and these, in turn, can lead to transformation of representations; and finally, intervention of social representations is intentionally directed at producing changes in activities of individuals and groups concerned.

The relation between intervention practices and social representations is itself an object of research practice (Abric, 1994b), in particular in health research (Jodelet, 2006a; Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Morin, 2004) or in education (Garnier & Rouquette, 2000). For example, intervention should allow for exchanges between traditional and new forms of knowledge (Quintanilla, Herrera, & Veloz, 2005), the preservation of culture, and its negotiation with emerging alternatives in society (Jodelet, 2006b). Doise (2002) regards social representations of human rights as interventions into social relations, whether these concern relations between individuals and groups, or individuals and institutions. Human rights must be clearly defined precisely because they are interventions of one kind or other.



## CULTURE AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ARE RELATIONAL PHENOMENA

Referring to two ways of studying social representations (which basically correspond to the two main meanings as discussed in this section), Jodelet (1989/91) emphasizes that when we focus on positions held by individuals and groups with respect to objects, representations are treated as structured fields. By “structured fields,” she means relations between contents contributed by subjects (or the Ego and Alter) and principles that organize contents, like cultural schemata, norms, and so forth. This perspective draws attention, again, to the relation between social representations and culture. I suggest that this does not mean to consider a social representation on the one hand, and culture as its context on the other hand, and to ask how they are related. Equally, it would be wrong to consider culture as a container within which one can identify a set of specific social representations.

Jodelet’s concept of a structured field, I suggest, can be viewed as something like the concept of an electromagnetic field in physics of relativity. Electromagnetic field is a totality of forces that exists “between the two charges and not the charges themselves, which is essential for an understanding of their action” (Einstein & Infeld, 1938/1961, p. 151). Thus “force between particles,” rather than “behavior of single entities” defines the field. Equally, we cannot understand the specificity of the Theory of Social Representations without taking on the concept of the force of interaction that binds elements to one another as complements, rather than as behavior of single entities (individuals, groups) that come to interact with one another. Taking Jodelet’s concept of the structured field, individuals and groups are not undifferentiated subjects as in the taxonomic psychology (*see above*), but their meanings are defined in and through concrete society or culture. Their internal interaction (in contrast to external interaction; e.g., in the analysis of variance) constitutes a new reality: the interacting components define one another as complements, whether this involves institutions vis-à-vis environment, institutions vis-à-vis groups, one group vis-à-vis another group, or social representation vis-à-vis culture (*see above*, the Ego–Alter). Like an electromagnetic field, the structured field of social representations is dynamic. It is open to participants’ new experiences and to social change.

There is yet another implication of the concept of structured field. Just like when speakers communicate, they select different ways of expression with respect to one another depending on their relations, status, experience, and otherwise, so when they represent a phenomenon they are in an intimate complementary relation with culture. In other words, it is not the case that the same culture would be in relation with a set of different social representations. Such a position would be something like Piaget’s mountain seen from different perspectives. In this case, the mountain remains the same, but the child’s position is different and through the growth of intellectual development, the child learns to understand this. In contrast, the relation between social representation and culture is unique. Each social with culture in a specific manner; it selects different aspects of that culture because not all aspects are relevant in the same way for each social representation. Consequently, the forces of interaction between them imply that for each representation we have a slightly different meaning of culture. If we return to communication between groups and their communicative genres, propaganda and propagation view different aspects of culture. The former places emphasis on authoritarian aspects of the culture, whereas the latter focuses on more democratic features.

We need to view forces as both constraining and stimulating. In Moscovici’s words, “society is an institution which inhibits what it stimulates. It both tempers and excites . . . increases or reduces the chances . . . and invents prohibitions together with the means of transgressing them” (Moscovici 1976, p. 149).

### **Social Representations As Anthropology of Contemporary Culture: The Case of Rationality**

Throughout his career, Serge Moscovici (e.g., 1987, 1993a, 1988/93; Moscovici & Marková, 1998, 2006) has persistently insisted that the Theory of Social Representations is—or should be treated—as anthropology of contemporary culture. Cultural anthropologists are concerned with the totality of life of social groups under study—that is, with beliefs and knowledge, myths, images, as well as with social practices in daily living. To understand these phenomena, anthropologists study them in relation to one another, like meaningful wholes, rather than as independent elements that, if need be, could either be joined together or disjoined. In the previous

section, I touched several times on the problem of rationality, culture, and social representations. This issue is significant in contemporary social sciences, and it raises specific questions in relation to social representing; therefore, in this section, I turn attention to this issue in some detail.

### ***Rationality and Irrationality in Social Sciences***

Whatever we can say about rationality and irrationality of, and within, social sciences, it is necessary to place this issue in the context of natural sciences. Since the end of the seventeenth century, natural sciences have been based on “knowledge which eliminates mystery. In contrast to Greek science it does not end in wonder but in expansion of wonder,” as says Michael Foster (1957, p. 53) in his treatise of “Myth and Philosophy.” Since the seventeenth century, natural sciences have prided themselves on being rational disciplines.

In contrast, social sciences started their scientific career as irrational disciplines. As Moscovici (1988/1993) reminds, they originated in the study of phenomena like nationalism, religion, myth, and beliefs. For example, Weber and Durkheim commenced from religion, Simmel from the relativity of values, and Marx from a kind of the Hegelian concept of historical forces. Vico, Herder, Hamann, and Humboldt were developing ideas of relativism and cultures. Other social scientists, like Le Bon, Ortega y Gasset, or McDougall, preoccupied themselves with the study of collectives and crowds in which rational individuals turned themselves into irrational beings.

Since the nineteenth century, the ideas of relativity, variability, and the evolution of species have been drawing attention to the importance of perspective-taking in the growth of knowledge. Yet perspective-taking has influenced natural sciences and social sciences differently. Natural sciences, despite the influence of theories of evolution and relativity, defined these scientific discoveries in rationalistic manner and so remained rational disciplines; in social sciences, however, we can observe a split between rationalistic and less rationalistic (or non-rationalistic) approaches.

In social sciences—specifically in anthropology and social psychology—the meaning of rationality has become a subject of keen interest. This has led to the search for universals that apply to all humans and to all cultures. Consequently, this has raised questions about the sources of relativism and

irrational beliefs. Rationality as opposed to relativism even forms titles of classic volumes like those by Wilson (1970; *Rationality*) and by Hollis and Lukes (1982; *Rationality and Relativism*). The contributors to the latter volume suggest that the problem of understanding relativism and irrational beliefs arises from the fact that different cultures, languages, and the minds of others can be understood only within their own idiosyncratic socio-historical situations, rather than universally. Can we, therefore, identify anything transcultural among humans? Does culture challenge “the very idea of a single world” (*ibid*, p. 1)? The dichotomy between the presupposition of universal rationality and questions concerning the sources of irrational beliefs as well as their rich and extensive presence in different cultures have led to the search for different forms of relativism. For example, researchers have been concerned with weak and strong forms of relativism, types of representational beliefs (convictions, persuasion, opinions), and different kinds of translation, interpretation, and explanation of beliefs.

Yet such questions can hardly be settled by academic discourses about rationality and relativism. Cultures are no longer isolated in their geographical ghettos. Therefore, Harris (2009) argues that it would be less misleading to abandon the notion of a singular rationality and speak, instead, about rationalities in the pluralistic sense. The contemporary world of societies is opened to other cultures and it set the stage for permanent situations of uncertainty moving cultures in different directions. In this situation, reason is not a private domain of the individual but it must be negotiated (Rosa & Valsiner, 2007, p. 697). A narrow rationality of the individual defined in formal terms cannot meet the world of ambiguities of the contemporary world, and it transcends not only individual reason but also a particular cultural reason. In these circumstances, judgments of what is right and wrong and what is and is not ethical guide any kinds of preferences, control the individual and social choices, and confront different reasons for choosing something rather than something else. In these confrontations, “Reason then turns into *Rationality*” (*ibid*, p. 697), giving rise to *Ethics* and to *Objectivity* that emerges in and through transformations of rules and new norms. As Rosa and Valsiner (*ibid*, p. 698) argue, “Rationality, Ethics and Objectivity” (all with capital letters) cannot be disentangled from one another. It is in this sense that we shall view rationality and social representations.

## *Reason and Cultures*

The interdependence between culture, rationality, and social representations is perhaps most clearly expressed in Moscovici's (1993a) lecture on *Razón y Culturas* (Reason and Cultures). One could say that the red thread through this lecture is an ethical concern of culture and social representations. Moscovici notes that the Cartesian approach discarding example and custom has also led to discarding culture, whether religious or profane, and substituted it by a narrow concept of rationality. However, to rationalize in this narrow way, Moscovici argues, means to ignore moral and ethical values of traditions in human histories and cultures as well as their symbolic values. He raises the question as to whether this narrow approach means that social psychology has nothing to say about arts or literature or whether this means that humans are satisfied with perceiving others, making judgments about objects, or looking for motivations of their conduct. Moscovici notes that humans have deep experiences in and through living in their cultures; they read novels, appreciate arts, listen to music, and experiment with ethical and moral values. These issues that have been neglected by social psychology are brought back to life by the Theory of Social Representations. Moscovici draws on three fundamental concepts: social representations, anthropology, and culture.

The lecture on *Razón y culturas* was written at a time when it became clear that the cognitive revolution failed to cope with complex human and social phenomena. In the late years of the twentieth century, cultural psychology gained importance because it was thought that it would solve questions of economic, educational, and political psychology as well as of child development and transformations of mental faculties in adulthood, migration, and nationalism, among others. Cultural psychology was seen as a plausible alternative to individualistic and mechanistic approaches (e.g., Bruner, 1985; Jodelet, 2002; Valsiner, 1987; 1989, 1998; Valsiner & Lawrence, 1996) in focusing on intentionality, indigenous psychologies, language and communication, and on semiotic and symbolic practices. But, Moscovici points out that even if cognitive revolution were to succeed, these phenomena could be understood only with reference to culture. But instead, as we have seen in the previous section, contemporary social psychology and anthropology are still disputing problems of rationality and the relation between universality and cultural relativism. These problems are not new.

## THREE PARADOXES OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MENTALITY

Moscovici (1993a) identifies three historically established paradoxes with respect to individual and collective mentality; both Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl struggled against them in their particular ways. Therefore, Theory of Social Representations, to fulfill its role as anthropology of contemporary culture, needs to address these paradoxes.

The first paradox concerns individual rationality and collective irrationality. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, for Descartes and Locke, only the individual was rational whereas culture and language were sources of error. Yet no individual starts thinking and talking from nothing like the biblical Adam; each individual lives in a culture and in language. Durkheim acknowledged this paradox, and therefore, for him, all representations were rational beliefs; however, as mankind progressed from religion to science, some became closer to true knowledge than others. Collective representations are socially true, as Durkheim (1912/2001) states in "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life." They are founded in the nature of things and they hold to and express reality. Religions, too, express reality, and therefore, all are true in their own fashion: there are no religions that are false. All religions respond, although in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence, and this is why for Durkheim a collective representation is a rational belief. In contrast, and as Moscovici (1998a, p. 134) analyzes this question, Lévy-Bruhl showed that members of different cultures did not view rationality of social representations in the same way. He has studied throughout his life the ways of thinking of primitive cultures and tried to understand why it was not possible to explain one form of thought by another one.

The second paradox to which Moscovici refers concerns the presupposition of "the mental unity of mankind" that contradicts with the observation that local cultures are very diverse. This paradox leads to the question as to whether it is possible to find any commonalities within these diversities. It is this question that is being vehemently discussed by social scientists and particularly by social psychologists and anthropologists, as we indicated above.

The difficulty of resolving this paradox might be magnified by ancient beliefs that were clearly expressed in Darwin's assumption that all species could be placed on an upward continuum and that humans differed from animals in degree but not in kind (Lovejoy, 1936; Ingold, 2004). As Ingold

explains, for Darwin, “the evolution of species *in* nature was also an evolution *out of it*” (Ingold, 2004, p. 210, his emphasis) as the mind progressively liberated itself “from promptings of innate disposition.” This means that ancestors of humans became humans gradually, in stages, rising from primitive savages to humans, developing (in degrees) reason and language. But at what point does an animal become a human?

If no organic being excepting man had possessed any mental power, or if his powers had been of a wholly different nature from those of the lower animals, then we should never have been able to convince ourselves that our high faculties had been gradually developed. But it can be shown that there is no fundamental difference of this kind . . . yet this interval is filled up by numberless gradations . . . Differences of this kind between the highest men of the highest races and the lowest savages, are connected by the finest gradations. (Darwin, 1859/1874, p. 157)

Darwin stated that in *The Origin of Species* he aimed to show this continuous development of species toward perfection (compare this with Durkheim’s and Piaget’s ideas toward progress). Thus the idea of gradual perfection might have led to an implicit assumption that cultures could be at different stages of their development, and it seems that this assumption is implicit in the ideas of rationalists and relativists that we discussed above.

The third paradox concerns the difficulty of intergroup or intercultural communication. Moscovici notes that groups or cultures in general believe that others understand their point of view but, in fact, others are not always capable of understanding others. Groups are often closed to the perspective of other groups, and communication between groups is absent even if groups occupy the same public space. This incommunicability affirms mutual incompatibility between different social representations and diverse forms of communication, and it characterizes our present society, which consists of numerous groups with noticeable antagonistic representations. For example, Europeans can hardly understand exotic beliefs of primitive assumptions. Moscovici maintains that a question like, “What objects constitute the world around us?” cannot be answered otherwise than by specifying the framework of a particular representation to which it is pertinent. Loyalty to certain values makes groups insensitive to values of others (Geertz, 2000, p. 70). The third paradox results in incompatible implicit

or explicit ethnocentric beliefs. These beliefs, on the one hand, are based on assumptions of superiority of the own group, and at the same time, groups propagate multiculturalism.

How does the Theory of Social Representations respond to these three paradoxes? The first paradox, arising from treating the individual and group as independent entities is being resolved by treating the Ego–Alter as interdependent. The second paradox, arising from the narrow treatment of rationality, is substituted by fiduciary rationality (see below). The third paradox can be surmounted by the reflection of the group on the existing incommunicability and attempting to improve communication. Yet overcoming this paradox remains one of the challenges for social representing. In conclusion, all paradoxes arise from the difficulty to overcome the traditional epistemology based on reasoning capacities of the individual, the narrow concept of rationality, and the treatment of groups as independent categories.

### ***Fiduciary Rationality***

Interdependence between the social representation and culture of a group also makes the communication within a group preeminent above the communication with outsiders. I suggest that to understand the nature of this preeminence, we need to return to the epistemic question of rationality in the triad Ego–Alter–Object. The Ego–Alter dialogical relation within a group comes from the ethics of common sense pertaining to social representations of that group. Social representations captured by common sense within a group, Moscovici argues,

are analogous to paradigms, which, contrary to scientific paradigms, are made partly of beliefs based on trust and partly of elements of knowledge based on truth. In as much as they contain beliefs, validating them appears a long, uncertain process, since they can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed.

(Moscovici & Marková, 2000, p. 253)

Within the epistemological triad of Ego–Alter–Object, relations between these components can take on different forms and strengths. For example, if the Ego searches for knowledge of this or that, he/she might pursue the route of own discovery and autonomous thought, focusing, within this triangularity, more strongly on the Object than on the Alter. In this case, the Ego would examine, in a step-by-step strategy, dispassionately and systematically, the object of knowledge. Dispassionate knowledge

can be expanded by new learning, or it can be suspended, resisted, or ignored. Moscovici (1993b) calls such kinds of knowledge (or beliefs) resistible.

For example, if the knower does not care about certain facts like “The Earth is not flat,” or “AIDS is caused by a virus,” then he or she might ignore, not think about, or suspend such facts and substitute them by others that appear more convincing. In a way, in such cases we can say that we possess beliefs just like other kinds of possession; if we do not need them any longer, then we can dispose of them.

Another kind of relation within the triangularity of the Ego–Alter–Object could be based on a strong relation between the Ego and Alter, whereas the relation between the Ego and Object would be treated as secondary. In this case, knowledge/beliefs can range from those that Moscovici calls irresistible to those that would function as constraints—be it compliance, conformity, or obeisance. Let us consider the latter, irresistible beliefs. Such beliefs can hardly be changed through evidence to their contrary, by facts, or by persuasion. Irresistible beliefs can lead to self-sacrifice and other-sacrifice of individuals and groups, rather than to their change. Such strong beliefs within a group are often based on trust and trustworthiness of the other. Irresistible beliefs “are like perceptual illusions: we are not a liberty to dismiss them, to have them or correct them if need be. Like many ideas, memories, or rituals, they take possession of us and are . . . independent of our reasoning” (Moscovici, 1993b, p. 50).

The rationality of these forms of relations in the epistemological triad is based not only on knowledge and justified beliefs but on the totality of human experience embedded in, and accumulated through, history and culture. It includes the struggle for social recognition, desires and their symbolic transformations, ethics and morality, myths and metaphors, judgments and evaluations of the self/other relations, and objects of knowledge. It is the epistemology of living experience and of daily thinking rooted in common sense, which is being transformed into new social representations when conditions for them are obtained.

In his analysis of *Razón y culturas*, Moscovici (1993a) argues that what makes one group distinguishable from another one is “the act of privileging a type of representation and as a result, a form of communication” with other members of that group. He calls this kind of group loyalty the *fiduciary rationality*. As I understand it, fiduciary rationality is a form of dependency among group members

that arise from within, from trust and loyalty, rather than from an outside pressure. Fiduciary rationality functions like irresistible beliefs. It is rooted within the group and it binds groups together. Rationality of the common sense, too, is based on fiduciary rationality.

We need to view social representations of various dependencies within a group—for example, rules and norms of acting and constraints of group members and solidarity and sympathy as established in and through tradition, history, and culture. They are present already in informal organizations that develop from within the group, before any more formal organization is formed. Similarly, communication is based on an inner contract among the in-group members. A contract is an ethical requirement for communication (Rommetveit, 1974), and we can say with Mikhail Bakhtin that there is no *alibi* for communication.

### **Concepts Relating Social Representations, Language, and Culture in Empirical Research**

The term culture permeates a great deal of empirical research on social representations—particularly the research that aims to separate itself from narrow rationalistic and cognitive perspectives. This research examines diverse topics ranging from political, ideological, and historical issues to mental health, illness, social services, and child development, among others. As one would expect, in many studies the terms social representations and culture are rather nonspecific and could be easily replaced by other terms like opinions, attitudes, stereotypes, or prejudice in the case of the former, and context, situation, or community in the case of the latter. In view of this, in this section I focus only on those studies that theoretically enrich this growing field addressing relations among culture, language and communication, and social representations. To do this, I focus on three fundamental concepts of the Theory of Social Representations that make such contributions—specifically on cognitive polyphasia; figures and metaphors; and communicative and cultural themata. These concepts, we shall see, are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive, and I can do no more than to draw attention to them.

### ***Cognitive Polyphasia and Heterogeneity in Thinking and Dialogue***

One of the basic features of the Theory of Social Representations from the beginning has been the

focus on dynamic co-existence of distinct modalities of thinking and communication in common sense knowledge (Moscovici, 2008). These distinct and rich modalities of thinking and communicating co-exist in communicative actions, contribute to viewing the issue in question from different perspectives, and so enable formulation of diverse arguments. They originate from knowledge and beliefs shared by social groups, and they have been established through their cultural and historical experiences. Such communication-centered thinking is directional and controversial, although it checks and validates its normative coherence (Moscovici, 2008, p. 168). It forces humans to take up their own positions in social situations and defend them; it is the thinking that judges, evaluates, criticizes, and makes proposals for action. Moscovici coined these diverse modalities of thinking and communicating as *cognitive polyphasia*.

It is not that humans change their ways of thinking according to their mood, temporary preferences, or personality characteristics. The concept of cognitive polyphasia is inherently dialogical. The divergent modalities of thinking are articulated as specific Ego–Alter communications. This point is important: We relate to others dialogically, which means that we express our thoughts as it is specifically pertinent with respect to this or that Alter. Whereas a Cartesian scholar would expect that the thought of the individual should be rigorous and should follow an identical logical route from one moment to the next, in the Ego–Alter dialogical communication, different cognitive and emotional goals employ heterogeneous modes of thinking. To think means to pursue diverse mental routes. These may range from scientific to religious, from literal meanings to metaphoric interpretations, from jokes to formal expressions, and so on. They are suited to and articulated in different contexts of which they are parts. Speakers create links to others' communications, anticipating their responses, reactions, and feelings. Moreover, the speakers' dialogues are also filled with ideas of absent others; in communication, speakers express commitment and loyalties to views of those who are not physically present in dialogue or they object to, reject, or contest opinions of absent "others."

Probably no other work has provided a deeper insight into cognitive polyphasia than Jodelet's (1989/1991) research on social representations of madness. We can see here that cognitive polyphasia dominates different kinds of communication

among villagers, and Jodelet examines in these contexts the production of social representations from communication, different modes of thinking, and knowledge. She shows that cognitive polyphasia emerges from the villagers' necessity of coping with fear of mental illness and enabling villagers to live together with patients. At one level, most villagers do not believe in medical dangers coming from mental patients. They know that mental illness is not contagious and that the lodger with mental illness does not transmit germs or microbes as in the case of tuberculosis. At another level they believe in contamination, but these beliefs remain unspecified because they are difficult to articulate. Beliefs take form of folk-fantasies, superstition, and convictions of a magic power. Jodelet emphasizes the persistence and forms of dual appeal in speech and actions of villagers, ranging from "biological and social, to ancestral, indeed archaic, representations of insanity with their magic contents borrowed from the realms of animism and sorcery" (Jodelet, *ibid*, p. 300). At the same time, villagers pride themselves on living in modern ways, on using advanced technology like fast trains or television, and on being aware of new means of medical treatment. Jodelet raises the question as to how can archaic beliefs retain their power in the face of modern medical treatment. She comments:

The embedding of these beliefs in the language codes which are transmitted by communication and the everyday acts which are transmitted by tradition, both conditions of collective memory, suffice to explain their permanence, not their intensity of character or the veil of secrecy with which they are covered.

(Jodelet, *ibid*, p. 300)

Such diverse meanings and beliefs are usually implicit and hidden in linguistic codes and in meanings of words. One may guess that they have been unconsciously transmitted for generations and that the contradictory forms of knowledge and belief have their specific expressions in particular social situations.

Other researchers have presented many examples of cognitive polyphasia in common sense thinking, and we can find excellent reviews of these studies (for example, *see* Duveen, 2007; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Wagner & Hayes, 2005) showing diverse forms of thinking in different social and cultural settings and among different groups. Numerous studies show that different cultural communities—for example,

in India (Wagner et al., 1999), in Chinese immigrants in the United Kingdom (Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999), or citizens in Turkey (Narter, 2006)—think about health issues both in terms of traditional ways of thinking and modern medicine. Cognitive polyphasia also dominates new and old ways of thinking about environment and science (Castro & Lima, 2001). Psaltis (2011) is concerned with diverse forms of thinking between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, relating them to varying meanings, emotions, distrust, and threat. These forms of thinking about the Cyprus issue express cognitive polyphasia when groups consider solutions to the problem from the point of view of the past, the present, and the future.

Research on cognitive polyphasia directs attention to shifts and changes in societies that experience movement from traditional forms of thinking toward modern forms. Yet it shows that traditional elements of representing, for example, mental illness, are deeply embedded within the communal life and are drawn “into a more *active* form of reflection and change through this process of cultural contact, communication, and exchange” (Duveen, 2007, p. 557, his emphasis).

Wagner and Hayes (2005, p. 235) have argued that the concept of cognitive polyphasia highlights two research areas. Instead of treating language and thought as independent, “representations are social because of their articulation within the context of their genesis and enactment.” The other research area places attention on the processes of change and transformation in representational systems. Just as a contemporary society’s culture is constantly in flux and transformation and rarely in the state of equilibrium, so are the modes of thought and representations within it. Wagner and Hayes observe that cognitive polyphasia emerges primarily when members of groups are coping with new conditions during their lifetime and that transformations in forms of thinking and communicating continuously run between different generations.

### **Figure, Myth, and Metaphor**

From the outset, the Theory of Social Representations included the figurative dimension—or images and metaphors—as features of representing. The term *figure* is preferable to *image* because imaging could be confused with mirroring or with a passive reflection (Moscovici, 2008, p. 20). I wish to emphasize once more that the transformation of one kind of knowledge into another one, including

that from science into common sense, involves creating metaphors, figures, and myths. Scientific discoveries diffuse themselves into common sense not as simplified versions of science; transformation of scientific knowledge into common sense knowledge is accompanied by creating figurative schemes and metaphors. It is well-documented that the science of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has had a profound effect on literature, art, and public imagination (e.g., Beer, 1993). For example, the discovery of X-rays at the end of the nineteenth century has led to artists’ and public’s images of the invisible world and to fantasies and occult ideas. More recently, metaphors of illnesses like cancer, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS in language and thought and their transformations in public representations were captured by Sontag (1978, 1989). Political, economic, and educational changes, too, are accompanied by new images and metaphors. The collapse of the Soviet bloc was marked by creating new symbols in re-emerging states. For example, Baltic States, in designing their new banknotes, chose symbols that represented preferred values of the newly created free nations (Mathias, 2008). Images, Moscovici (2007, p. 9) maintains, speak to the public and accelerate communication. In her chapter on “Crossing Latin America: Two French perspectives on Brasil and Mexico,” Jodelet (2007) shows that since ancient Greece, alterity or others have always played crucial roles in imagination. The discovery of the New World has created, from the beginning, rich forms of imagination of indigenous peoples in Latin America by European intellectuals, arts and literature, as well as social scientists and has contributed significantly to generating social representations filled with imaginary others.

If we turn to the research on figurative schemes, metaphors, and images in social representations, we find that it has considerable methodological implication. To access processes of thinking and communication, questionnaires and scales are substituted by other means such as drawings, analyses of the media images, posters, and by studies of semiotic contents of these.

### **REPRESENTING IN DRAWINGS OF MAPS**

One of the first studies of figurative schemes was the exploration by Milgram and Jodelet (1976) of drawings representing mental maps of Paris. The study showed that subjects were not drawing maps based just on their personal experiences but that they were transmitting images of certain subcultures and

ethnic groups to which they belonged. For example, certain places were drawn only by those belonging to special professions—for example, slaughter houses were drawn by butchers but scarcely by anybody else. Other places, such as the icons of the town like Notre Dame, Place de la Concord, or the Eiffel Tower, were drawn by nearly everybody. We can say that drawings express historical-cultural networks of meanings that are part of subjects' and subgroups' experiences, knowledge, and feelings about the place where they live (Guerrero, 2007). Institutions that societies create are nourished by collective memories, myths, national identities, and imagination (Banchs et al., 2007).

Imagining based on drawings of maps inspired extensive studies in Latin America (Arruda & de Alba, 2007). In her study of maps of the city of Mexico, De Alba (2007) shows that the symbolic construction of the city is an imaginary sphere in which mythical references, mystical beliefs, reveries, and urban legends have no correspondents in the real world. An interesting theoretical issue discussed in Arruda and Ulup's (2007) research of mental maps of Brazil is the presence of blank spaces in the center or center-west region. The authors maintain that void spaces coincide with the colonial occupation of these territories and that drawings sometimes reproduce the ancient images of isolated and dangerous places. The authors observe that although one might consider empty spaces on maps as signs of lack of knowledge, it is more likely that these distant places in the center of Brazil express strangeness from which subjects wish to dissociate. These empty places may also serve as reminders of the past and collective memories of occupation. Thus, emptiness does not always mean nonexistence but a choice or a defense (Arruda, Gonçalves, & Mululo, 2008). In contrast, seaside spaces were filled with images. They were inhabited by Europeans and civilized local people. In addition, the authors found that the participants from northern Brazil represented south as a very different region because of its temperate climate and its population of the European origin.

#### FIGURATIVE SCHEMES IN COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

A considerable amount of research has been carried out to compare figurative schemes and images in different fields like health and illness (e.g., Herzlich, 1973; Joffe, 2003, 2008; Joffe & Haarhof, 2002), biotechnology (e.g., Wagner et al., 2002), the body (Jodelet, 1984), the body and hygiene as culturally

determined (Jodelet, 2005; Wagner & Hayes, 2005), historical and cultural events (e.g., Sen & Wagner, 2005; Wertsch & Batiashvili, 2011). Kalampalikis (2007) analyzes symbolic conflicts embedded in social representations of two interpretations of history that are embedded in the name of Macedonia.

Equally, images and metaphors in social representations have been explored across cultures or in specific groups. In the 1980s, De Rosa (1987) carried out a multimethod research on the social representation of mental illness. In this research, children and adults were asked to draw images in connection with madness; their drawings suggested the presence of ancient images of madness (*see also* Schurmans & de Rosa, 1990).

Visual images in the press, advertisements, and campaigns are used to influence or change social representations of political or health issues (De Rosa, 2001; Joffe, 2008). Intentions of the producers of posters, on the one hand, and images of the public, on the other hand, could be quite divergent. For example, some posters produced on behalf of people with mental disabilities sometimes confirmed, rather than changed, the existing representations (Marková & Farr, 1990). Visual images in the press have been particularly influential in staged photographs capturing public images about genetic engineering as injecting tomatoes with genes that make them grow bigger (Wagner et al., 2002). Wagner and Hayes (2005, p. 181) comment that images of tomatoes injected with genes remind inoculation and injecting foreign materials into bodies known from medicine and chemistry. There is also an associated belief of infection that passes from one organism to another:

Finally, the monstrosity of genetically engineered organisms is related as well. The topic of '*Frankenstein foods*' is not far from these ideas and in fact frequently came up in interviews. Just as tomatoes are good to eat, they are also good to think with. These images and metaphorical projections capture the 'What is it' and the 'How does it work' part of popular imagination about 'genetic engineering.'  
(Wagner & Hayes, 2005, p. 181)

These examples show how the two opposite yet complementary explanations of phenomena in the world of reason and myth, or logos and mythos, mix to generate social representations. Nevertheless, it would not be correct to say that sciences are guided by logos (*see* Moscovici, 1992, on "scientific myths") and common sense by mythical thinking.



A recent volume on *Mythical Thinking and Social Representations* forms a true dialogue between anthropology and the Theory of Social Representations (Paredes & Jodelet, 2009). The contributions to this volume show that mythical thinking does not disappear with scientific progress, technology, and mass education but that it continues to be present in everyday reasoning and that it permeates daily practices. Jodelet (2009, p. 31) observes that there are at least three central aspects that relate social representations and mythical thinking. There is an instrumental aspect of common sense that utilizes certain mythical thinking in the construction of social life. Furthermore, production of common sense re-activates ancient myths with requirements of contemporary cultural identities. Finally, through functional aspect of common sense, the formation of myths facilitates interpretations of events or objects in social life and in social relations.

### ***Communicative and Cultural Themata***

In contrast to cognitive polyphasia, figurative schemes, metaphors, and myths, the concept of themata has entered into the Theory of Social Representations more recently (Moscovici, 1993c; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994/2000). It has since become one of the most important theoretical concepts in social representations with respect to culture and communication. Let us explain.

One of the fundamental features of human thinking is making distinctions and understanding phenomena as antinomies. For example, we understand freedom in contrast to what we consider to be a lack of freedom; justice is understood through what is considered to be an absence of justice; logos as contrasted with mythos, and so on. Antinomies are features of thinking, language, and communication in all cultures, but different cultures and societies employ their capacity of making distinctions and thinking in antinomies in specific ways. We find them throughout eons of human history both in scientific and in common sense thinking, although very often they are present implicitly without becoming an explicit topic of discourse. Socio-cultural changes, however, may bring implicit antinomies to the public awareness and into discourses, reflecting societal tensions and conflicts. This means that from that moment on, they turn into *themata*, whether in scientific thinking where they generate scientific theories (Holton, 1975, 1978) or in common sense thinking where they generate social

representations (Moscovici, 1993c; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994/2000).

Many antinomies are implicitly present in our common sense thinking for centuries, and they may never be brought to explicit awareness. This is so, because there may never be any reason—or at least there may not be any reason for many generations—for them to become problematized and thematized. For example, logos and mythos could be viewed throughout history as complementary antinomies until, for one reason or other, logos become a superior and rational way of explanation of phenomena, whereas mythos is degraded as irrational thought (Moscovici, 2009). In principle, all antinomies can become themata—that is, issues for public debates and disputes—but many of them do not rise to that status.

Themata that generate most social representations are those pertaining to the Ego–Alter, like private/public, morality/immorality, justice/injustice, and freedom/oppression, among others. Such themata are in the heart of social sciences, and they generate social representations of phenomena like democracy, citizenship, quality of life, and health and illness, to name but a few. How and in what ways themata become problematized and which meanings become foregrounded is specific to the structured field in which a social representation is engaged. A social representation is rarely generated from a single thema. If we consider, as an example, a social representation of HIV/AIDS and its vicissitudes over the last three decades in different parts of the world, we find that re-thematization of morality/immorality has been associated with re-thematization of social values related to sexuality, promiscuity in the general public, discrimination of minorities, and social recognition, among other issues (Marková et al., 1995). Although the antinomy morality/immorality itself has not been questioned, the content and context of morality/immorality has been differently thematized in different structured fields in which the social representation of HIV/AIDS has been engaged. For example, the question of personal and social responsibility, medical confidentiality, and human rights all became part of discourse in such specific structured fields. Communicative processes, through which these changes in meanings are usually achieved, carry symbols and images, which not only circulate in public discourses but also organize and generate discourses; they shape common thinking, language,

and behavior; and provide grounds for the formation of new social representations.

Liu (2004) describes themata as “deep structures” of social representations. In his research on rapid changes of social representations of the quality of life in China, he identified two themata that, in contemporary society, compete with one another: “to be” and “to have.” *Being* prioritizes traditional Chinese values like the authentic relation between subject and object, a union between self and others, and their rootedness, connectedness, and mutual commitment. *Having*, on the other hand, gives priority to how subject instrumentalizes object as a resource to be possessed and consumed. Possession has become a new value in the rapidly changing China, whether it is the possession of money and material objects or of symbolic objects like social status and power. Neither having nor being exist in pure forms, but they are both dynamically interrelated into the meaning of the quality of life in contemporary China.

In their research on social representations of Roms, Pérez et al. (2007) identified two underlying themata. One of them highlights nature versus culture. This polarity emphasizes the superiority of cultured European majorities over natural minorities of Roms. The second theme, human versus animal, represents Roms as having deficits in human qualities. Drawing on his socio-anthropological research, Moscovici (2011) shows that in the case of Roms themata are also articulated along the extensive historical narratives artistic/criminal.

Research on social representations of genetically modified food as presented in the press shows that these are underlain by themata of health versus disease and risk versus safety (Castro & Gomes, 2005). The already noted research by Wagner et al. (2002) implies that social representations of genetically modified tomatoes, both in the press and in interviews with citizens, are triggered by themata like natural versus unnatural.

### ***Morality of Human Rights As a Thema***

Although Doise (2002) does not use the concept of thema, we can subsume his work on human rights as social representations under this concept. Moral universality of human rights codified itself in societies as a basic thema, although naturally, it has been thematized differently in specific cultures and societies. Doise’s own empirical research shows that participants in different countries express consistent attitudes on general principles or articles of the

Declaration of Human Rights. This strong coherence disappears, however, when subjects respond to specific contexts in which human rights are presented. Having examined theories and practices in relation to human rights, Doise concludes that the basis of legal thinking on human rights is not to be sought in their institutional expression, but it is profoundly anchored in normative social representations. Doise traces the origin of normative social representations of human rights in communication and human interactions. Communicative contracts carry implicitly ethical norms (Rommetveit, 1974; Bakhtin, 1979/1986) that regulate our mutual interactions, mutual commitment, and social recognition of one human by another. These contracts are then built into social norms and social representations.

In a similar manner, Mead (1915) drew attention to the error in the assumption of theorists who were convinced that individuals had originally possessed their natural rights before any formal societal organizations existed. He was critical of those who thought that formal organizations had to be established to protect those natural rights. Mead argued that, on the contrary, already in informal organizations that developed within groups, the rights, rules, norms of acting, and constraints had already existed. Mead specifically referred to philosophers like Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke who were not aware of this fact. Thus, he said that if Locke had the knowledge of the contemporary anthropologists, then he would have recognized that people had been organized in informal groups from which governmental institutions later developed. Governmental institutions arose out of communities that already had formulated their customs. In other words, rights were already in existence, and they were recognized by group members, although in a different form than in governmental institutions. No special introduction or special instruments were required to establish them in formal institutions.

Doise has maintained that although norms do not translate themselves automatically into institutional expressions, they remain to be the shared references to which victims can appeal (Doise, 2002, p. 25). Concerning the issue of how to assess whether human rights are upheld by different countries, normative social representations are used as a tool of evaluation. Countries use their own norms and ethnocentric social representations of human rights to evaluate different countries with respect to discrimination and prejudice in others, and they commonly overvalue their own morality. Doise has

analyzed contemporary trends and habits of speaking about different kinds of human rights—for example, individual rights, socio-economic rights, the self-determination rights of ethnic groups, and rights for natives to maintain special ties with the land of their forefathers. Variability in dealing with human rights is great and anchored in different kinds of beliefs that are rooted in histories, politics, and in common sense.

### **Conclusion: Toward Theoretical and Empirical Diversity in Social Representing**

After World War II, the social sciences exerted a strong effort to establish their places in reconstructing the world and to coordinate themselves internationally. Among these efforts was the UNESCO research of the roles of social sciences in higher education. Social psychology was grouped together with cultural anthropology and sociology because it was assumed that this was its proper place (Moscovici & Marková, 2006). But the UNESCO research showed that the position of social psychology was split between psychology and sociology. In the years to come, social psychology leaned toward experimental psychology and its methods, and the relation to culture considerably diminished or totally disappeared. Equally, language and communication played only a minimal role in social psychology, the situation that Moscovici (1972) and Rommetveit (1974) deeply regretted.

In contrast, we have seen in this chapter that from its beginning, the Theory of Social Representations has been conceptualized within culture, language, and communication. In this chapter I have discussed three concepts: cognitive polyphasia; figurative schemes, myths and metaphors; and themata. These three concepts have made most significant contributions to the Theory of Social Representations. However, there is also substantial empirical research in social representations that covers diverse topics in education, politics, environmental problems, health, mental health, and aging. There is growing research on social representations of otherness or alterity, everyday life (Haas, 2006), identity (Moloney & Walker, 2007), and historical events. Jodelet (1992) has initiated the study of collective memories as an important aspect of social representations. Examining historical perspectives of collective memory in the work of social scientists like Halbwachs and Douglas, she has analyzed the process with the Nazi Klaus Barbie that took place in 1987 in France. Numerous studies of social representations of historical events

that have followed Jodelet's research have provided accounts of groups' representations in which history and collective memory have mixed and organized and have transformed these representations. Such accounts are never neutral cognitive narratives but dialogical evaluations and justifications of history; they are forging many ethnic, social, and national identities and pose questions about how histories could be re-interpreted and rewritten on the basis of politics and ideology (e.g., Liu et al., 2009; Lastrego & Licata, 2010; Paez, 2010). Raudsepp, Heidmets, and Kruusvall (2008) have explored social representations of collective memory in their study of the socio-cultural context of Estonia during the transition from a post-Soviet republic to a liberal State in the European Union. They have analyzed explicit and implicit socio-cultural regulative principles, and they have explored how these principles have transformed in the course of the transition period, focusing on the changed roles of Russian minorities and Estonian majorities during that time. Social representations of collective memories of daily life during communism in Rumania have been captured by Neculau (2008) and those of the Cyprus conflict by Psaltis (2011). Findings of these substantial empirical studies feed back to the theory.

### **Future Directions**

The growing interest in theoretical and empirical research in social representations also highlights challenges and problems for the future. Among these I mention the following.

First, despite the fact that strong emphasis on language and communication was already part of *La Psychanalyse*, this remains a neglected area of studies of social representations. Language and communication are usually taken for granted as essential features of human interactions but rarely studied as phenomena that require a specific exploration. We only see beginnings of such research in dialogical studies of different kinds of discourse (e.g., conversation and dialogue, polylogue, inner speech, focus groups studies) that have been recently emerging. They include analyses of various grammatical structures like modalizations, positioning, deontic claims, and other means by which speakers take distance from or express closeness to objects of social representations (e.g., Harré, this volume; Salazar Orvig, 2007; Marková et al., 2007; Salazar Orvig & Grossen, 2008; Linell, 2009). In addition, what participants communicate to one another is not produced solely by them; they necessarily draw on their

cultural resources, on perspectives of the parties that are not present in discourse (third parties), and on groups to which they belong or which they reject. For example, absent others could become, directly or indirectly, participants in talks among villagers in Jodelet's (1989/1991) research on madness, because absent others could become invisible or semi-visible judges of relations between villagers and patients. Groups do not live in a vacuum but are part of a broader community. Outsiders coming to the village are not neutral onlookers but they communicate with in-groups: they can make flattering as well as damaging comments about relations between villagers and patients. A close association with mentally ill patients could downgrade, in the eyes of others, the villagers' social identity. These different circumstances involving numerous communicating parties reflect themselves in diverse modalities of thinking.

Participants in interactions may jointly construct utterances that may suggest that they share—or assume sharing—a social representation. Alternatively, in and through a joint construction of utterances, they may question limits of their shared knowledge (Marková, 2007). They may refer to beliefs, to a super-addressee (god, generalized other, consciousness), the law and its different kinds, rules and norms, morality and ethics, traditions, habits, and stereotypes. There are countless examples of the interdependence among language, communication, and social representations that have not been explored or have only just become subjects of research interest.

Another challenging issue was implied earlier in this chapter. It concerns the fact that cultures live no longer in isolated ghettos, and rather, the contemporary world of societies is open to other cultures and they “set the stage for permanent situations of uncertainty,” moving cultures in different directions (Rosa & Valsiner, 2007). This is also the issue that Moscovici expressed in his third paradox concerning incommunicability among different groups (see above, p. 497). The challenge for the Theory of Social Representations concerns the issue of studying ethical problems arising from the growing uncertainty in the world of increasing complexity; and with problems how to establish reflective communication in intergroup and intercultural relations. Such issues concern the future developments of relations between the Theory of Social Representations and culture (Permanadeli et al., 2012). Moreover, the Theory of Social Representations is only one psychological approach that focuses on culture. Cultural

diversity is studied, for example, by structuralist, discourse, anthropological, phenomenological, narrative, and other approaches (Jodelet, 2012). Among all of these, what specific contributions can the Theory of Social Representations make that will differentiate it from other approaches? This is a challenge in the world of rapid changes that is characterized by a series of “trans-”processes (Jodelet, *ibid*) What different forms will transformation of knowledge take in these changes where the local competes with the global and crossbreeding thinking produces new kinds of cognitive polyphasia?

Finally, there are theoretical challenges concerning the epistemological status of social representations. Both knowing and believing co-constitute social representations, although some social representations are based primarily on knowledge or factual beliefs and others mainly on passionate beliefs and convictions. Knowledge and beliefs are transmitted in and through culture, language, and communication, as well as through learning (tacit or explicit) by repeating and changing others' activities. But what status can be attributed to knowledge generated from trust in authority of other individuals or institutions and of collective norms? Can these serve as preconditions of rationality and coherence of reasoning?

No doubt there are other theoretical and empirical challenges. The theory is now 50 years old, and over these long years it has undergone transformations and has become gradually enriched by different cultures all over the world as it has spread from Europe to other continents—particularly to Latin America and most recently to Asia.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Denise Jodelet for her generous help in providing ideas and references to research on social representations and culture and to Angela Arruda for references to the research in Latin America. This chapter was written during the period of my Emeritus Fellowship awarded by the Leverhulme Trust, and I wish to acknowledge the Trust's generous support for this project.

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PART 6

Tools for Living:  
Transcending Social  
Limitations

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# Life-Course: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

Tania Zittoun

## Abstract

This chapter characterizes a socio-cultural psychology of the life-course, and shows how it differs from other approaches of the life-course. General principles for such a psychology are highlighted, and a particular attention to ruptures, transitions, and the processes these involve, is proposed. Such a basic “grammar” enables us to highlight a few dynamics of development; empirical situations chosen along typical life-courses exemplify them. Issues to be further examined can thus be highlighted.

**Keywords:** development, socio-cultural perspectives, life-course, transitions, ruptures

The possibility shadows every single person and changes the nature of his life; for (and this is another well-known axiom of existential mathematics) any new possibility that existence acquires, even the least likely, transforms everything about existence.

(Kundera, 1996, p. 36)

The study of the life-course, an important issue in the social sciences and psychology since the 1970s, can also be considered as the effort to understand the mutual constitution of a developing person and her changing cultural environments. It is easy to admit that there is no human life outside of a culture—one can thus speak of the “cultural nature” of human development (López, Najafi, Rogoff, & Arauz, 2011; Rogoff, 2003) or of the “cultivation” of humans (Josephs & Valsiner, 2007)—yet *how* culture mediates development demands explanation. The current *Oxford Handbook* offers various ways of advancing such understanding; here, I propose to focus on the person’s changes through his/her life-course.

## The Study of the Life–Course

Why does a person become who he/she is? Is it true that our fates have been sealed before we even

speak (in a secret roll, in our genes, or in our social class)? Or on the contrary, can we “make ourselves” as we wish? What is our margin of freedom, how much can persons become who or what they want to be? The reflection on the nature of life-course finds multiple roots in old philosophical questions and has found beautiful forms in arts and literature. Life trajectories became the object of systematic scientific investigation relatively recently. In psychology and social sciences, reviews usually consider as first life-span studies these of Charlotte Bühler and Erik Erikson’s analyses of biographies. In the 1950s, a certain number of longitudinal studies were published in the United States, and these gave a new grounding for the research on how people develop over a life (*see* Giele & Elder, 1998, for a review).

Currently, two disciplinary traditions have emerged and have been given contrasting appellations. On the one hand, the orientation in psychology that considers the development from infancy to old age and death calls itself *life-span psychology* (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999; Overton, 2002). On the other hand, the sociological orientation that examines life trajectories considers itself as developing a *life-course* theoretical

perspective (Elders, 2004). Because these two fields of investigation develop in different disciplines, they have deepened different questions:

Life-span psychologists typically begin with psychological functions and ask questions about change and stability, individual differences, and intraindividual plasticity. Life course sociologists typically begin with social change and ask how it influences communities and families, and, in turn, trajectories of development. For all their significant theoretical commonalities, the two perspectives often begin the research process by asking distinct types of questions.

(Shanaban & Porfelli, 2002, p. 399)

### **Life-Span Psychology**

Since the 1990s, the life-span approach to development has made itself known thanks to its elegant propositions. First, it has proposed meta-theoretical principles according to which the role of natural growth and culture vary through life. From this perspective, the person's natural capacities and cultural mastery initially grow, until at some point of one's development, his/her biological capacities start to decline. At this point, culture plays a growing role in one's life. For example, when sight diminishes, one starts to use glasses; when one gets to the limits of his/her memory, online reference completes the amount of available information, and so forth. However, at some point, the biological state of person declines so much that culture cannot compensate it anymore. Second, life-span psychology proposes that development is regulated through *selection*, *optimization*, and *compensation* (SOC): people first select a certain number of skills, competencies, or relationships on which they will invest efforts; they then optimize these selected fields of activity; they finally compensate, in the limits given by the meta-theoretical model, their weaknesses by other means (Baltes, 1986; Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999). Studies in life-span psychology have particularly explored aging and old age, yet many other researchers over other periods of the life-course have been inspired by the model. However, the generality of these principles does not allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the processes of development nor the specific role of culture in these dynamics (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010). How can we describe the process enabled by culture, in what sense does cultural production participate to development, and in what respect is

cultural mediation different in a 5-month-old than in a 90-year-old person?

### **Life-Course Sociology**

On their side, sociological approaches to the life-course have been struggling for accounting both for social and historical effects on personal trajectories and individual agency (see Mayer, 2009, for a review). Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, and Crosnoe (2004, pp. 11–14) have highlighted five paradigmatic principles in life-course theory:

1. The principle of life-span development: human development and aging are lifelong processes;
2. The principle of agency: individuals construct their own life-courses and the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance;
3. The principle of time and space: the life-courses of individuals are embedded and shaped by historical times and places they experience over their lifetimes;
4. The principle of timing: the developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns vary according to their timing in a person's life; and
5. The principle of linked lives: lives are lived interdependently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships.

Mainly based on large samples over long periods, life-course studies have developed complex methodological strategies enabling combination of quantitative and qualitative data so as to show the interacting effects of context and biography, structure, and agency. They have tried to capture the commonalities of people born and developing under comparable socio-historical circumstances—for example, with the help of the notions of *cohort effect* “when historical change differentiates the lives of successive birth cohorts” and *period effect*, “when the impact of social change is relatively uniform across successive birth cohorts” (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2004, p. 9). However, it is not certain that people from a given cohort, in the same period, develop along the same line. Researchers have used the notions of *social pathways*, *trajectories*, *careers*, and *navigation* to describe the individual life-courses people trace within a given social and historical structure (Furlong, 2009). Scholars also

seem to agree on the importance of studying *transitions* within trajectories; they have acknowledged their role as *turning points*—events that “involve a substantial change in the direction of one’s life, whether subjective or objective” (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004 p. 8)—and have tried to capture their long-term consequences.

If we accept the five principles above and retain the importance of transitions in a life-course, how can we account for the processes whereby a person might decide the course of his/her life within a given sets of constraints and relations? How can we account for what is unexpected? And how is this connected to the cultural means at his/her disposal?

### ***Using Traditions—Studying Transitions***

Research from the two traditions of life-course and lifespan studies have been published in separate journals, and researchers have presented their studies in different conferences and have developed their own research traditions. Only on rare occasions do they attempt to see their contributions as complementing each other (Levy, Ghisletta, Le Goff, Spini, & Widmer, 2005), then facing complex methodological as well as theoretical issues. These two traditions have also kept their distances toward the current developing field of cultural or socio-cultural psychology (and reciprocally)—even if their object is ultimately the same. Indeed, from a socio-cultural perspective, it is clear that it would be absurd to consider human development out of its cultural, social, and historical constraining and enabling conditions; yet for various reasons, socio-cultural psychology neither developed models enabling us to fully understand the nature of “cohort effects” over individual trajectories (but see Sato, Yasuda, Kido, Arakawa, Mizogushi, & Valsiner, 2007) nor gave much attention to the evolution of the biological constraints of development. In that respect, both lifespan and life-course studies might contribute to our enquiry. However, the core issue of socio-cultural psychology is to account for the life of humans as meaning-makers. Here, we first need to define the specificities of a socio-cultural approach to the study of the life-course, which is open both to the multilinearity of development and to the centrality of human meaning-making in their worlds of culture. We will thus propose a theoretical model for exploring the life-course, drawing on various studies of different traditions, using the notion of transition as transdisciplinary “analyzer” as proposed by

Levy, Ghisletta, Le Goff, Spini, and Widmer (2005, p. 365).

### **General Principles for a Socio-Cultural Perspective on the Life-Course**

As much as there is life, there is change: things move, evolve, are constructed, become organized, decompose, and perish. Galaxies dilate and suns die; it rains, water evaporates; our bodies grow and become weaker; we inhale and exhale; the seasons pass. As humans, we perceive discourses and information, we think and dream, we communicate with others, and as William James (1892) wrote, our consciousness *flows*—it flows, as one might say it rains, or it snows. Human perception of these passing events, realized thanks to various social and cultural markers, produce *time*—as a personal sense, or as a collective history.

Cultural psychology tries to account for the experience of humans *in time* and *in social and cultural environments*. A person’s birth takes place in a certain moment of history (of the group within he is born), and from that moment on, his/her life will unfold as times goes on. It also takes place in a family, with its beliefs, located in an area of the town, in a country that has current policies—that is, in a social, material, and symbolic environment. As the person develops, she will explore that sphere of experience, its boundaries, and explore other spheres. Finally, each of the others met by the person are changing him or her, the mutual relationships of persons, environments, societies, with their own rhythm and periodicities, produce the complex environment in which a person’s life occurs. Hence, cultural psychology examines the ongoing *transactions* (Dewey & Bentley, 1946) or mutual adjustments between developing persons and their changing environments.

One of the specificities of human life, over other forms of organisms, is to be found in the central role of *meaning making* (Bruner, 1990). Young humans not only perceive their environment, they also feel it, develop memories and expectations. Their environments not only provide them with food and warmth but also with lullabies, rhymes, and fairytales. Children learn to read other people’s intentions, and they make themselves understood; as they grow older, they learn to use and produce words, toys, colors, and ideas, to understand what occurs around them, to represent their ideas of the world, and to create alternative realities. On

the other hand, the experience of human groups is deposited and registered in concrete objects—a car is the result of many generations' experience of how to facilitate human locomotion—and in cultural elements primarily meant to carry meaning, such as chronicles, novels, psychological textbooks, and cartoons that convey, under a semiotic form, people's experience of life.

A core idea of cultural psychology is that each person, as one particular instantiation in time and space of the infinities of shape that can take humans, is absolutely unique. That person, exposed to the discourses, shapes, and rites of his/her environment, is likely to understand them in a sufficiently shared manner so as to remain in interactions with others; but these discourses, rites, or lullabies will also find a form of unique understanding, and translation, in her mind—where it will be integrated with other traces of experiences, bring to psychological reorganizations, and so forth. Such process of *internalization* thus brings the person to develop his/her own “personal culture” (Valsiner, 1997). On this basis, he/she will also be able to communicate, make his-/herself understood, move, take specific postures, by which he/she *externalizes* (translates unto a semiotic form) what occurs in him/her, or within specific interactive dynamics (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003; Valsiner, 2000). Internalization and externalization can thus be seen as the core processes by which meaning can be produced, individually and collectively. Cultural psychology examines human development with a specific attention to the *dynamics of meaning-making* in which groups and individual are engaged.

With the help of other sciences, cultural psychology has developed a theoretical basis, notions, and models to account for human development, its transactions with environments, and dynamics of meaning-making (especially Boesch, 1991; Cole, 1996; Josephs & Valsiner, 2007; Valsiner 1997, 1998, 2007; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007; Wertsch, 1991).

### ***Life-Course As Lifelong Development***

Stating that everything constantly changes is of course just a starting point. It is clear that change occurs only within a constant tension between continuity and change. Our bodies remain “the same” even if each of the cells of our organism is replaced every year. Paul can cut his hair, change jobs, and divorce, but he remains Paul—for himself and for his mother, and even for his ex-wife, even if she has fallen out of love. How can we account for the fact that we are both the same and not the same?

In psychology, there has been for many years a tendency to identify structures of personality, and types of character, as if these were acquired once for all—one believed that if Paul was an introvert he would remain so, or that if he had a low IQ he just had to live with it. Other parts of psychology have in contrast tried to account for how these structures have developed through time—what is the genesis of cognitive structure (Piaget, 1967), how a person's identity matures over years (Erikson, 1959). Finally, recent approaches have proposed models that emphasize the mutability of humans—Paul is not a father and a plumber, he is *doing* the father or positioning himself as a father in a specific sequence of dialogue with his son's teacher, which vanishes as he is doing the soccer fan with his friends 2 hours later (Harré & Davies, 1990). Similar debates have been legion in life-course studies: Is it true that a child's fate is defined by the first 3 years of his/her life (e.g., by the attachment style developed, or by the mode of resolution of his oedipal conflict?), or by the profession, income, and numbers of books read—that is, social class—of his/her parents?

Whether we change or remain the same through time, whether we are constrained by the hazards of our birth or whether we can develop in any direction, is a recurring question in human history. It has been treated as a philosophical question (about freedom and determinacy) and as a political issue (whether we are produced by our class, can emancipate, or can determine our own fate). As cultural psychologists, we can take a nuanced position.

### **TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE CHANGE**

Drawing on dynamic system theory, cultural psychology can distinguish between *sorts of change*. In an open system, some changes are quasi-circular: people eat cakes, digest them, eliminate them, and eat again. Students read books, write notes, raise questions, check references, and borrow more books in the library. There is a “virtuous circle”; even if each book is different from the other, it remains a book that will be borrowed, read, and serve as a source of questions. Such changes are called *transitive*, in the sense that the circle is “symmetrical”—it can be considered from any point, and the other points will be found (this is what van Geert [2003] has called a “level 1 change”). Of course, transitive changes can also involve slight displacement and evolution—if Paul and Mary have the habits of swapping novels they have read and liked, then they are in an transitive movement; yet one day Paul can

propose to Mary not a book, but a DVD, which will also bring Mary to propose a Paul a DVD she liked (it can be distinguished from the former form of transitivity by being called a level 2 change: here, the structure remains the same even if some components vary). Other changes lead to total new forms of conduct or situation, from which there is no coming back: if Paul has an accident and loses a leg, then he will not recover it, and he will have to reorganize his life accordingly; if Paul goes to evening classes and gets a degree in law, then he will not “unlearn” what he has acquired, and this can also open new life possibilities. Such no-return changes can be called *intransitive* (or a level 3 change); these require real re-elaboration of one’s understanding, means of actions, or relationship to the environment. From such a perspective, it is clear that these different sorts of change also have various degrees of freedom—transitive changes do not enable radical innovation, whereas intransitive require them. And, in turn, intransitive changes are sometimes imposed but can also be deliberately provoked.

Change occurs in continuous forms, as slow accumulation of reconfigurations of person–world–others dynamics, or through events that appear as caused by or causing discontinuities. Continuous change has been described as processes of maturation, growth, increase of expertise, and so on and so forth, which have been privileged in the studies of child learning and development. Events bringing discontinuities specifically call for change. Studies on youth and adult life have mainly focused on these.

#### **RUPTURES AND TRANSITIONS**

Not every change has durable consequences—this appears very clearly once we replace types of changes within a person’s life trajectory. From that perspective, transitive changes are part of the daily transactions between the person and his/her environment, whereas intransitive changes are linked to more clear-cut changes that we can call *ruptures*. Ruptures are moments in which existing modes of progressive adjustment are interrupted. A rupture can result from internal factors or causes (as when Paul decided to leave his wife after a long period of doubt, or when he decided to take evening classes) or by external ones (as when he lost his leg); they can be expected by the person, as when a nursery child is anticipating and imagining his first day at primary school, or not (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009).

Ruptures are what life-course researchers call “turning points” or “critical moments” (see above). They usually constitute *bifurcation points* in a trajectory—some pathways are opened, others are closed, and generally their outcomes are not yet decided (unless the rupture is one’s own death). Hence, Paul’s new degree opens the possibility of working as a lawyer, but also of starting full-time studies again; his accident forbids him to play soccer but instead, after re-education, brings him to kayaking, which he always wanted to do.

The interesting thing is that ruptures experienced by a person demand substantial, intransitive changes—processes of adjustment, or adaptation, between him/her and his/her environment. It is these processes that we will call *transitions*. From a life-course perspective, then, ruptures followed by transitions are moments of accelerated or catalyzed changes. For researchers, they offer the opportunity to study substantial, observable development, and this probably explains the current popularity of studies on transitions.

In life-course research, the notion of transition has been used to designate moments of change either from the perspective of a person’s life trajectory or from an observer’s perspective. Adopting such second perspective, the studies on the “school-to-work transition,” for example, examine the fact that groups of students end school and enter the labor market. Such a perspective has enabled researchers to distinguish “normative transitions,” which are expected to be experienced by certain group of persons of a certain age in a given society, from non-normative transitions (Elder et al., 2004), which affects the way in which individuals perceive changes as ruptures or not. It is usually easier to engage in a transition in a normative way than non-normative, because one is more likely to find appropriate social support and acceptance: for example, when a young graduate applies for his first job, his lack of experience is likely to be tolerated as part of a “normal” school-to-work transition, whereas if Paul applies for a first job after his studies in middle life, he might be considered as too old for too little experience. Hence, the normative nature of a transition might facilitate the processes of change in which a person is engaged, whereas non-normative transitions might be experienced as stronger subjective ruptures. More generally, such studies highlight certain of the structure of constraints within which change takes place.



In contrast, when we focus on ruptures actually perceived as such by people, as we do when we focus on meaning-making, we observe that socially observable ruptures are not always felt as such (Zittoun, 2006a); also, people experience as ruptures and engage in transitions for events that are not visible for an observer (e.g., a grandmother died, a close friendship ended, or the person developed some new self-awareness).

#### LIMITED PLASTICITY

From a socio-cultural perspective, we need to propose a model accounting for the ways in which psychological change is enabled and constrained by biological and social situations.

On the one hand, it is clear that one cannot speak of meaning-making without considering the person's embodied existence. Any meaning-making is just one part of the ongoing processes of perceiving, moving in, understanding, acting in an environment that we constantly *experience*. In that sense, experience seems enabled and limited by our senses, the capacities of our bodies and minds—which are plastic to some extent only. However, these capacities are themselves mediated by our own meaning-making (we overhear advices that we do not like, or hormonal processes are modified by moods or achievements) and by our understanding of our social and cultural environment (that valorizes certain capacities rather than others, encourage us to develop other, and cure and replace further ones). For example, we can imagine that Paul developed a good memory as a consequence of his interest in soccer and his intention to be acknowledged as expert; this memory then helped him as he started his late studies, even if his bad hearing could have limited his participation to seminar discussion. Also, we can imagine that Paul is a rather handsome slim man and that his usual facility to charm people enabled him to develop a sense of self-confidence; hence, received for a job interview, he might have made a good impression in an environment that valorizes self-confidence and slimness. Hence, our bodies are important in sense-making as it is as embodied person that we experience ourselves, the world, and others, and through these bodies that we make sense of our experiences; also, it is as embodied beings that we are recognized by others and addressed and treated by our societies. Indeed, it is also clear that our societies, with the quality of the environment it creates, the modes of life it encourages, its industries and medical systems, shape the changes of our bodies, as other perceive us,

and how we experience the world. It is thus important to emphasize that if it is clear that biology sets important constraints in human development and change (Baltes, 1987), then its action always already is in great part mediated, if not guided, by individual and collective semiotic dynamics.

On the other hand, human development is also canalized by social or cultural conditions. But what do we mean by that? The social is so much “everywhere” that talking about the “influence” of the social is as absurd as talking about the influence of “matter” on cells—cells are made out of matter, matter circulates through their inner and outer membranes, it is around them... More interesting, and more difficult, is to define ways of describing the multiples modalities through which the social and cultural becomes psychological and back.

Many authors have proposed such descriptions (see Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000, for a review; Valsiner 1998, 2007; Zittoun, Valsiner, Vedeler, Salgado, Goncalves, & Ferring, in press).

Here, building on the socio-cultural tradition, I will distinguish five modalities on a continuum through which the social and the person interact. First, the social and the cultural is already “in the mind” of each person. Since birth, each instant through interactions with the world, the person internalizes portions of discourses and signs that will participate to the development of his/her thinking and acting possibilities. This constitutes the mind—as always already social (see below). Second, every time a person interacts with another person, there is the construction of the social—as coordinated perspective, which is eventually designated by symbolic meaning exchanged (Gillespie, 2010). Third, every time a person interacts with or creates an artifact, the person is actually interacting with a symbolic object—an object that designates a world of shared meaning in a social group on the one side, and his own life on the other (Zittoun, 2005, 2010). Fourth, each sphere of experience in which people are located are socially structured and organized according to rules, which allocate them rights and mutual positions; it is supported and usually reinforced by material arrangements (it is often called a “social frame”). Hence, a school in a closed environment, such as a boarding school, creates a total institution that gives quite clear indications to people about what can be done, or not (Goffman, 1958). Fifth, the social and cultural is pervasive; present in the daily organization of the public and mediatic space; it

imposes, on the fringe of our consciousness, certain messages, values, and beliefs that constitute our belonging to a social world. For example, the smoking bans in most north European towns have created zones for smokers separated by a yellow line on the floor and glass boxes in airports, and they impose smokers to freeze in front of restaurants while their beer warms up inside, repeatedly making smokers feel unwanted, and non-smokers learn to see them as deviant (*see* Zittoun, Valsiner et al., in press).

Meanings move from one modality to the other. The meaning of the smoker–non-smoker segregation is that “smoking is bad,” which eventually becomes internalized and guides the action of the not-yet-smokers who hesitate to buy a first pack of cigarettes. The issue of the smoking ban can also become an object of discussion between peers. The famous Marlboro poster is an artifact that now crystallizes these many meanings for a middle-aged viewer: the imaginary freedom associated with smoking, now overwritten by the fact that “Mr. Marlboro” had cancer, by the scandals of tobacco companies manipulating public opinion, and the present smoking ban. Interacting with the social and cultural around us, more or less reflectively, we constantly internalize and revise our earlier understanding and our systems of orientation. In turn, we can also externalize our opinions, make our friends change their views, produce discourse or art pieces that will be seen by others, and use various means to reshape our environment; we can smoke out of the smoker zone, move country, or, like in certain parts of Switzerland, use our democratic rights to show that the smoking ban is unconstitutional and suppress it.

#### **MULTILINEARITY, UNPREDICTABILITY**

Life is not a quiet river. It is a tortuous torrent, full of surprises. It can be characterized in two ways.

First, the development of a child or a person is not linear and therefore cannot be predicted. Our contemporary societies encourage people to travel, work or study abroad, or meet foreigners in their office or in their street; we are exposed to a wide variety of information about alternative life choices, other countries, and innovative professions; we live in a world that has lost its economical and ecological stability; we know that every other marriage will end up in a divorce; we are offered ways to alter our bodily appearance and physical strength; we hear

stories of colleagues “turning green” or scientists abandoning their universities to live on sailing boats. At every step of our lives, social discourses, fictions, narratives, and gossips present us with alternative lives. Nourished by these semiotic means, but also by our own past, affective lives, and our imagination, we constantly explore the possible outcomes of situations, alternative choices, new versions of the past, or possible futures. Each moment, we engage in an action by closing down an alternative.

In addition, the world in which we live is not predictable, neither at an individual level nor at a collective one. Cohort-studies retrospectively show how a given generation went through comparable events—for example, very old people in Switzerland all experienced two World Wars, years of crises, and years of economical optimism (Lalivé d’Epinay & Spini, 2008), yet how these events have affected each life is not predictable. Hence, if sociologists thought that in the 1960s (an until the mid-1980s) work trajectories were quite linear (e.g., a middle-class young worker would enter in a company, make his way through the hierarchy, and have a good retirement), then retrospective analysis have shown that unexpected events (such as an evolution of the market’s needs), disturbed predictions, and personal crises brought people to have very personal trajectories, not so much depending on their social or economical background or initial training as on a synthesis of unexpected opportunities, luck in meeting others, accidents, random injustice, personal imagination, re-examination of one’s situation, and moments of personal decisions (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2009). Hence, if life trajectories were never fully predictable (i.e., people always had accidents the day before graduation, fell in love with a person from a different social class, or experienced a war), then our contemporary society brings us to deal with a much more generalized uncertainty.

The second characteristic of life trajectory is their multilinearity: there is always more than one way to get to comparable points in the life-course. Studies classically have shown that children can start walking after crawling or might just stand up and walk (Bottos et al. 2008; Valsiner, 2000); one can become a lawyer studying straight after college or as a mature learner; one can have children early in life and then establish oneself as a professional, or one can acquire a professional stability and then have children; and one can learn the violin as an adult. This has two implications. First, not everyone develops skill A in the same spatio-temporal place

(e.g., in the classroom, third grade); very often, skill A is developed in other circumstances. Second, the so-called “learning disabilities” often more result from the fact that a person might be engaged in a pathway that does not enable him/her to change or develop that particular understanding or skill—an alternative way might enable the person to develop in such way that the disability is suppressed or avoided (Vygotsky, 1929).

Unpredictability and multilinearity always characterized human lives; only our current society constantly reminds us of multiple choices we have, the ambivalence in which we live (Sato, Fukuda, Hidaka, Kido, Nishida, & Akasaka, 2011), and the uncertainty that we have to tolerate in daily lives. Do we have more freedom, or are we more slave of our own fears?

### ***Freedom in the Life-Course***

Life-courses depend on many personal choices, social forces, and random events; they are not predictable in a strict sense. Studies that have used mainly “objective” data (i.e., income, health assessment, and standardized tests of well-being) have tended to show, initially, the structuring effect of the social or the irresistible effect of biological constraints on human lives; this has then been debated by others who have wanted to confer some agency to actors (Furlong, 2009; Goodwin & O’Connor, 2009; Levy et al., 2005). However, if one considers that human lives are as much made by what is invisible (i.e., what people believe in, who matters to them, how they find the world meaningful or absurd, how they enjoy the sunset or an illegal copy of an alternative music band) than by what is visible (i.e., their income or their ability to run 100 meters) then the discussion takes another dimension.

Indeed, within and beyond the modalities of social constraints as defined above, people have various means to expand their life worlds. People engage not only in reasonable or practical activities, they are also constantly imagining—beyond considering *what is*, they engage in thinking *what if* (the distinction comes from Vaihinger, 1924; Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999). Imagination—that is, thinking beyond the here and now—takes various directions: remembering, which is an imagination of the past, thinking alternatives in the present (I am sitting here at my desk, but *what if* I were now at the movies or walking the dog or visiting Tunisia), and anticipation, which is imagining the future. These imaginations can be minimal loops,

as when I consider *what if* I would have another cup of coffee, or can imply major construction, as when *what if* I gathered the best scientists in the world and we would build a spaceship that could bring a country to the next liveable planet. Considering imagination, one can understand why very old people, with limited mobility and reduced social networks, still consider themselves as happy as years earlier (Lalivé d’Epinay & Spini 2008) or how people in very hard detentions conditions could actually survive thanks to the powers of their mind—living in faith, exploring their past, or living alternative lives (Bouska & Pinerova, 2009). Such hypothesis is also needed to understand why, in all times of visible or invisible oppression, some people are taking the risk to object to absurd rules or engage in changing the society. Imagination is usually accompanied by a good dose of forgetting—forget that we are on Earth just for a minute and that our action will not change much (something that depressive people usually cannot forget anymore). Of course, some people might object that surviving in a situation of oppression thanks to a world of one’s own or to minute degrees of freedom is still a form of alienation; but actually, who can say whose alienation is bigger, that of the bank director who plays golf, flies first class, and eats sushi (as it is expected) or the street cleaner who writes absurd novels after work?

The freedom of imagining is made possible through the mediation of signs, and so it intervenes at each of the modalities of our encounter with the social; we can imagine on our own, we imagine as we discuss with others, we enter in imaginary worlds when we read novels, and we can continue being surprised at our environment and remember how it was and how it could be. We are infinitely constrained by our social and cultural environment and yet very free from it. However, sometimes, it becomes harder to imagine, and this we have to account for. In what follows, I propose concentrating on two of the five modalities of the social and cultural as part of our lives: how we encounter it in our immediate environment, and how it is already in our mind, as part of our personal cultures, constituting a system of orientation.

### **A Sketch of a Theory of Transitions in the Life-Course**

#### ***The Plurality of Spheres of Experiences in Contemporary World***

In our complex worlds, we participate in various social and material settings, which are structured by

certain rules and organized through specific webs of meaning, that participate to the allocation of mutual social positions and define ranges of possible, encouraged, or forbidden actions. Typically, a child participates in family life, classroom interactions, playground during school time, family life, and perhaps going to football rehearsals, visiting his cousins, or gaming on the Playstation®. Each of these settings creates, for the person, a specific *sphere of experience*. These spheres of experiences, partly defined by the environment (as affording certain actions and thoughts rather than others) and by the person, have been described in different traditions (as social frames, microsystems, community of practices, symbolic contexts, etc.) that metaphorically consider that each sphere is “bounded” (socially and/or personally perceived as different from another one).

Ruptures, as what generate transitions processes, sometimes are caused by the passage of one person from one sphere of experience to another one; sometimes ruptures occur within a given sphere of experience; and sometimes what causes them is more general (e.g., a war) and therefore might be experienced in parallel in different spheres of experiences.

There has been abundant research on various forms of transitions *between spheres of experiences* (these are often perceived as problematic and are socially more visible). Authors sometimes distinguish vertical transitions, which suppose a development through time (such as the passage from primary school to secondary school for children, which is actually an intransitive change), from horizontal transitions, the daily passage from home to school, and back (which is a transitive change). Given our observations above, we will not call the daily passage from home to school and back a transition, although the question of how a person manages these passages (sometimes thematized as boundary crossing) is a relevant question from a life-course perspective. In effect, it raises the question of transfer of knowledge or, rather, moments in which a skill typical for one sphere of experience, a way to present oneself, can be used in another sphere of experience—what we have called *boundary crossing events* (Grossen, Zittoun, & Ros, 2012).

### ***The Mind As a Meaning System***

What is it of the self that remains self while changing? In the dynamic perspective outlined above, we need a working model in which even what

is perceived as having some stability is dynamic. If the person is essentially a meaning-maker and grows and develops through culture, then the mind has to be described as a semiotic system, producing sense about real and possible worlds. In psychology, various models are based on similar premises. The model of the psyche promoted by Freud precisely describes how streams of thought transit through layers of consciousness and undergo various semiotic transformations, under the constraining forces of internalized cultural rules on the one side and biological needs and strives on the other (see Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011). The “dialogical self model” represents dynamics taking place between various I-positions, resulting from internalized positions developed in specific social situations, within the “imaginal landscape of the self” (Hermans & Kempens, 1993). Here, we follow the idea that as humans develop in cultural world and internalize signs under some form of translation, these become progressively organized, differentiated, and hierarchized (Valsiner, 1998, 2007; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). We learn to identify some experiences as “sweet” and “likeable”; we organize them in classes of experiences, which we then prefer or avoid; our general beliefs (i.e., that people are good) guide each of our actions—for example, trusting unknown persons, and so on.

Some of our experiences get organized and classified into formal categories, which are usually called “concepts” and are the basis of scientific reasoning—hence, from that perspective, we say that what a dog, a cat, and a mouse have in common is that they are mammals. However, we also have other, more experience-based modes of organizing experiences: one might also say that a mouse, a cat, and a dog have in common the fact that they live at my grandmother’s or that they run after each other in some cartoons. Developmental psychology has usually considered such grouping of experience as preconceptual (Nelson, 2007; Vygotsky, 1934), as a step to acquire the mode of organization of experience required by our society (and schooling system). It is also typically the mode of organizing experience observed by psychologists studying the modes of memory of various indigenous groups that had no formal education (Cole, 1997). However, such more intuitive, affective-based organization of experience remains active and can easily be convoked in daily lives (Zittoun, 2010); their logic is not conceptual, but affective, based on personal relevance.

Preferred associations between components of experience can be said to be grouped in *semiotic sets*, often in prereflective ways; hence, a person can think herself to be a “decent woman,” because she does not go out with foreigners, she has good cooking skills, and she expects a decent man to marry her (Zittoun, Avelling, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2011). Such semiotic sets are partly organized according to one’s experience and partly caused by the internalization of shared values or social representations. They constrain one’s actions and feeling about one’s actions; they can be reshaped through experience (self-reflection, or psychotherapy, *see* Zittoun, Valsiner et al., in preparation) and they slowly evolve. They also can be the object of progressive distantiations and reorganizations.

Progressively, certain zones of one’s personal culture acquire some stability because they are recurrent, efficient, and enable a good enough understanding of one’s environment. People hence define their version of a “system of orientation”—a sort of meaning-producing system that renders the world intelligible and actionable, made out of semiotic sets and concepts (Zittoun, 2006a). A system or orientation is produced through progressive distantiation from experience, its differentiation in more or less formal classes (semiotic sets, categories, scientific concepts) and progressive distantiation. Distantiation enables us, on a first dimension, to transform more concrete, specific, embodied experience into abstract and more general values and to have the latter to guide and channel concrete experiences. Of course, these can be more or less mutually adjusted: it is quite often the case that young people have certain values of being “good students,” which is contradicted by poor school results, for example, or that they decide to become “non-violent vegetarians” yet find difficult to refuse a nice steak. On what can be seen as second dimension, distantiation enables us to organize experiences along what people feel to be a time perspective—some experiences are connected to earlier ones, others are felt as oriented toward future—although it is clear that any new experiences bring a reorganization of past experiences. However, in parallel to these processes of differentiation, hierarchization, and time orientation, other links organize traces of experiences according to logics of affective or subjective similarity. Such affective logic enters in dynamics of free association, can connote different zones of experience, and superimpose a different

temporality to one’s time perspective (Green, 2000; Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011). Hence, the same experience of meeting a deer in the fields can on the one side feed my experience of wild animals, my knowledge about deer inhabiting this countryside, and complete my personal narrative; in parallel, it might enter in more floating and much less conscious fantasies about wildlife, entrapment, or cannibalism.<sup>1</sup>

Examining daily reasoning as a socially situated practice, the facility with which some signs are made socially available, internalized, and acquired a power to reorganize a person’s life is at times striking. For example, it is very easy for a teachers’ committee to jointly consider that a series of disconnected actions of a little girl actually belong to the same semiotic set conventionally designated as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Hjörne & Säljö, 2004). In turn, offering a girl to be treated as ADHD might be extremely convenient for her, as it brings adults to be more tolerant of her actions; this might bring her to more or less deliberately act as-if she were an ADHD child (Abbey & Valsiner, 2003). Such processes might durably shape the life-course of a person. Such analyses also suggest that it does not take much to attribute different values to one’s experience and to reshape a life-course!<sup>2</sup>

In summary, a person’s view on the world is a randomly stabilized system of orientation, and bases for sense-making processes, resulting from the internalization of various socially situated and shared experiences, as well as from the responses her externalizations find in the world. Systems of orientation are the basis through which a person confers sense to his/her experience, which includes the affective valuation of experience, its semiotization, turning it into possible narratives, and the basis of development of more generalized beliefs and values guiding one’s life.

The study of the life-course can thus be seen as the study of the slow evaluation and variation of people’s systems of orientation, which are likely to require reorganization of semiotic sets or transformation along the two dimensions of distantiation and time. Of course, what the metaphorical notion of system of orientation designates cannot be studied directly; it can be only inferred on the basis of people’s externalization. In what follows, I propose to examine of transitions in people’s lives, as these offer occasions of changing and to elaborate new meanings.

## *Ruptures and Transitions*

Psychology, as well as many other developmental sciences, has been looking for moments of progressive evolution as well as of sudden change, called alternatively “irritations,” “disequilibrium,” “turning points,” “conflicts,” and so forth (see Zittoun, 2009). Although there is something structurally comparable in all these developmental studies, it is important to see that what is considered as changing or being re-equilibrated or re-elaborated after a disrupting event depends on the theoretical perspective envisaged, the object of study, and the models used to represent its usual functioning.

In a psychology focused on the development of persons through the life-course, the object of study is the person. Because we consider persons as meaning-makers, we have to consider ruptures perceived as such (and not, for example, the reorganization of schemes involved as a child realized that a quantity of liquid remains the same even if it changes glass; Piaget, 1941). Hence, the notion of *transition* designates here the processes triggered by a rupture experienced by a person and that lead to a progressive, new adaptation between the person and his/her environment. (It is, of course, clear that the new “adjusted” situation still involves changes but only the smooth transactions of transitive changes.) But what is re-elaborated during transition dynamics? How can this adjustment be made?

At one level, it is the system of orientation of the person that has to be reconfigured. But this construct is extremely abstract, phenomenologically inaccurate, and difficult to operationalize. Actually, our system of orientation and semiotic sets appear to us in some forms of stabilized configuration, which people and social scientists identify under different labels in different contexts. Hence, identity (what a person thinks she is, or how others recognize her) is a stabilized or recurrent sets of beliefs and meaning about oneself. We can thus define a model that is closer to data and phenomenological experience—a midrange model (Zittoun, 2008). Research in development and the learning sciences have developed, through numerous studies, notions that enable us to capture some aspects of the person’s changing activity after ruptures. Hence, at another level, grouping these analyses, we have proposed to consider that ruptures in the life-course lead to three mutually dependent lines of change: processes of *identity definition*, perception or positioning; processes of *learning* or definition of modes of understanding or acting; and processes of *sense-making*, linked to the

valuation of the situation, working through affects, or the linking of a situation to one’s own experience and in one’s time perspective (Perret-Clermont & Zittoun, 2002; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Psaltis, & Ivinson, 2003; Zittoun, 2005, 2006a).

*Learning processes* have been widely studied by researchers focusing on transitions between institutions, or from school to work (see below). Learning designates the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which are often identified through the fact that a person can actually solve a problem or handle a situation. *Identity processes*, including the elaboration of social identities, issues of positioning and recognition, or self-definition, have been the focus of studies of life changes, but also have more recently been included in studies in adult learning and learning in sensitive populations. Identity processes are engaged when a person is required to define who he/she is (in a job interview, in a questionnaire) or when he/she has to stand for what he/she believes he/she is (often because he/she is treated in a different manner). *Sense-making dynamics* have been approached through studies on narratives, biographical elaboration in the life-course, or representation of the future (Bruner, 1990; Dominicé, 2007; Mc Adams & Logan, 2006; Masdonati, 2007), but within transition and life-course research, rarely as an overarching process. In some studies, sense-making processes and learning, or identity and learning, are seen as mutually dependent. However, our proposition is that sense making, a direct production of what we have called a system of organization, plays a central role both in identity changes and in learning.

## *Uses of Resources in Transitions*

People experiencing ruptures in their life-course might use any available information or help to facilitate processes of transitions. Beyond the umbrella notion of “copying”, it is possible to study what resources people find in themselves or in the environment and how they use them to facilitate these processes. Many of these resources play an important role in facilitating the process of imagination, enabling the consideration of alternative options, reconsidering personal narratives, or opening possible futures.

One important class of resources is *institutional*; many social settings are actually meant to facilitate transition processes in the life-course. Vocational trainings, birth preparation courses and groups of parents, alcoholic anonymous, and religious congregations are such settings, which might more or

less tolerate exploration and offer a safe space for try-and-fails, and support identity changes, sense-making or the question of skills. Then, people often activate *interpersonal relationships*, which might play an important role in offering a protected space to experience sharing, dialogue, mutual perspective-taking, and distantiating from experience, whether it is friendships or family or professional “transition-helpers” such as counsellors, priests, and psychologists. People also might look for, and more or less deliberately use *semiotic resources*—social knowledge, information, scientific knowledge, (including what can be more specifically called symbolic resources)—cultural elements that primarily demand an imaginary experience, such as films, novels, arts, and poems (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Zittoun, 2006a). Symbolic resources might play important roles of mediation of transition and processes, first because they support and guide affective imaginary experiences (isolated from daily constraints), and second, because their semiotic form provides people with means to contain, take distance from, and transform personal experiences. Finally, people might simply use their own reflective ability, and in a less mediated way draw on their past experiences to establish links between situations, take distance, and redefine problems—what we might call *personal resources*.

As a contribution to a life-course socio-cultural psychology, it is very fruitful to describe the processes whereby uses of various resources support transition processes (for such analysis, see Zittoun, 2006a, Zittoun, Cornish, Gillespie, & Aveling, 2008). As we will see in the examples below, it is possible to show how each resource used by a person facilitates (or not) playful exploration, and consequently, identity changes, the acquisition of knowledge, or sense-making processes and thus, the transformation of one’s system of orientation.

### ***Dynamics and Variations in the Life-Course***

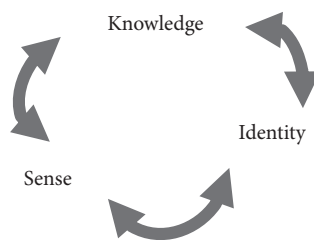
The study of the life-course has to account for the complex interplay of social changes, the constraining role of culture, psychological development, and the margin of freedom of each person in given circumstances. Identifying spheres of experiences, ruptures, processes of transitions, resources used by persons, and the work of imagination, one might attempt to capture some of the dynamics of the life-course. Rendering visible such dynamics might be useful for the identification of further comparable

processes, and it might also offer entry points for practitioners (teachers, parents, counsellors) who accompany people in different moments of transitions in the life-course.

The three types of changes—learning, identity and sense-making—are deeply related and mutually dependent. In most cases, changing one of these aspects will imply changes in one of the other aspects, in the shorter or longer term (see Fig. 23.1). For example, an adult that takes language classes (learning) might progressively feel more competent and, consequently, take more initiative in his/her workplace, where he/she might then be given new responsibilities, which changes his/her social and personal definition (identity); in turn, the person might then imagine new options for his/her life—for example, further studies or a professional change (sense).

From this follows that when a person who has experienced a rupture seems to resist one of these changes required by a new situation, the problem is often that one of the two other changes is impeded. For example, if after arrival in a new school, a formerly good student does not learn anymore (NO learning), it might be that he/she cannot tolerate the position of a newcomer he/she has in this new school (NO identity change); or perhaps the family of the young person plans to soon return to a foreign country where he/she would anyway take on the family company for which this knowledge is not required (NO sense).

Then, as noted above, each person participates to a plurality of spheres of experiences. It is very often the case that transition processes start in one of the spheres of experience only; yet these can extend beyond these boundaries, to others’ spheres of experiences, which might then evolve at various speeds. The plurality of spheres of experiences has interacting effects, which can be stabilizing or destabilizing, facilitating transition processes or impeding them. A teenager finishing compulsory



**Figure 23.1** Mutual dependency of dynamics of transition.

school might experience a rupture in his educational trajectory; yet he might, in parallel, still regularly attend his piano classes, his theatre activities, and his informal gathering with his friends. There is thus a transition in one sphere of experience but not in the others. However, the older person who enters in a pension might at once experience a rupture in the sphere of daily life but also put an end to her weekly meetings with neighbors, her attendance to church, and the monthly visit of her grandchildren; here, rupture diffuse in many spheres of experience and demand numerous transitions at once. In addition, this multiplicity is co-evolving. Often, key events in one's sphere of activity result from events in others—a professional transition might be caused, or facilitated, by a coincidental meeting with an uncle at a family dinner, or a person's ability to deal with the demands of a new job might be facilitated by his weekly discussions with childhood friends in a local pub.

In addition, each sphere of experience is socially structured and sets precise demands on people; consequently, for different reasons, the system of orientation of a person and, following from them, the sense a person is prone to confer to a situation, her ways of defining skills and identity, can at times be consonant, yet also extremely dissonant within a given sphere of experience. The experience of dissonant demands might thus be the cause of a felt rupture within a given sphere of experience. For example, religious young men who have developed a meaning system in a religious environment, which is extremely functional within that sphere of experience, might precisely feel that they do not have the means to deal with daily events once they are in a secular context, because their values and semiotic resources are dissonant there (Zittoun, 2006b).

It then seems that people can more easily engage these processes of change when they can work through one of these aspects at the time, leaning on at least another, more stable one. Hence, when a person changes country and sees her whole life questioned, having with her personal objects or pictures can offer a sense of personal continuity beyond the rupture, on the bases of which she can initiate other changes (e.g., learn the new language) (Habermas, 1996; Zittoun, 2006a). Similarly, in some cases, a person who is living through a rupture in one sphere of activity can, under some conditions, use resources coming from other past or present spheres of experiences to facilitate these transitions<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, to generate change in any of these aspects, a person has to engage to some degree in exploration, try-and-fail, and approximations; it is by acting “as-if” one is qualified that one can have the experience of being treated as qualified; it is by accepting to be treated “as-if” one were ignorant that one can learn; and, most of all, it is by exploring possible explanation, narrative, moods, possible outcomes, and preferred lives that one can develop and confer sense to a situation. Hence, each of these processes demand the work of imagination, through which a zone is created for potential actions and thoughts not-yet possible. Very often, these explorations are rendered possible by the immediate social environment, which accepts a student's wrong answer, an adult's divorce, or a period of confusion in a young woman's life (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

Many of the surprising curves and bends in a life-course simply result from the multiplicity of a person's spheres of experiences, their mutual dynamics, and the dynamics of transitions, and so these have to be studied if one wants to address life-course development.

### **Current Issues in Life-Course Transitions**

In this section, and based on the framework defined above, I use a series of empirical to highlight four inter-related issues that could be further analyzed in the study of the life-course.

First, the processes suggested here are meant to account for any transition, at any age, in the life-course, including very young children. Paying attention to such experiences of transition is a first step to develop a life-course analysis. Second, the principle of plurality of sphere of experience might help us to understand dynamics traditionally studied in isolation, such as the school-to-work transition. Third, the question of *what changes* as persons get older and accumulate experience through life has to be raised; and fourth, transitions of one person are likely to influence others, especially in inter-generational relationships. If the first two issues are currently being at the heart of a growing number of studies, the latter two are still to be explored.

### ***Transitions to New Spheres of Experiences: Childhood***

Although the interest for the study of transitions in the life-course has mainly focused on youth and aging population, transitions as defined here obviously start very early, and birth is probably one of



the first substantial transitions a human person has to go through.<sup>v</sup> Without going that far, we will examine early childhood experiences. The passage from home to kindergarten, or from kindergarten to primary school—even if usually prepared by adults through different techniques—is lived by every child as a particular transition (Lam & Pollard, 2009) depending on his past experience, his preferences, his social insertion, and his ability to play with reality. Even if very young children do not have the capacities to develop long-term time perspectives, research documenting children's externalization have shown their ability to reflect on what happened to them and what might soon happen (even as young as 2 years old; Nelson, 2006). For example, Ditte Winther-Lindqvist (2009) followed two groups of children for 8 months, before the end of nursery school and after the entrance at primary school, and before and after their move from primary school to secondary school. Here, I report some of the observations of children age 5 years and analyze them with the notions proposed above.

James is a popular child in the nursery school. In that social frame, children are free to organize their time as they please, and the most valued activity by the boys is soccer. As James is very good at it, he is recognized as very competent by his peers and himself feels quite content. In contrast, Benjamin is friends with girls and is bad at soccer; the other children consider him incompetent, and he says he doesn't like them; he often withdraws, and seems bored when adults do not organize time for him; his main commitment is in adult-conducted activities. Before changing schools, both children construct anticipations of what might happen:

James is sitting in the couch reading when Ollie asks him if he is coming outside to play soccer. "Yes, when I have finished reading this book," he says. I sit down next to him. It is a spelling-pointing book. He pronounces every word carefully as he points at it. Sometimes he asks me to read a word aloud if he is not certain. He sits a long time concentrating with the book. "I know my dad's telephone number," he says and recites it for me. "I am attending school next Friday," James says. "Only after the holidays," I correct him. "No we are to visit them next Friday and they will show us around and everything," he says with excitement. "That is why I rehearse reading," he says, as he puts the book away and joins his friends in the playground.

(Winther-Lindqvist, 2009, pp. 134–135)

Benjamin and Mark are drawing at the table with the adult Mia. All children are supposed to make a drawing for Liva as it is her birthday. Benjamin concentrates and works with commitment on the task.

Mark: I am done (stands up).

Mia: But Mark you only just arrived! When you start school you can't just quit when you feel like it... Draw some more....

Mark: (grabs the pen and draws for 10 more seconds without sitting down) Now it is done!

Mia: Mark, you know in school there is no such thing as not being bothered! (Sighs) Alright, this will have to do then.

(Winther-Lindqvist, 2009, p. 134)

James seems to be positively anticipating school, and playing as-if he would be already at school. He is actively creating a zone of proximal development, with the help of a book, and his experience developed in another sphere of experience—knowing his father's phone number. Benjamin is not reported in such active explorations, even if he is part of interactions that signal him what is expected in the primary school.

After having changed school, things appear quite differently. James is put in a different class than his good friends. Soccer is not the main activity anymore and is even difficult to practice: it can be played only during breaks, yet the sport ground is far and always very busy. Eight weeks after the beginning of the school year, the researcher writes the following:

(protocol notes from the school interview). James draws an unhappy face to the general question: How do you like school? And the class teacher asks him what it is about school he does not like. He shrugs and cannot tell her. "Is there something you miss from day care?" she asks him. "I miss my friends," he says. "But you have nice friends, also in school, don't you?" He shrugs. Regarding the questions about scholastic activities, James also says that lessons are boring, and learning rhymes and singing is dull.

(Winther-Lindqvist, 2009, p. 138)

In contrast, Benjamin seems to do fine: "in school he is not supposed to decide for himself what to do with his time, and he is engaged in the project of learning and being a good student, recognized by all teachers and peers for his hard work with drawing, counting, writing letters, remembering rhymes and lyrics, putting his hand up when wanting to speak, etc." (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009, p. 138). He

still does not have many friends, but this fact seems to worry his teacher and his parents more than him, as he seems to enjoy schoolwork.

The examples enable Winther-Lindvist (2009) to highlight how, in different spheres of experience, children's "orientation" and social identity are welcome or not and lead to integration versus disintegration. In our terms, it seems that in the new school, James was relying on his good identity as a good soccer player, reinforced by his friends' acknowledgement and supported by the related skills; in the new sphere of experience, there is no occasion to practice these skills and to reactivate his friends' admiration so as to support his own identity. The expectations he had for school, through which things could have acquired a personal sense (e.g., reading and knowing telephone numbers), on the other hand, have not been met by reality: so far, children do "boring" things like rhymes and singing, which are much less grown up activities than writing phone numbers! Hence, the whole activity seems devoid of sense, which is suggested by the general emotional tone of James' externalizations (his unhappy face, his comments on missing friends and finding things boring). James has thus experienced the school change as rupture, and it seems that he could rely on none of the dimension identified above: identity is questioned, skills become redundant, and the sense degrades. In contrast, Benjamin was described as having had difficulties establishing a strong positive identity, and his skills enabled him to execute what was asked from him. The entrance in the primary school enables him to actualize such skills in an environment where it is valued, and where he becomes acknowledged as a good pupil; in turn, one might think that through this, and perhaps, through a genuine epistemic pleasure hence generated, Benjamin seems to confer some sense to school as a place to learn—manifested by his enthusiasm. Here, some pre-existing skills are reinforced and support an identity in the making. Hence, in the new sphere of experience, the processes of transition in which James engages seems to take an involutive shape, whereas it is more generative in the case of Benjamin.

In this example, we see the intricateness of learning, identity processes, and sense-making, ranging from affective connotation to anticipation of the future and evaluation of the adequacy of the situation, as these might take place at any moment of the life-course. We also see that such mutually dependent dynamics take place in specific spheres

of experience, where relevant social others play an important role. Others acknowledge or not, validate or ignore, a child's externalization; this might facilitate or hinder the exploration or the change in which the child is engaged—his attempt to understand something he did not, his work of conferring sense to a situation, or of redefining himself.<sup>vi</sup> In addition, the role of these others might be guided by institutional rules: a kindergarten teacher can let children play, why a primary teacher has to bring them to read according to a certain agenda. Hence, to actually observe dynamics of transition, one has to consider not only the person's actions and externalizations but also how these enter in interpersonal dynamics, in a given socially defined setting.

### *Youth Transitions—Relationships Between Spheres of Experiences*

Typically, youth (including adolescence and what is at times called "emerging adulthood") is a period of many transitions; several changes of spheres of experience might occur in a short period, each of them creating experience of ruptures and subsequent readjustments. This partly results from the fact that young people often involve more time in the social world and in imaginary worlds than children do, through their leisure and because of training and economical reasons. For example, a study on secondary school students' uses of symbolic resources (SYRES) has shown that many young people spend, besides school and schoolwork, up to 20 hours a week in playing music, working out and combat sports, pocket bikes, art school, and in addition, during weekend, mixing to earn some money, or investing online. Each of the spheres of experience to which a person participates can involve processes of transitions. These spheres of experiences might be felt as more or less connected or disjointed, and young people might seem to experience a plurality of identities, might create boundary-crossing events between these spheres of experiences (Grossen, Zittoun, & Ros, 2012), or might reflect these in a rather unitary way. In the frame of this study, interviews were made with 20 young persons regarding their leisure time and their relationship to school knowledge (Zittoun, Padiglia, & Matthey, 2010). The data that follow comes from an interview with Marc, a young man engaged in vocational training. His interview enables us to show relationships between spheres of experiences.

In the sphere of school experience, Marc presents what is initially an involutive circle, because of

what he considers a lack of skills: “[School] is very demanding for me, I need to work a lot, I am dyslexic and things are very difficult for me. I never liked school . . . That is also why I trained as a carpenter”. Dyslexia, a learning difficulty, is for Marc an identity, and it seems to limit his engagement in further learning. On this basis of such negative identity, Marc seems to have engaged in a negative choice, choosing to study the less demanding trade:

I did a CFC [diploma] of carpenter [a few years ago] and (...) I worked 6 months in a company, and I didn't correspond to me at all, the work . . . It was not the act of working, it was the relation to the trade, the stress, and also the workshop chief was a bit lunatic, and as I was all the time with him it was too heavy. (...) Then I worked with another boss (...) someone I knew personally, a friend of the family. And there the atmosphere was nice, much nicer. But I wanted something else, to work alone in the workshop didn't correspond to me.

Marc seems unable to define a positive sense in a trade chosen as a consequence of negative self-definition. This experience led him to change his orientation. In the first company, Marc disliked the work and the other persons, which prevented him from developing a vocational identity—he felt as not “corresponding.” Marc then changes place—that is, sets a relationship to examine “what if” would then happen, exploring ways to generate more sense. However, even in the new, supportive environment, the work still does not make sense, and Marc decides to go back to school to re-orient his professional pathway. Marc engages in a vocational bachelor after difficult entrance tests. Suddenly his relationship to learning changes, which surprises Marc himself:

It is funny at the beginning of the school year, because French has always been the discipline that I don't link, because of dyslexia, spelling mistakes. It never worked for me. But coming here, surprisingly, my grades became very quickly quite good. And I don't have the same relationship with the discipline than in compulsory school.

The interviewer asks him about this sudden change, and Marc answers that he believes that the teacher played a role. First, the teacher often talks about things that are external to the course, and students feel that it increases their general knowledge. Second, French is taught in a different way: it is for the first time that the construction of a text is analyzed and discussed, and Marc discovers a new way

to read and question a text. Marc realizes that he can read despite his dyslexia and that complex texts can make sense. He explains how, through his activities in the worker's union, he came to think again about the novel *Germinal*, by Zola, that had been read and analyzed at school. In other words, in the new school, Marc can engage in French learning, confer sense to it, and, possibly, change his identity into that of a competent student.

Contrasting with his school experiences, Marc is very assertive about his skills and identity in the sphere of musical activities:

I started to play in a brass band [13 years ago], I started to play drums; after [3] years of training I could have the costume and of on parade, and soon this was not enough for me anymore, I went to the conservatory, I played a lot of drum, I made few years of xylophone which I had to stop because of the vocational training, and then I concentrated on percussion (..) and suddenly the director of the brass band left and I took it on. Now I play less, I direct, and I am still at the conservatory. (...) I compose pieces for concerts, I have a team of 114 young people, I have to teach them, manage the team, last week we were second at the [regional] competition with the percussion.

Music is a strong component of Marc's life; the members of his family play music and most of his friends were known through the band. Now, with the prize obtained, Marc feels also the public acknowledgment of his work. As musician, Marc's legitimacy is self-evident. Marc listens to a lot of music; he developed over the year his personal taste, he is actively exploring the musical field, attends concerts, and shares his interests with friends. Identity as musician and learning go hand-in-hand. In terms of personal sense, Marc is also aware of the way in which music is personally meaningful to him. On the one hand, music can be directly resonating with personal experiences. Hence, asked whether music he listened to could be related to his mood, Marc answers about his experience as adolescent using music to regulate his emotional state:

Very much so. There was a period in my adolescence, during which I was . . . a bit in love with a girl and it didn't go, and it is true that I turned to music which were revolting or a bit hard. (..) it makes the energy go out. In general it easily calms me down. (...) There was also a song, where the text corresponded really to what I was living, and I listened a lot to it . . .

Playing has various other benefits:

Playing enables me to cut from everything that is going on (...) when I play I don't think about what is going on anymore, it also enables to let the steam off, especially drums, sometime it hits hard, and now what I like is to be able to transmit to younger ones in the band. And this concourse... is also a bit (...) an acknowledgement.

Marc gives a narrative account of his changing relationship to music through time, and of the evolution of its use as symbolic resource. In the past, he used music for emotional regulation and to reflect about a love affair. In the present, music can be used to create intergenerational relationships in teaching; and played in public, it can produce social acknowledgement. Other people's recognition (students, the public, juries) comfort Marc in his competent musician identity. Sense follows: through these activities, one can also share his pleasure and expertise and enjoy the satisfaction of doing so. The transmitting activity becomes very important in Marc's present life. He enjoys it, and his comments show how seriously he reflects about the didactics of music in his ensemble:

It is really interesting, the youngest is 10 years old. So, to teach them, is quite interesting. (...) I compose most pieces, it is easier for me because I can write according to their level, I can make voices which are progressive and not too difficult.

Hence, for Marc, in the musical field, an identity of musician, the learning it engages, and the sense that one can extract from it are mutually supportive and generative. That music makes personal sense supports engagement in learning, which supports social recognition, which supports identity and enables transformation of the sense one finds in it, until it changes the activity of learning, now oriented toward the development of teaching skills.

If we now consider Marc as a whole, we see that he developed in one sphere of experience an identity of incompetent learner, bringing inadequate learning and meaningless activity, whereas in another sphere of experience, learning, identity, and sense are united positively in music. The key point is that Marc, after his second work experience in the workplace, realized what was missing:

I wanted to be able to transmit what I had learned, and there I thought that teacher of handcraft, this would be a good thing, yes, to be able to transmit, and to be in contact with other persons.

(Interviewer: as you were doing in the brass band?)

Yes, that is what was missing on the professional plane.

Hence, it seems that Marc could connect his experiences in the sphere of school and in the sphere of music playing: having the identity, the skills, and the reasons to "transmit what one knows to younger ones" is something that can occur in both spheres of activity. It can be read as a specific semiotic set, crystallized enough to cross boundaries. Thanks to it, the identity of self-as-teacher comes to enrich the identity of self-as-learning-a-manual-trade; and the experience of being skilled in teaching, what is socially acknowledged, and the sense it has for self can now support the vocational sphere of experience.

Note that not all young people have to develop convergent understanding of different spheres of activity. Some young people develop parallel, but disjointed, skills in their spheres of music-mixing or Asian film watching and at school; others might in contrast have a clear unifying definition of their activity through different spheres, as Mara, who is interested in visual arts and uses every information provided by the school to develop her own exploration of arts, art books, and her practice of painting in an art school or in her daily life (Zittoun, Padiglia & Matthey, 2010). There is still a tendency in psychology to claim what sort of life configuration is "better"—predictive of better social integration, or more well-being, and thus emphasizing the importance for people to elaborate more "integrated personalities" (Erikson, 1968), or on the contrary, more diversified, multifaceted self-definitions (Proulx & Chandler, 2009; Moshman, 2009). Given the open-ended nature of these processes, it is not possible to say whether some of these modes of joining or maintaining disjointed various spheres of experience is "good" or "not good" for facilitating development over time. One might even say that for some people, under some circumstances, some modalities might be better than others. Hence, for a young woman enrolled in the war effort, working in the fields with no possibilities to change activities, it might be good to have leisure experiences felt as very disconnected, such as Walt Disney film-watching, whereas at other moments, reading botanic books and literature about life in nature can serve as a symbolic resource that enriches daily practice (Zittoun, Cornish, Gillespie, & Aveling, 2008). In the state of our society, it might simply be good to find, when necessary, the psychological and social conditions permitting playfulness,

imagination and explorations of alternatives; these conditions are extremely variable.

### ***Moving Through Life: Experience in Transitions***

As people advance through life, they also are likely to accumulate experience from transitions. Hence, if transitions lived by older persons might still be similar in kind with those experienced by young people, they might simply have known more of them and learned from them or about them. Personal experience is not the simple accumulation of distinct moments; it implies the constant re-elaboration of one's system of orientation. With it, not only do people have the ability to use more resources in new transitions, but also, the modalities of experiencing these transitions might be different.

In the following sequence taken from an essay called "November Hurricane," the Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal,<sup>vii</sup> age 75 years, describes how, seeing the crowds getting organized in Prague in November 1989, he reminisced about dramatic past experiences that occurred in November 1939 (on reminiscence in old age, *see* Coleman, 2005):

So there I stood in front of the pub in my Russian fur hat, while all the people who'd been in Wenceslas square streamed past me, shouting and carrying placards – I watched them, astonished as this May Day parade on Eastern Monday, still without its customary whipping and lashings... I'd never seen so many beautiful unblinking people, I'd never seen such solemnity in young people... I walked along with them, and I came to my old Law Faculty, where across the bridge the white helmets gleamed and shone, proclaiming no entry—and I stood where fifty years ago I saw the Army and the SS-Waffe hounding my fellow-students out of the Faculty – it was morning, my friends from the University were forced at rifle butt into army trucks with green tarpaulins, while I stood on the corner of Bilkova and saw what I saw... And as the side-flaps were slammed shut, and those lorries set off, making for Sachsenhausen, I heard my fellow-students singing... *Kde domov můj*... our national anthem... Today I stood there and saw young men in jeans bending their knees and squatting down on a patch of lawn to light candles by a little memorial I'd never spotted before... (...) [where was a marble tablet in the memory of a young man fallen for freedom in 1945]

(Hrabal, 1998, pp. 111–112)

In this passage, a present moment—linked to a dramatic transition in Czech's people's lives, the end of socialism in 1989, 75-year-old Hrabal as narrator sees the situation through the eyes of someone who has experienced similar events and their meanings —1939 and the transition of Czech people under the German occupation but also 1968 with the arrival of the Russian tanks leading to a totalitarian state. Hrabal's description of the past events, his fellow students' arrest, is already interpreted through the lenses of the present: in 1939, Hrabal did not know that they were sent to Sachsenhausen. The emotional intensity of that excerpt seems to be result from the fact that it is not a simple experience of a transition; it is vibrant of all the traces of comparable, past transitions, with their various meanings and longstanding consequences on the narrator's life and on that of a nation. In that sequence, then, these past events and the lessons learned by the narrator are also questioned and reread, for, if past November events lead to dramatic events, the present one, full of dignity, will actually see the "victory of the people," demanding a radical rereading of the past: hence past deaths, which seemed meaningless in the past, seem now to find a meaning in the new freedom acquired.

This active work of understanding, linking, and working through experience, takes place all through life, yet gets depth with experience (of course, in the case of a writer, the effect of experience goes hand-in-hand with the development of creative skills).

### ***Intergenerational Relationships and Transitions***

Finally, it might be worth returning to the principle of inter-related lives; in effect, very often, how a person lives and experiences (or has experienced) transitions affects other persons living their own transitions. Intergenerational relationships affect, among others, nuclear families, teacher–students interactions, as well as grandparent–grandchild exchanges.

The fact that people's lives are inter-related has been largely shown by systemic psychotherapists. Trying to understand how interactions taking place with one or members of a family could have an effect on other members of a family beyond the therapeutic encounter, Dreier (2008) has proposed a complex ideographic study of a family, where not only a session with one or more members of the family are registered but also where the family members

are interviewed at home. Hence, the study enables us to see how, for a person, transitions in one sphere of life (e.g., therapy) are linked to changes in other spheres (e.g., family encounters); it also examines how transitions in the life of one person affects the lives of others and conversely, how the resistance to engage in developmental transitions hinders daily transactions in the other family members' lives. Such study enables us to advance in the understanding of the mutual relationships between transitions that are synchronic, affecting various persons, in and through various spheres of experiences.

A second type of mutualities are those affecting transitions lived in the past by an adult and the ones experienced by younger persons with which the adult interacts—that is, interacting with a child, the adult is in the position of the adult who was played by another person as he was in the position of the child. Such position exchange (Gillespie, 2011) and reactivation of old transitions can bring the adult either to simply exchange position (become the adult that once dealt with him) or, having the possibility to reflect on that situation, transform the situation. In either case, young people or children are confronted to some respect, to a re-actualization of a drama that already happened. Hence, psychologists call the “Pygmalion effect” the tendency of teachers to treat students as small themselves or modeling them in that direction (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968); and conversely, it is part of the hard work of teachers or parents to realize that their children or students are not the sorts of students or children they once used to be and that the transitions experienced by younger persons are different (*see*, for example, Hatchuel, 2007). This tendency to align present transitions with old ones in which one had a different position can typically be identified in the adult's constant complaint that “youth is not anymore what is used to be”—less well-educated, less politicized... To advance our understanding of such dynamics, in the study on secondary school students mentioned above, we interviewed teachers about their past transitions, and their modalities of uses of symbolic resources then, and we examine how, in classroom interactions, teachers tend to promote, in their students, the same sorts of uses of resources, and through that, a similar transition experience; we then compare this with the students' discourses on their transitions. This type of study can thus participate to a better understanding of the mutualities between transitions in people whose lives are inter-related.

Finally, studies on grandparenthood have suggested that although dynamic of experiences of reactivation of past transitions in the present of interactions with grandchildren, the different positioning gives occasion of creative re-invention. First, grandparents are not stressed with their children's troubles as they used to be as parents (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 2007; Cesari Lusso, 2004); but second, intergenerational exchange allows for an explicit transmission of experience, with grandchildren being more likely to accept to learn from elders—especially, but not limited to, their grandparents—than from the generation of their parents. Today, as longevity increases, the co-existence of three to four generations becomes common in some families; at the same time, the drop of birth rates produces many elder persons without offspring. Researchers and policymakers have called for a “new intergenerational pact” so as to allow the establishment of new relations between generations (Fragnière, 2010)—within or across family lines. As traditions, which usually provided semiotic resources to guide most of life transitions, tend to erode, one might wonder whether such trans-generational transmission might bring the emergence of new forms of crystallized experience—that is, the embryo of traditions. In the future, such studies should pay attention to the role of mutually dependent transitions in inter-generational dynamics.

### **Conclusion: Life-Course Dynamics**

The study of the life-course is an old project in the social sciences. Given the research methods that have been privileged so far, wide groups meant to be representative of some universal beings have been considered; this has led researchers to focus on what is general among trajectories—either the impact of social and historical events affecting many people at once, or the biological necessities of aging. From a socio-cultural psychology perspective, the core issue is elsewhere: it is located where people render their experience significant—be it in the here-and-now of the emerging moment, or when 2 weeks or a whole life is examined at once. It seems reasonable to ground such a socio-cultural study around the study of transition, as this notion might facilitate trans-disciplinary synthesis.

In this chapter, I have retraced the main theoretical assumptions of a socio-cultural perspective on the life-course, and I have in particular proposed to focus on two of four aspects through which human “cultivation” occurs (Josephs & Valsiner, 2007): in

the constant evolution of one's system of orientation, and in the interactions that take place in various spheres of experiences. Using a deliberately limited number of processes, I have tried to highlight basic dynamics taking place as people experience transitions through their life-course as many occasions for development. In the last part of this chapter, I have also suggested some issues for systematic studies, such as the evolution of people's modalities of experiencing transitions and using resources to facilitate them, as they gain more life experiences, and the inter-relations of people's experiences transitions.

From what precedes, it becomes clear that to move toward the construction of a more general socio-cultural psychology of the life-course, less wide-samples studies are needed than well-thought case studies (or ideographic approaches). Beyond the strategies evoked here (quasi-ethnographic work, interviews, use of personal writings), there is a current scientific effort to rediscover and emphasize methods that would be adequate and to which the reader might refer (Abbey & Surgen, 2012; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010; Valsiner, Molenaar, Lyra, & Chaudhary, 2009). More generally, we can invite the reader to be creative—as long as data collection respects the basic theoretical principles exposed here (and by others) and preserves the unexpected dynamics of the life-course.

### **Future Directions: Life-Course in the Twenty-First Century**

The study of the life-course presents new challenges in contemporary times. The acceleration of time perceived by more and more humans—both resulting from actual technical, political, ecological changes, and to the information about these—changes the perceived stability of human life. More and more people become migrants or feel nomadic, and experience frequent transitions. In this moving environment, the strong social or cultural canalization becomes less visible—we live with the illusion of being free, when we are not. With less explicit cultural guidance, people would have to rely more on their personal system of orientation and on the resources they are able to find in themselves, with the help of others, or around them. Learning from experience is vital, and for those who, in rich societies, do not have to focus on daily survival, learning from experience involves mainly being able to reflect on one's experience and to develop strong basis of usable knowledge mobilizable in unexpected situations. This also requires an enhanced

creativity—not only that which brings some of us to engage in a craft or an artistic creativity, but a daily ability to question the obvious, to explore the possible, and to see what is not yet the case.

A psychology of the life-course should give means to advance the understanding of humans in the contemporary world. I have attempted to highlight a few ideas toward that goal; yet this exploration also leaves us with open issues: How can the theoretical ambition to develop a psychology aware of the complexities of dynamics of the person in context really be translated in empirical work, and how can this empirical work be generalized? How can the notion of transition really become an “analyzer” by which advances in various sciences might contribute to such complex understanding? Then, how can a knowledge that emphasizes dynamic processes offer tools for teachers and practitioners? And more generally, how should we define human choice and responsibility in a changing world? How can our society, which educational institutions tend toward self-maintenance, facilitate the development of persons who are equipped to deal with unpredictability?

### **Notes**

1. Hence, three modes of organizing one's experience can be proposed: first, the organization of experience according to formal logic and that tends toward scientific knowledge; it involves causal reasoning and temporal succession, and it refuses contradiction. It is what we usually call “rational” thinking. A second mode, which we have here associated to the creation of semiotic sets, is experience-based and as such might engage reasonable, yet not rational, reasoning—what one might call “common sense” thinking (with all its positive and negative connotations!), which is highly sensitive to cultural variation and is typically displayed in narrative accounts of one's lives. The third mode is the logic of affective dynamics, which are much more embodied and ignore time and causality. We have very little control over it, yet it might infuse other modes of thinking, especially common sense. The first and third modes have been described by psychoanalysis, as resulting from conscious versus unconscious logics, secondary processes, and primary processes (Freud, 1898) or as “asymmetrical thinking” versus “symmetrical thinking” (Matte Blanco, 1998; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2010). The first mode is also privileged by learning and developmental psychology. The third mode has been explored by psychoanalysis but is still widely ignored by psychology, with the exception of some streams of social psychology (Moscovici, 2000). The second mode is the preferred object of study of social psychology and “folk psychology” (Bruner, 1990) yet has the less clear status of all. It is often seen as a combination of the two other modes of thinking (it is close to Freud's “preconscious” thinking, it demands a combination of symmetric and asymmetric thinking) but has still received very little attention in itself. However, it is quite likely that this mode of thinking groups a large number of identity dynamics, cultural experiences, and daily thinking, which participate in

what we call sense-making—and that is the object of study of cultural psychology.

2. It is to this sort of goal that some forms of meditative practice tend to orient people and reveal the random nature of the world in which we believe and, therefore, its vanity (in a Pascalian sense).

3. This raises the complex issue known under the idea of “transfer of knowledge” or of “use of resources” from one sphere of experience to another (see Zittoun, Valsiner et al., in press, for a discussion).

4. Such explorations take place in what Vygotsky had called a zone of proximal development (as it is created in children’s play, or in adult–children interactions, see Van der veer & Valsiner, 1991) or as transitional phenomena in the sense given by Winnicott—between what is and what is yet to be (Helson, 2009; Winnicott, 1971).

5. It is not only a biological change but also and immediately a symbolic one: a child enters in the world of culture. All traditional cultures accompany birth with actions aiming at facilitating the cultural birth of the child, such as circumcision, baptism, or name-giving rituals. Humans, who are used to reasoning in terms of transitions, are pushed to question where these children were before being there. The question, “Where do children come from?” is a classical anthropological and religious question; raised by most children, it is quite likely to be present in many people’s minds, even if in a very unconscious form. Parental theories (ethnotheories) about how to accompany the child’s progressive mastery of biological functions (progressive sleeping hours, whining, sphincter control) can also be seen as actualization of implicit knowledge about transitions: people might act as if it were better to accompany self-generated transitive changes, eventually bringing more substantial changes (as when parents decide to follow the child’s sleeping rhythm); on the contrary, they might privilege clear transitions by imposing a rupture to the infant and having the child adjust to it (as when parents decide to have their child learn to “make their hours”). Whether one believes in the importance of early experience or not, it is probably the case that these first handling of experience of ruptures in children might constitute a basis for further handling of ruptures and transitions. However, as humans are extremely plastic—especially in early age—and because of the multiplicity of experience and the multilinearity of development, it is quite likely that some experiences of demanding transitions might be compensated by later experiences, and memories of the one and the other revised accordingly.

6. The model of the semiotic prism, proposed elsewhere, enables to capture these dynamics of recognition in sense-making (e.g., Zittoun, 2006a).

7. The text of Hrabal belongs to a series of “letters to Dubenka”—although they are very written, they have the specificity of having the form of a freeflow of consciousness—with Hrabal (2008) explaining that his work consists in absorbing during the whole day experiences and situations, and emptying himself on the paper afterward; his work has been qualified as “total realism” (Naughton, 1998).

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## Being Poor: Cultural Tools for Survival

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### Abstract

Poverty has been a subject of interest in psychological theorization and research, inasmuch it is related to many problems and fields with which psychologists deal. Nevertheless, the narratives on poverty available in psychological research and theory are not enough: one might say there exists a “poverty of psychology” regarding this condition, which is a quotidian reality for the majority of the world’s population. In this chapter, we intend to approach the reality of being poor as a living experience in process, by addressing several considerations: What does it mean to be poor in the perspective of the poor? How can the relation poor versus non-poor be understood? Which cultural tools are employed in the struggle for survival? This chapter analyzes the historical emergence of the notion of poverty and its uses in research and social policies, identifying the different discourses related to it, the official, the activist, and the discourse of living experience. The approach on cultural tools highlights the concepts of collective memories and resilience, presenting relevant features concerned to them: folk and oral culture, group identification (belongingness and spirituality), hope, and destiny.

**Keywords:** cultural tools, poverty, otherness, collective memory, resilience

*I remember your words very well, Your Excellency: our misery is profiting well. In order to live in a country of beggars, one needs to show the wounds and the boys’ salient bones. (. . .). This is the current word: gather the debris to easy the view of the disaster. The outsider should be able to contemplate all that “poorness” without making too much effort.*

—Mia Couto, 200. (*Mozambique*)

*It has always been the main European argument to colonize other nations the right to compare cultures in a hierarchical way that gave them tranquility of spirit to proclaim they were bringing civilization to the non cultivated, barbarian and savage Indians. How to compare past and experiences?*

—Pepetela, 2009 (*Angola*)

The idea of a “poverty of psychology” is not new. In 1970, Arthur Pearl wrote a chapter with this title, remarking:

“psychologists as a group, along with other social scientists, have been guilty of refusing to accept the challenges that poverty presents to a society of unparalleled affluence”

(Pearl,<sup>1</sup> 1970, p. 348; Harper, 2003, p. 185)

Representations of poverty throughout history have been complex and multidimensional in their nature. Such representations need to be understood in their socio-historical contexts, rather than treated as homogenizing stereotypes. The approaches to the topic of poverty vary, of course, according to the culturally and historically situated place and time and their prevailing philosophical and theoretical assumptions. The condition of living in poverty implies that the poor, as a social category, do not usually have the opportunity to produce academic knowledge about their reality from their own perspective. Studying poverty is possibly one of the greatest epistemic and ethical challenges concerning the I–Other relationships in a multicultural world that increasingly needs to learn about the complex dynamics of otherness. When it comes to poverty, the very possibility of the social visibility of the other is the first problem: the poor as agentive people become invisible. The academic, political, and financial centers of decision-making, from the outside, study, evaluate, make diagnoses, and implement programs that still relate to the poor in a condescending or patronizing way, offering explanations and solutions that hardly fit the reality of poverty as an ongoing process of living experience—just like other human conditions. In doing so, those institutions, scholars, and technicians implicitly deny, to the people and communities living in poverty, the possibility of expressing their own voice.

Alternatively, we want to adopt in this chapter a different perspective on poverty, a perspective capable of revealing the cultural tools that the poor wield for survival, and the developmental poetics present under adverse and paradoxical circumstances. Such an approach aims to overcome the blindness—still present in psychological research—toward the broad variability of modes of living, and in doing so, allow us to dialogically consider diversity and otherness.

### The Dialogical Perspective

Bertau and Gonçalves (2007), accepting the Bakhtinian idea of dialogicality as a potency referred

to as the expectation of the other’s addressivity to oneself, have emphasized the dialogical form that characterizes the dynamics of selfhood: “the dialogicality of the self is defined in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions which can be endowed with a voice in the landscape of the mind” (p. 5). Thus, the *Other* can be an external voice inside the self, yet a voice personally signified:

This dynamic perspective on selfhood has proven itself to be one of the most promising ways to surpass the old static conceptions of self which viewed the self as a monadic structure capable of relating with other monadic structures (Sampson, 1993), but still each independent from the other. The reality of the individual self was, in this sense, different from the reality of relationships.

(Bertau & Gonçalves, 2007, p. 5)

Perhaps this claim can also be applied in broader spheres (as done by Hermans & Dimaggio [2008], when bridging dialogicality and globalization) inclusive of the relationships between social classes, inasmuch as, besides material constraints, complexes of meanings sustained by poor and non-poor build and maintain poverty as a social reality. No understanding of poverty is possible without taking into account this social-psychological dimension, and it is better if done from a dialogical standpoint, which implies:

Human expressions are in interrelationships with other’s expressions: any single expression, such as a spoken utterance, a written text, a thought (even if not yet exteriorized) is a reply to other’s utterances, texts or ideas. In this sense, dialogicality refers to a property that is essential in all human meaning-making processes. (...) Linell (in preparation) goes beyond the level of expression and addresses the human condition: “*The term dialogicality (...) refers to some essence of the human condition, notably that our being in the world is thoroughly interdependent with the existence of others.*”

(Bertau & Gonçalves, 2007, p. 6, emphasis added)

Therefore, if dialogically considered, alterity or otherness (Simão, 2008) is itself constitutive; the *I* depends on the view of the *Other*. For our purposes in this chapter, the *I* and the *Other* are historical and culturally context-situated. The poor is “the other” in our discussion—the other to whom the *I* is related. In this relationship, *I* and *Other* need to be mutually recognized in his/her otherness as being part, at the same time, of an equal human condition. If the

poor cannot be seen from this relational standpoint, then there is not complete consideration of his/her reality; then there is not an encounter between different objective and subjective realities from which a new understanding can emerge. Which kind of relationship does psychological research put in motion when studying, approaching, and intervening on poverty?

This chapter intends to approach the reality of being poor as a living experience in process by addressing several considerations: Which cultural tools are employed in the struggle for survival? How do meaning-making processes inform and direct life trajectories under poverty? What does it mean to be poor from the perspective of poor persons? How do we approach the relation poor *versus* non-poor as a social relationship? What can the non-poor world learn from the lives of the poor?

The literature in psychology, history, and social sciences has been screened to select studies where the perspective of the communities and persons under focus is effectively considered. Special attention has been given to studies that illuminate processes, mechanisms, and cultural tools involved in facing the reality of poverty.

### Meanings of Poverty: Historical Roots

*Seeing so much poverty everywhere makes me think that God is not rich. He gives the appearance of it, but I suspect some financial difficulties.*

—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 1862

As a reality, poverty is known in every society and time throughout history; yet noteworthy is Mollat's claim (1986) that the word "poverty" only became diversified and part of the vulgar languages in the 13 and 14 centuries. Etymologically, *poverty* comes from Old French *poverté*, Latin *paupertatem*.<sup>2</sup> The word "poor" comes from Latin "pauper," meaning "small" and "to give birth." Originally, it was used to refer to unproductive land or cattle. The main feature here is the idea of infertility: something that is small and cannot generate (give birth); gradually, the term began to be used as an attribute of people.

The study of poverty must be approached from each of the two poles that support it: the process of being poor and social conditions (objective and subjective). According to Mollat (1986), "poverty refers initially to the quality, and later the condition of a person from any social status struck by privation" (p. 2), and also:

Poverty was quite broadly defined. A pauper was a person who permanently or temporarily found himself in a situation of weakness, dependency and humiliation, characterized by privation of the means to power and social esteem (which means varied with period and place): these included money, relations, influence, power, knowledge, skill, nobility of birth, physical strength, intellectual capacity, and personal freedom and dignity.

(Mollat, 1986, p. 5)

The image constructed about the poor at different times is connected to social goals and varies throughout history, ethically and aesthetically, according to the values of the time (Geremek, 1995). This image can carry notions and experiential realities that are basically similar, but the relationships between the concept and the living situations are difficult to apprehend (Mollat, 1986). Mollat's assertion takes into account the Middle Ages but could perfectly fit contemporary times.

Examination of Mollat's classical study in social history, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, not only verifies the polysemy of the concept of poverty, considering its several dimensions (biological, economical, and cultural) but identifies the historical roots of signs that are still associated with the poor—in addition to, of course, the array of conditions that enhance poverty: from material deprivation and social inequalities to war and violence. All these dimensions should be considered in any discussion about the poverty line,<sup>3</sup> which indicates the existence of degrees of poverty. They are also intertwined: poor hygiene and health appear linked to the lack of economic resources and are used to generate social exclusion:

In the Middle Ages, to suffer a loss of status meant literally to fall from one's estate, to be deprived of its instruments of labor and of the marks of its condition. For a peasant this meant the loss of farming implements and animals; for an artisan, loss of the tools of his trade; for a merchant, loss of his shop; for a cleric, loss of his books; for a noble, loss of his horse and arms. Without these things a man ceased to be anything, because he no longer possessed the means to carry on a social existence. Stripped of his social position and excluded from the community, he was forced into emigration and vagabondage. The poor man was uprooted and alone.

(Mollat, 1989, pp. 6–7)

However, starting from the sixteenth century, there were changes in the image of the poor. The term

*poor* has begun to refer to the person that cannot maintain him-/herself: the beggar, the sick person, the old, the widow, the landless farmer, the abandoned child, the soldier with no war to fight. The epidemics turn out the beggar as a factor of popular disorder. The *poor* have become a social danger. To control these “marginal” people, society has based itself on moral arguments. (*Petit journal de l'exposition*. 1997).

One could identify here some roots of the current discussion on the concept of poverty, but should it emphasize economic indicators or social exclusion? The social construction of the image of the poor entails process and steps. In this way, the term poor is historically employed, first as an adjective with several connotations (e.g., condescendence, disdain, contempt, repugnance, fear), then as a substantive and only later in its plural form, acquiring here an abstract dimension: the poor, charged by feelings of pity and/or social disquiet. In his description of this process, Mollat (1989) recognizes:

The word *poor* in an abstract sense [is used to] evoke not only an image of the afflicted individual and the state of his or her affliction but also an affective component of compassion or horror, which carries with it considerable potential to provoke rebellion or social fear.  
(p. 2)

From a cultural-semiotic perspective, the word “poor” can be seen as a hypergeneralized sign (Valsiner, 2007), a semiotic regulator that orients important psychological mechanisms that contribute, on a personal and social level, to maintain or modify the social *status quo*. Just as other conditions of being in the world, the image of the poor has the power of a hypergeneralized sign, presenting a dense, dynamic, social and personal quality, likely to interact with affective-semiotic fields set up by feelings of empathy-repulsion, inclusion-exclusion, compassion-indifference and from which emerge complex attitudes and responses to poverty—keeping in mind Mollat’s claim that “evidence concerning these attitudes and responses generally exhibit only one point of view, that of the non-poor casting their gaze upon the poor” (1998, p. 2). Considering that the *Other* carries what Souza (2009) refers to as “a way of perceiving the future as a possibility (p. 104),” the images of the poor constructed by non-poor are, on the other hand, just as other social realities, value-laden and may underestimate or excessively idealize poverty and poor people, as this author emphasizes.

The historic roots of charity offer another good example in explaining the ambiguities of poverty as a concept and as a reality. In the Christian tradition, as in other more ancient religions, being poor appears as a virtue. In the Middle Ages, Mollat (1998) reports the honorific use of poverty in the expression “pauper of Christ,” initially applied to monks who chose poverty for love of God, and later, with Saint Francis and Saint Benedict, with the connotation of a means of perfection or a virtue in itself (the poor hold an inherent dignity and it is a social duty to restore this dignity if broken). Starobinski (1994) highlighted that the role of “poor” as representing the salvation of souls through charity turned out to be indispensable to distinguish between “good” and “bad” connotations of the word: the one that worked and the one that did not. The first, the “poor for Christ,” needed to be helped administering charity (and not giving alms in the streets) so the new urban order could be maintained. Later, with Illuminism, poverty became an issue of politics and government, no longer of charity.

As Mollat’s perceptive analysis has noted, the central ambivalence lies in considering poverty as “a form of spiritual sublimation” or “a permanent disgrace” (p. 9):

The idea, derived from the Gospels, that the pauper was created in the image of Christ the Redeemer was frequently contradicted for brutal contempt for the peasant (...).

... the misery of the pauper is often described dispassionately and with the purpose of reminding society of its duties towards the poor. But what was proposed? Resignation in anticipation of consolation in the hereafter? A social upheaval that would humble the proud and exalt the humble without changing the structure of society? A balance between rights on the one hand and duties on the other, based on some notion of mutual charity?”  
(pp. 9–10)

As also stressed by Starobinski, here Mollat refers to a notion of the “true poor,” whose belongingness to a group implies living on scarce resources generated by humble work, in contrast with the false one, the vagabond, wanderer, the beggar. The latter could be seen as a rebel, likely to disseminate social disorder and epidemics. Using these polarities as a basis, Ezequiel (1998) has commented on the many nuances around the subject of poverty and the image of the poor, which need to be studied over the course of history. Only by the late Middle Ages was

the notion of the poor as a social group established, with important social and moral implications:

What had been an individual affliction became a social scourge. Poverty, once seen as a consequence of, and punishment for, individual sin, was later considered a form of social parasitism or even (as in the case of beggary) a crime. (...) Humanist praise for success, with its concomitant exaltation of wealth, eventually contaminated the poor themselves, who were rightly or wrongly accused of giving in to the natural tendency of the poor man to envy or desire the comforts of the rich.

(Mollat, 1998, p. 297)

And he continues:

A new word came into use as a rival to *charity* and *mercy*: *beneficence* (with its equivalent in other languages), a precursor of the more modern *benevolence*, which first came into use (in French) in the eighteenth century, along with *philanthropy*. (...) And meanwhile, governments guided by the principle of *raison d'état* invented the idea of policing the poor – an idea more rational than it is charitable. (p. 298)

The contemporary meanings of being poor refer to social conditions of social disqualification (Paugam, 2003), stigmatization, and criminalization (Wacquant, 1999). To deal with those conditions, the poor develop cultural tools for survival: it is not only the lack of food and not having somewhere to live and a job. According to Paugam (2003), understanding social disqualification demands for us

“to study the diversity of statuses which define [people living under this condition], their personal identities, i.e., the subjective feelings around the situation experienced by these individuals along their social experiences and, finally, the social relationships they hold with other people, inside the same social condition and in different situations.”

(p. 47)

As a social category, connected to the Marxist notion of class struggle, the contemporary concept of poverty comes from mercantilism, incorporating the French Revolution's claim of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and the fight for living with dignity—the latter, according to Mollat (1998), originating from one of the conceptions of poverty within Christendom, well-expressed by Saint Francis. Marx (1890/1968) himself did not approach the subject

of pauperization directly: he was interested in the mechanisms that generated this reality. The Marxist analysis is structured around three main axes: the mismatch between labor income and purchasing power; the industrial reserve army (mechanism of the capitalist system that has control over the establishment of a constant distinction between the mass of wages and productivity); and the structural unemployment (with the decrease in the elasticity of the industrial army reserve). The changes in these three areas lead to increased illegal economic activities, institutionalized drug trafficking, underemployment, piracy, and informal trade.

The much-discussed crisis of capitalism and the demands and realignment that it brings on a global level have revived the discussion on the issue of poverty, by scholars and international agencies. Governments create ministries and special offices for dealing with poverty (e.g., the Brazilian Department of Solidarity-Based Economy). This conjuncture allows the emergence of new concepts (or new emphasis) around poverty as an international reality, such as the ideas of Amartya Sen (1999) on “development with freedom”. He highlighted the idea that development is not possible in a socio-economic model that excludes human life as a value by itself.

Eventually, initiatives characterized by solidarity or community life introduce new perspectives that consider the voice of the poor man himself. From the standpoint of the poor, considering their living reality, the process of globalization entails displacements and realignments with deep and as yet poorly understood impacts on the self. These are some of the consequences of belonging to an industrial army reserve that, in the words of Serge Paugam (2003), is not more “reserve” but “obstacle.”

To understand how these concepts impact the research, be it through scholars' ideological and epistemological biases or through the measures the studies adopt, let's consider the three different kinds of narratives on poverty that can be currently identified: the official discourse, and the discourses of activism and of living experience. The critical point here is that the official discourse is structured upon the naturalization of social inequality: two different kinds of logic are accepted and taken for granted—one for the rich, another for the poor (Fonseca, 1987; Chaves, 2009).

### ***Poverty According to Official Policies***

The understanding of poverty that prevails contemporarily in academic and political spheres

is based on some central ideas, which come from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The first concerns the criteria to identify a poverty line and classify families according to their position relative to this line.

The first of these criteria is *subsistence*. Families were defined as in poverty when their income was not “sufficient for maintaining mere physical efficiency” (Rowntree, 1901, p. 86). Food, rent, and clothing were taken into account as indicators. If the family income minus rent was not sufficient for the consumption of the items above, the family was classified as under the poverty line—Rowntree’s construct. After Rowntree’s studies in England (in 1901 and 1918) and the policies on Social Security in the 1940s (Beveridge, 1943), the poverty line concept greatly influenced the scientific research and such national and international policies and agencies as the World Bank. In the United States, the idea of subsistence predominated in governmental policies for poverty reduction until the late 1970s (Usdheh, 1976). This conception can be found updated in Gazeley and Newell (2000).

*Basic needs* constitute the second criterion. The concept of subsistence was criticized as long it was built exclusively on physical needs, without consideration of social ones (Rein, 1970; Townsend, 1979). In the 1970s, the International Labor Organization (ILO) argued that basic needs should include two components: (1) minimal consideration of consumption: adequate food, habitation and clothing, and minimum housing and furniture; (2) access to community services in general, such as water, sanitation, public transport and health services, education, and culture (ILO, 1976, 1977). This framework has a very important role in the international scenario, strongly influencing the public policies for fighting poverty for all nations that sign the multilateral programs of ILO (Brandt, 1980). Broadly understood, this concept also produces a frame of reference not only for survival but also for the prosperity of populations in all countries.

*Relative deprivation*, which has been a very popular concept in psychological research related to poverty in the 1960s and 1970s (Carr, 2003), resulting from the emphasis on prosperity over survival, guided social scientists to formulate the third contemporary conception of the meaning of poverty. In such a case, poverty applies not only to the victims of poor income distribution but, in a more precise way, to the people whose resources do not allow them to satisfy the demands and social norms

prevailing in the society to which they belonged. In this sense, people are suffering from relative deprivation when they cannot get nourishment, amenities, standards, and services that allow them to play social roles, participate in relationships, and have the normal behavior as members of a given society. People can suffer from relative deprivation in any country—even the more developed ones—and it may concern one or more spheres of life (Townsend, 1985, 1992; Desai & Shah, 1988; Sen, 1983, 1985; Lister, 1991).

Therefore, the policies to eradicate poverty have been highly influenced by these conceptions. More recently, a dialogue between the so-called “official” discourses and policies have begun to benefit from the discussion on poverty as social exclusion, elaborated mainly by French social scientists as Bourdieu and Paugam (Ezequiel, 1998).

As the recent report on the world social situation by the United Nations (2010) stresses, there is not a single criterion that separates the poor from the non-poor. The experience of poverty is multifaceted and multidimensional, encompassing dimensions of time and relativity. Therefore, multiple indicators are needed to capture its scale and dimensions (p. 3); there exists, recognizably, a “poverty of poverty measures” (p. 45) to be overcome. The study “Voices of the Poor”, conducted by World Bank, is also a good example of a new research direction (Carr, 2003b; Spink, 2003; Eyber & Ager, 2003).

#### THE DISCOURSE OF ACTIVISM

The Brazilian scholar Pedro Demo, synthesizing the discussion around poverty and inequality, poverty and social exclusion, avers that “the most obstinate center of poverty is its political nucleus of social exclusion, in addition to material deprivation” (p. 9): and here the “poverty politic” finds fertile ground to develop, having an impact also in the “poverty” of many studies of poverty, marked by the same “political naiveté”—not to mention the researchers that benefit and draw prestige from the poverty of the majority.

Activists criticize welfarist policies, as long as they consider that these policies delegitimize communities’ political and emancipatory initiatives. The argument has been clearly exposed by Demo:

[Public] assistance is a radical citizenship right concerning material survival, linked to democratic ethics and, thus, independent of the market. The right to survival cannot be determined by insertion



in the market, because this would destroy *ipso facto* the notion of subject implied in the law. This is the problem: how to do assistance in such a way that the beneficiary is not reduced to a recipient target of minimal and minimalist material aid, thwarting his/her emancipatory horizon? (2003, p. 10)

In the context of developing countries, welfarist policies represent part of the solution but also part of the problem, as much as the social projects so characterized can weaken civil society and promote the depoliticization of the social question:

In this context the poor are renamed by their fragilities, and not for their effective or potential strength. In technocratic discourse, they arise decontextualized and de-historicized, reconstructed by a new kind of surveillance, which disregards the social values that allow solidarity, spontaneous cooperation and fraternity in daily life (Ribeiro, 2005, pp. 20–21)

The issue of the political approach to poverty is complex; let's just emphasize its insufficiency, ambiguity, orientation for social control and the fact that the poor are rendered invisible as agentic persons.

The activist discourse is relevant as much it draws attention to this. However, it is possible that the real movement of the crowd—those anonymous people so important in history (de Certeau, 2001)—be kept out of reach.

Demo (2003), inspired by French literature on the matter, defines poverty as social exclusion, characterized thus by “non-belongingness, social irrelevance, weak identity, mental depressions and discriminatory nature” (p. 33). Here, instead of centering the discussion on income levels (material basis for poverty), the author stresses the increasing vulnerability of the vast majority (social exclusion), whose condition becomes more visible and globalized. According to Demo (2003), it is necessary to realize that social exclusion cannot be reduced to the lack of essential goods but is, mainly, the situation of someone unable to raise him/herself to the status of controlling his/her destiny. Here, what is denied is emancipatory autonomy.

Close to social exclusion stands social inequality, on the basis of the unfair distribution of the income.

Poverty arises when scarce goods become privileged goods, in a material and immaterial sense. At its heart is the removal of political content—an imposed, unfair condition, historically produced and maintained.

(...) The economist approach persists in reducing

human complexity to its material face, despite of important scholars as Sen, who overcame this barrier. (Demo, 2003, p. 37)

In psychological research, a counterpart of the activist discourse can be found in the intervention studies, particularly when it comes to action-research. In the United States, the work of Garbarino (1992, 1992b, 2008) and Kozol (1992, 2005) has illustrated this trend, as have Latin American studies in education and social inclusion (Lacerda & Guzzo, 2010; Ferreira-Santos, 2009; Iriart & Milani, 2009) and the so called “psychologies of liberation” (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Thus, Villarreal and Díaz (2009) have stressed that, in place of the “real plans of death” that the Mapuches sustain to be imposed by the Occident on indigenous people, a “plan of life” should be proposed. And from Algiers, Mekideche (2009) asks: Does territory, as designed by the North, constitute a concept and a reality connected to the economic contexts of the South? Her answer is that this must be epistemologically questioned.

#### THE DISCOURSE OF LIVING EXPERIENCE

Saint Bernard would have said that “no man should commend poverty unless he is poor.”<sup>4</sup> The analysis of famine in Africa made by de Waal (2005) illustrates the gap between the poor and non-poor world, evident through the many contrasts between the concepts of famine held by European and American scholars and those held by the people who actually suffer famines. His exemplar analysis, considering Africa's situation, identifies how the difference between economic indicators and being poor as a living experience impacts the efficiency of programs meant to diminish famine in the world.

de Waal's claims that the notion of famine could be better understood “if we discard the English notion of ‘famine,’ and instead adopt the concepts used by the people who have experience suffering famines” (p. 24). An interesting example for illustrating this point comes from the different words used to refer to the experience of famine, as happens in Bangladesh: there are *akal* (scarcity, when times are bad), *durvicka* (famine, when alms are scarce), and *mananthor* (famine widespread in the whole nation, bad times). These ideas go far beyond the international definition commonly adopted:

... widespread food shortage leading to a significant regional rise in death rates.

(de Waal, 2005, p. 9)

Indeed, the words above indicate several layers of complexity involved in the experience of famine, its extension, and its diverse causality.

In the current world scenario, the case of famine, analyzed by de Waal, is a good example also to demonstrate the conflicting interests involved in initiatives to eradicate poverty, especially considering relations between rich and poor countries.

More than famine is at stake:

This work should be seen in the context of other work which centered on starvation and the command over food for the starving, for example that of Sen (1981). The implication in Sen's work is that command over food is the overwhelming, even the only concert of famine victims. The implications of the anthropological studies are that even when people are dying from starvation, the "conceptual centre" of famine, for both the victims and people studying it, may not necessarily be that same starvation. *The experience of a threat to a way of life may be more real than the experience of the threat of starvation.* (p. 29, emphasis added)

The imposed aid may be a burden, inasmuch as it overlooks the perspective of the starving. Many times it is based on inconsistent constructs and techniques, such as "child's thinness," "anthropometric surveillance:"

The development of techniques such as nutritional surveillance creates a "citadel of expertise" (often inappropriate expertise) which prevents dialogue with lay people, including the famine victims. It also reinforces the "otherness" of famine, and its isolation from ordinary life (Hewitt, 1983). *"Famine" has become a technical malfunction, not a human experience.* (p. 29)

Furthermore, the recipients of this imposed aid only rarely have the power to decide what this aid is and how it can be used. Thus,

*The concept of poverty is bound to what we (the non-poor) can do to alleviate it, rather than what they [the poor] can do to alleviate it.* The point of this is not to pronounce upon the ethics of the aid business, but to place famine relief in the context of power relations between rich and poor countries. (de Waal, 2005, pp. 31–32, emphasis added)

Although shy, new measures emerge in social research to approach the reality of living in poverty. Aside from the traditional measures of poverty

(income poverty, food poverty), the new construct of a *subjective poverty* has been proposed and valued inasmuch it gives the word to the poor so that they can express their own suffering and expectations (Ferroukhi & Bedrani, 2009). That concept is grounded on a non-utilitarian perspective from which these authors, based on Sen's work, accept the idea that maximizing personal reasons is not the only individual leit motiv: therefore, individual action can be motivated by compassion or social commitment. Improving other people's well-being can improve one's own well-being. This approach implies the valorization of abilities and the understanding that having resources is not enough unless the aptitude for using them well is also active.

The meaning of "being poor" varies widely according to the particular experiences individuals and societies go through. Hundeide (1999) has evinced how this meaning is cultural and historically situated, considering four different communities living in poverty: Begumpur (slum-dwellers of Patna, India); Simpruk (slum-dwellers of Jakarta); the homeless poor in the United States; and Jews of Eastern Europe. The author observes:

These four communities gave four different reconstructions of their similar situations. The Begumpur population believed that everything in life happens according to a predestined pattern leaving no room for individual effort. For the Simpruk slum dwellers fate determines the possibilities of life and the fulfillment of these depends upon personal effort. The Western slum dwellers, with their individualist and materialistic orientation, put great emphasis on individual effort and personal success. Their failure in this context gives rise to a combination of guilt, resignation, inferiority feelings and hatred towards authorities. The East European Jews are more pragmatic in their orientation. They face the challenges of everyday living through a practical tradition of skills in trade and economy and a literary tradition of transcendental reconstructions. (p. 143)

Esquit (2009) has studied the relationship between political action and the formation of the Indian Guatemalan Kaqchikel's concepts of *meb'ail* ("poverty"), *qawinaq* ("our people"), *poqonal* ("suffering"), and *consciousness* ("politically positioned"). For him, the Indians' notion of poverty—through which they define their social relations—can be understood when we examine their language and

the discourses about history and daily life. This analysis has shown that *qawinag* is a category that defines the Indian being and the solidarity kept because of *meb'ail* and distress they suffer facing the hegemonical culture. He has emphasized that to be poor and Indian are kind of synonymous because the differences between the Kaqchikel group and the dominant one always showed them as not having "house, food, clothes."

## Poverty as a Process

And one would not have given a fair representation of a world that, as the social cosmos, has the peculiarity of producing numerous representations of itself, without a place in the space of views for these groups particularly exposed to little misery which are all professions that have the task to treat or speak of their great misery, as all the distortions related to the peculiarity of their views.

(Bourdieu, 1997, p. 13)<sup>5</sup>

The approach to poverty developed by contemporary French sociologists is very relevant for understanding being poor as a living experience. Embracing the road opened by Bourdieu, Paugam can be recognized as the one who has developed a processual approach to poverty, as much as he focuses on trajectories built across ages and contexts where there is an increasing social disqualification. Taking into account the case of welfare policies in France, Paugam has worked with the notions of trajectory, identity (positive, negative), and territoriality (the spatial basis that houses socially excluding processes, such as segregation).

One could say that Paugam's analysis is based on categories that assume the standpoint of the poor: the kind of processes and situations people experience when crossing the several layers that constitute life in poverty.

The concepts involved in this debate often refer to job insecurity, lack of qualification, uncertainty toward the future, finally, to pauperism, coupled with the crisis of industrial society (from the nineteenth century to today) and the exclusion itself. Both refer to moral degradation as the new condition of material deprivation (...). There is a process which is progressively pushing to outside of the productive population those segments less qualified. It is, indeed, the disillusionment in the belief that progress would bring prosperity for all.

(Véras, 2003, p. 14)

Individual trajectories through poverty can be illustrated by the French example, where social policies, meant to integrate people under the welfare system, establish three conditions: the assisted (depending on welfare services), the fragile (still distant from welfare services), and the marginalized (who had severed social bonds). This system contributes also to stigmatization (each condition in a different way) and sets up conditions for a broad array of personal experiences and cultural tools for survival under poverty.

According to Véras (2003), Paugam's system shares some of Robert Castel's description of the process of disaffiliation, which starts from the *destabilization of the stable*, who become vulnerable and settle down in *precarious conditions* (long-term or recurrent unemployment). It is followed by the absence or deficit of places to be occupied in the social structure (*social uselessness*).

Paugam has worked on the concept of disqualification, related to social status and identity. One could say it is his way to approach poverty as a living experience:

To study disqualification, the discrediting of those who, at first glance, do not participate fully in economic and social life, means to study the diversity of status that defines personal identities, that is, the subjective feelings about their own situation along diverse social experiences, and finally the social relations that hold among themselves and with others.

(Paugam, 2003, p.47)

In the psychological field, diverse representations of poverty are present, sometimes implicitly, but nevertheless orienting the view and choices of the researcher. Obviously, these representations imply a certain concept of the psychologist as a scientist and as a practitioner. It is therefore possible to identify the social activist as the one who practices charity and philanthropy; the other who consents to work on explaining—for example, delinquency—for purposes of social control; and employees at institutions and funding agencies. These institutions and agencies are oriented by specific goals and adopt images of poverty from an outsider perspective, hardly taking into account the poor's own goals.

Ezequiel's report on Geremek's account of the representation of poverty between the years 1400 and 1700 recognizes that "the constructions of the cultural elite regarding the marginal elite were absorbed by the social elite as answers to its need to

be horrified in front of the dirt and the unknown. Such a strangeness was useful for praising their values and legitimizing the existing rules through the reversal of the discourse” (1998, p. 109).

Therefore, a curious mosaic of intertwined meanings is set up: representations and explanations of poverty are available that do not consider the needs and goals of those who live in poverty. The actions generated by the studies on poverty, for their part, are directed to the poor, offering them solutions that they internalize, and then comes the moment where the well-known questions on the ability of the poor for a subjective life, for agency, emerge in the field of psychological studies and practices (“Are the poor ready to go through psychotherapy?”, “Are they able to maintain autonomous thinking?” or “Are they condemned to be in a subordinated position?”). These kinds of questions appear with much distance and strangeness, as if referring to a different humankind, and are not without consequences, inasmuch as they regulate decisions and choices in the process of researching and intervening on human lives.

Actually, sociological thinking registers different images of poverty, connected to different times and paradigms, related to different dimensions of the process of being or becoming poor, and also present in the field of psychology. Bajoit (2006) offers the following sketch of these images:

1. “The poor as marginal: he is poor because of his bad socialization, or as he comes from a subculture different from that of the majority of persons. So, he cannot succeed because he is stigmatized (and cloistered inside his culture and his stigma by the view of the others). (Oscar Lewis, Richard Hoggart, G. Simmel);
2. The poor as exploited: he is poor because he is exploited by the upper class/ruling class, because he is alienated, impoverished, excluded by the way capitalism works, and he cannot succeed as he is not protected and is not aided (Jean Labbens, Paul Vercauteren);
3. The poor as dependent: he is poor because he has no autonomy and no success, and cannot succeed because he does not have sufficient capital – associability, information, training, trust, autonomy (Klinsberg, Tomassini, Putnam).
4. The poor as disaffiliated: he is poor because he is isolated, fragmented, and discouraged and he cannot succeed because he does not participate in organized forms of solidarity (R. Castel, S. Paugam).” (p. 92)

Although providing relevant cues, these images still do not fill in the blanks regarding being poor as a living experience. To consider just one of these portraits, social disqualification based on disaffiliation, it is necessary to analyze the diverse statuses and personal identities involved in impoverishment (Paugam, 2003); the personal feelings concerning one’s own situation, the social relationships.

In the field of cultural history, being poor as a living experience can be described by specific features:

Thinking of a cultural history of society, Chartier (1990:19) states that its subject is the understanding of shapes, motifs and representations of the social world, which, despite of social actors, reflect their interests and describe the social world as they think it is, or how they would like it to be. In consequence, the values, the conceptions of the self and the world and the images of the poor should be studied because they are constituents of the past as much as quantifiable information.

(Ezequiel, 1998, p. 104)

Balsa, Boneti, and Souler (2006) argue that the socio-anthropological analysis of poverty, unlike a historical and socio-institutional approach, is supposed to focus on

“The ways in which situations are rooted and the particular contexts and trajectories can be approached through the use of individual, family or group life histories. The goal here is to examine how poverty and its dimensions are grounded in personal biographies or how people experience and handle the events that lead to poverty and exclusion”.

(p. 22)

A similar direction can be found in some psychological studies, moving—more or less resolutely—toward constructing process models. For example, in Garbarino’s (1992) claim of the need to consider the “phenomenology of deprivation” (p. 231) starting from the evaluation all human beings do of their situation, comparing it with their surroundings. Therefore, to impoverish at recession times assumes specific connotations: “It leads to a growing sense of deprivation that stands in stark contrast to the ‘objective’ facts of modern affluence (pp. 230–231).” Garbarino concludes:

“The phenomenology of poverty is dominated by the experience of deprivation and exacerbated by widespread promulgation of highly monetarized affluence as the standard. Low-paying jobs can come to be interpreted as an affront in such a context,

the accoutrements of affluence a right. None of this contributes to the well-being of young children. All of it sustains rage and despair.”  
(p. 231)

Undoubtedly, variables linked to poverty as a situation (income, socio-economic status, environment, unemployment) have been exhaustively measured in psychological research, as predicting outcomes. Carr (2003) has presented an interesting synthesis of some milestones relevant to understanding the relationship between psychology and poverty since the late 1950s. He starts with the sociological account of poverty represented by the notion of a “culture of poverty” of Oscar Lewis and considers that a more psychological approach can be identified during the 1960s:

During the 1960s, the field moved toward a much more psychological approach, captured most succinctly in the concept of a Need of Achievement (McClelland, 1961). In a similarly psychological way, the 1970s were largely focused on attribution theory, and in particular on how the comparatively wealthy view the causes of poverty amongst the relatively deprived (Feagin, 1972). The 1980s, in turn, witnessed something of a crisis of confidence in this type and level of analysis, culminating in suggestions that psychology may be doing more harm than good (for examples, see Sinha & Holzman, 1984). During the 1990s however, tentative calls that psychology might be able to make a difference began to appear (e.g., Sloan & Montero, 1990; Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). By the new millennia, we are witnessing a renewed debate about the role of psychology in fostering critical awareness of the causes of, and solutions to, poverty (Cohen, 2001).  
(p. 2)

In the particular field of developmental psychology, we can see socio-economic variables often correlated to measures of development, with a predominance of linear, one-dimensional explanatory models. Some efforts, however, rely on different, more systemic grounds, such as Bornstein and Bradley (2003) and Tudge (2008),<sup>6</sup> who take into account the need of understanding the multiple levels of organization involved in human development.

New trends exemplifying processual approaches are also reflected in *Poverty and Psychology—From Global Perspective to Local Practice*, edited by Carr and Sloan (2003). This pioneer work, coming from what the authors name a positive and critical psychology, has to be considered and encompasses a

meaningful number of subjects relevant to analyze the scope and directions of psychological research and intervention addressing poverty—power and justice, place and community, wealth and crisis, psychopathology, and unemployment. We (Bastos & Rabinovich, 2009), in *Living in Poverty—Developmental Poetics of Cultural Reality*, cover the results of investigation of social realities and their public representation in Brazilian poor communities, with a particular emphasis on the use of cultural tools to survive and create psychological and social novelty under conditions of severe poverty.

### Cultural Tools for Survival

“The miserable ones are those who confess to be defeated. However, poor people do not surrender. Every day they find out unprecedented/novel ways to work and fight. Thus, they face their difficulties and search to overcome them. Having to be constantly alert, they do not have an intellectual rest. Memory would be their enemy. The heritage of the past is flavored by the feeling of urgency, this awareness of novelty that is also an engine of knowledge”.

—Milton Santos, 2000.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis of cultural tools for survival entails various conceptions about what survival is: What does it mean to be poor, to remain in poverty, to overcome poverty? In which directions and with which characteristics are cultural tools to be utilized?

When it comes to survival and to coping with poverty, two relevant alternatives are in place: survival and coping. They need to be understood in the direction of adaptation: is the desired goal conforming to or overcoming poverty? In each case, which cultural tools are available and likely to be handled?

The concept of cultural tools comes originally from Vygotsky and, from the beginning, has been defined by the quality of signs projected to master and improve natural human psychological processes. Signs are included in psychological operations just as tools are included in a work operation, and the metaphor of tools is just as appropriate (Valsiner & van der Veer, 1996). Cultural tools are, therefore, media of transformation (Cole et al., 2001; Wertsch, 2002). To properly understand them, studies need to focus on processes and not on outcomes. Using cultural tools entails a focus on psychological distancing, through the use of semiotic mediation for overcoming, temporal and spatially, the particular here-and-now situation.

## Collective Memory

Collective memory is among the most widely usable cultural tools. It is a concept originally developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1990), who claimed that there are as many collective memories as collectives. This concept contrasts with that often employed in psychological studies on memory, linked to the assumption that memory is a distinct phenomenon that can be studied isolated from other mental functions. Usually, it is studied as an individual phenomenon. Studies on collective memory, on the contrary, have the guiding assumption that it is a complex setting always bound with something else (Wertsch, 2009, p. 122). It is also seen as in the service of providing a usable past that serves some group identity (p. 123), and this has led to a view of remembering as contestation and negotiation in social and political spheres (p. 124). Because of the issues involving memory *in* the group and memory *of* the group, Wertsch (2009) proposes the concept of a “distributed version” of collective memory:

From this perspective, memory is viewed as being distributed: (a) socially in small group interaction; (b) “instrumentally” in the sense that it involves both active agents and instruments” (p. 119). Cultural tools belong to instrumental distribution. The author suggests two forms of mediation: explicit linguistic forms, especially narratives, and forms of mediation that rely more on embodied practices. Narratives are a crucial cultural tool for representing the past (*APUD* Bruner, 1990) and what makes collective memory collective is the fact that members of a group share the same narrative resources. (p. 120)

Wertsch (2009) proposes the concept of schematic narrative templates as they concern abstract and generalized functions. The organizing form is a narrative, and these abstract structures can underlie an entire set of specific narratives (p. 129). These narratives operate at a level that can be called “deep collective memory” because they:

“function to exert a conservative, yet unrecognized force on collective memory, making it resistant to change. This reflects the fact that they are deeply embedded, both in the sense of being transparent and unconscious, and in the sense of being part of deeply held identity commitments.” (p. 130)

Thus, cultural tools (either narratives or other means such as calendars, computers, etc.) can be

seen as mediators affording people the capacity to create distinct versions of their collective past and to share these versions that construct their “collective memory.” These memories are not about the past but about present interests and conflicts (p. 113). Belelli and Leone (2007) have argued that communities “have a memory” only in a metaphorical sense; still, collective memories can be a marker of community life, favoring belongingness.

As a kind of cultural tool, collective memory implies the possibility to organize and direct the struggle for survival, which has important political consequences.

## Resilience

Many studies centered on poverty have focused cultural tools from a conceptual perspective broadly called *resilience*. Resilience has been generally defined as overcoming adversity and seen through different lens, disciplines, and theory approaches. For example, Adger (2000), a geographer, has emphasized the connection between social and ecological resilience, pointing that the demand for diverse and resilient resources partially determines location for a settlement. But for Unger (2004, p. 344), a social worker and a family therapist, there are two discourses on resilience: a positivist one, the *ecological model*, that defines resilience as “health despite adversity”, and a *constructionist approach* that defines it as “the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse.” And Payne’s methodological critics (2008) have highlighted the importance to capture the phenomenology of the studied person, which is not usually taken on account in studies about resilience.

Other concepts to describe correlate phenomena are vulnerability, risk and protective factor, coping, and empowerment. Risk may be defined as statuses that increase the probability of failure as a consequence of the imposition of structured constraints (O’Connor, 2002). Constraints are practices that systematically and/or institutionally limit the life chances of particular groups of people. However, Shih (2004, p. 180) opposes coping models to empowerment model: in the first, individuals are motivated to avoid negative consequences rather than to create positive ones; the second one proposes that overcoming adversity is not a depleting process but rather a replenishing and enriching process. In the same direction, Nicolas et al. (2009)

have used the concepts of strengths and resistance—not of resilience—to refer to active coping strategies that youths learn to use to alter environments or their reactions to adverse environmental contexts.

Nevertheless, one important notion is that of opportunity: it signifies the availability of specific institutional, material, or human resources that might be employed in the negotiation of structured constraints. Opportunity can be registered through the availability of institutionalized and non-institutionalized resources. Institutionalized resources reflect systematic and structured supports that counteract or circumscribe constraints. In contrast, non-institutionalized resources reflect those supports that mitigate the impact of circumstances but are acquired through idiosyncratic or informal mechanisms. (O'Connor, 2002).

As a consequence of opportunity social differentiation, Schoon et al. (2004, p. 399) concluded from their study about levels of adult adaptation that for the socially disadvantaged, secondary school adjustment was a more important predictor of successful adult adjustment than for their more privileged peers. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have to have the necessary credentials to succeed, whereas for their privileged peers, other factors, such as existing social networks and familial resources, might be more important. Bronfenbrenner's idea of a structure of opportunities and its components—mainly the differentiated degree of permeability at each level of the context and the differentiation by forms of social integration and participation (Goodnow, 1996)—was utilized by Bastos, Iriart, Alcântara, Milani, and Ferreira Santos (2008) to analyze mechanisms for social inclusion of Brazilian adolescents living in poverty.

The study of resilience started from an individualistic approach to a much more complex and social one. Historically, researchers relied on deficit models (Ceballos, 2004, p. 172). Poor families were seen as potentially confronting multiple stresses, such as unemployment, substandard housing, lack of health care, crime, violence, and substance abuse (Black & Lobo, 2008). Poverty was considered a risk factor for a multitude of reasons, including family exposure to parents with higher stress and greater propensity for negative parenting, and neighborhood factors, such as crime, violence, drug use, peer influences, and cultural pressure (Abelev, 2009). Despite these pressures, many low-income families not only met basic needs, but were able to avoid violence and crime involvement, kept their children in school, engaged

their children in enriching activities, and maintained family cohesion (Black & Lobo, 2008).

However, framed within a positivist paradigm, most of these studies choose arbitrary distinctions of what are to be accepted. "Such arbitrariness is more the result of ethnocentrism than of cross-cultural study that questions the hegemony of Western middle class norms" (Ungar, 2004, p. 345).

Payne has highlighted this issue (2008, p. 5), studying "street people" (Black men) and noting that traditional literatures on discussions of resiliency are typically grounded in four problematic assumptions: (1) a middle-class and upper-middle-class orientation, (2) an a-historical stance, (3) an individualized perspective that often holds the person solely responsible for the development of resiliency, and (4) a refusal to consider the overall social structural impact of economic conditions in the lived experiences.

Therefore, in contexts such as poverty, the significance of societal context has been minimized in resilience research (Bottrell, 2009a). Recently, research has centered on understanding processes to account for the complexity of factors and their correlated interactive effects (Abelev, 2009; Adger, 2000; Bottrell 2009b; Brown, 2008; Gomes, Rabinovich, & Bastos, 2005; Hernández, 2002; Jones, 2007; Payne, 2008; Seginer, 2008). That which may constitute risk in one cultural context may not apply to another or elsewhere may constitute a protective factor or process, based in specific conditions, cultural values, and norms (Ungar, 2004; Bastos et al., 2008). Moreover, criteria for assessment of positive or maladaptation may be embedded in socio-cultural assumptions and historically specific societal expectations.

Bottrell's study (2009b) has revealed that resilience goes beyond the protective factors currently highlighted within the resilience literature, noting that all her respondents also benefited from access to the *habitus* of the middle class, without which they would not have exhibited the same level of resilience. So, to become a middle class can be understood as one way to surpass the difficulties of being poor—even if it can conduct to other kinds of poverty, considering the restricted worlds and horizons of some typical middle classes.

Besides social class, gender and ethnicity have been related to poverty (Campbell, 2008; Hartman et al., 2009). O'Connor (2002, p. 878) has shown how constraints were expressly linked to the women's positioning as Blacks and women, as well as to

how the intersection of race, class, and space determined their access to educational opportunity. This point of view suggests the importance of resources to enhance both resilience and social capital because options and opportunities are constructed out of the unequal resources of multiple interdependent capitals (O'Connor, 2002). The role of social structure in risk decision making has been extended beyond social factors to include notions of power, opportunity, and constraint—for example, social exclusion, access, and use of social networks, and the range of “social capital” available to the decision maker to include the structure of opportunity itself and the range of choices and resources genuinely available (Kemshall, 2008). Therefore, Bottrell’s (2009b) study about Black student girls has shown that the students thrive on recognition within their own networks, but “their pride can readily transform to shame and anger in the face of outsider” (p. 499).

These two levels of focus (individual vs. collective) may not always be exclusive and contradictory. Stigmatized individuals who adopt an empowerment model tend to engage in efforts aimed at removing stigma at the collective level (Shih, 2004, p. 183). Those individuals believe that the stigma associated with the identity is unjust, and consequently, they are often spurred into action to remove the stigma from the identity.

Besides pride and relations of recognition that close down opportunities and resources for some and open them for others differentiating types of networks and their capacities for facilitating accrual of social rewards and resources, social institutions are subject to external pressures and shocks associated with both political and economic change. The ability to absorb these changes depends on social capital but also on the role of surprises and the characteristics of the resource system (Adger, 2000). At a still broader perspective, Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003) have accrued another perspective including welfare regimes. The authors have concluded that the stability of the welfare regimes reflects the strength of their resilience when confronted with the effects of the economic transformations caused by globalization.

So, either focusing on individual or social resources, the deficit model prevailed. More interestingly, the concept of paradoxical poverty has been used to refer to places that are poor in material resources yet rich in social, cultural, or environmental resources (Driskell, Bannerjee, & Chawla, 2001). The paradox of people’s culturally and emotionally

rich lives within the context of a poor and environmentally degraded place “is not a naïve story about poor people content with their low station in life. Such an interpretation would serve only the interests of those who wish to retain the inequities of the status quo” (Driskell, Bannerjee, & Chawla, 2001, p. 80). Driskell’s account of India Sathyanagar’s young people spoke of young people living under difficult circumstances: of 6- and 7-year-olds thrust into adult roles; of hours spent each day in household chores such as fetching potable water; of children exposed to open sewer drains in their daily play; of people’s lives cut short by disease and violence; and of social and political injustice. Yet they also spoke of young people with an astonishing degree of resilience. In many cases, the children of Sathyanagar could be described as confident, connected, and happy—words seldom used to describe young people in many other cities that enjoy much higher relative levels of well-being.

Some approaches to Black and Native American studies have turned their focus to cultural differences. Brown (2009, p. 45) concludes that the cultural practices of some Black American families and communities may have a significant role in their resiliency. Having the support of another person (e.g., family, peer, and community member) can be advantageous for African-Americans (Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, Williams, 2007, p. 77). The worldview of African-Americans is grounded in a strong spiritual/religious belief system, extended familial and fictive kinship bonds, a collective social orientation, and affective expressiveness. Studying the continuity as resistance of the Native American family, Gross (2003) has shown that “memory is a key source of self-destructive behavior, as well as of cultural resilience” (p. 31). So, cultural factors can have a significant impact on the level of resilience reported by participants.

The study of a gifted Black child living in rural poverty (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001, p. 98) also showed that the boy, besides solitude, “found that his quiet surroundings gave him high-quality thinking time and inspiration for his creative writing.” The authors note that educators need to appreciate and respect the cultural qualities of rural life to people born and raised in a rural culture. Related to an education process, Sartorello (2009) has proposed collaboration, interlearning and co-theorizing to arrive at a new curriculum in Chiapas, an Amerindian Mexican region. New Amerindian social movements related to education can be seen in Chiapas but also



in the whole Mexico and in Latin America. These new movements look for ethnic and solitary citizenship, supported by Amerindian cultures against the domination–submission balance between the national-mestizo culture and Amerindian cultures. He insists that educators must listen to the voices of their Indian collaborators and let themselves at some measure be guided by them so they can construct and express their educational proposal.

#### FOLK AND ORAL CULTURE

Santos (2009, p. 143), discussing the effects of globalization, opposes the resistance of the previous culture to the mass culture, dominated by the international market. This folk culture outlines the daily life of the poor people using the mass media tools. Even so, its content is not “global” because its base is grounded on the territory and on the traditional and local culture (p. 144). For this author, scarcity is again the main issue; as “the poor” do not have the instruments (material and others) to participate in the modern mass culture, their own culture, based on territory, work, and daily life, becomes strengthened and finds its way out. So, territoriality is important to consider how poor people manage to find solutions to their challenges. This is culture and how they do it, cultural tools.

Martins (2000) also stresses that poor people’s common sense is socially related shared knowledge (p. 59). Meaning comes before the relationship “because without shared meaning there is no interaction” (p. 59). Meaning is reciprocally perceived and negotiated by the participants. So, new meanings are continually re-invented and not only merely copied. An important contribution to understand cultural tools related to poverty comes from Denham (2008). His study focused on narratives of resilience of one Indian American family to understand historical trauma. Owing to the manner in which memories and ancestral identity are transmitted to future generations, family members constructed their sense of self from a network or chain of *intergenerational* memories and narratives situated within the larger socio-cultural, political, and historical context. Children are told: “Never forget who you are and where you come from.” The author concludes that the resilient dimensions of the narrative praxis of the family—that is, the active employment, telling, and interpretation of narratives—illustrate how personal situations or experiences are given meaning and often interpreted in relation to a specific narrative or an ancestor with whom the individual closely

identifies. That is, stories of individual experience are frequently employed in direct reference to the content or structure of family trauma experiences or oral history (p. 406).

Based on these considerations, our understanding of cultural tools and resilience related to poverty made us highlight the following features: belongingness; hope; destiny; cultural beliefs and values; spirituality; and strategic interpretations of social environment.

#### GROUP IDENTIFICATION: BELONGINGNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

Individuals that are highly identified with their group, despite the negative meaning associated with it, are more likely to be empowered. They interact with others from the same group and are more aware of the positive aspects of their group membership. As a result, they are less likely to buy into the negative messages received from society about their negative public identity (Shih, 2004, p. 181).

Hernández (2002) has defined *autogestión* as

“the name in Spanish to the processes in which communities develop agency and organize themselves to demand the fulfilling of their rights, restructure relationships of power within the community, or become political in society.”

(p. 343)

Social networks in communities living in poverty can be seen as a survival mechanism. Informal kinship is another manifestation of the value of interconnectedness and authenticity, present in the Afrocentric belief system. It is a manifestation of the collective social identity whereby one has a view of oneself as part of a community. As a result, the microsystem expands to include more than immediate and extended family members (Jones, 2007). Driskell et al. (2001) have shown that the children of Sathyanagar had the advantage of being part of a generally cohesive culture steeped in tradition, myth, and ritual that gave them a strong sense of identity. They knew who they were and had a strong sense of belonging, partly because of their extended family networks, strong ties of kinship, and a vibrant social and cultural context in which interaction with community members of all ages was an integral part of daily life. Analogous trends have been analyzed by Mahfoud and Massimi (2009), in a Brazilian semi-rural community that stands on religious traditions, particularly celebrations (“festas”) to relate with modernization without losing the sense of identity,

keeping the autonomy for making choices and positioning themselves. Belongingness and celebration of the history and the artistic resources of the community were found by Ferreira Santos (2009) to be the most important strengths in the struggle to survive for adolescents living in a slum of Salvador, Brazil.

Historically, spirituality has been defined as a search for universal truth and meaning or a form of belief that connects an individual to the world and provides meaning to one's existence (Jones, 2007, p. 131). Cultural resources are sources of external support, such as religion and spirituality and availability of extended family networks (Nicolas et al., 2009). The term *religiosity* historically has been associated with functional, institutionalized behaviors associated with religion. More recently, researchers have begun to minimize the polarized nature of these definitions and consider a more integrated definition of spirituality. Jones (2007) focused cultural beliefs and values that are used as coping mechanisms in the context of specific African-Americans. Participants in the study included 71 African-American children between the ages of 9 and 11 years who lived in a high-crime, high-poverty community in Houston, Texas. The results indicated that formal kinship and spirituality, along with high levels of combined supports, demonstrated buffering effects on exposure to violence. Utsey et al. (2007) concluded that spiritual and collective coping were statistically significant predictors of quality-of-life outcomes above and beyond the traditional predictive factors for African-Americans from high-risk urban communities.

In Driskell's et al. study (2001) in India, religion, with its symbols and rituals, also played an important role in community life. From Brazil, people living on the border of the Amazon River emphasized the importance of family, nature, work, and religiosity (Vasconcelos, 2009). The religiosity in this context legitimated the family and work relationships and demonstrated it to be strongly tied to the regional traditional values. And Terena (2009), a great Brazilian Indian leader, has said that spirituality is a criterion shared by every Amerindian together with oral, historical, and ancestral wisdom, which maintain the balance and the quality of life.

Spirituality is a broader term than religiosity, but both seem important when we consider them as cultural. Both also are related to belonging to a group, either transcendental or more socially based.

## HOPE AND DESTINY

Lothe and Heggen (2003), after their study in Ethiopia, raised the question: "Is resiliency sufficiently differentiated to fit cultural setting in the countries of the South? (p. 319), based on a possible cultural bias of the lack of attention paid to the significance of hope that "emerges as the most significant source for survival" (p. 320). For Hernández (2002), studying the meaning of hope and solidarity in Colombia Latin American context facing war and political repression, the locus of hope is located in the building of social networks and promoting agency. From Israel, studying the psychological factors that facilitate adolescent future orientation in times of political violence, Seginer (2008) has outlined an integrated model positing that the effect of challenge/resilience on future orientation is mediated by hope. She has defined hope as "a positive emotion specifically related to the feeling that things will turn for the best, and close to the meaning yet distinguished from optimism" (p. 277). Finally, Payne's (2008, p. 9) project has provided a social psychological examination of how street life as an ideology and set of relations and networks operate in the lives of low-income Black men as a space within which hope, friendships, violence, terror, risk, optimism, and struggles for survival are displayed.

A very interesting way of looking to destiny and to its underlying processes is proposed by Chaturvedi, Avinish, Chiu Chi-yue, and Viswanathan Madhubalan (2009) by using the concept of negotiable faith belief. This model accepts that the individual does not have direct control over one's fate and at the same time maintains that the individual can negotiate control with fate for better personal outcomes (p. 882). They differentiated it from disjoint agency "which boasts the ability of self-determine one's course of action and outcomes unconstrained circumstances" and from "fatalism, which holds that all events are predetermined by fate." Negotiable fate recognizes fate as a powerful causal agent through agentic actions (p. 881).

In their study, among relatively low literacy in Indians, the belief in negotiable fate was linked to a greater tendency to engage in decontextualized judgment and rule bases categorization (p. 890). This thinking style is privileged by Western culture and not in societies where contextualized, intuitive thinking is emphasized. They "speculate that, among these individuals, the belief in negotiable fate and its associated thinking style may support a focus on their personal agency despite the environmental

constraints. Specifically, this belief may help these individuals to identify the critical factors that create and remains the major constraints in their life” (p. 891) and motivate them to identify rules to maximize personal control without directly confronting the “nonmalleable” social reality.

There is a Brazilian’s expression, *jeitinho* (literally, “little way”), which is difficult to be translated but means “that a problem should be accepted as given” (Torres & Dessen, 2006, p. 262) but that at the end some solution will be anyway achieved. This expression is similar to the concept of negotiable faith belief in the sense that, even if fate exists, agency also plays a role and results depend on both.

Besides, there are other processes to overcome stressful poverty situations related to strategic interpretations of social environment. Individuals may switch their identity orientations across situations to strategically emphasize identities that are valued and de-emphasize identities that are not in any given social context. Work on identity adaptiveness has found that individuals orient themselves more positively toward identities that are adaptive in any given situation (Shih, 2004, p. 179). In a broader sense, orientation to the future and human capability of psychological distance respond for survival under adversity, as exemplified in the experience of Brazilian families living in poverty. There is a poetic dynamics involved here, in every shift that challenges *what is* and clearly promotes moving into the direction of what *could be* and *should be* (Bastos & Rabinovich, 2009).

Individuals can manipulate their interpretations of their environment to protect their sense of self-worth. By changing their standards of comparison, individuals are able to ameliorate perceptions of inequity and relative deprivation (Shih, 2004, p. 179). They also may manipulate the kind of attributions they make to explain social events.

These could be cultural tools that underlie some processes by which poor people manage to survive. As Kumar (2010, p. 16) has concluded, cultures remain an important variable in explaining phenomena linked to poverty and development, but daily culture is majorly responsible for structuring the responses to real-life situations.

## Future Directions

The issue of poverty, broadly considered, and for its implications for human lives in several senses and at multiple levels, cannot be reduced to a research topic or to a technical problem. It seems impossible

to dissociate research, theoretical understanding, and social change when it comes to poverty; similarly, poverty is a phenomenon that entails economic, social, psychological, cultural, and ethic dimensions. No wonder that so many initiatives to reduce or alleviate poverty fail. However, there are signs that justify some optimism.

To recognize this mixed, complex nature of poverty and the trials for interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches is an important, positive sign. The initiative of United Nations inviting 10 international journals of psychology to elaborate special issues on the subject of poverty is an interesting example in the search of a more complex, integrated view in the development of policies and strategies for poverty reduction. However, as Tripathi (2010) has observed, the possibility of halving poverty in the world in 2015, as a Millennium Development Goal, is not likely to be achieved then.

An effective criticism about conceptual perspectives on poverty has to be centered on the question of its relation with alterity. Everything is preceded by how poverty is perceived and by the way one relates to it (de Waal, 2005; Bastos, Rabinovich, & Almeida, 2010). Here, we need to consider the diverse discourses and to situate ourselves in relation to them. This challenge requires basic changes in the way of feeling, thinking, and acting of researchers and practitioners. The issues discussed in this chapter can help to delineate the nature and directions of these changes, and it may be worthy now to single out some of them.

The first issue concerns the cleavage between being poor as a living experience and as a focus for study and intervention, and the epistemic and ethic challenges to build different basis for the relationships I–Other, in a globalized world and at multiple levels—the person, the family, the community. New developments in the conception of poverty and in research methods are needed, articulating the study of micro- and macro-level processes and fostering the voices of the poor to be heard, taking advantage of cultural diversity.

Besides the two psychological models in understanding poverty presented by Tripathi (2010), *dispositional* (where the poor are held responsible for their fate and fall victim to stigmatization and prejudices that are based on social class or a social category) and *situational* (that holds the social, economic, and political conditions responsible for the emergence of the social class of the poor), it is also needed a different perspective on poverty, a perspective capable

of revealing the cultural tools that the poor wield for survival, and the developmental poetics present under adverse and paradoxical circumstances. Such an approach aims to overcome the blindness—still present in psychological research—toward the broad variability of modes of living, and in doing so, allow us to dialogically consider diversity and otherness.

A third set of questions is directly related to cultural tools, as we understand here. Which cultural tools are employed in the struggle for survival, and how does it happen? Cultural tools are media of transformation (Cole et al., 2001; Wertsch, 2002) and media for understanding social change itself. Research should also focus on the new cultural tools that continuously emerge from the struggle of the human being to survive, living in a world of poor and non-poor people, full of heterogeneous and ambivalent social directions.

We agree with Tripathi when he says that “poverty reduction requires approaches which are trans-disciplinary. Poverty alleviation cannot be left to be dealt with by any single discipline” (pp. 216–217). Furthermore, we would say that poverty reduction requires intercultural and intersectorial approaches, far beyond of the academics and governmental walls. Nothing will happen without the effective and agentic participation of the poor, at the social level and at the personal level as well. Whatever should be the role of the researcher in this process, he/she must be aware of the political implications of every decision and step taken. These implications start from the conceptions he/she holds about poverty and the relationship with the poor. In a certain way, we must also consider that the researcher has necessarily a political and a social inclusion that participates in his/her research. The possibility of investigating poverty depends on an honest, intense, and open practice of reflexivity considering the place occupied by the researcher allied to intervention as a way of knowledge. The participant of the research also must occupy the place of the knowledge constructor.

Finally, an intercultural perspective is important to identify general patterns of conditions, contexts, and ways of feeling, thinking, and acting that produce specific ways of survival. It would favor a broad vision of poverty as part of human experience—to be transformed toward dignity—but still a source of psychological and socio-cultural novelty and concerning every human being, poor and non-poor, for its multiple implications. Poverty must not be a stigma that superposes itself to richness and to

the poetry of a diversity of ways of life that still, in a certain measure, escape from homogenizing and impoverished models as, for example, the limits, paradoxes, and suffering of consumer society.

In this context, it is worthy to have in mind the goal stated by the United Nations—even if inscribed in the official discourse, which needs to fight very much to be recognized and legitimated from the standpoint of people living in poverty:

Promoting inclusion and reducing deprivation strengthens democratic institutions and processes, making social and economic relations more harmonious, and provides a firm foundation for long-term development and prosperity.

(UN, 2010, p. 7)

## Notes

1. Pearl, A. (1970). The poverty of psychology: An indictment. In V.L. Allen (Ed.). *Psychological factors in poverty* (pp. 348–364). Chicago, IL: Markham.

2. Retrieved October, 6, 2009, from Online Etymology Dictionary. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=poverty&searchmode=none>

3. It is interesting to note that the idea of a poverty line was present then: Mollat reports the medieval French expression saying of a man “that he ‘fell’ into servitude or misery, or that he could not ‘maintain his estate,’ much less ‘rise again’” (1989, p. 5).

4. In: *The Free Dictionary* by Farlex. Retrieved April 6, 2010, from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/poverty>.

5. E não se teria dado uma representação justa de um mundo que, como o cosmos social, tem a peculiaridade de produzir inúmeras representações de si mesmo, se não se tivesse feito seu lugar no espaço dos pontos de vista para essas categorias particularmente expostas à pequena miséria que são todas as profissões que têm por missão tratar a grande miséria ou falar dela, com todas as distorções ligadas à particularidade de seu ponto de vista” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 13).

6 These authors study, respectively, parenting and child development and culture, class, and child-rearing in diverse societies.

7 Miseráveis são os que se confessam derrotados. Mas os pobres não se entregam. Eles descobrem cada dia formas inéditas de trabalho e de luta. Assim, eles enfrentam e buscam remédio para suas dificuldades. Nessa condição de alerta permanente, não têm repouso intelectual. A memória seria sua inimiga. A herança do passado é temperada pelo sentimento de urgência, essa consciência do novo que é, também, um motor do conhecimento”. Milton Santos, 2000.

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# Cultural Psychology of Racial Ideology in Historical Perspective: An Analytic Approach to Understanding Racialized Societies and Their Psychological Effects on Lives

Cynthia E. Winston and Michael R. Winston

## Abstract

Race as a label and idea has developed over time as part of science, philosophy, psychology, and other areas of scholarship. Its social uses have been notable—and often notorious—leading to treating race as a “thing.” Such ideological use of race as a “thing” has been discredited in our century. Nevertheless, the residual reality is that socially destructive ideological concepts of race have been embedded in racialized societies to varying degrees through social, economic, and political institutions and their practices. This reality has psychological consequences for human personality development, identity formation, and lives. Varied cultural historical conditions have buttressed systematic and institutionalized agents of power. This has motivated, manufactured, and sustained new forms of racial thinking and ideology. The goal of this chapter is to develop an analytic framework for cultural psychology that penetrates the historical surfaces of racialized societies so that the interactions among race, culture, and racist ideologies may be understood as a dynamic, rather than static, multidimensional system that varies over time and place. Although modern scholarship on race across the disciplines is vast and more than a century old, the Winston Framework provides a new organization and synthesis of cultural psychological concepts that operate at multiple systems and interindividual levels across time and different racialized systems of domination. It is proposed that a cultural historical psychology of race analytically requires a synthesis of race concepts appropriately placed in their historical context, including the dynamics of individuals, institutions, and societies.

**Keywords:** race, racialized societies, racial ideology, identity, master narratives, cultural historical, cultural psychology, comparative

Contemporary biological and social sciences recognize that human beings are a single species and that observable physical differentiations among them are not markers for traits, abilities, or intelligence. Moreover, genomic research has found that all humans are approximately 99.9% the same genetically (Collins, Green, Guttmacher, & Guyer, 2003). Since the end of World War II, an international scientific consensus has dismissed the idea of superior and inferior races as a myth. For more than 200 years, however, such ideas were a dominant although often challenged ideology,

especially in Europe and in the Americas. In those societies in which dominant and subordinate groups were classified racially, economic and social institutions were structured to maintain the existing disparities in power, wealth, and social development. Those aspects of the social structure in turn shaped patterns of behavior, forming cultures of dominance and subordination. Within such societies, behavior coded and regulated by race and or color became an integral component of the psychological development of dominant as well as subordinate groups.

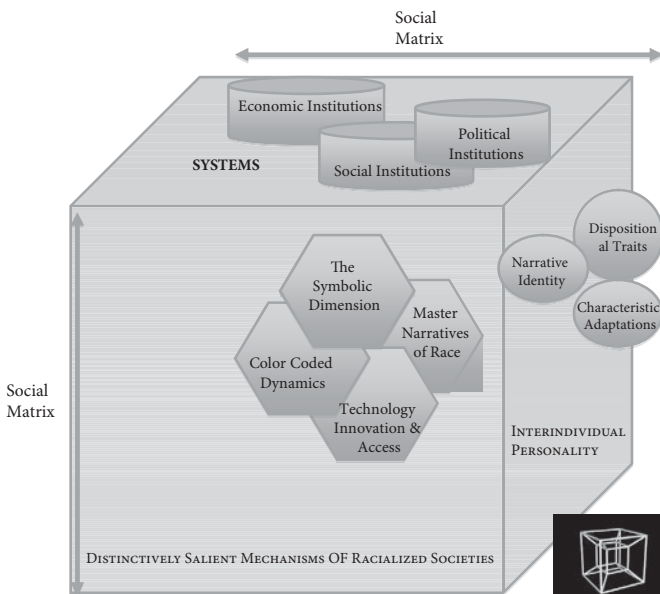
In this chapter, we propose an analytic framework for penetrating the historical surfaces of racialized societies for cultural psychology. It would enable researchers to view interactions between race, culture, and racist ideologies as a dynamic, rather than static, system that varies over time and place. A cultural psychology of race conceptualizes culture as central to the psychological meaning of race. Race's meaning is both constituted by and constitutive of culture. A cultural psychology of race fuses systems and identity development dynamics through mechanisms that are political, social, economic, and personal. It includes history as a tool to specify empirically the psychological mechanisms of domination, subordination, and equality.

There are several factors that distinguish our analytic framework from others within the field of psychology and other social sciences. Our framework allows for comparative analysis of racial systems across cultures and social types in different countries—such as the United States, South Africa, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. As such, it allows for very specific factors to be compared across systems and cultures. For example, the date of emancipation varies across the British colonies (1834), the United States (1865), and Brazil (1888). In some instances, emancipation precipitated a search for other racial sources of labor, as in the case of the British Empire, where Asian (Chinese and Indian) contract labor was imported to replace local Black labor. The racial-cultural dynamic was thus made only more complicated but actually

facilitated colonial exploitation by the British system of “divide and rule.” In other instances, such as Brazil, color and class replaced the legal status of slavery as markers for social and economic subordination. In such a system, the cultural dimensions of class became a major component of the system of racial subordination, enabling supporters of the system to argue that it was not based on race or former slave status, but class.

Another example of a comparability measure is the degree of urbanization and proximity to seaports (e.g., coastal versus interior [Africa, Latin America, Caribbean]). For example, in pre-industrial societies, seaports were “zones of racial juxtaposition” because they attracted populations involved in various aspects of trade. These included slaves, textiles, spices, tobacco, and other commodities in trade between tropical areas, Europe, and the Americas. As cities grew in the coastal areas of the Americas, England, Europe, Africa, and Asia, work and commercial opportunity attracted populations that were highly differentiated racially.

The Winston Framework also allows for empirical data to be interpreted within a dynamic and scalable framework referring to linked concepts and phenomena that vary in their expression and intensity from society to society. The Winston Framework identifies such concepts as color coding, technology, and master narratives of race as being mutually relevant (see Fig. 25.1). Therefore, empirical data on the race



**Figure 25.1** The Winston Framework for the Cultural Psychology of Race in Historical Perspective (2010)

and or color and status or role of a particular racial group in a technical field may be examined as part of a socio-cultural system, rather than isolated demographic and employment data. It was the pattern in racialized societies, for example, for newly emerging technical fields of scientific importance or social prestige to exclude racially targeted groups. Aerospace programs, organ transplant programs in their early development, and militarily significant research programs (such as the development of nuclear weapons) are all examples of this phenomenon. Limiting the access of targeted groups to the relevant education and training is also, of course, a part of the institutional means for making some fields more exclusive, prestigious, and Whiter than others.

## Race As a Biological and Historical Phenomenon

### *The Basic Dualism of Race*

The term *race* has been used for centuries to categorize human groups. If it were no more than a convenience for generalizations about human variations, then it would have had no more historical or social significance than different classification systems in botany and zoology.

Analysis of race is often marred by confused reasoning caused by the tendency in some academic disciplines, and in certain aspects of public policy, to discuss race as if it were a concrete “thing.” On one level of analysis, “race” is a label with no universal definitions or intrinsic substance. On another level, race is implicated in a vast system of social and economic control and subordination. An understanding of these two aspects of race necessarily involves the history of how the use of the term race evolved and how it became more than a neutral label. In fact, it became a major social, political, and cultural force. The key distinction is between what race “is” objectively and what race “means” in different cultures and periods of history.

Just as there is a basic dualism in the *concept* of race, as a label and a “thing,” there is also a fundamental dualism in the *history* of race. On the one hand, race as a label, as a means of classifying humans, has continued to evolve over centuries in both science and scholarship. On the other hand, race has evolved as a component of various ideologies—some explicitly racist, others more nationalistic or cultural but with a strong racial element—for example, American White Supremacy, (Fredrickson, 1981, pp. 136–179), Russian Slavophilism, (Riasanovsky, 1963, pp. 401–404), German *Volkish*

ideology—the transcendental, unique essence of the German soul (Mosse, 1964, pp. 3–30); and *Yamato minzokuism*—the Japanese as the pure “leading race” (Dower, 1986, pp. 204–207).

The ideological use of race as a “thing” has been discredited in science and scholarship. The ideological manipulation of race, however, has often adapted to new social and political conditions, sometimes using politically potent proxies for race such as religion or immigration status. Despite the steadily narrowing appeal of overt racism since World War II, a residual, institutionalized reality continues to exert significant psychological influence on lives. Ideas, attitudes, and values now known to be erroneous have an embedded life in the economic and cultural patterns that continue to shape the interactions of people of different racial identifications in what the Winston Framework conceptualizes as “racialized” societies. This has psychological consequences for individual personality development (Winston, in press a) and for the study and understanding of lives affected by subsurface social ideologies from earlier periods of history (Drake, 1987).

### *Origins of Racial and Racist Thinking*

The physical differences among humans noted in early civilizations were variously explained by creation myths and legends. Claims to superiority were usually rooted in a belief that a given civilization or culture was superior to all others (e.g., Greece and China), which were characterized as “barbarian,” but not because of the physical differences themselves. As early as the time of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), physical and temperamental differences were sometimes explained naturalistically as a result of climate and culture (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book X 1327b). When Christianity emerged as a syncretistic religion of the Roman Empire, transcending tribal and sectarian traditions, it acknowledged human differences but emphasized St. Paul’s statement that God “hath made of one blood all nations in the earth to dwell” (*Acts of the Apostles* 17:26). Later, in the early fifth century, St. Augustine argued (in *The City of God*) that differences in color or “quality of nature” did not mean that human beings did not all derive from the same divine source (Gossett, 1965, p. 9).

The spread of explicitly racist views is linked historically to the European conquest of large territories inhabited by non-White populations. It was observed initially in the Spanish conquest of Peru and Mexico in the sixteenth century, when Indians were enslaved to provide free labor for

mining and agriculture. Countering religiously based objections to slavery, most significantly those of Bartolome de Las Casas (1474–1566), defenders of the system asserted that Indians were inferior to Europeans, not because of climate or culture but because of unchanging “racial” differences. As other Europeans—notably the English, the French, and the Dutch—vied for the opportunity to extract wealth from their colonies in the Americas, racist ideas took firmer root with the expansion of the African slave trade. As late as the seventeenth century, these ideas were still far from systematic and did not generally have the sanction of the learned. As Thomas Gossett has pointed out, as slavery expanded as a system driven by economic gain, “there was a minimum of theory” (Gossett, 1965, p. 29). When slavery began to be attacked more frequently as immoral by Quakers, and contrary to Christian teaching by some Protestants, explicitly racist theory began to be developed in defense of the system (Frederickson, 2002).

Race gradually became more than a device for classifying human beings. Under the pressure of controversy, it evolved into something new, in which its social meaning was more important than any biological variations. Variations in physical appearance (phenotype) were interpreted to be markers for unchangeable abilities, temperaments, and traits. It was claimed that just as human groups differed in color, physical stature, and facial features, they differed fundamentally, as groups, in their “capacity for civilization,” their intelligence, general educability, capability in mathematics and the sciences, character traits such as industriousness, adaptability, as well as motor skills, sexual behavior, tolerance for particular diseases, pain thresholds, and aesthetic sensibilities (Hall, 1905, pp. 95–107).

### ***The Enlightenment Sources of Modern Racist and Anti-Racist Ideology***

During the eighteenth century, intensified contact among Europeans with Asians, Indians in the Americas, and Africans aroused increasing interest in the subject of human variations. Over the course of the century, two contrasting intellectual responses to the new information about non-European populations emerged. One approach continued the effort in botany and zoology to develop a scheme for classifying populations. This strain of thought was a type of proto-racial theory, classifying humans according to color or geography (usually white, red, yellow, brown, and black; or, alternatively, as

Europeans, Asians, Americans, and Africans). By mid-century, some writers in this camp ventured a stratifying notion of “the races” in a hierarchy, with Europeans at the apex and Africans at the base (Cohen, 1980). Equally prominent was their attempt to associate “character traits” with nations as well as races, identifying some as uniformly clever or dull, courageous or servile, militaristic or passive. The opposite approach, based on a broad conception of the formation of human cultures and societies, posited that there is a single “human nature” that is expressed variously in different cultures. Its adherents also argued that civilizations or societies evolved over time, from simpler forms and structures to more complex, with the range and variation in human behavior attributable to the type of society in which individuals and groups lived. The first approach tended toward a racial determinism in human behavior, expressed as unchangeable racial superiority or inferiority, whereas the second recognized human differences but left open the possibility of “savage” peoples evolving into “civilized” peoples. Two of the most prominent philosophers of the century, Immanuel Kant and David Hume, adopted the racist approach. The opposite view was prominently advanced by J. G. von Herder, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson (Broadie, 2003, pp. 88–90).

A vehicle for systematizing and disseminating knowledge was the creation of encyclopedias, the most influential of which were the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert (published in parts, 1751–1772) and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (published in three volumes in 1771). What these works had to say about race reflects a distinct stage in its evolution as an organizing idea or concept in society and among the learned. *The French Encyclopedie* said that not only did color and facial traits distinguish Negroes from other men, but they “appear to constitute a new species of mankind.” The first American edition of the British version (1798) claimed that Negroes were “a variety of the human species” and identified them as *Homo pelli nigra*—black-skinned man (Eze, 1997, p. 91). After describing the color and physiognomy that was supposedly distinctive of Negroes, it ascribed to them a remarkable catalog of implicitly hereditary traits:

“Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge,

cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself”

(Eze, 1997, pp. 91, 93–94)

Although it might be thought that such notions were more likely to flourish in societies heavily involved in the African slave trade, some of the most influential debates about race biologically and socially occurred in Germany, which had no colonial assets at the time and was only marginally in contact with non-White populations.

The most important German racial theorist was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose influence as a philosopher was of European—not simply German—significance. Kant introduced a course on anthropology at the University of Königsberg in 1772, the first in any German university. Over the course of his career, Kant offered at least 72 courses in anthropology (compared with 28 in ethics and 54 in logic). The ideas developed in these courses became embedded in European racial theory for more than a century. In one early essay, “*On National Characters*” (1764), Kant wrote, for example, that “the Arab [is] the noblest man in the Orient,” whereas “the Persians are the French of Asia.” By contrast, he wrote:

“the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. [David] Hume [in his essay, *Of National Characters*, (1754)] challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents . . . not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality . . . So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man [blacks and whites] it appears to be as great in mental capacities as in color.”

(Eze, 1997, p. 55)

In the same essay, Hume had also written that he was “apt to suspect” that there were four or five “species of men” who were naturally inferior to Whites.

“There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than [W]hite, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation . . . On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the [W]hites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them . . .

Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages if nature had not made an original distinction between the breeds of men.”

(Eze, 1997, p. 33)

The claims of Kant and Hume were countered by James Beattie (1735–1803) in his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Skepticism* (1770) on logical grounds: the only way to prove an inherent inferiority of Africans and American Indians would be to introduce arts and sciences among them to see whether they were “unsusceptible to cultivation.” “The inhabitants of Great Britain and France,” he wrote, “were as savage 2,000 years ago as those of Africa and America are to this day.” Adam Smith, another member of the Scottish Enlightenment, argued in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that geography, not individual abilities, was the underlying cause of the social and economic differentiation that led to personal achievement. All of the inland areas of Africa and Asia, he wrote, were in a “barbarous and uncivilized state” because they lacked waterways that supported internal “commerce and communication,” whereas all the civilizations of the past (his examples were Egypt, India, China) were built around great river systems. He added that Europe followed this pattern, with inland and other isolated areas having less developed populations than the sea coasts or the river systems (Smith, 1776, Chapter III, Section 8).

The large shifts in racial populations occasioned by slavery, contract labor systems, and the mobility associated with intensified transnational and intercontinental trade after the sixteenth century resulted in vast increases in mixed race populations. In the ancient and medieval worlds, such populations were clustered mainly on the Mediterranean rim (the Maghreb, Egypt, Western Anatolia, Sicily, Southern Italy, and Spain). In the early modern period, mixed race populations grew rapidly in the West Indies, Latin America, and North America. In some social systems of the Spanish Empire, the term *mestizo* included mixtures of Indians, Whites, and Africans, whereas in others there was an attempt to place racially mixed groups in a hierarchy based on the observable “amount of their White blood.” The Spanish colonies generally developed systems of psychological advantage and prestige attached to people of “pure Spanish blood” as the number of mixed race people grew, in most cases to a clear majority of the population. In such a triadic system (e.g., Cuba,

Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico), Whites were at the top of the hierarchy, mixed race people in the middle, and dark-skinned or Black-skinned people at the bottom, although some of them were indeed of mixed race. Thus, *color* became a major part of the psychosocial matrix affecting the distribution of education, occupations, wealth, and social prestige. Language also played a cultural role, with a premium placed on “correct speech” as opposed to the Creolized or pidgin speech associated with the lower classes and darker segments of the population.

The French colonies of the West Indies and North America followed some of the same mixed race and color-graded patterns of the Spanish but developed different attitudes about the acknowledged mulatto children of wealthy Whites. Those children, at times, inherited property, were provided educations in France, and returned to the colonies as a privileged segment of the population (e.g., Saint Domingue [later Haiti], Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Louisiana before 1803). As in the Spanish case, color was an important feature of the cultural matrix in the racial systems of the French colonies.

The British developed racial policies and practices in their colonies that varied. In India, racial theory was used as a dividing technique, classifying some groups as “martial races” (e.g., Sikhs and Gurkhas, although Sikhs were not racially different from Hindus or Muslims) and others as “backward.” Racial or “color bars” were imposed in establishing residential areas and clubs. In the settler colonies of Africa, such as Kenya and Rhodesia, racial segregation and racially limited educational opportunities followed the South African pattern, whereas in Egypt, Aden, and other places, racial discrimination was more muted. Theories of racial inferiority were, however, an essential part of the British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Spanish, and Portuguese systems of rule and the maintenance of White dominance.

In the United States, the juxtaposition of White, Black, and Indian populations resulted in a large mixed race population from the early seventeenth century to the end of the mid nineteenth century. This occurred, of course, before the U.S. Congress passed an Indian removal bill, signed into law by President Andrew Jackson in 1829, that mandated the forced removal of the Indians (principally in the Southeast) to territory west of the Mississippi River. Most demographers concluded by the early twentieth century that only a tiny fraction of the Negro population in the United States remained,

as a matter of biology wholly African. Because the racial system in the United States was regulated by law and the usual violence of slave societies, the racial definition of these populations became a matter of law rather than custom, cultural preference, or individual decision. Popularly known as “the one drop rule” because the legal and social definition as a Negro could be made if a person had any African ancestry, no matter how remote (*see* Frazier, 1949). As a result, in the racial system in the United States, many individuals who would have been classified as Whites in the West Indies, Brazil, or other parts of Latin American were classified as mulattos (one-half White), quadroons (one-fourth White), or octoroons (one-eighth White). In the nineteenth century, they were generally called “people of color” but remained legally an undifferentiated part of the “American Negro race”. From 1890 until 1920, there was a mulatto category in the U.S. Census. After that category was eliminated in the 1930 Census, some of those formerly identified as mulatto simply became White, as they were not counted as Negroes. Although color played a personal role in cultural preference among American Negroes, the fixed legal status of the race had the effect of creating a social and political solidarity that had no analog in Latin America or the West Indies. By contrast, in the South African system of Apartheid, laws succeeded in creating a system in which Whites, Coloreds, Indians (and other Asians), and Africans developed as separate populations in the racial system. The opposition to Apartheid eventually included members of all of these groups, but there was never the degree of solidarity between Black Africans and Coloreds as there was between those of various racial mixtures among American Negroes. This is mainly attributable to the fact that the Coloreds had privileges as a matter of law that were denied to Africans, whereas in the United States there was no legal or political difference based on racial mixture.

## **The Consolidation of Race Theory in the Era of Scientific Racism**

### ***From Racial Ideas to Racial Ideology***

The transformation of eighteenth-century speculations about race into an ideology that was regarded as solidly based knowledge and sound science was a process that stretched from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. In this period, several developments accelerated interest in racial theory. One was the dramatic expansion of European imperialism in Africa and Asia. By

the end of the century, only two African countries remained independent: Ethiopia and Liberia; all the others were direct colonies of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and Spain or were controlled less directly by European powers (e.g., Egypt and the Sudan). Holland, Britain, and France directly controlled colonies in Asia (e.g., Indonesia, India, French Indochina) and had spheres of influence in China. Another development of profound importance was the abolition of slavery in the United States after the Civil War (1861–1865) and the creation of a system of government-enforced White Supremacy in the South and various types and degrees of segregation in the North, all of which were sanctioned by the U.S. Congress, the Presidents of the United States, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Both European Imperialism and White Supremacy in the United States (and South Africa) were buttressed by racial ideologies that posited the inherent inferiority of Africans, Asians, and American Negroes. Although it is an exaggeration to call Count Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) the “Father of Racism,” as he often is, he was the European thinker in the nineteenth century who wrote the most influential racist book of the era, the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–1855). He borrowed the racial classification schemes of the eighteenth century and followed the usual Hume–Kant hierarchy, placing Blacks at the lowest level and Whites at the highest. New in Gobineau’s ideology was his application of these ideas to a racial interpretation of all history, explaining the rise and fall of civilizations on the grounds of supposedly racial migrations, traits, and degrees of “purity.” Gobineau also popularized the idea that among Whites there were various “races,” with the “Nordics” being the most superior, whereas the Mediterranean and Slav groups were inferior. Of “the [W]hite races” as a whole, he wrote that they “are gifted with reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence.” He added the following details:

“They have a feeling for utility, but in a sense far wider and higher, more courageous and ideal, than the yellow races; a perseverance that takes account of obstacles and ultimately finds a means of overcoming them; a greater physical power, an extraordinary instinct for order, not merely as a guarantee of peace and tranquility, but as an indispensable means of self-preservation. At the same time, they have a remarkable, and even extreme, love of liberty, and are openly hostile to the formalism under which the

Chinese are glad to vegetate, as well as to the strict despotism which is the only way of governing the Negro.”

(Gobineau, as in Biddiss, 1970, pp. 136–137)

In Gobineau’s theory, Northern Europeans were regarded as superior, intellectually and physically (the “Nordics” of Scandinavia and the “Celtic Germans” of Central Europe), whereas Slavs in Central Europe and Eastern Europe were “demonstrably” inferior, as shown by their often subordinate status in peasant societies. Those Europeans on the Mediterranean rim, southern Frenchmen, Spaniards who were not “of pure blood,” Greeks, and Italians were inferior. In the evolving racial theory of the nineteenth century, there were as many as 30 different “races” or “racial types” of Europeans, including a religious minority—Jews (Snyder, 1939).

Gobineau’s ideas were further popularized by Richard Wagner’s version of racism allied with German nationalism (his “Teutonism”), and by Wagner’s son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927). Chamberlain’s two-volume, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), fused racism with anti-Semitism, an amalgam exploited politically by Adolf Hitler in Germany (and enacted into law in 1934) and by the anti-immigration movement in the United States (enacted into law in the immigration quota system in 1924 and “the national origins plan” of 1929).

An important stage in the consolidation of race theory in the nineteenth century was the skewed importation of Darwin’s biological ideas (e.g., natural selection) into social theories in the newly developing social sciences. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), for example, argued that just as there was a struggle for existence between animals in nature, there was a struggle between classes in society, between nations and between races. As in nature, he maintained, these struggles had the result that the strongest triumphed, and this was the key to overall human progress—the “survival of the fittest.”

Social Darwinism became not only an approach to society but was embedded in the social sciences as the most “realistic” way to think of the disparities in education and wealth in industrial societies and between Europe and other parts of the world. From this perspective, social inequality was a natural phenomenon, based on biological facts that could not be changed by education or other variables. It was, therefore, a “sentimental delusion” to believe that the “lower orders” of humanity could be improved

by better education, health services, or other social policy interventions.

In the same era, medical and physical anthropological research attempted to establish an anatomical and physiological foundation for theories of racial inferiority, especially of Blacks. The most consequential and prestigious American scientist to adopt rigidly racist views was Professor Louis Agassiz (1807–1873) of Harvard University. He was the founding scientist of Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School (1848), the first school in the United States to train scientific researchers. His popularity as a public lecturer and writer on scientific subjects propelled him to unprecedented influence as a shaper of scientific knowledge and public opinion. Supported not only by Harvard but by substantial research funds from the Massachusetts legislature (for his Museum of Comparative Zoology), Agassiz's work was influenced by Samuel George Morton, the leading American anthropologist, who believed that on the basis of his examination of human skulls, he had shown that Whites had the largest skulls, whereas Blacks and American Indians had the smallest skulls, proving to his satisfaction that Whites had more intellectual ability because of their presumptively larger brain size. Morton's results were achieved in part by arbitrary racial classification, deciding for example, that the ancient Egyptians were Caucasians. In his first year as Lowell Lecturer, Agassiz lectured in Charleston, South Carolina and maintained that as a matter of science, Negroes were a distinct species. Using Morton's work, Agassiz said that the "brain of the [adult] Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a 7-month's infant in the womb of a White" (Stanton, 1960, p. 100).

Agassiz developed his ideas into a theory, polygenism, that maintained that all of the races were separate creations and in an immutable hierarchy of abilities. Polygenism was a theory especially congenial to defenders of slavery. Agassiz's theory meant that the abolitionist and humanitarian views on slavery were false, because Negroes were not fully human and could not be included in the natural rights doctrine announced in the American Declaration of Independence or ever be entitled to citizenship or constitutional protections. Agassiz's ideas about race retained their scientific authority in the United States far beyond the slavery controversy and the Civil War because they became the foundation of the American School of Anthropology and part of standard medical research and teaching in the United States (Menand, 2001, pp. 97–116).

The most active and influential of Agassiz's successors in this area of research was Robert Bennett Bean, a professor of anatomy at the University of Virginia Medical School. The "Negro brain," he wrote in 1908, developed normally as far as perception, memory, and motor responses were concerned, but logical critical thinking or the comprehension of abstract ideas were beyond its grasp because of "arrested physiological development" (Bean, 1906, pp. 353–432). The significance of this development in science was, first, the assumption that it was objective and correct, and therefore not a matter of controversy, but fact. Second, its application to public policy had far-reaching consequences, especially in education and employment.

### ***From "Race Science" to Racialized Public Policy and Institutions***

The United States had the most sophisticated system of racial domination in the world. As a hard system, the United States maintained a structure of racialized power through legislation and judicial opinion. This distinguished it from European systems in which claims of racial difference were made, for example, about Italians, Germans, Poles, or Jews. When members of these groups immigrated to the United States, those European racial distinctions virtually vanished, as they were identified by U.S. law as White. As a result, the social use of race was redefined because of the use of the legal system to maintain a racial hierarchy after the abolition of slavery (Mangum, 1940). The question became, Who is Black and who is White? At the same time, in Europe, race theory was still based on the idea that there were multiple "races" within Europe (Goldstein, 2006). In England and Ireland, there was the development of the idea of an "Irish Race." Maintaining the European distinctions would not only have been too complicated legally but would have worked against the assimilation of immigrants so they could become "Americans," pure and simple.

Because of its size and distribution, the Negro population of the United States was always of public policy importance, during the slave era and afterward. Constituting about one-fifth of the national population in 1790, it remained a much larger proportion of the population in the southern states. By 1880, Negroes were 13% of the national population but in some southern states comprised as much as 50% or more of the total population (Bureau of the Census, 1918, pp. 46–49).



The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, and the Congressional policy of Reconstruction, had been intended to be the basis for the Freedmen to be citizens and participants in a democratic society. Although no government measures were taken to secure an economic base for the ex-slaves, the Freedmen's Bureau (a part of the War Department) was the government agency created to provide the recently emancipated slaves with education, health care, and other forms of assistance. With the defeat of Reconstruction (1876), southern Whites attempted to erase the progress that had been achieved by Blacks in the decade since the end of the war through Black Codes, Ku Klux Klan terrorism, and other violence. These methods were gradually superseded by changes in state constitutions and federal policy, principally by the U.S. Supreme Court, which removed Negroes from political participation in the South. Southern and northern Whites then created a system of legalized racial segregation and economic exploitation (Logan, 1954, pp. 3–11).

Between the 1880s and 1920s a new type of society was structured, one that was “modernizing” with respect to industrialization, commercial development, urban growth, expanded transportation, communications networks, and a rapidly growing system of public education, including higher education. At the same time, disparities based on race in education, income, and access to social resources were institutionalized through segregation laws and other forms of public policy that made it possible to limit the development of Negroes (segregated schools, libraries, hospitals, racial classification of jobs as “White jobs” and “Black jobs”) while advancing Whites at public expense.

The fusion of racial theory and institutional development made it possible to perpetuate inequalities based on race from generation to generation. An illustration of this trend is the expenditure of funds for education of Whites and Negroes in those states maintaining racial segregation of schools (the most crucial institution for social mobility in the American social system). Charles H. Thompson, head of the Bureau of Educational Research at Howard University, pointed out that in 1900 the disparity in per capita educational expenditures for the two racial groups was 60% in favor of Whites, but by 1930 had increased to 253% (Thompson, 1935, pp. 419–434) As such disparities were consolidated in all social and economic institutions,

including the military, the United States developed separate social and cultural environments that not only limited the development of the Black population but affected them psychologically. Race became a determinative aspect of the economic and social realities that shaped most Black lives, irrespective of the frequently enunciated egalitarian aspects of American ideals and democratic constitutional theory. The United States became a racialized society at the same time that the country rose to become one of the most powerful countries in the world, a social fact that did not begin to change until after World War II.

### ***The Scientific Error of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Race Theory***

The fundamental error of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century race theory, as science, was the assumption that naming a race and then attributing fixed abilities, behavioral traits, and physical characteristics to it was logically or empirically adequate. However, the intellectual weakness of this approach as science did not lessen the hold such ideas had on social thought, public policy, or popular culture. It was not, strictly speaking, an issue of science but of power and a need to find a cultural and social means to unify a majority of the people of the United States, even if at a terrible cost to the minority that was not White. The multiple traumas of the Civil War placed in high relief the divisions among the White population—by region, class, immigrant status, religious domination—so that hatred and exclusion of Blacks (to the extent possible) became a kind of social adhesive for people who increasingly thought of themselves as “White” rather than as ethnic immigrants, class opponents, or former enemies on the Union or Confederate side of the war.

### **A Racialized Society**

The racial ideas of the eighteenth century did not, of course, independently create the racialized societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In their time, they were primarily speculative conjectures. They gained importance later, when race-based systems of dominance operationalized them by the application of governmental power and private institutions.

A “racialized society” develops over time. It is not simply a society in which there is a sudden or transitory contact between different racial groups through conquest or immigration. In a racialized society, different groups that have been socially identified

as “races” are limited to social and economic roles according to their racial identification.

Racialized societies are historically a phenomenon of the early modern world (beginning in the sixteenth century) when western Europeans developed the technical and military means to conquer societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and extract mineral wealth and other natural resources from some of those areas using native labor. During a second stage, millions of laborers, either through slavery or contract labor systems, were moved to frontier societies, such as those in North and South America, the Caribbean, East Africa, and South Africa. There, Europeans imposed a caste system in which race was made a functional boundary for economic and social roles (Du Bois, 1945; Frazier, 1957).

The concept of a racialized society does not apply to all multiracial societies. In the ancient African and Mediterranean world (e.g., in Egypt, the Greek or the Roman Empires), Africans, West Asians, and Europeans were significant demographic components of those societies, making them multiracial. But there was no systematic or strict determination of social and economic roles by what would be later called race (Snowden, 1970, 1983). In the ancient world, slavery was a result of conquest, as it was in the Medieval Muslim and Christian realms, but slavery was not the product of a racialized economic system, as it would become in the era of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade, the Atlantic Slave Trade, and European colonization. Status as a slave or free person was not tied in the earlier historical periods to racial or ethnic identity. The mere existence of several races in the same society does not, therefore, make it conceptually a “racialized society.”

Is there a distinction to be drawn between a “racialized” society and a “racist” society? The Winston Framework uses “racialized” to designate societies in which race is used as a socially differentiating marker. Societies may use such markers in varying degrees. In “softer” systems, race and color may have more importance in the private than the public realm and historically were linked in some societies to class hierarchies. In such systems neither race nor color may have formal legal significance. The absence of a legalized, state-imposed racial regime does not, of course, mean that there is no racial prejudice or virtually hereditary racial stratification in a society, as was claimed by scholarly apologists for the Brazilian racial class system (Fernandes, 1969; Freyre, 1946; Ramos, 1939). In “softer” systems,

the prejudices of the private realm are extended by custom to the employment and civic realms, so that persons of the less socially privileged racial groups would not be absolutely barred from certain occupations or public offices but would attain them very rarely. In “harder” systems designated as “racist,” in the “racialized society” continuum, racial groups are defined formally by law. Limitations in the educational, economic, and political freedoms of those proscribed racial groups then become enforceable by law, including regulation of such private relations as marriage (Higginbotham, 1978; Mangum, 1940).

Historically, the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean were racialized but not racist in the sense defined here. In the United States and South Africa, the societies were racist as defined here because the status of racial groups was fixed and enforced by the power of the State through the formal mechanisms of legislation, judicial proceedings, and executive force. In the case of those regimes developed by such colonizing powers as the Dutch, the Portuguese, the English, and the French, racial policies and the distribution of educational and economic opportunities in the colonies were regulated by colonial administration, whereas in the metropolitan area such laws did not apply. Thus France, for example, maintained a racially stratified regime in its African and Caribbean colonies but provided legal equality in France itself for all racial groups. In such a system, it was possible for Negroes (as defined in the United States; in France they were mulatto), such as the Chevalier de St. Georges (1745–1799) and Alexandre Dumas Père (1802–1870), to become famous and distinguished “Frenchmen” in music and literature (Banat, 2006; McCloy, 1961).

The analytical significance of these distinctions derives from the fact that societies that may be classified along the “racialized–racist continuum” adapted different kinds of institutions and cultural systems to perpetuate racially stratified social and economic differentiations. Those differences, between customary regimes on the one hand and legalistic ones on the other, had varying kinds of impact on those who were within the racial nets maintained by political and social elites. Institutional and cultural variations, in turn, had different types and degrees of psychological and social consequences for individuals in those societies. By conceptualizing a “racialized–racist continuum” as a framework, it is possible to compare very different racial systems

across time and geography, one of the most difficult analytical problems in studies of the intersections between race, culture, and society.

### ***Master Narratives of Race***

Within racialized societies, master narratives of race emerged as a cultural psychological mechanism to “story” dominance, subordination, and equality ideology. Master narratives of race are dominant cultural stories and discourses that reflect racial ideas and ideologies within a racialized society. These stories include plotlines, characters, settings, and other narrative features that create a framework that individuals draw upon in thinking about the meaning of race within lives. Master narratives of race function as societal, symbolic meaning systems of culture. In a sense, they have a dramatic quality like all narratives that are constructed over time (see Bruner, 1990). Moreover, often based on the “point-making” motivation (see Bamberg, 2004) of the master narrative speaker or writer, only selected narrative features of the story are emphasized.

Although master narratives of race may at times appear to be elusive, they are omnipresent, producing images, symbols, storylines, and caricatures that reflect dominant racial ideas and ideologies within a racialized society. This can include storylines about the meaning of racial group membership, as well as explanations for racial group disparities. There is a rapidly growing body of research on implicit racial bias in social psychology that provides an example of how these master narratives of race can work to shape unconscious bias at the interindividual level (see Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). In this research, the symbolic meaning of race is often induced using cues associated with a particular group membership or stereotyped characteristic of racial group members.

Master narratives of race serve the function of configuring power dynamics through distortion of reality, gross overgeneralization, and extension of the ideas with origins or roots in scientific racism, racial thinking, and ideologies associated with racist and antiracist movements. In other words, within racialized societies, master narratives of race to varying degrees provide one of the most important mechanisms through which racialized habits of thinking are sustained and reinforced. The key vitality and sustainability of these master narratives of race is a pervasiveness of thickly embedded racism in American society and culture. Discourses, policies, and practices of individual, institutional, and

cultural racism (see Jones, 2003) can be combined within master narratives of race that reflect their influence on both social structures and individual cognitive structures. In many ways, they come to provide a distorted justification for the racial disparities that emerge not from individual sources but from collective constructions of institutions, systems, and customs.

The form that master narratives of race takes can be varied and complicated. Master narratives of race can present themselves as ideologies, plot constructions, storylines, and discourses. Plotlines for master narratives of race for African-Americans, for example, have been up from slavery/sharecroppers’ child, affirmative action unqualified, and Black exceptionality of excellence. These master narratives of race plotlines evolve over time, retaining the central essence of their meaning, grounded in racial ideas and ideology that are prevailing at a particular point in time. Characters in master narratives of race are contextualized in the format of exemplary actions by exemplary characters that are appropriated to act out and make relevant the claim. For example, Sterling A. Brown (1933, 1937, 1966) identified seven stereotypical characters that were prominent in fiction of the late 1800s and early 1900s which included the contented slave, the wretched Negro, the comic Negro, the brute Negro, the tragic mulatto, the local color Negro, and the exotic primitive. More contemporary characters in master narratives of race include the hip hop icon, the superhuman athlete, and the highly successful exception whose achievement, therefore, is not to be considered important vis-à-vis the low-achieving stereotype by its very exceptionality (Rice, 2010).

Master narratives of race act with storylines that have both static and dynamic features, making the master narrative of race a cultural historical construction that is recombinant at the level of the individual and society. Master narratives are temporary, like other narratives, of course. Bamberg (2004) asserts:

“[L]ooking at narrative at a different angle . . . there seems to be something special in their implementation, even at the level of mundane, conventional everyday interactions, because narratives order characters in space and time and therefore, as a format, narrative lends itself not only to connecting past events to present states (as well as imagined, desired states and events) but also to

revealing character transformations in the unfolding sequence from past to future.”

(Bamberg, 2004, p. 354).

The master narrative of race about the alleged intellectual superiority of White Americans and alleged intellectual inferiority of Black Americans is an illustration of one of the main features of master narratives of race. Within American society and culture, there is a master narrative or common “story” whose main characters are individuals who are Negro, Black, or African-American as well as typically White characters. One storyline develops the plot that intelligence is an exceptional or genetic impossibility for individuals who are non-White and particularly for those who are Black. A contemporary example of the plotline of exceptionality occurred when early in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Campaign, Senator Joe Biden referred to then Senator Barack Obama as “articulate” (see <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/01/31/biden.obama>).

From a cultural-historical perspective, typically when the word “articulate” is used to describe someone who is Black, it may be interpreted as a coded way to indicate that he is an exception to the socially scripted inarticulate stereotype for Blacks in this race and intelligence master narrative. In other words, although the speaker’s motivation may be to pay a compliment, the symbolic meaning of the discourse is interpreted in the resonant context of the master narrative of race and intelligence.

In response to this master narrative about the alleged intellectual inferiority of individuals who are Black and African-American, powerful counter-master narratives have also emerged in American society and culture. These counter-narratives have been developed primarily among individuals who are the targets of the master narrative of intellectual inferiority. This counter-narrative script is that Black people are intelligent and at least equally as capable as their non-African-American counterparts. These counter-master narratives have evolved over time as part of a response to the ideologically driven, institutional, and culturally crafted explanations for structural disparities across racial groups, particularly related to public policy debates about compensatory education and affirmative action (e.g., Jensen, 1969, Herrnstein & Murray, 1994).

Within the counter-master narrative of race, there are features that act like other types of counter-narratives. For example, there are some elements of dominant narratives that Bamberg (2004) suggests

are left intact, whereas others are reshaped and reconfigured. To extend this idea further to a counter-narrative of race, the master narrative of race is reflected in the construction of counter-narratives of race, making it not a “simple counter-story”; rather, these counter-narratives juggle several story lines simultaneously (see Bamberg, 2004). The degree of psychological interactivity required to negotiate the meaning of race between the level of society and the individual is complex. As such, precise determination of the shifting meanings of race is analytically challenging given the current state of research in the field, the quality of the conceptual tools developed thus far, and the inadequacy of the research instruments and methods.

### ***Human Personality Development With Racialized Societies and the Centrality of Identity***

The complexity of master narratives of race inhere in their fusion of interindividual dynamics and systems level racial ideology that are within economic, social, and political institutions. Within the field of psychology, individuality is most often conceptualized in terms of the concept of personality and focuses on those psychological forces within the whole person.

The development of personality within all societies, racialized and non-racialized, involves the dynamic interplay between phenomena on three levels: (1) dispositional traits or the broad individual differences in behavior, thoughts and feelings that have longitudinal consistency across situations and developmental time; (2) characteristic adaptations or goals, values, motives, coping strategies, and stage specific tasks that are contextualized in time, place, and social role; (3) narrative identity or internalized and evolving narratives of the self that reflect the meaning of life experiences in time and culture. In fact, McAdams and Pals (2006) have argued that any science of the person should include conceptualization and corresponding methodological approaches of personality as “an individual’s unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as developing patterns of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life stories complexly and differentially situated in culture” (p. 212).

Culture impacts these different levels of personality in different ways. For example, different cultures may emphasize distinct characteristic adaptations, with individualistic cultures emphasizing

independent self-construals, in contrast to collectivist cultures that stress goals and values of interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The most profound influence of culture on personality is arguably reflected within the psychological repertoire from which a person draws in making sense of past, present, and anticipated future experiences that comprise that person's identity construction. In answering the question *Who am I?*, people have agency in choosing from competing internal and external stories while rejecting many others. McAdams and Pals (2006) have described this process and the relation of culture and identity as self and culture coming together through narrative. This process of self-exploration occurs in the context of a person's dispositional trait profile and adaptive states. As such, it highlights the centrality of the identity dimension of personality in understanding the psychological effects of living in a racialized society.

### **Identity**

Within racialized societies, persons construct the personal, collective, and cultural dimensions of their identity, in part, within the context of the racial ideologies that present themselves in master narratives of race. The narrative features of these master narratives are reinforced by the institutional and structural features of society, as well as through the political and economic realities that automatically create limited opportunities distributed by race.

A person's identity is a psychological dimension of personality that functions to integrate past, present, and anticipated future life experiences to answer perplexing and complicated questions: *Who am I as a person? What does my life mean in the overall structure of the cultural contexts in which I live? How do I bring unity and purpose to my life through how I think about self and who I am? And how do I fit into the adult world?*

Identity is at the same time personal, social (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), hierarchical (Markus, 1977), storied (e.g., McAdams, 1985), and cultural (Erikson, 1968). Such simultaneously constructed elements make its development across the lifespan complex and both a product of and producer of culture. Within any type of society, identity drives psychological attachments to the values, attitudes, customs, cognitions, affect, and views of the self, others, and the world. Racialized societies present unique contexts in which complicated forms of identity develop, because master narratives of race

most often require individuals to reconcile psychologically contradictory characterizations of who they are in terms of a personal sense of self as persons, as well as with respect to their collective attachments within social, religious, and national groups. The narrative features of these master narratives of race are often omnipresent because they are reinforced by the economic, political, and social systems of society.

The human development of identity has a profound impact on all other aspects of a person's life-course. To understand comprehensively the magnitude of this impact, imagine if human beings did not strive to achieve and restore their identity. There would be no posing of questions and striving for answers to the question of *Who am I?* at any developmental stage of life, including adolescence and later adulthood. In this sense, all of the psychosocial tasks associated with resolving conflict, achieving psychological balance, developing trust, and choosing a life's occupation would be eliminated from what it means to be human.

The experiential elements specific to living in a racialized society contribute to a person's identity construction in the form of autobiographical memories of race (Winston, in press a; Winston, in press b). In her theory of race self complexity, Winston (in press a) argues that the meaning of race is processed narratively, and as such, there is a complex process of the self-system by which autobiographical memories of race are recalled and narratively organized. In the construction of autobiographical memories of race experiences, encoding of remembered emotion launches two core processes of the self-system: narrative processing and autobiographical reasoning (Mangum & Winston, 2008; Winston, 2011). This processing engages narrative sequencing and emotion. The processing also is triggered at different times across the life-course, and in various roles and environments. The narrative processing of autobiographical internal and external race-related stimuli requires channeling of a stream of thought into prescribed, narrative race meaning sequences. These narrative sequences rely on both cultural and personal templates, as well as the stimulation of affect. Often the stimuli and cultural templates are in the form of master narratives of race. Such dominant narratives in society serve as a mechanism for drawing up a personal meaning of race. Also, the human nature of individuals to categorize phenomena, objects, and people serves as a culturally universal mechanism that individuals

use in racialized societies to cultivate the meaning of race within their lives.

Emotion is an adaptive characteristic of personality that is also a core part of the narrative processing of race in identity construction (Mangum & Winston, 2008). Emotion enhances memory encoding and therefore serves to launch a person's narrative processing and autobiographical reasoning of race experiences, including those that are personal as well as those that are at the level of master narratives of race within the larger racialized society. In the process of identity construction, these experiential affect cues give rise to one of the psychological functions of autobiographical memories of race—to aid a person in organizing events of past life experiences of race in a temporal sequence and meaningful internal portrait of people, places, and events (Winston, in press a). In this regard, narrative is an organizing structure of personality, an idea advanced by both Singer (1995) and McAdams and Pals (2006). Self-protection, self-enhancement, and psychological balance (*see* Rice, 2008) are forms of self-regulation of the internal and external stimuli that operate within racialized societies. These three motives of the self serve important psychological functions of constructing autobiographical memories of race in the process of identity development.

Because identity is selective and constructed rather than fixed and genetically based, like other features of human personality such as dispositional traits, individuals within racialized societies have a wide range of ways they can choose to configure their identity. As a narrative of self, identity development within “harder” racialized systems may, for example, include elements of counter-racial or anti-racist ideology that have been influenced by familial and other primary socializers. This can be the socializing agenda for families from both dominant and subordinate groups. For members of groups that are subordinate within a racialized society, the intended result of such socialization is to help foster identity development that is adaptive and functional. For members of the dominant group, the function of such socialization is to normalize the presumption of privilege.

Within the field of psychology, for example, there has been a long history of debate about whether individuals who are Black living in the United States can form a healthy identity, given the pervasive racism within society. This debate began with the pioneering doll study research of Ruth Horowitz (1939), Mamie P. Clark and Kenneth B. Clark (1939),

whose findings had the single most important social science impact on the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954), which held that the racial segregation of public education by law was unconstitutional (Kluger, 1976). Although the validity and reliability of these findings were later questioned, on interpretive and methodological grounds (Baldwin, 1979), this body of research continues to have a profound impact on the debate about the role of Black culture in the development of an identity that is not self-hating.

During the Black consciousness movement that began in the 1960s, Cross (1971) introduced his theory of Nigrescence (the process of becoming Black) to explore the stages of racial identity development shifts from an unhealthy sense of self as a Black person in the United States to a healthy identity. The impact of this stage model of identity development has been great. It has continued in various forms for more than 40 years, largely pursued by scholars who were students or collaborators of Cross (Parham & Helms, 1981). More recently, Black identity theorists, building on previous research, have shifted their focus from an emphasis on trying to understand the content of a “healthy” identity in a racist society to a focus on mental health correlates of the dimensions of racial centrality, racial regard of the public toward individuals who are Black, as well as Blacks' own regard for their group, racial salience, and racial ideology—mainstream, assimilationist, nationalist, and oppressed minority (*see* Sellers et al., 1998; Shelton & Sellers, 2003).

Another recent development in the study of identity within the United States has been to shift terminology from *racial identity* to *ethnic identity* for two reasons. One is to be more politically correct in the use of the term race, because the fallacy of its biological basis is widely recognized, and the second results from the racial and ethnic diversification of the participants in psychological studies beyond White male college students.

The complexities of identity construction within racialized societies have been formalized in the most sophisticated way in theories that focus on the psychological impacts of racially determined disadvantage on people of African descent. Jones (2003), for example, has proposed a theory of Time, Rhythm, Improvisation, Orality, and Spirituality (TRIOS) to explain the cultural dimensions of African culture that individuals of African descent use to adapt and cope with living in a universal context of racism. In so doing, his model identifies individual,

institutional, and cultural levels of racism that individuals have to negotiate in cultivating a sense of self and other. This negotiation can be linked to both self-enhancement and self-protective factors.

Similarly, Boykin (1986) has proposed a theory of identity dilemma in which individuals of African descent have to negotiate simultaneously three realms of psychological experience: the mainstream, minority, and Afro-cultural orientation. Harrell (1999) also has provided a theoretical orientation for describing the psychological consequences of racism on the minds of people of African descent. He describes three forms in which these consequences take shape: standards of beauty, European ideals, and miseducation. There are many other theorists who focus more explicitly on the psychological impacts of early forms of domination and oppression (particularly slavery) on the identity development of individuals of African descent (Akbar, 1984; Kambon, 2002; Cress-Welsing, 1991; Nobels, 1991).

Within the field of sociology, there is a class of theories called “Whiteness” theories (*see* Anderson, 2003; Bonnett, 1996; Lewis, 2004; Murano, 2004; Roediger, 2002) that posit a relationship between ideological and material components of race that afford individuals who are White automatic privileged social status within a societal racial hierarchy. Lewis (2004) asserts, “whether Whites have self-conscious racial identities may or may not matter as much for their life chances as external readings of them as White” (p. 624). Thus, she asserts, the social category Whiteness cannot be divorced from its role as a force of domination and subjugation. Moreover, whiteness theories suggest that the psychological negotiation that Whites must do in constructing their identity and corresponding behaviors and feelings is based on notions of privilege and entitlement.

Taken together, these theories about the psychological significance of race within lives suggest that the context of the racism within racialized societies and the simultaneous demands of psychological negotiation create complexities in a person’s quest to formulate answers to identity questions. Such complexities make it very challenging for researchers to uncover the meaning of race within lives. In addition, these theories and their important ideas have, for the most part, not been integrated theoretically or methodologically in the discipline of psychology and related fields.

To address this gap, the theory of race self complexity was developed. Race self complexity is a

new narrative theory of personality that posits that the meaning of race can be processed narratively (Winston, in press a). Within the framework of this theory, narrative theories of personality are integrated with psychological significance of race theories to describe and explain the nature, form, and psychological function of autobiographical memories of race specifically, and race narratives generally, across critical life periods within the lives of individuals in racialized societies. In other words, this theory provides a theoretical and accompanying methodological orientation to study, understand, and transform an individual’s identity construction process that includes making sense of race within racialized societies across critical life episodes. This allows for the incorporation of cultural psychological mechanisms through which systems and identity interact, change, or stabilize.

In sum, identity construction is fundamentally a cultural process. The amount of identity work in which a person engages shifts in developmental time, place, and role and in cultural dynamics that are made even more psychologically complicated by living within racialized societies. The demands of the broader cultural contexts in which the meaning of self and life experiences are cultivated may represent maneuvers simultaneously between complicity in and countering established master narratives of race. Those narratives give guidance to one’s actions, but at the same time constrain and delineate a person’s agency—where, for example, laws or entrenched customs prohibit access and movement to key institutions and opportunities of the society. Erik Erikson, psychology’s most influential identity theorist, has suggested that identity is “a process located at the core of the individual, and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact the identity of those two identities” (Erikson, 1968, p. 22).

### **The Winston Framework for Inquiry: The Cultural Psychology of Systems and Human Personality Within Racialized Societies**

The concepts presented thus far comprise the Winston Framework for Inquiry. Racialized societies have specific generic features whose particular details will vary by culture, historical period, and the structure of political power and economic development. The Winston Framework is a conceptual framework for inquiry about the cultural historical intersection of interlocking societal systems and interindividual personality adaptations within

racialized societies (Fig. 25.1). It identifies, defines, and explains a collection of linked core concepts at both the macro- and micro-levels of reality within a racialized society. Regardless of discipline, these concepts are inherent and fundamental for all inquiry about or related to the meaning and impact of race on lives within racialized societies.

Although at one level the Winston Framework is systems-oriented, there is no intention of suggesting that what we describe as “racial systems” are mechanical, deterministic, or permanent. They are systems in the sense that they have structure, form, and stability across varying periods of time. Another characteristic of these systems is that they have identifiable uniformities and patterns. Moreover, a system itself is not necessarily a racial system *per se*. A system that is theoretically “race neutral” may be used for a racial purpose. This phenomenon is seen, for example, when the law is used to segregate schools, hospitals, or other public facilities or to use the power of eminent domain to eliminate the neighborhoods or businesses occupied or owned by disadvantaged racial groups. Another example would be the “special attention” policing applied to the non-White “Bidonvilles” of Paris or Marseilles or the immigrant slums of Manchester and Leeds. In other words, all societies have multiple systems that allow them to function as a whole, including economic, social, and political systems. In a racialized society, these systems operate differentially according to race. That is, those in a subordinate position do not benefit from the system in the way that individuals who are racially privileged have a probability of doing. Many debates have been launched about the greater significance of class to race, as well as arguments about race being more important than class in determining life experiences, as well as socio-economic outcomes (*see* Wilson, 1980).

At another level, the Winston Framework identifies processes used by the targets of racialized societies to establish their own identities, modes of independent action, and human flourishing. These processes of race self complexity include psychological manipulation of the plotlines of master narratives of race in the form of self-protection, self-enhancement, and psychological balance. In other words, there is an intra-active process by which meanings and personal actions are guided. The individual’s actions and internal processing have some degree of autonomy, but that autonomy has boundaries within the context of the interconnected systems of racialized societies.

Racialized culture is learned. A racialized society’s institutional arrangements, structured by racial stratification, induce the development of types of racially mediated, learned behavior—that is, they generate cultural mechanisms to perpetuate patterns of racial dominance and subordination. An example of this is the routine deference that a member of the subordinate group is expected to show to a member of the dominant group, whether it is expressed in the once entrenched southern custom of Blacks being expected to yield the sidewalk to Whites in small towns and cities during the segregation era or the cultural expectation in certain contemporary academic or corporate environments that the professional judgment of a member of a racial minority should count for less than a White colleague of the same training, experience, rank, or status.

A racialized society requires unwritten cultural codes because human institutions are not perpetually renegotiated in day-to-day living by individuals but fit, for the most part, into patterns that are governed more by implicit than explicit assumptions, beliefs, and habits (Doyle, 1937). These racialized cultural prisms of lived experience naturally refract psychological consequences. With some notable exceptions, scholars have focused more on the legislative, judicial, and public policy formulations of racial dominance and have given scant attention to the cultural plasma that allows racialized societies to actually work and escape socially paralyzing violence and disorder most of the time.

In a racialized society, culture also has the immensely important function of normalizing and rationalizing inequality and other aspects of the racial system, whether in a modern industrial state or, historically, in colonial environments as large as India or as small as the Caribbean islands. In all of these cases, the individual in the target group(s) must learn how to adapt psychologically to these cultural imperatives. These adaptations assume a range of forms, depending on the individual’s personality and access to a repertoire of coping resources and strategies. Within the limits imposed by a racialized society’s institutions and culture, such individuals engage in an evolving process of generating ways to give their own lives frames of meaning and significance that the dominant society’s racial postulates and practices deny or attenuate. Formation of such meaning-making resources is both a psychological and cognitive process that varies through an individual’s life span and differs in its details, but not in its function as a way to attain agency, integrity, and



personal fulfillment in the distorted social arrangements and cultural habits that characterize all racialized societies.

The most challenging element in developing the Winston Framework as a robust and appropriate model for inquiry is to make the connections between the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts and the individual without being simplistic or without denying agency to the individuals affected. This is a classic social science problem—filling the gap between what sociologists and historians do and what psychologists and others do who focus their research on individuals.

The Winston Framework serves as a heuristic device for researchers, practitioners, and the public to guide inquiry about racialized societies in terms of both systems and interindividual variables. It does so with an emphasis on global, complex, and cultural-historical conceptualization of the concept, structure, and psychology of race.

There are several key mechanisms that link systems and interindividual personality development within racialized societies. These include transportation, mass communications, color-calibrated social dynamics, master narratives of race, hierarchies of cultural prestige, access to technology, and academic scholarship.

### *Distinctively Salient Mechanisms of Systems and Interindividuality Personality Development*

#### **COLOR-CODED CALIBRATED SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF RACIALIZED SOCIETIES**

There are color-coded calibrated social dynamics of racialized societies in which race and color shape social experience and become a part of a society's culture. Although laws are used in some systems (e.g., the United States and South Africa) to establish racial and color boundaries, most systems function through culture and custom. In some systems, such as Brazil's, there has been more sensitivity to color and social class than to race (as defined in the United States). There were, for example, more than a dozen color classifications that calibrated skin shades between blanco (white), pardo (brown), and preto (black). Such color stratification affected employment opportunities; access to public spaces such as beaches, schools, and nightclubs; and were cultural rather than legal boundaries for the marriagability of women (Pierson, 1942, pp. 111–156). Similar cultural coding of color and physical appearance was a

salient feature in multiracial English-speaking colonies such as Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana, or Spanish-speaking colonies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Within racialized societies, these types of color-coded calibrated social dynamics provide a mechanism for the social, economic, and political institutions and interindividual personality development to interact in ways that provide a multidimensional constellation of lived experiences.

#### **THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF RACIALIZED SOCIETIES**

Modernization as a phenomenon always affects the *mode* of transmitting racial meaning in a racially stratified society. In pre-modern systems, force is more important than social or cultural systems. In modern systems (characterized by industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of mass media), racial symbols have become a primary cultural means for stabilizing a racial system. Thus, the portrayal of subordinate racial groups in mass circulation newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and films becomes a cultural mechanism for embedding stereotypes in a society. As those images become a stable form of representation, all racial groups in the society begin to accept those stereotypes as representations of reality for interindividual personality development and description. For the subordinate racial groups, this has an effect on motivation, education, standards of beauty, and achievement, thus reinforcing its racial stratification (see Harrell, 1999).

#### **TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AND ACCESS IN RACIALIZED SOCIETIES**

Technology innovation and access tend to destabilize racial systems. Historically transportation was the first important change, as railroads, and later automobiles, enabled subordinate racial populations to migrate readily from rural to urban areas, from agricultural labor to industrial enterprise and better educational opportunities. As print media technology became more widespread, independent newspapers and book production by subordinate racial groups became possible, enabling them to mobilize for political and social action and to develop a counter-cultural racial consciousness (Winston, 1982). As mass media, like television, accelerated the spread of images and information, the shifting imagery of Blacks and other racial groups

destabilized racial attitudes and cultural boundaries (e.g., televised coverage of the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s versus earlier and limited print coverage, 1890s to 1950s).

#### MASTER NARRATIVES OF RACE

Master narratives of race as dominant cultural stories and discourses are a mechanism connecting systems-level racial ideas and ideologies to interindividual processing of the meaning of race. Most often, this kind of processing is required of the individual in developing motives, goals, and coping mechanisms, as well as in constructing an identity. In large part, these personality dynamics are adaptive responses to living in a racialized society and can work to create a continuum from psychological depletion to psychological stamina in overall well-being and functioning. Master narratives of race serve the function of maintaining power dynamics through distortion of reality, gross overgeneralization, and extension of the ideas with origins in scientific racism, racial thinking, and ideologies associated with racist and antiracist movements. In other words, within racialized societies, master narratives of race to varying degrees provide one of the most important mechanisms through which racialized habits of thinking are sustained and reinforced.

It is important conceptually to delineate the congruity between the political institutions of racialized societies and the dynamics of how master narratives of race are used. In the United States, for example, public opinion had an increasingly and at times decisive role in shaping race relations because elections are a fundamental part of the American political/power process. Although the defeat of federal Reconstruction policies enabled the White South to disenfranchise the Black population in those states, the continued national acquiescence in that system (supported by the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the presidents) depended on national public opinion, not only public opinion in the southern states. Therefore, the hostile portrayal of Blacks in developing a national market for mass circulation of newspapers and magazines was a significant component of the racial system and the master narratives of race that stabilized between the 1880s and 1950s (Logan, 1954; Winston, 1982). This is the reason that the most important intellectual and psychological response to scientific racism, White supremacy, and imperialism developed in the United States.

#### Counter-Cultural Racial Consciousness: The Intellectual Reconfiguration of Race and Social Action

There was a group of exceptionally well-trained Negro scholars who were clustered (although not exclusively) on the faculties of Atlanta University, Fisk University, and Howard University. They initially used the definition of race (of their time) and developed it as a mobilizing device. Many also redefined the concept of race and its consequences on lives. The trajectory of this change can be traced from Du Bois's work in the 1890s, in which "blood" was still a component of the concept of race, through Alain Locke's *Race and Inter-racial Relations* (1916), in which it was argued that race is a socially constructed, malleable concept, to the consensus views of E. Franklin Frazier and the United Nations statement on race in 1950.

In the United States, the foundation for anti-racist thought and action was created immediately after the Civil War when the Freedmen's Bureau, under the leadership of General Oliver Otis Howard (1830–1909) established a complete educational system from kindergarten to higher education for the former slaves (Bond, 1934; Holmes, 1934). This was the first such system of education in the American South, where educational opportunities among Whites were limited and prohibited by law for slaves and for Free Negroes. No similar system was created in any other former slave society. Spread over an area larger than Western Europe, these colleges and universities prepared generations of teachers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who became the core of a new middle class in the 1870s and 1880s. It is significant that the most important of the counter-cultural, antiracist intellectuals and scholars, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), was a graduate of Fisk University in Tennessee. Fisk was one of the institutions assisted by the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association, a key educational agency founded and operated by northern White missionaries.

In his influential paper delivered to the American Negro Academy, the *Conservation of Races* (1897), Du Bois argued that American Negroes were the "advance guard of the Negro Race," whose mission it was to counter White racist thought, achieve racial equality within the American system, and ultimately liberate non-White colonies from European and American domination. Du Bois (Ph.D., Harvard, 1895), the fifth American Negro to earn a Ph.D. at an

American University (the first was Edward Bouchet in Physics from Yale, 1876), virtually created the field of objective science-based Negro Studies in the Atlanta University Studies (1896–1913).

DuBois's evolving racial theory converted the biological elements of Euro-American race theory into a historical-social construct that posited a global Negro race. In his view, Africans, all North Americans, and Latin Americans of any African descent (no matter how minute), as well as the mulattoes of the Caribbean and Latin America, constituted one race as a result of the shared historical experiences of slavery, emancipation, and economic exploitation.

A founder of sociology in the United States, Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro* (1899) demonstrated that social conditions, rather than innate traits, accounted for much of the observed behavior in urban Blacks. His work became the inspiration for a generation of Black scholars in history and sociology (notably Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, and Horace Mann Bond). Du Bois had a clear concept of the intellectual mobilization of American Negroes to fight racial segregation, economic exploitation, and political domination by Whites. Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), another early Harvard Ph.D. in History (1907), founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 and the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916, both cornerstones of the Negro History Movement, perhaps the most effective fusion of scholarship and popular participation in the counter-cultural movement against racial ideas and policies. Through his books and other publications as well as his support for a younger generation of Negro historians (e.g., Charles H. Wesley, Rayford W. Logan, Luther P. Jackson, John Hope Franklin), Woodson decisively answered Hume's question about what Negroes had achieved over the centuries.

By the 1940s, Negroes in the United States had developed a national network of Civil Rights organizations; more than 100 accredited institutions of higher education; hundreds of newspapers; professional organizations of teachers, doctors, and lawyers; and a growing body of scholarship in the social sciences and humanities that was unparalleled in other racialized societies.

The largest and best supported of the Negro institutions of higher education was Howard University in Washington, DC, founded in 1867 with a multiracial administration, faculty, and student body. From Reconstruction to the end of the 1960s, it

produced nearly half of the Black physicians in the United States (the bulk of the other half was produced by Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee) and more than 90% of the country's Black lawyers, engineers, and architects. In the twentieth century, its faculty in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities included the highest percentage of nationally recognized Black scholars and scientists of any institution of higher education in the country. The law and social science faculty (and their graduates) from the 1930s through the 1960s provided most of the intellectual leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. Equally important was the impact of the published scholarship of its leading faculty, which was instrumental in changing the global consensus on race, racial segregation, and White Supremacy (Winston, 1971). Howard University is an example of the institutionalization of a counter-racist micro-environment. Functionally, such an environment normalizes and legitimizes intellectual opposition to the prevailing social and cultural order. It also creates expectations of intellectual performance and achievement that are the opposite of the cultural stereotypes and expectations that reinforced the racial system imposed by Whites. An institution functioning in this way is one of the components for effective mobilization of a targeted racial group in a sophisticated system of racial dominance of the type developed in the United States.

### ***The Establishment of Black, Asian American, and Latino Psychology as Counter-Counter-Cultural Racial Consciousness Movements***

Within the field of psychology, a group of well-trained Black scholars cultivated a paradigm and associated publication outlets to counter the racist ideology that permeated much of the empirical science of mainstream psychology. In so doing, they established what has been recognized over time as the field of Black Psychology, the *Journal of Black Psychology*, and the Association of Black Psychologists.

The development of a new field of Black Psychology was stimulated by a desire of a group of Black psychologists "to move away from the pathology-oriented notions about the behavior of black people and toward creating, interpreting, and reinterpreting the psychological literature on Blacks" (Jones, 1972, p. xi). In 1972, *Black Psychology* was edited by Reginald Jones and was the very first

volume to bring together in a single volume writings of black psychologists. Prior to this publication, the feasibility of developing a journal of Black Psychology was discussed among this same group of Black psychologists at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Black Psychologists in 1970 (Jones, 1972). This book included both philosophical and empirical chapters that were designed to highlight re-interpretations and clarifications of the psychological literature on Black people related to the following topics: racism, psychological assessment, personality, motivation, counseling, education, and the training of Black psychologists for work in the Black community.

In June 1974, a group of Black psychologists held the first Conference on *Empirical Research in Black Psychology* at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. This conference was stimulated by the Association of Black Psychologists' charge to Black psychologists to focus their professional contribution toward service to the Black community. The primary purpose of this small conference, which currently continues in another form, was to cultivate in-depth exchange among Black psychologists whose primary interest was empirical research (Boykin, Franklin, & Yates, 1979). The University of Michigan conference (and the second in 1975 at Teachers College, Columbia University) resulted in the publication of a collection of revised and edited papers. Publication of *Research Directions of Black Psychologists* (by the Russell Sage Foundation) was a significant advancement toward establishing a field of Black Psychology. It is also significant that this book was edited by three early career psychologists—A. Wade Boykin, Anderson Franklin, and J. Frank Yates. Their careers had the potential to demonstrate the verifiable validity and research fruitfulness of the new modes of conceptualizing the field and its major research problems. The volume included sections on methodology, identity and adjustment, cognitive abilities, motivational issues, and problems for future research. These chapters were written by a collection of Black psychologists who later became some of the field's most influential theorists and researchers, including the following scholars: Oscar Barbarin, A. Wade Boykin; William Collins; William Cross, A.J. Franklin, James Jackson, James M. Jones, William Lawson, Diane Pollard, and J. Franklin Yates. The goals of the book as described by the editors were held together by an interest in empirical research in psychology but also included a concern for the growth and sustainability of this

work through the graduate and professional training of others:

“In particular, we hope this book will serve as an impetus to students and behavioral scientists to embrace research as one means of alleviating oppressive life conditions of Black people, and we visualize it as being especially encouraging to Black graduate students interested in pursuing systematically the difficult questions of ethnic pertinence so often confronted in professional training. Moreover, we expect to provide thesis advisors with a frame of reference for counseling students who adopt research proposals with themes that emanate from their professional interests and concerns about life conditions of Black people.”

(Boykin, Franklin, & Yates, 1979, p. xiv)

Within the field of psychology, a small group of well-trained Asian-American and Latino scholars organized through regional and later national conferences in ways similar to Black psychologists to counter the racist ideology that permeated much of the empirical science of mainstream psychology. In a recent article on the History of Asian American Psychology, Leong and Okazaki (2009) have identified the pioneering Asian-American psychologists and described the events that led to the founding of the Asian American Psychological Association. Similarly, Padilla and Olmedo (2009) have recently published a chapter on the History of Latino Psychology in the Handbook of Latino Psychology that describes the founding of the Association of Psychologists por la Raza in 1969 and the founding of the National Hispanic Association in 1980.

There were several significant historical events that created the momentum necessary for the establishment of a national movement for Latino/a Psychology. After 1969, when Edward Casavantes, an educational psychologist who worked for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, founded the Association of Psychologists Por La Raza, an annual meeting of this association was held in conjunction with the annual American Psychological Association meeting. The first was held in Miami in 1970 and led to organization of a symposium for the following year that was to be the first on Chicano Psychology at APA (Padilla & Olmedo, 2009). In 1979, a National Conference of Hispanic Psychologists was held at the University of California Residential Conference Center at Lake Arrowhead. This conference was funded by a grant from the Division of Manpower and Training and the Center for Minority Group

Mental Health at the National Institutes of Mental Health. The goal of the conference was twofold: (1) to share information on needed training, services, and research from a Latino perspective; and (2) to determine if there was universal agreement to establish a national Latino association. This conference was significant in the history of Latino/a Psychology because it was the first time that a large number of Latinos/as representing different geographical regions, national origins, and disciplinary interests converged in a single location to develop an alliance for the empowerment of Latino/a psychologists and their communities (Padilla & Olmedo, 2009). More recently, the name of the National Hispanic Association was changed to the National Latino/a Psychological Association.

Like the Black Psychology and Latino/a Psychology movements, there were a few key historical events important to the momentum of Asian American Psychology. In 1972, a group of psychologists who lived in the San Francisco Bay area (including Derald Due, Stanley Sue, Roger Lum, Marion Tin-Loy, and Tina Tong Lee) founded the Asian American Psychological Association. The first national conference on Asian American mental health was held in San Francisco, California, and funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health. The conference was attended by more than 600 individuals from a wide diversity of Asian ethnic groups and types of organizations, including grassroots organizations, academia, and private practice. Leong and Okazaki (2009) have described how this diversity of backgrounds, views, and agendas led to some tensions and debates about the most pressing issues for a national Asian American psychological association to address. In 1976, Asian American psychologists organized a second conference in Long Beach California with the following objectives:

“(a) to gain a sense of mental health service needs of Asian Americans from individuals with active engagement with them; (b) to identify and recognize salient issues for various Asian American groups; (c) to abstract from participants’ backgrounds and experiences both instances and preparation that would facilitate work with Asian Americans and instances of inadequate or counterproductive training for such work; and (d) to organize information gathered into a series of recommendations for improving the training of Asian American psychologists.”

(Leong & Okazaki, 2009; p. 356)

Despite the widespread impact of this national organization of Asian American Psychologists that was stimulated largely by these two conferences, it was not until 2010, that *The Journal of Asian American Psychology* was established and published by the American Psychological Association.

### Future Directions

The human mind has the unique capacity of agency and adaptation. Racialized societies are complicated contexts in which the mind is called on to make these shifts of adaptation. The Winston Framework as a cultural psychology framework for analysis of systems level and interindividual level variables within racialized societies creates new opportunities for theoretical and methodological innovations within future research. Although clearly not an easy undertaking, scholars of the future will have unprecedented opportunities. They will have a new ease in gaining access to digital information across disciplines that provides insight into the economic, social, political, historical, and psychological dimensions of human life. This, coupled with the relative ease of travel, compared to the past, creates new ways to begin to formulate theories within the Winston Framework. Technological advances in digital data collection tools, all used within appropriate cultural boundaries, provide new opportunities to collect first-person accounts (*see* Winston in press b) with more ease in crossing geographic location, time, and resources to collect, process, and analyze the fusion of systems and interindividual personality data.

A derivative effect of the expansion of opportunities for theory development and methodological innovation are new emphases in research related to a cultural psychological analysis of race in historical perspective. For example, future research should examine the relationship between personality traits and identity construction within racialized societies. It is likely that racialized constraints within a society, driven by law or custom, for example, can cause tension and conflict if a person has personality traits that are more expressive or demanding than the system accommodates, making it more difficult to construct a balanced and adaptive identity.

### *The Significance of Comparative Analysis of Racial Systems*

It is now understood that race is a socially constructed category whose significance varies historically, socially, and psychologically by era, types of social and economic structures, cultures, and the

dynamics of individual and group adaptations to imposed racial boundaries. As scholarship about slavery, racial segregation, and personality development has matured, the importance of comparative studies has emerged, principally as a means of grasping the essential social and psychological mechanisms that perpetuate or destabilize racial regimes, and to separate fundamental structure from merely idiomatic or cultural features of systems of racial dominance (Holt, 2000). This realization underscores the importance of developing a provisional framework for the analysis of racial systems, regardless of geographic area, historical period, or the methods used to enforce dominance (e.g., a “hard” approach via government power or a “soft” one utilizing culture and private prejudices).

This chapter has posited the elements of a comparative framework for the analysis of racial systems but has deliberately avoided a purely schematic or theoretical approach, anchoring the framework in a historical, cultural, and psychological continuum. Thus, the core racist ideas have been identified, the process of their becoming embedded in institutions and culture described, and some of the social processes and intellectual movements mentioned that destabilized the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century racialized society system.

The Winston Framework emphasizes the issues of power, wealth, social development, and psychological adaptations because all racialized societies—regardless of culture—operated to reserve power, wealth, education, prestige, and social development to a dominant racial group, while systematically disadvantaging a subordinate racial group (or groups). It is the nexus between material advantages and racial identification that entrenched racial ideas in societies. Although the racist ideas themselves have been discredited, and the legal framework for racial segregation and other state-enforced discrimination has been destroyed, all societies with a racialized past or with later and weaker derivative variations have cultures and social habits that continue to have negative impacts on lives. The Winston Framework enables scholars and scientists to identify more readily the evolving adaptations of racially identified individuals to less racially restrictive (not “post-racial”) societies.

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## Belonging to Gender: Social Identities, Symbolic Boundaries and Images

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### Abstract

Symbolic boundaries mark the differences between individuals and social groups in daily life. These symbolic boundaries are deeply connected with the feelings of belonging to specific social groups. What does *belonging to gender* mean? Social control related to the feminine body and sexuality is a field in which the study of reproduction of inequalities in the domain of gender relations is of interest. It is necessary to construct creative analytical and methodological strategies to investigate gender issues inserted in broad cultural meaning systems, historically constructed. In this paper, I consider the analytical and methodological relevance of images as data sources in the context of psychological science.

**Keywords:** gender, social identities, symbolic boundaries, meaning-making processes, images as cultural artifacts

... To affirm the identity means demark boundaries, means make distinctions between what is inside and what is outside. The identity is always connected within a strong separation and distinction, supposes and, at the same time, affirms and reaffirms power relations. 'We' and 'they' are not in this case only grammatical distinctions . . .

(Silva, 2000, p. 82)

What does it mean to be a man or to be a woman? What does *belonging to gender* mean? These questions are important in the analysis about the complex relations between the collective culture and the psychological development of each person. From a cultural psychology framework, this chapter focuses on the construction of symbolic boundaries that are deeply connected with the feelings of belonging to specific social groups. More precisely, our story is about symbolic boundaries related to the construction of gender identities.

It is not possible to properly understand the processes of the construction of gender identities from an isolated approach that treats cultural meanings

associated to femininity and masculinity as "linguistic atoms" (Madureira, 2007a). Therefore, it is necessary to construct creative analytical and methodological strategies that emphasize the importance of images, as cultural artifacts, in the inquiries about meaning-making processes and the construction of social identities.

### The Construction of Symbolic Boundaries and Feelings of Belonging to Specific Social Groups

From a cultural psychology framework, human conduct is conceived as behavior reorganized by *semiotic mediation* that is used by the intentional and active mediator, the person oneself (Valsiner, 2005, 2007a). Consequently, *understanding human conduct is essential to considering the central role of semiotic mediation*. Nevertheless, our relating with the world is not just a rational enterprise mediated by signs expressed by verbal language. Therefore, an important theoretical and analytical challenge is the overcoming of rationalistic and linguistic

reductionisms in the inquiries of social and psychological phenomena (Madureira, 2008). In this direction, the concept of *symbolic boundaries* could be a useful conceptual tool that expresses the necessity to construct an integrative view, a systemic approach that articulates cultural, affective, and cognitive aspects in the inquiries of important issues for psychology and social sciences in general.

In this chapter, I focus on the process of social identities. More precisely: the focus is on the construction of gender identities. In this sense, it is important to stress that social identities are always constructed on the ground of collective memories, historically situated. When we intend to analyze the construction of social identities, we move ourselves into the direction of crossing the boundaries between psychology and social sciences. After all, as Rosa, Bellelli, and Bakhurst state, the concept of identity “. . . is not a concept that pertains exclusively to psychology, but it is part of the heritage of all social sciences . . .” (2000, p. 57). Therefore, in order to understand the construction of symbolic boundaries and the feelings of belonging to specific groups present in our societies, it is necessary to establish interdisciplinary dialogues.

### ***Social Identities: The Construction of Affective Bridges between Individuals and Social Groups***

The metaphorical image of a boundary as semipermeable membrane (Valsiner, 2007b, 2009) is a promising path to study diverse phenomena like, for example, the construction of social identities and the related dynamics (and tensions) between in-group and out-group, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices, as prejudices in action (Madureira, 2008, 2009a).

From a cultural psychology framework, it is central to recognize that without differences and ambiguities, meaning-making processes are impossible (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006; Valsiner, 2007a). In other words, the differences are central elements of classificatory systems through the meanings that are created (Woodward, 2000). Therefore, meaning-making processes are deeply related to the tension between sameness and difference. As Ferreira, Salgado, and Cunha (2006, p. 28) state: “. . . Human meaning, in that sense, is brought to being by difference, contrast, tension, disagreement. . . . In other words, meaning is always dependent on the play between sameness and difference.” Thus, marked differences are central in the

processes of meaning making in daily life, and symbolic boundaries have an important role in these processes. Tensions, ambiguities, and differences are in the heart of the meaning-making processes that involve the constant using of signs through the flow of personal experiences. It is important to stress that signs, visual and verbal, present a hybrid and recursive nature that increase the complexity of the meaning-making processes (Valsiner, 2007a). After all, there are many possible combinations between icons, indices, and symbols.

Making distinctions is important at different levels of analysis, including the biological level—for example, the differentiation of organ systems in embryogenesis, the “self/other” distinction in our immune systems (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). In the biological sense, boundaries work as membranes. After all, “Boundaries as structures that unite standard in the biological world. All membranes are boundaries—and the livelihood of organisms depends on how well appropriate transpositions of chemicals through these membranes work” (Valsiner, 2007b, p. 221).

From a biological level to a sociological level of analysis—considering the societies as dynamic and open systems—we can notice that in diverse societies around the world, there are always symbolic boundaries that delimit the differences between individuals and social groups in a semipermeable way. Some of them do not present meaningful implications, but others present deep implications in different levels of analysis: (a) macrosocial level; (b) interpsychological level (social interactions); and (c) intrapsychological level (Madureira, 2008, 2009a).

The color of skin, for example, illustrates how symbolic boundaries can present relevant and concrete implications in daily life. This arbitrary criterion has been considered culturally meaningful to split individuals into different and hierarchical social domains in different societies. This arbitrary criterion is in the base of racism, a kind of prejudice that, frequently, is associated with elitism (contempt for poor people) in countries with slavery as a social practice in their past. There is obviously a long history of oppression and resistance in the process of the transformation of the arbitrary criterion “color of skin” into a culturally meaningful recognition of differences, which become connected with social power issues, understood as the relation between forces of oppression and resistance (Foucault, 1996). In few words, differences become inequalities.

When semipermeable symbolic boundaries become cultural barriers—understood as rigid, non-permeable boundaries—and come to qualify some groups at the cost of disqualifying others, we can perceive different kinds of prejudices in action (racism, sexism, homophobia, elitism, xenophobia, religious bigotry, and so on). When these rigid symbolic boundaries are targets of transgression, we see the violence and the intolerance underlying diverse discriminatory practices. For the constant reproduction of social inequalities and hierarchies, there are many social mechanisms that, in different ways, inform that these boundaries should be respected, whatever the cost in terms of psychological suffering: depression, anxiety, shame, and so on (Madureira, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008). In extreme cases, when the symbolic boundaries become more rigid, the “others” (they) are socially perceived as enemies that should be eliminated. Figure 26.1 shows a didactic view of the transformation of symbolic boundaries: (a) from differences to inequalities; and (b) from inequalities to intolerance.

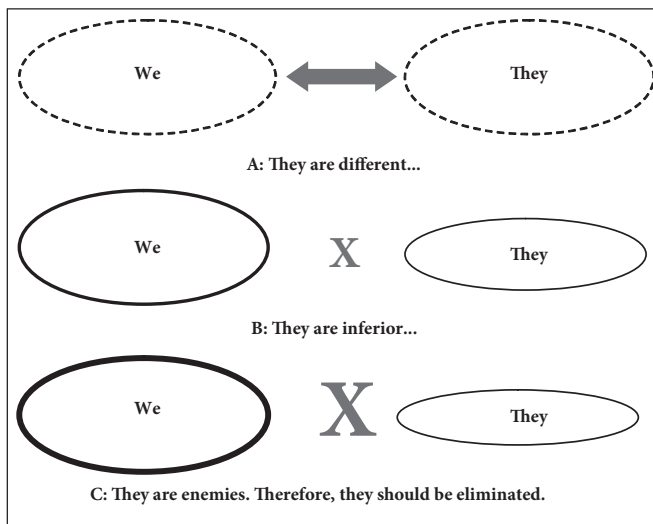
**THE FEELINGS OF BELONGING TO A SPECIFIC GROUP: THE TENSION BETWEEN THE HEIMWEH AND THE FERNWEH PROCESSES**

The feelings of belonging to a specific group provide a familiar and secure basis to face the ambiguities present in ordinary situations in our lives (Madureira, 2008, 2009a). In this direction, it is relevant to mention the notion of tension between two general processes, specified by Ernest Boesch, *Heimweh* (“homeward road”: striving toward the known and the secure) and the *Fernweh* (“road to

the far away”: adventure, encountering novelty and also risks). In general terms, while the perception of risks and dangers are related to the promotion of the *Heimweh* process, the feelings of pleasure and curiosity are related to the promotion of the *Fernweh* process. As we encounter in daily life many ambiguous situations, one possible solution could be avoided the experiences that put in risks the sense of stability of self-system, especially our personal values (Madureira, 2007b, 2007c). As Joerchel affirms,

... the relation between ‘home, secure’ and the ‘strange, unfamiliar’ is a key element in developing a self system. ... Thus, the self concept is comprised both of the familiar, the home environment, as well as of the strange and the unknown. It is within this tension that humans develop a self concept: the secure home environment provides the base for self confidence and self actualization, the strange and the unknown provides a platform for hopes, dreams, and desires, for potential actions and potential self concept as well as a platform for fears and threats to the self system. ... In this respect the construction of a social barrier can be seen as defense mechanisms in reaction to a perceived threat to the self concept. (2007, p. 257)

Therefore, when the *Heimweh* orientation is promoted, the symbolic boundaries between “us” and “others” tend to become rigid. It is important to clarify that we are not talking about a linear causal relation. Instead of we are talking about a tendency. In this sense, when the *Heimweh* orientation is promoted, a cultural barrier tends to be erected and the others come to be perceived as inferiors or enemies



**Figure 26.1** Prejudices as rigid symbolic boundaries: from differences to inequalities, from inequalities to intolerance.

who put at risk ourselves and, in a broader sense, the *status quo*. More than seeking strategies to deal with ambiguities from a secure and familiar basis, what emerges is the desire to eliminate all ambiguities, and all differences, to eliminate the others, perceived as the source of uncomfortable feelings (Madureira, 2008, 2009a).

An example can illustrate the discussion above: from (a) the secure basis of religious beliefs, values and practices in the case of religious individuals who respect other religious beliefs distinct of their religion; to (b) religious bigotry based on fundamentalist mentality (e.g., one's belief that everybody outside of the symbolic boundaries of his/her own religion is "unfaithful" and should be converted or combated and eliminated (Sim, 2004). Therefore, differences become inequalities, and intolerance, that underlying prejudice, becomes explicit through discriminatory practices against different social groups (Madureira, 2007c, 2007d, 2008).

*To summarize—the study of boundary processes challenge us in the direction of an integrative view that articulates cultural, affective, and cognitive aspects in the research of important issues for psychological and social sciences as, for example, social identities, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices.*

From the previous discussion, it is possible to conclude that when we talk about the construction of social identities, we are talking about *affective bridges* (feelings of belonging) between the individual and the social groups present in society (Madureira, 2000, 2008, 2009a; Madureira & Branco, 2007). These processes are a political arena where tensions and contradictions are not the exception, but a common characteristic. In this sense, gender, class, and race become important interdependent axes in the approaches on social identities, as powerful social organizers in different societies (Barcinski, 2008; Oliveira, 1998). Therefore, the construction of gender identities always happens in connection with other social identities. Moreover, identity processes present a clear political dimension (Silva, 2000). Surely, we are not analyzing a neutral domain of social life.

### **What Does Belonging to Gender Mean? Social Identities, Symbolic Boundaries, and Cultural Canalization**

Between the (biological) concept of sex and the (cultural) concept of gender, there is a long way to be covered by each person. This "long way" is always covered from particular socio-cultural contexts, permeated by beliefs, values, stereotypes, prejudices, and

practices that mark what is socially expected regarding men and women. These social expectations delimit the symbolic boundaries of masculinity and femininity. Frequently, masculinity and femininity are conceptualized by the logic-exclusive separation. As Watzlawik (2009) demonstrated, the constructs of masculinity and femininity—based on the oversimplification and overlapping between different levels of analysis—are fragile in scientific terms. In this sense, to be a man or a woman is not a "natural fact." Instead, belonging to gender is a cultural construction.

In the cultural construction of gender identities, an important domain entails the beliefs, values, and practices related to sexuality (Blackwood, 2000). Thus, in this paper, we pay a special attention to the interfaces between gender and sexuality issues, including the deep connections between sexism and homophobia, which constitute boundary phenomena (Madureira, 2007b). The maintenance of gender inequalities in daily life is sustained by a complex power system (Foucault, 1996). Women, frequently, have a strategic and important position in the maintenance of this complex power system. The scornful talk among women about the sexual behavior of other women is, for example, a powerful informal social control strategy concerning feminine sexuality. More precisely, the social control related to feminine sexuality is a meaningful field to study hierarchical gender relations. In this sense, the feminine body, sexual pleasures, and desires play a strategic role in the context of the "power games" occurring within cultural contexts.

### ***Gender Identities: We Are Not Talking about "Natural Boundaries"***

The interdisciplinary studies of gender have questioned the biological essentialism diffused in daily life, and in scientific approaches based on the traditional biomedicine model (Costa, 1996). As previously mentioned, the construction of gender identities is permeated by beliefs, values, stereotypes, prejudices, and practices that mark what is socially expected regarding men and women in specific sociocultural contexts. These social expectations, with historical roots, are the "collective ground" where the symbolic boundaries of masculinity and femininity are delimited in daily life. In this sense, we can say that gender identities are:

(a) constructed not only in the relations between men and women, but also intragender relations from the cultural models and antimodels of masculinity and femininity (Parker, 1991);

(b) constructed in an articulated way within power relations that permeated our societies in their different levels, relations of force, oppression, and resistance (Foucault, 1996).

The development of the gender concept, from the 1980s, expresses the important exchange between the scientific enterprise and the feminist movement, which as a social and political movement, has fought against the sociohistorical inequalities between men and women in different domains of life (Louro, 1998). According to Joan Scott, "... Gender is the social organization of sexual difference. The concept [gender] is not a reflection of biological reality, but gender constructs the meaning of this reality ..." (Scott, 1995, p. 115).

Therefore, as an analytical and political tool, the concept of gender helps us to reject the assumptions—underlying discourses about the "natural" inequalities between men and women—that are based on biological differences. In this sense, the concept of gender has an important heuristic value concerning the understanding of the cultural and psychological basis of the process of becoming a man or a woman (Madureira, 2007b). We can say that gender issues have an important role concerning individual psychological development, in terms of cultural canalization (Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Madureira & Branco, 2004). Gender is, therefore, an interdisciplinary analytical tool that makes it possible to understand diverse phenomena studied by human sciences. Gender is a relational concept—best viewed as a field (Madureira, 2007b).

When we focus on identity processes and power relations, it is essential that we pay special attention to the role of scientific discourses in contemporary societies. As Foucault (1996) analyzed, there are intrinsic connections between scientific knowledge and power relations in our disciplinary Western societies. Historically, modern sciences broke the ancient distinction between *episteme* (theoretical knowledge) and *téchne* (applied knowledge) (Marcondes, 2000). Thus, modern sciences are not a kind of contemplative knowledge. In fact, the socially spreading myth of scientific neutrality hides this "practical" aspect of the production of scientific knowledge (Chauí, 1995). From the noticing that science is power in our societies, we should develop ethical and political reflections concerning our researches and recognize that we are not constructing neutral knowledge (Madureira, 2009b).

### ***Sexism and Homophobia: When Prejudices Meet Each Other and Become Stronger***

Since the beginning of Christianity, coherent with the ancient Greek one-sex model, and during all the medieval period in the Western Europe, "...the woman was defined from her deficiencies in relation to the human nature, that is was accomplished in the most complete form in man" (Zuber, 2002, p. 144). The adopting of the two-sexes model, at the end of eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century, was not just a consequence of "medical scientific progress", but resulted from deep social and political changes. As Costa claims: "... From the 'inverted man', the woman became the 'inverse of man', and the cause was in her sex. Firstly, the production of social and political inequalities happened, between men and women, legitimated by the natural norm of sex. Then, what is effect became cause..." (1996, p. 85, italics added).

The maintenance of a deep gap between masculinity and femininity has a strategic role in political terms, in order to reproduce the hierarchical structure between men and women. The transgression of symbolic boundaries related to gender is socially perceived as a threat to ordinary flow of life. For example, homosexuality is traditionally perceived as a defect of gender identity, as if gays and lesbians are men and women that "fail" in the construction of their gender identities. In the cases of transgender, the transgression of the gender boundaries is socially perceived as an even greater threat, because these cases question the existence of a "natural link" between biological sex and gender identity. It does not cause surprise that the amplification of differences between men and women is in the basis of sexism and homophobia.

Sexism corresponds to an *exclusive separation* (dualistic conception) of genders, prioritizing one over the other, and associating pejorative meanings to the other. In didactic terms: *sexism = rigid distinction of genders + unequal power relations + constructed prejudice to mark the unequal relation* (Madureira, 2007a, 2007b, 2009b). If we focus on the macrosocial level of analysis, we observe the reproduction of a hierarchical structure of gender that expresses inequalities between men and women in different domains, as autonomy, prestige, status, and so on (Bourdieu, 2005).

However, it is essential to recognize that sexism, as a kind of prejudice, is not present just "in men's minds." It can be found in institutional and informal practices, in different social relations in daily life. The

empirical example presented in this paper will illustrate the importance of the adoption of a relational perspective in gender studies. Beyond that, as recent studies have demonstrated, there are deep connections between sexism and homophobia (Andersen, 2000; Lionço & Diniz, 2009; Madureira, 2007b; Welzer-Lang, 2001). Sexism—as a rigid and hierarchical gender distinction—is directly related to the reproduction of nonpermeable boundaries between masculinity and femininity, between the heterosexual population and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) population.

### ***The Traditional Dualistic Gender View: Cultural Meanings Associated to Masculinity and Femininity***

There is a historical-cultural dualistic gender view in Brazilian society, like other Latin American, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and North African societies (González-López, 2005). According to this dualistic gender view, we can perceive strong connections between:

- (a) femininity, sexual passivity, and the value of female virginity *versus*
- (b) masculinity, sexual activity, and the value of diverse and precocious sexual experiences.

According to this dualistic meaning system, the antimodel of masculinity is the “passive man,” and the antimodel of femininity is the “active woman” (promiscuous) (Parker, 1991). The traditional cultural discourses about sexuality in Brazil have structured from this traditional dualistic gender view: masculinity—activity in social and sexual domains—*versus* femininity—passivity in social and sexual domains.

Therefore, the “major problem” concerning female sexuality would be the active conduct by women, many times perceived as a sign of promiscuity. In this sense, it is curious to note that of the women who participated in a qualitative research about the construction of nonhegemonic sexual identities in Brasília, Brazil (Madureira, 2000), all of them argued for a clear-cut difference between gays (out-group) and lesbians (in-group). In their opinions, comparing to men, women are more affective. Moreover, they claimed that men are totally sex-oriented, and depict men as promiscuous (out-group) whereas they are not. As Blackwood (2000, p. 232) claims: “. . . By establishing certain ideas about who and what men and women are, gender ideologies create different possibilities for men’s or women’s understanding of

their desires and their access to other sexual partners.” In fact, the label of promiscuity is a real danger for women in some contexts, especially where the traditional gender ideology is strong.

Sexual violence, more precisely, rape, does not correspond with a simple “individual pathology,” completely dissociated of power relations, beliefs, values, and cultural practices regarding gender issues. In this sense, it is pertinent to mention the research coordinated by the anthropologist Rita Segato (2003) about gender structure and sexual violence, from the analysis of interviews with prisoners of Complexo Penitenciário da Papuda (Distrito Federal, Brazil) who committed crimes against sexual freedom. This research shows that, in the rapists’ discourse, it is commonly a “moralizing accent” concerning the women’s behavior that is considered, in some way, immoral. Segato stresses that the rape is perceived by rapists:

... as a punishment or revenge *against* a generic woman who goes out of her place, that is, her subordinate position and ostensibly tutelage by a status system. . . . ‘Only the protestant woman [in Portuguese: *mulher crente, evangélica*] is good’, said to us a prisoner, which means: ‘only she does not deserve to be raped.’

(2003, p. 31)

According to the analysis carried out by Lloyd Vogelmann with rapists in South Africa (as cited in Segato, 2003, p. 30): “women who are not propriety of a man . . . are perceived as propriety of all men. In essence, they lose their physical and sexual autonomy.” Therefore, in traditional hierarchical gender structure, the notion of propriety of a man does not involve only material possessions, but also the possession of women. In other words, the woman is not socially perceived as citizen of her own sexuality and body, but as an object/property of the man: an “honorable” woman would be a possession of a unique man.

Without any doubt a rape is a case of extreme violence. However, it reveals subjacent cultural meanings associated to traditional gender relations in our societies. As it was analyzed by Segato (2003), the rapist fulfills a kind of mandate of society: the “deviated” women must be punished! They should not circulate freely in spaces designated to men, such as the public space of streets at “inappropriate times.” Indeed, as men socially perceived as “closer to women,” gays are also victims of sexual violence. *The maintenance of rigid symbolic boundaries*

between masculinity and femininity does not only imply “bad jokes” against the supposed transgressors, but also implies, in extreme cases, acts of physical violence against women and men who do not “respect” their biological sex. As if biological sex completely determines their actions, their thoughts, their feelings, their desires. As if the biological sex traces an inexorable destiny that must be respected.

#### **SOCIAL CONTROL ON THE BODY AND SEXUALITY OF OTHER WOMEN: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE**

... Because gender includes beliefs about sexual behaviour, it is one of the primary crucibles within which sexuality is produced. Sexualities are informed by and embedded in conceptions of gender; that is, they are embedded in gender ideologies that enable and structure differential practices for women and men . . .

(Blackwood, 2000, p. 229)

This topic focus on the interfaces between gender and sexuality issues from an empirical example extracted from a broader research (Madureira, 2007a). The main objective of the research in focus was to analyze teachers’ beliefs and conceptualizations within the context of Brazilian public middle schools, located in Distrito Federal (DC, Brazil), about gender and sexuality issues, especially those concerning sexual and gender diversity. These issues were analyzed from the integration of different methods: (a) questionnaire; (b) individual semistructured interview; and (c) focus group. One hundred twenty-two teachers (n = 122) from seven different public schools in Distrito Federal participated of the first phase of the research (questionnaire). Ten teachers (n = 10), from two different schools that contributed in the first phase, participated in the second phase (individual semistructured interview and focus group). The age of their students was between the range of 11 to 15 years old. In the process of analyzing the “empirical indicators,” it was central to interpret the implicit connections between: (a) individual beliefs and values concerning the issues in focus; and (b) the broader cultural meanings system of gender and sexuality, historically established. In other words, *it was central to construct analytical strategies to integrate different levels of analysis in order to elaborate a more general understanding about the subject of the target research.*

The following empirical example was extracted from the individual interviews carried out at the second phase of the broader research (Madureira,

2007a). It is an insightful example to analyze how women, frequently, put in action the mechanisms of social control on the feminine body and sexuality. These mechanisms of social control are deeply connected within archaic cultural meanings about femininity, as it will be discussed later. Moreover, it illustrates the importance of adoption of a relational and political perspective (Louro, 1998; Scott, 1995) when we focus on gender issues.

*Example extracted from individual interview:*

Interviewee: Joanna (fictitious name).

Age: 34 years old.

Religion: Catholic.

**Ana Flávia (interviewer): Do you think today’s society expects different things from men and women? Why?**

– Joanna: I think that too much equality, also, is not good, you know?

– Ana Flávia: What do you mean? So I can better understand what you’re saying . . .

– Joanna: Well, I guess, like, too much equality, then we’d go like, then I don’t know. I’m going . . . I’m going . . . for instance, uh, the same rights. When you say, like, that women want to have the same rights as men, and everything. But then you have the sexual thing. You know, it’s too cheap, you see, like, what’s the problem if I go out with a guy this weekend and then with another in the next? You see? Because if all rights are the same, everything the same, at work, things are like this, you see? Then you have an equality, a sexual freedom, you know? A sexual freedom that I, like, sometimes I think that, it’s not worthy, you know?

– Ana Flávia: This sexual freedom you’re saying it’s not worthy, what do you mean by that?

– Joanna: I mean promiscuity.

– Ana Flávia: In relation to whom? Men or women?

– Joanna: To women.

In this excerpt of the interview with Joanna, she says that she disagrees with the idea of men and women having the same rights in all domains of life. She agrees about the same rights in the professional domain, but she really disagrees about the same rights concerning the sexual domain. Her position is made clear when she says:

*But then you have the sexual thing. You know, it’s too cheap, you see, like, what’s the problem if I go out with a guy this weekend and then with another in the next? You see? Because if all rights are the same, everything the same, at work, things are like this, you see? Then you have an equality, a sexual freedom, you know? A sexual*

*freedom that I, like, sometimes I think that, it's not worthy, you know?*

According to Joanna, sexual freedom is a real problem for women, but that is not so for men. Here we observe, in her discourse, the links between: (a) same rights for men and women in the sexual domain; (b) [women] become cheap; (c) [women's] sexual freedom; (d) [women's] promiscuity. Thus, we can conclude that, for her, the same rights between men and women at the sexual domain are not desirable; instead, it seems that the same sexual rights can be "dangerous." After all, for women, sexual freedom is interpreted by her as a sign of promiscuity. The personal values system seems to express a central role in the interpretation of what "sexual freedom" means. For example, for some women sexual freedom is interpreted as a sign of individual rights, while other women interpret sexual freedom as a sign of promiscuity. A sign that can present concrete implications in some contexts (especially sexist contexts): women who were marked with this sign (seen as promiscuous) become less worthy in the community's eyes.

What is particularly interesting here is that such a position was presented by a woman. Again, in order to develop our analytical strategies to interpret gender issues it is essential to go beyond generic assumptions about the "masculine oppression against women." *Gender inequalities are sustained by a complex power system that is built on cultural meanings and practices where women, frequently, have a strategic and important position in the maintenance of the oppression system.* For example, the scornful talk among women about the sexual behavior of other women is a very powerful social control strategy concerning feminine sexuality.

Here we have an example of the strong relations between gender and sexuality issues. More precisely, the social control (by men and women) related to feminine sexuality is a meaningful field to study hierarchical gender relations. The feminine body, sexual pleasures and desires play a strategic role in the context of the "power games" occurring within cultural contexts. Therefore, it is essential to integrate a critical view about gender relations with the interdisciplinary studies of sexuality, as illustrated in this empirical example.

For example, the pejorative view of Joanna about the "sexual freedom" of women (understood by her as a sign of "promiscuity") is inserted in the long Christian tradition that presents feminine sexuality as potentially dangerous. Thus, it should be

"controlled" by each woman, by other women, and by society in general. The pejorative view about the female body and sexuality is fed by social imaginary. The ways that each woman deals with her sexuality and body in daily life are socially interpreted from symbolic boundaries. *These symbolic boundaries split women in two different social groups: "honorable women" and "nonhonorable women." A central issue is: the honor of a woman is focused on her private life while the honor of a man is focused on his public life.*

### **The Feminine in the Medieval Christian Iconography: The Woman as a Devil**

When we focus on the construction of gender identities, it is necessary to promote interdisciplinary dialogues between psychological science and social sciences in general. For example, the current historical analysis about social imaginary in the Middle Ages can be a fertile ground for psychology. Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, two important contemporary historians, stress the necessity of integrating "...in our analyses and in our reflection a new orientation in history so present in the view of historians nowadays: the history of imaginary..." (2002, p. 14). In other words, it is important to articulate the analysis of the "historical facts" and the representation of these "facts." The authors note that "Around twenty years, an important part of these new ways appears under the label of 'historical anthropology'" (Le Goff & Schmitt, 2002, p. 18).

In this sense, the present topic analyzes some historical clues about the cultural pejorative view about the sexuality of women from the image of the feminine in the medieval Christian iconography. After all, our personal imagination is constantly fed by the images that circulate in social imaginary, and we should not disregard the force of the Christian cultural tradition in Western societies.

The European Middle Ages is, traditionally, divided in the following way: it began in the fifth-century, with the disintegration of Western Rome Empire in 476 AC, and continued until the fifteenth century, with the Turkish capture of Constantinople in 1453 (Pratas, 2009). It is important to remember that Catholic Church was the most powerful social institution in this historical period, especially during the last centuries of the Middle Ages (tenth to fifteenth centuries), when its economic, political, and cultural power reached its peak. The Earth was considered the center of universe, and the universe was considered as finite and unchanged. The image



of God was in the center of medieval societies and, therefore, philosophy and arts were simple servants of theology.

From the conception that images are cultural artifacts, this topic focuses on some elements of medieval Christian iconography<sup>1</sup> in order to seek clues about the historical roots of archaic meanings about femininity. These meanings are still present in the social imaginary in Brazil, a country with a strong Catholic tradition, but are also present in other Western countries.

### *Misogyny in the Medieval Social imaginary*

Misogyny, or hatred of women, was widespread in European medieval societies. Misogyny did not begin with Christianity in the Middle Ages; it corresponded to an appropriation of conceptions and beliefs that were already presented in the Ancient world. On another hand, misogyny became a project "...in the sense to encrust in the popular imaginary the belief in the inferiority of woman and femininity. In Western history, the period when this procedure was the most obvious was during the Middle Ages." (Gomes, 2009, p. 261). In this sense, some meaningful examples will be presented in order to illustrate how the social imaginary in this historical period was full of hostile images concerning women.

As the start point, we will focus on the holy book for Christianity, the Bible that comprised the Ancient (Old) and the New Testament. Then, other examples will be presented. The Bible presents at least three essential elements of the religious doctrine associated with femininity: (a) as the man and the woman were created (Ancient Testament, Genesis); (b) the figure of Eve (Ancient Testament, Genesis); and (c) the figure of Mary, mother of Christ (New Testament) (Gomes, 2009; Pratas, 2009).

According to Genesis, concerning the way that the man (Adam) and the woman (Eve) were created, it is interesting to note that "...the man is a direct descendent of God—a divine being—although the woman is a descendent of man's rib—a flesh being and, therefore, closer to what is profane, sensorial and corporal" (Gomes, 2009, p. 262). Thus, the human tendency to commit sins is interpreted by Christianity as stronger in women than men. In a similar way, the figure of Eve *per se* also expresses this pejorative view of femininity. More precisely, Genesis stresses "the incapacity of Eve to resist the temptation, the woman is also responsible to induce Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, which resulted in

the expulsion from the paradise and the establishment of original sin" (Gomes, 2009, p. 262). In the New Testament, the third important element of religious doctrine related to femininity is the figure of Mary, mother of Christ, who is in opposition to Eve. Although Eve has a sin essence, Mary receives the Holy Spirit. The Virgin Mary "...is the unique woman in the Christian ideology who is not essentially sin and of which the body is not vehicle of sin" (Gomes, 2009, p. 263). Moreover, the figure of Mary is perceived as something extraordinary, as an ideal of chastity and purity that transcends the reality of concrete women.

Between the fourth and sixth centuries, spread a literature for men, inspiring the practice of solitary life that already had been happening among Eastern Christians since the third century. It was a literature that presented accounts about the life in monasteries with the objective to persuade men to seek to chastity. For example, Athanasius (295–373 AC), archbishop of Alexandria, found refuse among the monks before writing his famous *Anton Life* (Vainfas, 1992). In this work, a "crowd of feminine faces and bodies, that assaulted the monks' imagination, is associated to devil. It was another image of woman that emerges in these works: the diabolic, fleshly, that must be execrated of the spirit ... demonic mask." (Vainfas, 1992, p. 16).

In the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco<sup>2</sup>, the plot of the novel happens in the last week of November 1327 in a Benedictine monastery in medieval Italy. Although the work was fictional in nature, the author reconstructs in detail the atmosphere of this historical period. In this sense, there are parts of this novel that express some of the images about women that circulated in medieval monasteries. In general lines—with the exception of Mary, mother of Christ—the images of other women are extremely pejorative (Eco, 1983).<sup>3</sup>

From the previous examples, it is possible to deduce that there is no salvation for women out of the model of chastity and purity that were personified by the image of the Virgin Mary. In this sense, women should sublime their femininity, essentially marked by the original sin introduced by Eve in paradise. Mary and Eve are, therefore, biblical figures that personalized the strong moral dualism regarding women present in Christian imaginary (Gomes, 2009; Pratas, 2009). This dualism is inserted in the long Christian historical tradition of pejorative meanings associated with the body and pleasures (Vainfas, 1992; Delumeau, 1990).

In this direction, Vainfas—after the accomplishment of historical analysis of marriage, love, and desire in the Christian West (since the beginning of Christianity until the end of the Middle Ages)—states that, although the moral diversity concerning sexual issues during many centuries of Christianity, if there was a characteristic trade of all these morals was: “. . .the refuse of pleasure . . . that presupposes that the pleasure is an evil itself and also is an obstacle to eternal salvation. . .” (1992, p. 81). Therefore, we find a true “angelical anthropology” (Delumeau, 1990) between the lines of the Christian religious tradition, based on the conception that human beings should get closer to angels, who would be celestial beings without body and sex. It is possible to deduce that, concerning the Christian ideal of asceticism, women—as “Eves in potential”—would already have been born in disadvantage.

### ***Telling Stories through Religious Images***

Marked by the original sin introduced by Eve, women, in principle, would be more distant from the Christian ideal of renunciation of body and pleasures of “the profane world” (in opposition to “the spiritual world”). As “Eves in potential,” the women should be the target of a strong social control. Their actions, their body, and their sexuality should be kept guard over with rigidity. Because of the supposed feminine proximity to diabolic forces, women were forbidden to cure diseases and their transgressions were to be punished with severity (Dall’Ava-Santucci, 2005). Thus, thousands of women were burned alive during the Inquisition.

The Christian ethos of refusal of pleasures, permeated by misogyny, found in the universe of visual<sup>4</sup> arts an important ally in doctrinaire terms. In the Western history of arts, in the period of transition between the Middle Ages and Modern Ages, the Gothic cathedrals occupied a space of prominence. As Strickland (1999) stresses, the Gothic cathedrals were true “Bibles in rock,” wonderful architectonic structures:

... In fact, these ‘Bibles in rock’ overcame even the classical architecture in terms of technological audacity. . . . The medieval theologians believed that the beauty of church inspired the meditation and faith of believers. Consequently, the churches are more than a simple combination of spaces. They are holy texts, with volume[s] of ornaments preaching the salvation way . . .

(Strickland, 1999, pp. 28–29)

The Gothic cathedrals illustrate how the architectonic structures can make real in their “rocks” all of the symbolic universe that embody some beliefs, values, narratives, and cultural practices that populated the medieval imaginary. In a social world where the analphabetism was the reality of the great majority of the population, *the sculptures, the paintings, the stained glass windows, and the tapestries in the Gothic cathedrals fulfilled a didactic function: telling, through images, biblical stories. Thus, these different forms of art have become more concrete and palpable beliefs and values coherent within the Christian view of the world.* There is a rich iconographic tradition in the West that was legated by Christianity. The Christian medieval iconography fulfilled, therefore, a strategic function in a historical period when the participation in the symbolic universe of reading and writing was not a right of each citizen, but a privilege of a reduced part of the population.

It is important to mention that the artistic style named “Gothic” developed in Europe between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the period of transition between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age (Strickland, 1999). In the Gothic style, that succeeded the Romanesque style, the sacred became, gradually, closer to human reality through a more naturalistic representation. According to León (2006), a common characteristic of Gothic painting was the increasing naturalism, stimulated by the scholastic philosophical thought, that had as one of the most representative name: Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). He introduced a Christian version of the works by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC), focusing faith issues through the “light of reason” and defending that philosophy helps the work of theology (Marcondes, 2000). The scholasticism promoted an approximation between human beings and the surrounding world, seeing the reflex of God in each creature. This approximation stimulated the analysis of the details of nature and also a narrative sense in the different plastic manifestations of Gothic style (León, 2006).

Around 200 years after the death of Thomas Aquinas, western Europe passed through a deep revolution called cultural and artistic Renaissance, directly related to the increase of mercantile bourgeoisie and the increase of cities (urban Renaissance). A new view of the world started to delineate. Nevertheless, this Renaissance did not imply a radical rupture within the medieval mentality. For example, the diffusion of the international Gothic style—that happened at the end of the fourteenth

century and the first half of the fifteenth century—resulted in the development of Flemish painting in northern Europe (León, 2006). Although the Italian Renaissance sought inspiration from classical ancient works, the Flemish Renaissance sought inspiration from nature (Strickland, 1999). Both of them, however, followed a tendency present since the end of the Middle Ages: despite the increased naturalism in the plastic expressions, the majority of the themes represented were still religious.

We find the most original expression of the Flemish tradition in the paintings by *Hieronymus Bosch* (1450–1516), an artist considered to be the precursor of the surrealist movement of the twentieth century (Strickland, 1999). The principal interest of Bosch was shown in his paintings, with irony, the passions and vices of his epoch (León, 2006). Underlying his work, there is a moralizing discourse connected within the medieval imaginary, permeated by misogynic images that remitted to original sin and the punishment of hell. One of the most notorious paintings by Bosch is the triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.<sup>5</sup>

There is no other Renaissance panel painting like so-called *Garden of Earthly Delights*. . . , Bosch's best-known work. When opened, the triptych reveals three scenes that, at first glimpse, present a straightforward Biblical account. Adam and Eve appear in the left panel, their many children in the centre, and a monstrous scene of hellfire and damnation in the right. However, upon closer inspection, things are not as they should be. To begin with, no descendants of the first parents ever lived so well! Instead of the thorns and thistles the Bible says were food for Eve's children, who were consigned to lives filled with pain and work, Bosch's handsome young people feast with abandon on huge berries and frolic naked among giant birds. They seem more like children at play, innocently taking exuberant advantage of a world devoid of any hint of danger or evil.

(Dixon, 2003, p. 227)

As commented by Dixon, on the left panel we see the representation of paradise. On the central lamina, we see the representation of the Garden of Earthly Delights. Finally, on the right panel, Bosch has represented hell. *There is a clearly narrative sense in this painting: a story is narrated through images based on Christian doctrine.* In the representation of paradise, the Creator gives Eve to Adam (left panel). Thus, it is through the feminine figure of Eve that

sin is introduced in the world. According to Torviso and Marías, Bosch “...did not more than reproduce plastically what the theologians and poets were writing during the fifteenth century, following the medieval patristic, ‘culpa of Eve’...” (1982, p. 163). If we “read” the images—from the paradise into direction to hell (from left to right, like a text)—we can see the development of a religious narrative in front of our eyes, a religious narrative with moralizing function that alerts individuals to the tragic consequences of sin and, especially, the luxuriance sin (Torviso & Marías, 1982).

Between the historical period when Bosch lived—around 1450–1516 (Charles, Manca, McShane, & Wigal, 2007)—and the beginning of twenty-first century there are, surely, innumerable economic, political, and cultural differences. However, the social imaginary in the contemporary Christian Western societies are still marked, in different ways, by archaic images about women that are reproduced, reactualized, and contested in daily life. In some sense the moral dualism expressed by the strong opposition between Mary and Eve is still alive. In the promotion of gender equality, in diverse social spaces (including relations in the private domain), an important challenge is, exactly how to overcome this strong moral dualism about women. As we see in this topic, this complex challenge is articulated to the long Christian iconographic tradition that has marked, in deep ways, the social imaginary in the West.

### **Culture, Semiotic Mediation, and Images: Cultural Canalizations of Human Experiences through Visual Signs**

Since the prehistoric period, people have been practicing painting. Through colors, light, and shapes, artists have expressed the conception of the world that surrounds them; they have become closer to the immaterial and have understood, controlled, and appreciated everyday life.

(León, 2006, p. 6)

From the image of the feminine in the medieval Christian iconography, some historical clues on the pejorative view about women's sexuality were analyzed in the previous topic. Surely, psychological science should not disregard the historical force of different religious traditions in the construction of social imaginary in diverse cultural contexts around the world. In the context of Western societies, for example, the long Christian cultural tradition, and

its rich iconography, can offer meaningful clues about different social and psychological phenomena. *After all, our personal imagination is constantly fed by the images that circulate in social imaginary.*

As Silva claims: “To affirm the identity means demark boundaries, means make distinctions between what is inside and what is outside...” (2000, p. 82). In the flow of everyday life experiences, each person uses implicit criterions to include or exclude in the symbolic boundaries of a particular group his/herself or other individuals. These implicit criterions are connected within the personal values system that involves beliefs with deep affective roots (Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco, Branco, & Madureira, 2008). From a cultural psychology framework, the personal values system is not perceived as a simply individual creation. Instead, *a personal values system is created and changed by the tension between collective culture (and its complex mechanisms of canalization) and the active and intentional role of each person. In other words, even the most “personal” values have cultural roots.*

The construction and maintenance of these diverse symbolic boundaries is directly related to distinction, fluid or rigid, between insider and outsider (Kim, 2007). Who is responsible for “gatekeeping” of these symbolic boundaries? If we focus on the macrosocial level of analysis, we can suppose the fundamental role of social institutions (e.g., religion, media, science, schools, laws, etc.) in “gatekeeping” the symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Kim, 2007; Madureira, 2007c). An important strategy used by social institutions is the materialization of some conceptions, beliefs, values, and world views through images. Our distant ancestors in the prehistoric period already used images to become closer to the immaterial (León, 2006).

In this sense, we can suppose that visual signs have fulfilled a strategic role in the processes of cultural canalization of human experiences in different historical periods and different cultural contexts. Thus, the present topic focuses on the analytical and methodological relevance of images, as cultural artifacts, in psychological science.

### ***Semiotic Mediation and Visual Signs: Beyond the Verbal Language in the Study of Human Experience***

A central issue for cultural psychology is the relevance of individuals’ experiences in their relations with the social world and with themselves (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). In other words, the

focus is on the human experience instead of the behavior itself (Valsiner, 2007b). The focus on human experiences—which always happen in culturally structured contexts—expresses the phenomenological approach present in researches carried out in the cultural psychology framework (Valsiner, 2007a)—*a cultural phenomenology of human experience.*

In the context of theoretical and empirical researches on the construction of human experience, we are in front of an important challenge: improving our analytical capacity in order to integrate biological, cultural, and subjective dimensions. After all, human experience, as cultural organized, is the result of a long *Homo Sapiens* phylogenesis (Rosa, 2007a, 2007b). Thus, human senses have a clear biological basis. At the same time, human senses are deeply changed from the individual immersion in a specific cultural context that promotes a constant and, frequently implicit, “education of senses” (Madureira, 2007a). In this sense, *it is not exaggeration the metaphorical statement: social control penetrates in the mind through the body and its sensations.* Therefore, “the body is the intimate place where nature and culture meet each other” (Nightingale & Crombyas cited in Araiza & Gisbert, 2007, p. 115).

As it was analyzed by Louro (1998, 1999, 2003), social institutions in general, and schools in particular, promote a continuous cultural education of senses in agreement with hegemonic social values. Thus, individuals present on their bodies the “marks” of years of schooling. It was not just their minds that were modified by schooling, but also their bodies.

According to Le Breton (2007), the sensory perceptions correspond to an ambitious and original research field that remains almost unexplored in social sciences. If we consider that: (a) the Western societies present a long and rich tradition of images; (b) in our contemporary societies, we are living a true “invasion of images” in daily life through outdoors, television programs, movies (in 2D and 3D), Internet, sophisticated video games, and so on; and (c) through vision, individuals classify other individuals in different social groups, then we can conclude that the sense of vision—organized through stereotypes—has a special value in the study of social identities, personal values, prejudices, and discriminatory practices. After all, in ordinary situations in daily life, individuals classify other individuals in different social groups from their first impression<sup>6</sup>. Frequently, that classification is not based on more accurate

information. The first impression is enough to construct symbolic boundaries that split people in different domains: man, woman, white, black, heterosexual, homosexual, rich, poor, and so on.

Surely, there are particularities related to the processes of classification concerning different social groups. Some social groups present clear “marks” on their bodies, although other groups do not present these marks in a clear way. For example, as analyzed by Bourdieu (2005), the symbolic domination against gays and lesbians is related to a specific stigma that, unlike the color of skin or femininity, could be hidden or revealed. However, there are strong social expectations that work as cultural canalization into the direction of dissimulation and/or discretion concerning nonhegemonic sexual orientations. Compared to sexism and racism, a specific feature of homophobia is the demand that all nonheterosexual people keep his/her sexual orientation secret. The rescue of legitimated public existence, including the domain of laws, is a relevant mark of homophobia (Madureira, 2007c).

The maintenance of this secret includes also other aspects related to personal sexual orientation, like the sexual and affective relationships. Frequently, it is a complicated task for nonheterosexual people to deal with the social expectation to maintain this secret. Therefore, there are deep connections between the social invisibility and the psychological suffering, expressed in feelings of discomfort, like anxiety, fear, depression, guilt, and shame by people who present nonhegemonic sexual identities (Madureira, 2000, 2007a, 2007b; Madureira & Branco, 2007). Thus, social invisibility is one of the mechanisms of social exclusion that ensures the maintenance of hierarchical relations between different groups in society.

In sum: *we should not disregard the corporal sensations and emotions embodied when we focus on the cultural and psychological basis of different phenomena like identity processes, values, and prejudices.* The accomplishment of theoretical and empirical studies of psychological functions as embodied processes—that is, integrated biological, cultural, and subjective aspects—is a central challenge for contemporary psychology. In order to deal with this complex challenge it is necessary to find some general mechanism. From cultural psychology framework, this general mechanism is found in *semiotic mediation* (Vygotsky, 1978/1991).

In order to avoid any linguistic reductionism, it is central to recognize that our relating with the world is not just a rational enterprise mediated by

signs and expressed by verbal language. Beyond this reductionistic concept, our relating to the world and to ourselves is affective embodiment (Madureira, 2007a, 2007b; Madureira & Branco, 2005b). Thus, affect, cognition, and action form a whole and complex unit, and human beings are semiotically mediated: “. . . the role of language-mediated relating with the world is not [the] highest level in the semiotic mediation hierarchy—but an intermediate one . . .” (Valsiner, 2003, p. 156). In other words: *the processes of semiotic mediation go beyond verbal language.*

Human experience, culturally structured, is based on complex recursive semiotics processes: semiosis (Rosa, 2007b). Iconic signs, because of their similarity to objects, are powerful signs in terms of cultural canalization. Contexts that involve specific activities—as, for example, religious rituals—are used in order to promote the generalization of some feelings, beyond the immediate contexts, “here and now” (Valsiner, 2005). *Architectural structures, paintings, sculptures, and visual arts in general also fulfill certain functions in this direction, working as a “social technique of feelings”* (Vygotsky, 1970/2007). They promote more general and abstract levels of cultural mediation connected, in different ways, within the symbolic universe in which they are inserted. The raw material of social identities, personal values, and prejudices are not only verbal languages, but also images.

### ***Images as Cultural Artifacts and Their Methodological Potential in Psychology***

Through the centuries, images have been created to fulfill diverse functions (religious, aesthetic, political, entertainment, etc.). Thus, as researchers, we should not ignore the force of images in terms of cultural canalization of human experience. It is important to recognize the methodological potential of images in our researches. In contemporary societies—marked by a true “invasion of images”<sup>7</sup> in our daily life—we can mention, as an example of a broad and fertile field of investigation in human sciences, the cultural meanings, beliefs, and values expressed by media. Through advertisements, television programs, magazines, journals, etc., the hegemonic cultural meanings related to femininity, masculinity, and sexuality are continuously (re) appearing. According to the analyses carried out by Sabat (2001), media presents, in its majority, images and texts that reinforce a stereotypic view of gender.

For example, in an essay about the content of masculine magazines, Nogueira (1986) analyzes the image of man expressed in these magazines: a “victorious man,” rich, surrounded by beautiful women, without existential problems and sadness. “Words as glory, successful, and power are the most found [in these magazines] ...” (Nogueira, 1986, p. 61). We can even conclude that the anguish and sadness would be the marks of “losers,” men who were at fault concerning the project of a successful masculinity, men who are closer to women, and their “emotional problems” and “unnecessary affective and relational demands.” After all, from the images and texts presented in these masculine magazines, happiness could be translated as: having a lot of money, expensive cars, beautiful and sensual women. Therefore, the “masculine happiness” would correspond to the possession of socially valued “power signs,” including beautiful and sensual women, according to the models of masculine desire stimulated by these magazines.

As previously discussed, the feelings of belonging to gender are directly related to the identity processes, to symbolic boundaries that delimit who pertains to the group of “men” and who pertains to the group of “women.” Moreover, inside the boundaries of femininity and masculinity, there are implicit boundaries that mark who are the “honorable men” (focus on public life) and who are the “honorable women” (focus on private life). *When we talk about identity processes (including gender identity), we are talking about boundary phenomena.*

It is pertinent to note that arts are a fertile cultural domain to the study, especially, affective and emotional aspects involved in human experience. If we promote a closer relation between sciences and arts, we will see a fertile (and less explored) ground that integrates cultural and affective aspects in inquiries on theoretical and socially relevant issues. Concerning the articulation between sciences and arts, Del Río and Álvarez stress the importance of the broad formation of Vygotsky—his intellectual and humanistic formation, his scientific formation allied with his artistic sensibility—in the establishment of the double challenge faced by Vygotsky along his life: “... reach an objective knowledge about human beings without resigning its subjective knowledge. Or vice-versa ...” (2007, p. 11). Vygotsky proposed as a central idea of psychology of art “... the recognizing of the overcoming of material by artistic form ... the recognizing of art as *social technique of feeling* ...” (1970/2007, p. 160).

Therefore, the arts involve diverse social techniques of feelings that promote new levels of cultural mediation of affective and emotional processes, integrated with cognitive processes. In other words, the artistic objects are cultural artifacts that mediate, especially, human feelings and emotions. Thus, *we can say that the artistic object is a cultural artifact produced to the creation of aesthetic experiences, to the contemplation. The artistic object would correspond to feelings incarnate in forms* (A. Rosa, personal communication, 2008). It is important to stress that in order to contemplate, for example, a painting, it is necessary to have a cultural education of vision that involves cognitive and affective aspects, as well aspects related to the knowledge actively internalized by the person along his/her life. The interpretation of a painting, as a cultural artifact, demands an elaborate process of apprenticeship that orients our look (Franz, 2003). After all, images are signs to be interpreted (Lonchuk & Rosa, 2008).

The colors, shapes, and composition of a painting bring in itself some social conventions that are culturally and historically situated. Moreover, it is important to not forget that there is “... a narrow connection between vision and power. The act of looking—that involves what we select to see and how to see—produces effects on the person, produces power relations, many times, in a subtle and seductive way ...” (Loponte, 2002, p. 290). In this sense, the use of images can be a fertile tool, in analytical and methodological terms, in researches about gender and sexuality issues inserted in broad cultural meaning systems, historically constructed. Broad cultural meaning systems are those that support and are supported by power relations that permeated all levels of society (Foucault, 1996). In sum: *images as cultural tools (paintings, photographs, drawings, etc.) can be used as an insightful methodological resource in empirical researches on diverse subjects, like identity processes, personal values, and prejudices.*

#### **IMAGES AS METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES IN PSYCHOLOGY: AN EXAMPLE**

Historical images can be an interesting methodological resource in empirical researches on identity processes. In this direction, we can mention the PhD studies carried out by María Fernanda González (Carretero & González, 2006; González, 2005). This research focused on the construction of national identities from a sample formed by participants of different ages and from different

countries: Argentina (n=80), Chile (n=80), and Spain (n=80).

The author used, as a methodological resource, a historical image: a drawing by Theodore de Bry called “Disembarkation of Columbus in Guanahani,” included in the work “The Great Voyages.” It was one of the first works with illustrations about the colonization of America by Catholic and Protestant countries. From the size of this work (13 volumes edited between 1590 and 1634) and its broad divulgation, this work corresponds to an “iconographic invention” of America (Bucher, as cited in González, 2005). The historical image selected was the base for the interviews with the participants. The interviews were analyzed from a quantitative approach (statistical analysis) and qualitative approach.

It is interesting to note that historical images tend to rouse some “affective looks” (in the original: “miradas afectivas”). As González (2005, p. 106) claims: “In this way, we can sustain that historical images produce and convoke some affective looks that are linked with the definition of who we are, where we are pertained, who is part of our group and who is not . . .”. Historical images, such as the drawing by Theodore de Bry, can be promising methodological resources in the studies on affective aspects concerning identity processes.

More precisely, the analysis of affective aspects concerning the construction of national identities among the participants from Argentina, Chile, and Spain disclosed interesting issues. For example, it was asked for the participants that choose one group between the two groups that appeared in the image (Natives and Spanish people) that they have more sympathy, and choose the group that they identify themselves with, they fell closer, resembling. Beyond that, participants were asked to justify their choice. The results showed that:

... The image of the Pacific native, innocent, linked to earth and his/her traditions; selvage and backward, but respectful concerning his/her surroundings, convokes sympathy of the majority of participants. However, at time to seek references about identity the references related to European and Hispanic cultural heritage are stronger, in this way 48% of sample is situated in this crossroad: sympathize with somebody [Natives] and identify with another [Spanish people].  
(González, 2005, p. 143)

This result is meaningful because it demonstrates clearly the presence of ambiguity and conflicts in

identity processes. In other words, the actuations of identification (Rosa & Blanco, 2007) are not oriented by cognitive processes alone. The emotions, feelings, ambiguities, and conflicts are presented at one time to choose the social groups for whom we have sympathy and the social groups with whom we identify ourselves. The sympathy concerning marginalized groups does not imply, necessarily, personal identification with them. Surely, there are deep connections between identity processes and power relations. Connections that also foment prejudices concerning some groups present in our societies. There are implicit connections between: (a) the inequalities among different social groups, in a macrosocial level of analysis; and (b) discriminatory practices and the reproduction of psychological suffering, in interpsychological and intrapsychological levels of analysis (Madureira, 2007a).

#### IMAGES AS METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES IN PSYCHOLOGY: OTHER POSSIBILITIES

In researches on identity processes, personal values, and prejudices it is necessary to construct analytical strategies to interpret cultural, affective, and cognitive aspects—all of them. Therefore, we are in front of a challenge: create new methodological resources in order to find meaningful clues concerning the subjects under scrutiny. This is an invitation to our analytical and methodological imagination. After all, as Alves (1993, p. 39) claims: “. . . the scientist is a hunter of the invisible.”

It is possible, for example, to construct two images: (a) one image formed by different photos of men (different social classes, ethnicities, ages, and so on); and (b) one image formed by different photos of women (different social classes, ethnicities, ages, and so on). Then, these images could be used in inquiries about the construction of gender identities and their connections within other social identities from questions like: (a) Who do you like to be? Why? (b) Who do you not like to be? Why?

It is also possible to investigate the interfaces between religious values, political ideology,<sup>8</sup> and gender issues from a different version of the famous religious image of *The Last Supper*, with Marilyn Monroe at the center—at the position of Jesus Christ—and actors of Hollywood at the right and at the left of the image—at the position of the apostles (see Fig. 26.2).

After the presentation of this image (see Fig. 26.2), it would be interesting to ask: (a) What do you see in this image? (How the participant describes this



**Figure 26.2** Photo of one version of *The Last Supper*, with Marilyn Monroe at the center (Image on display in a café, close to a movie theater in Madrid, Spain).

image); (b) Do you like this image (or not)? Why? (How the participant values this image—in terms of positively, neutrally, or negatively valued). In research on gender and sexuality issues, it is important to investigate religious values of the participants (Madureira, 2007a), and how these values orient their views about the feminine, the masculine, and about sexuality.

Figure 26.2 presents a possibility, among others, to focus on participants' religious values at the beginning of an investigation about identity processes (especially about gender identities) in a more fertile way than asking direct questions about the religion of participants. Beyond that, it is possible to analyze the motives why a participant may like or dislike the image presented. Thus, the valued dimension implicit in identity processes is also contemplated. Surely, this is just one methodological suggestion; there are many other possibilities. *The most important is: the creation of fertile methodological ways to properly investigate the phenomena in focus in our researches.*

## General Conclusion

*"A scientist without imagination is like a bird without wings."*

(Alves, 1993, p. 43)

Throughout this chapter, I focused on the construction of gender identities, as a boundary phenomenon, with special attention regarding the interfaces between gender and sexuality issues within a cultural psychology framework. The feelings of belonging to a specific gender are constructed from the beliefs, values, practices, stereotypes, and prejudices that culturally delimit the symbolic boundaries between femininity and masculinity. It is

important to notice that without a serious political analysis about gender issues: (a) in theoretical terms, we tend to develop a naïve approach and reinforce conceptions based on a biological determinism; and (b) in practical terms, we lose a fertile opportunity to contribute, in different ways, with the elaboration of concrete strategies against social inequalities. The knowledge produced from our theoretical and empirical researches can contribute to public policies in order to promote gender equality in different domains of our societies.

The studies of social identities (gender identities, sexual identities, ethnic identities, etc.) are a promising field to understand the complex connections between individuals and social groups. Therefore, in terms of future theoretical development, the present author suggests the construction of "conceptual bridges" between social-identity approaches and dialogical self-theory (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006; Hermans, 2001; Rosa, Duarte, & Gonçalves, 2008). As a cultural contextualized theoretical model of self, dialogical self-theory can provide insightful conceptual tools to better understand the development of the self-system in its psychological and sociological dimensions. Both of these dimensions are also essential in the construction of social identities. From the tension between the particular and the general, we are in front of a relevant challenge: improving our capacity to consistently integrate different levels of analysis regarding the development of the self-system and social identities.

## Future Direction

Concerning the theoretical implications of the inquiry in focus, it is important to mention the



relevance of future researches on how the cultural meanings concerning gender and sexuality are integrated in broader cultural meaning systems, historically constructed. *In a metaphorical sense, meanings are not "linguistics atoms" that can be properly analyzed in an isolated way* (Madureira, 2007a). Instead, if we intend to improve our understanding concerning the multiple connections of cultural meanings about gender and sexuality, we should investigate them from a systemic approach.

These multiple connections are inserted in the context of broader meaning systems marked by the tension between stability and change. This tension has always been present in the cultural development of societies throughout history (Madureira & Branco, 2005a). The continuous construction and reconstruction of cultural meanings is connected within hierarchical structures of power between different social groups present in any society. These hierarchical structures have historical roots that should not be disregarded by cultural psychology.

There are diverse methodological ways to investigate meaning-making processes regarding the construction of different social identities. Therefore, the use of images, as methodological resources, is just one possibility that seems fertile. The most important is to constantly feed our methodological imagination in order to construct creative ways to investigate the phenomena under focus in our researches. Sometimes, we find interesting clues to do that in our everyday life: in the architectural constructions on the street, in famous paintings, in anonymous images in books, cafes, bars, and so on. At the most ordinary places and moments, we feed our imagination.

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank the National Committee for Scientific and Technological Development—CNPq (Brazil) for the financial support of my PhD studies, including the period that I was Visiting Student of the Psychology Department at Clark University in Worcester, MA (USA). I also want to thank the National Committee for Academic Support—CAPES (Brazil) for the financial support of my postdoctorate at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). This chapter brought some contributions from both my PhD and postdoctorate studies. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Angela Branco (University of Brasília, Brazil), Prof. Dr. Jaan Valsiner (Clark University, USA) and Prof. Dr. Alberto Rosa (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain) for their important theoretical contributions and for their relevant role in my academic trajectory. I also thank Juliana Garcia Pacheco (PhD in Psychology, University of Brasília, Brazil) for

the fertile discussions about social imaginary and images in psychology.

## Notes

1. In an etymologic sense, the word "iconography" is derived from the Greek "*eikon*" (image) and "*graphia*" (description). See: <http://www.etymonline.com/>. This site was visited 01/20/2010.

2. Umberto Eco is Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna in Italy. His first works focused on medieval aesthetics, especially in the works of Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). *The Name of the Rose*, published firstly in 1980, was his first novel.

3. "... Eco's celebrated story combines elements of detective fiction, metaphysical thriller, postmodernist puzzle and historical novel in one of the few twentieth-century books that can be described as genuinely unique. Set in Italy in the Middle Ages, this is not only a narrative of a murder investigation in a monastery in 1327, but also a chronicle of the fourteenth-century religious wars, a history of monastic orders, and a compendium of heretical movements." See: <http://www.umbertoeco.com/en/the-name-of-the-rose-1983.html>. This site was visited 01/19/2010.

4. "... In fact, concerning the medieval Christianity, the notion of "image" seems to be a singular fertility notion even that we understand little every senses related to the Latin term *imago*. This notion is, with effect, in the center of medieval conception of world and man . . . . The notion of image is concerned, in short, to Christian anthropology as a whole, because is the man . . . that the Bible, since its first words, qualify as "image": Yahweh says that make the man '*ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*' (*Genesis* 1:26). " (Schmitt, 2002, p. 592–593).

5. See: <http://arteuniversal.wordpress.com/2010/06/16/bosch-hieronimus/bosch-hieronimus-the-garden-of-earthly-delights-triptych/>. This site was visited 08/15/2010.

6. Stereotype is a "belief about the personal characteristics of a group of people. Stereotypes can be super generalized, imprecise and resistant to new information." (Myers, 1995, p. 346). The stereotypes are not prejudices, but they can work as a base to development of prejudices (Myers, 1995). On the one hand, the stereotypes offer a base, even super generalized, to the future development of a deeper understanding about individuals of a specific social group. On the other hand, the stereotypes can promote prejudices especially when [they] 'close the doors' to the appropriation of new knowledge that contradict[s] what the stereotypes inform about the social group in focus (Madureira, 2009a, 2009b).

7. New technologies of images have been developing faster nowadays. The new generations already born in a world with computers, Internet, sophisticated video games, and other technologies. At the end of nineteenth century, cinema appeared (images in movement). In modern times, the accomplishment of 3D movies has been stimulated by the success of the creative movie *Avatar*. It is not an exaggeration to affirm that we are living a "true invasion of images" in our daily life. Psychology should not ignore this aspect of our contemporary societies.

8. In Latin America countries, because of the cultural colonization by the United States since the second half of the twentieth century, there are social groups, especially groups that identify themselves with the left political ideology, that cultivate a mistrustful attitude regarding the movies produced by Hollywood. In this sense, cultural products, like movies, can be an interesting

methodological resource to investigate political ideology and its relationship to personal values.

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## Risk and Culture

Bob Heyman

**Abstract**

This chapter explores the interrelationships between risk and culture with particular reference to 'late-modern' societies. In such societies, the benefits of technological progress are no longer taken routinely for granted, and the human predicament is understood in relation to the 'lens of risk'. The chapter homes in on the taken-for-granted presuppositions which underpin this interpretive framework. Following a brief mapping of leading social scientific risk theories, the chapter will address still neglected definitional issues. Risk-thinking will be considered as a specific way of constructing contingency; and contingency thinking as derivative from a universal human tendency to view events in relation to the potential infinity of what **might** happen. The unlimited scope of possibility will be contrasted with the necessary cultural selection of a small number of contingencies, viewed mostly as risks in late-modern societies, which become objects of organized concern. The lens of risk will then be unpacked by recasting each of the elements in a standard definition of risk (The Royal Society, 1992, with present author's additions in parentheses) as:

the probability (3) that a particular adverse (2) event (1) occurs during a stated period of time (4a), or results from a particular challenge (4b).

Each numbered element will be reframed in order to bring out its concealed interpretive underpinnings: events as categories; adversity as negative valuing; probabilities as rule-of-thumb derived expectations; and 'stated' time periods as time frames (indefinite and therefore incalculable in the case of condition 4b). It will be argued that societies and social groups must attempt to align their interpretations of the above elements in order to make organized risk management possible. It will be further argued that this interpretive work tends to be pushed to the background of social consciousness through a tacit process of 'deletion.' Without such unspoken but collective direction of attention away from the indefinitely large set of what might happen, social orders organized around selective attention to particular risks could not be sustained.

**Keywords:** probability, risk, culture, interpretation, escalation

Anthropological observations of the warning signs which festoon the environments of full-blown risk cultures provide an instructive introduction to

this bizarre yet taken-for-granted world. Readers are invited to guess the location of the signs reproduced in Figure 27.1, below.

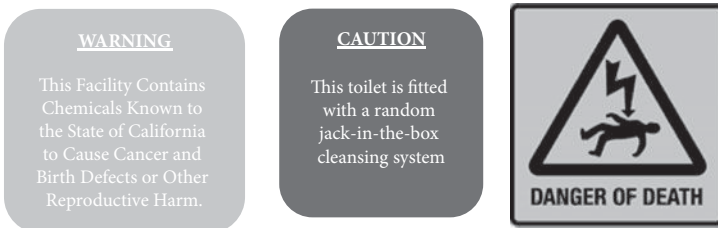


Figure 27.1 The weird and wonderful world of risk and its linguistic relatives.

The left sign (in tasteful pale blue) guards the entrance to one of the apparently most dangerous places in the world—an up-market San Francisco hotel! Its purpose is clearly to fend off potential litigation, rather than to warn individuals considering entry about consequential risks. In contrast, the third sign (in harsh yellow, nature's danger signal) was placed on a building site for an office block being erected in the City of London prior to the financial crash of 2007. It may well have been designed to discourage entry to a location which contained a large amount of expensive machinery. The middle sign could be observed in toilets on London to Brighton trains in 2009. Its pragmatic purpose is hard to fathom. But this sign shows up the esoteric nature of risk microcultures, since nobody appeared to have considered the sign's impact on users of the facility in question! The three signs also illustrate a small part of the rich linguistic family, of warnings, dangers, hazards, vulnerabilities, alarms etc., in which risk-thinking is embedded (Heyman et al., 2010, pp. 25–28). All are oriented in implicitly different ways toward possibilities of unwanted events, and convey unstated attitudes, for instance that hazardous **environments** should be made safe, or that vulnerable **persons** ought to be protected. Such lexical choices are used pragmatically, albeit unreflectively, in attempts to influence decision-making, rather than to merely describe contingencies.

The present chapter will analyze the relationship between risk and culture, focusing on late-modern developed societies in which contested issues of risk affect every sphere of organized life (Beck, 1992, 2009). It will be argued that this pervasive risk consciousness stands out historically and culturally from a much more general human concern with contingency (i.e. selective, symbolically mediated concern with what **might**, and by extension, what **might not** happen). The present preoccupation with risk is bound up with one particular approach to contingency which draws on probabilistic reasoning and the metaphor of randomness. It is found primarily in rich, science-based countries whose citizens can afford to invest the required resources into precaution (Bujra, 2000).

The author cannot offer anthropological expertise, a more general shortcoming of the risk social science literature (Caplan, 2000), but the chapter will address risk from a cultural perspective. The definition of risk will be given considerable

attention below. The term culture will be defined more cursorily as:

*the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group.*  
(Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/culture>)

The chapter will home in on one critical form of this wide-ranging and ubiquitous phenomenon, namely the shared but unspoken presuppositions on which risk perceptions are unavoidably predicated. Unarticulated assumptions provide the buried, although by no means secure, foundations on which the vast edifices of cultures are built. They can be uncovered fairly easily, but only if attention is directed away from concrete cultural products and received problematics, toward the barely concealed collective mental processes which underlie their creation, maintenance, and dissolution. The material which follows will address these processes after a brief context-setting foray into social scientific theories of risk.

## Social Scientific Theories of Risk: A Brief Introduction

Major social scientific theories of risk offer distinctive, although not necessarily incompatible, analyses of why risk concerns have taken centre stage in contemporary developed societies. Despite their differences, these theories all point to complex organizational processes which the authors consider to be unrecognized by social actors who focus on particular risks. By way of background to the analysis offered in the present chapter, thumbnail sketches of four such approaches are offered below. For full accounts of risk society, cultural, systems theory, and governmentality theories, see Zinn (2008).

One variant, at least, of Beck's risk society thesis (Beck, 1992; 2009) anticipates that:

*in its mere continuity industrial society exits the stage of world history on the tip-toes of normality, via the back stairs of side effects.*  
(Beck, 1992, p. 11)

This vision of history sees developed societies gradually undermined by the cumulative force of the interacting, unintended consequences of technological development. The striking quotation suggests that accumulating ecological risks are backgrounded until they can no longer be ignored. Their pressure stimulates a transformation from modernity to late

modernity in which the benefits of technological 'progress' become contested.

Cultural theory, as developed by Douglas and colleagues (Douglas, 1966, 1992; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983), equates risks with dangers, and views their collective selection as serving the function of buttressing structural weaknesses of a particular culture such as internal contradictions and unclear external boundaries. Although most apparent in small, undifferentiated and therefore fragile 'primitive' societies, this analysis can be applied to late-modern hang-ups, for example in relation to hostility toward immigrants, and panic about mentally disordered violent offenders and paedophiles. In contrast, risks which cause far greater total harm, such as those arising from traffic pollution and accidents, tend to be calmly accepted because they do not challenge the underlying cultural order.

Risk systems theory accounts for heightened societal risk consciousness as an unintended and unrecognized consequence of the ever-increasing role differentiation which results from societies becoming progressively more and more complex, specialized, and interdependent (Luhmann, 1993; Japp & Kusche, 2008). Each subsystem creates its own primary risk 'object' (e.g., loss of profit or patient safety failures), while decentering from those of others. The consequent multiplicity of risk orientations generates unrealized differences of perspective which make the organized coordination of social action more difficult to achieve, and more vulnerable to breakdown than in less differentiated forms. According to this theory, heightened generic sensitivity to risks in highly developed societies reflects the insecurity which arises from the increasing fragmentation required to carry an ever-expanding culture by means of indefinitely increasing levels of role specialization.

Finally, governmentality theory treats risk consciousness as a historically novel method of transmitting social power (O'Malley, 2008). The mechanism for social control becomes internalized within individual minds through acceptance of the imperative to manage risks responsibly, for instance by adopting a healthy lifestyle. This particular form of governmentality carries the concealed function of promoting a neoliberal social order in which responsibility for avoiding adverse outcomes is individualized. Within a Governmentality<sup>1</sup> framework, individuals are deemed to have placed

themselves voluntarily in designated higher risk categories such as obesity or illicit drug-taking, and to be morally accountable for officially disapproved 'choices'.

The above brief sketch will hopefully give readers unfamiliar with risk social science a sense of the diverse ways in which the relationship between risk and culture has been theorized. Conjointly, the four outlined approaches outlined can be used to construct a gloomy picture of near future risks for the prevailing science-based civilization and the billions of human beings who rely on it. In this envisaged future, the combined impact of runaway global warming and resource depletion overwhelms increasingly complex, interdependent and therefore fragile socio-economic systems. At the same time, raw cultural sensitivities, competition between nation states and the prevailing neo-liberalism preclude effective prophylaxis.

Some such hefty social scientific machinery is required to explain the yawning contrast between the vast resources spent fighting the 'war on terror' and the feeble global response to the looming catastrophe of human-induced climate change combined with unmanageable resource depletion. The risk of human activity causing catastrophic climate change has been much debated. Resource depletion has received less media attention. With respect to peak oil, for instance, according to one senior whistleblower from the International Energy Agency, this organization has presented unduly optimistic accounts of future supplies because the truth would destabilize stock markets (*The Guardian* newspaper, November 11, 2009). Risk arising from systems complexity is illustrated by analysis of the impact of severe solar storms (Marusek, 2007). The event of September 2, 1859 caused telegraph systems to collapse, with relatively trivial consequences. An equivalent event in the twenty-first century could bring about millions of deaths through the simultaneous destruction of electricity substations resulting in a lengthy loss of usable supplies and ensuing chaos. This example illustrates the potential for failure of a mundane but vital component of complex socio-technical systems to crash an entire civilization. The four processes of runaway global warming, resource depletion, systems failures and political paralysis may feed off each other with devastating consequences. Readers will share this doom-laden construction to a greater or lesser extent. What cannot

be disputed is that many different possible futures can be targeted for organized attention, the issue picked up below in relation to the key importance of contingency visualisation.

As noted above, the four major theories outlined above share one common feature despite their differences, namely the identification of key drivers for risk concerns which are claimed to operate outside the awareness of social actors: whether cumulating side effects of technological development (risk society theory); structural weaknesses in prevailing social orders (cultural theory); unintended consequences of increasing role differentiation (system theory); or the insidious operation of social power in a new form driven by individualized risk consciousness (Governmentality theory). Together, such work provides a rich and potentially complementary analysis of concealed societal processes. However, on the whole, social scientific theories do not systematically dissect risk thinking itself. Social scientists have, perhaps, been more concerned to highlight insight deficits than to analyze what people **do know**, or at least believe, when they think about a risk.

### *Goals for the Rest of the Chapter*

The remainder of the present chapter will not pursue the rich lines of analysis offered by social scientific theories of risk. Instead, the chapter will address the culturally mediated presuppositions which are carried by risk-thinking itself. The analysis will take off from the position that theories such as those presented above tend to take 'risk' for granted, and that this lacuna reflects more than a scholarly shortcoming, but derives from a wider cultural reflectivity shortfall. A degree of prevailing collective reticence about defining risk at all will first be diagnosed and accounted for in terms of the ambiguous 'reality' of risks. Risk-thinking will then be depicted as one historic form of a general human tendency to view events as contingent. A definition will be offered which allows risk to be decomposed into four components—events/categories, adversity/values, probabilities/uncertain expectations, and time periods/time frames, all influenced by cultural interpretive processes. It will be argued that risk differs from other forms of contingency thinking only in one respect: the grounding of uncertain expectation in the metaphor of randomness. These complex issues have been discussed in more detail elsewhere (Heyman,

1998; Heyman et al., 2010). The present chapter hones in particularly on the interrelationships between risk and culture. An adequate account of these relationships must illuminate **both** the generic existence of risk as a cultural phenomenon, **and** the construction and selection of particular risks such as climate change or terrorism for organized collective concern.

### **The Definition of 'Risk'**

#### *A Tendency toward Non-definition*

The idea that risk-thinking now influences all life domains in modern developed societies has acquired almost platitudinous status in the social science of risk, although its impact on public attitudes can sometimes be exaggerated by over-enthusiastic social scientists<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, it has become more interesting to comment on the contexts in which risks are apparently ignored, by mountaineers and other (fool)hardy adventurers, people ruining their livers with alcohol, or enjoying condomless sex with multiple partners. Such seeming exceptions must all be qualified in various ways. Mountaineers are expected to take high risks responsibly, particularly when their actions cause further risks for rescue services (Simon, 2003). Alcohol and sex are peddled by ruthless commercial interests, exposing potential consumers to profoundly conflicting cultural messages. Nevertheless, such behaviour appears to stand out as apparently anomalous in relation to the assumption of a pervading risk consciousness in late-modern societies.

The very ubiquity of risk-thinking in modern cultures challenges definitional efforts. It can be argued that use of the term has become stretched so far that it has lost much of any definitional purpose which it might once have possessed. Garland (2003) has eloquently noted that the wide range of substantive social domains in which risks are considered is cross-cut by a variety of approaches to risk, which can be applied in any domain.

*Today's accounts of risk are remarkable for their multiplicity and for the variety of senses they give to the term. Risk is a calculation. Risk is a commodity. Risk is a capital. Risk is a technique of government. Risk is objective and scientifically knowable. Risk is subjective and socially constructed. Risk is a problem, a threat, a source of insecurity. Risk is a pleasure, a thrill, a source of profit and freedom. Risk is the means by which we*



*colonize and control the future. 'Risk society' is our late modern world spinning out of control.*

(Garland, 2003, p. 49)

In this respect, risk may not differ from other widely used symbolic tools which acquire their usefulness because of their plasticity rather than their precision.

*Philosophers tell us that nouns are misleading because they suggest that a clear object exists when this is often not the case. In the case of 'risk' and 'risk management' we would do well to heed their advice. However, this book [Organized Uncertainty: Designing a World of Risk Management] takes as its point of departure the surely uncontested fact that the noun has grown in use and significance in organizational life.*

(Power, 2007, p. 3)

Similarly, another major contributor to the social science of risk, Hansson (2005) dismisses as the "*first myth of risk*", the idea that risk "*must have a single, well-defined meaning*". Althaus (2005) has argued persuasively that risk is conceptualized differently in a wide range of academic disciplines and subdisciplines, including economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, medicine, legal studies, the arts, and philosophy. For instance, a long-standing line in economics, a discipline which took on risk much earlier than other social sciences, relates risk and uncertainty to entrepreneurship, with the successful entrepreneur 'beating the odds' through innovation (Knight, 1921). Medicine, in contrast, seeks to make practice evidence-based in line with empirically derived probabilities, turning conformity to statistical messages into the primary professional virtue. Such differences remain virtually unexplored because scholars tend to confine themselves to the voluminous but narrowly focused universe of their home discipline. A little discussed, embarrassing consequence of this breadth of focus is that not even the slickest polymath can internalize more than a small fraction of the current stock of risk knowledge on which the late-modern world turns<sup>3</sup>.

Students of risk should not naively assume that this word necessarily indicates the presence of a single entity possessing the same attributes. On the other hand, members of cultures in which risk-thinking plays a strategic role tend to implicitly presuppose that the term **does** possess a common core of meaning; that it somehow connects

widely diverse social contexts, including business, insurance, sport, weather, health care, crime prevention, child protection, war, and many others. The above quotations offer a debunking challenge to a mindset which connects the multitudinous contexts of late-modern life through the notion of risk. An alternative view is that the same term is used across social domains because it references a shared meaning which can be articulated. From this starting point, a social scientific failure to carefully consider what members of modern societies are actually doing when they use the term 'risk' to link together a vast range of organized activities can be diagnosed. Luhmann (1993) criticized "*carelessness in concept formation*". Rosa (2003) went further, identifying "*an intentional silence about defining risk at all.*" Most risk texts take the meaning of this heavily used term for granted, as documented by Heyman et al. (2010). Even a sharp, much-needed contribution to the "*sparsely populated*" field of risk philosophy, Lewens launches into a discussion of risks without reflecting on what the term refers to.

*Decision-makers of all kinds frequently face situations where they must choose one of several risky options.*

(Lewens, 2007, p. 2)

But what is a risk? And where do menus of "*risky options*" come from? Reticence about the meaning of the term 'risk' can be detected in the wider society as well as among social scientists who have tended to remain immersed in this unreflective conspiracy of silence. Definitional absence stands in sharp contrast to extended usage in every sphere of modern life. An extra-planetary anthropologist might be struck by the amount of energy invested by some of its wealthier inhabitants in managing a phenomenon which they cannot specify. An apparently sloppy or even conspiratorial approach to the concept of risk may be driven by its very ubiquity. Risks have become so much a part of the fabric of everyday life that they have acquired the aura of a fundamental natural force which can be directly observed. However, when attention is directed away from the practical management of particular risks toward the attributes of riskiness, its elusiveness becomes apparent. Probing the meaning of risk has a gently subversive effect, shaking the foundations of taken-for-granted cultural assumptions on which analyses of specific risks are

predicated. In particular, as argued in the next section, careful reflection about the core of meaning carried by the term 'risk' demonstrates that risks can never exist as material entities independently of an observer who has learned to view the world through the lens of risk. Definitional reflection undermines the apparent material substantiality of risks, and thereby opens up the indefinite number of alternatives which might become the focus of risk concern. Because the coordination of human action requires a limited number of risks to be selected from the infinity of possibility, such challenges threaten the underpinnings of organized risk societies.

### **On Contingency**

The best starting point for a conceptual analysis of risk is consideration of its relationship to contingency (Luhmann, 1993; Renn, 2008), the idea that one of two or more outcomes might happen (or might have happened while remaining unknown). Carefully uncoupling contingency and risk allows the latter to be put in its historical place as merely one variant, however currently significant, of the former. Risk-thinking can be distinguished from other ways of viewing the world contingency through its reliance on the **metaphor** of randomness, as argued below.

A contingency exists when an observer thinks that an event will fall into one of two or more categories<sup>4</sup>. For example, a child born on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 might or might not be alive 70 years later, and one and only one of these alternatives must hold true. An observer's sense of contingency is dissolved by eventually finding out the actual outcome, necessarily after, but perhaps not immediately after, an event has happened. In the practical, cookbook world of culturally mediated decision-making, contingency derives ultimately from uncertainty, not from indeterminacy, as demonstrated by the following consideration. An event which has already happened, and therefore is wholly determined (e.g. a sport outcome), can still be considered contingent by an observer who does not know what occurred. Conversely, for an observer who mistakenly believes that a particular outcome has already happened, the turnout no longer appears contingent.

Although contingency specification is mainly motivated by a pragmatic desire to influence outcomes, the concept can be logically uncoupled from perceived or actual prospects for human control. Contingency indicates merely a belief that specified outcomes might or might not happen. Thus, the

view that an uncomfortably close supernova might wipe out all life forms on earth refers to a contingency even though little or nothing could be done to prevent such a catastrophe. Similarly, at the personal level, a patient waiting to hear whether a suspicious lump is benign or malignant confronts a contingency specifying two alternative futures, but cannot influence which one will have their name written on it because the cancer process has already either started or not started. Contingency, as already argued, rests solely in an observer's uncertainty as to which of two or more outcome categories will hold true<sup>5</sup>.

The proposed separation of contingency from agency allows two interesting alternatives to be specified: contingencies perceived by some observers and not others; and contingencies which some observers, but not others, regard as fully or probabilistically controllable. With respect to global warming, for instance, an observer might hold that this future will simply not occur, or is too unlikely to be worth considering; or they could agree that global warming might occur while asserting that any such trend will be unconnected with human activity. As discussed further in the next section, contingencies cannot be thought about without categorization which requires boundaries to be set (e.g., warming above two degrees centigrade)<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, value must be assigned to outcomes, allowing further differences of opinion—for example the view that global warming will confer as much benefit as cost. These and other potential areas of disagreement open up many challenges to the coordination of social action among observers who construe a contingency differently. They can be distinguished from the condition where a contingency which might be considered simply has not been thought about, a point taken up below and illustrated in Box 27.1 (p. 610).

### ***Some Esoteric Properties of Contingency***

The culturally universal ubiquity of contingency conceals the non-obviousness of its nature. As with gravity and time, its familiar practicality is misleading. Three important issues—the need for prior categorization, the infinite scale of possibility, and the creation of non-events—will be discussed here, before being taken up below in relation to risk.

### **Contingency and Prior Categorization**

The formulation of a contingency requires a prior interpretive act of categorization, without which multiple possible outcomes could not even be conceived

of. Outcome categories such as winning games or elections may be constituted by rule systems, or may be mapped onto qualitative disjunctions like death or heart attacks. Nevertheless, every individual event is unique. Classification transforms this natural variability into identical, distinctive, symbolic packages (Bowker & Star, 2000).

The infinite diversity of nature can be squeezed into an indefinite variety of category sets, yielding an unlimited number of potential contingencies. To count as a contingency, a category set must possess the three properties of possibility, exclusivity, and universality. For example a presently live person aged under 70 years might or might not die before their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday (possibility), can only experience one of the two or more categorized alternatives (exclusivity) and must undergo one or the other (universality). These properties do not appertain intrinsically to events, but arise from socially organized interpretive action. Many category schemes can be applied to the same domain of events. For instance, just considering binary distinctions for the sake of argument, deaths might be viewed as premature/of at least normal length, achieving/not achieving salvation, painful/peaceful, or brave/cowardly, depending upon the culturally mediated concerns of those applying a contingency. Once a contingency has been constructed, slotting cases into its alternatives requires simplification through the conjoint processes of homogenization within, and differentiation between, categories (Heyman et al., 2010, pp. 39–43), discussed further below in relation to risk categorization. These two processes direct attention away from both intracategory variability and intercategory similarity. This price must be paid in order to drive the diversity of events into unified alternative packages which can be generalized about. Allowing for a larger number of categories mitigates the distorting process of homogenization-differentiation, but at the price of extra complexity, and may fail pragmatically. For instance, screened individuals must either be offered or not offered further expensive and invasive diagnostic tests. In the practice of screening, the continuous scale of probability tends to be reduced to the two alternatives of higher and lower risk linked pragmatically to the action/inaction binary (Heyman, 2010).

#### POSSIBILITY CREATION

A second, crucially important property of all forms of contingency, not just risks, is that they conjure up possibilities through contemplation of

what might/might not happen, or might have happened/not happened while remaining unknown. A long-term cigarette smoker might or might not die of lung cancer, for instance. Thinking contingently by no means requires a risk-based interpretive framework which draws upon the metaphor of randomness. Thus, some religious belief systems hold that human beings are bound for either heaven or hell after death, with the outcome of this contingency determined by faith, repentance, or predestination. Two possible outcomes (or three if limbo is included) are specified. Every individual to whom the contingency applies must experience one of the specified trajectories generated by a chosen category system, but remains suspended between the constructed alternative categories until their fate becomes a matter of known historical fact.

If the Aztecs did carry out human sacrifices before dawn every day in order to appease the sun god (Meyer, Sherman, & Deeds, 2003), their view can be represented as a contingency. From this point of view, either the sun will rise following the present night or it will not, with the latter outcome potentially leading to eternal darkness if the sun god decided to depart for good (a second-order contingency). Similarly, at least with respect to its focus on what might happen, Tony Blair, the prime minister who took the UK into the second Iraq war (testimony to the Chilcot Inquiry, January 29, 2010, quoted in *the Guardian* newspaper, January 30, 2010), retrospectively accounted for this decision by appealing to contingency. He argued that “*What is important is not to ask the March 2003 question, but to ask the 2010 question. Supposing we had backed off this military action . . . ?*”. Blair maintained that the “*crucial thing after September 11 was that the calculus of risk changed*”. This instructive phrase distinguishes risk-thinking from other ways of reasoning contingently by attaching an aura of probabilistic scientific rationality to the mental activity of analyzing the inherently ethereal multiverse of possibility.

Examples drawn from cultures which seem exotic from a current science-based cultural perspective illustrate the infinite scale of the possible particularly well, showing that, in principle, anything might happen. Even the laws of physics do not curtail the potential bounds of contingency which require only that an observer should believe that a categorized outcome might possibly occur.

Culture plays the crucial roles, firstly, of shaping how contingency is understood (e.g., as risk

through the metaphor of randomness or as the will of the gods); and secondly, of specifying which small number of possibilities out of the infinite number of those which might be contemplated become foci of organized concern. Variants of contingency, in both its form and substance, should be located in the human mind, not in externally observable events which merely happen.

#### THE CURIOUS REALITY OF NON-EVENTS

In addition to selectively addressing what might or might have happened, thinking contingently allows the observer to ‘see’ an imagined outcome such as eternal darkness or runaway global warming ‘**not happening**’. To an observer who is not thinking about a contingency, the absence of an imagined possibility will simply not register. Thus, members of societies which recognize the risks of smoking can see a heavy lifetime smoker ‘not dying’ from a smoking-related disease, but this (non)event could not be ‘observed’ before smoking risks were flagged up. Non-events do not register to the senses or any measuring instrument, but cultural distancing is required for their ghostly nature to be recognized. In relation to an unmet expectation, non-occurrence is experienced as tangible. However, since anything might happen, the number of possible non-happenings is unlimited. The infinity of possibility, a crucial starting point for the analysis of contingency thinking, was emphasized by the nineteenth century philosophical psychologist Alexius Meinong<sup>7</sup> (Dölling, 2001, p. 63):

*In developing his theory of objects, Meinong was guided by the insight that the totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the objects of knowledge. This fact easily goes unnoticed, probably because the lively interest in reality which is part of our nature tends to favour that exaggeration which finds the non-real a mere nothing.*

Meinong’s assertion that there are “*objects of which it is true to say that there are no such objects*” caused considerable contention at the time (Dölling, 2001 p. 64), perhaps because it subverted the taken-for-granted assumptions of empiricist science. Contingency identification requires a semiotic “*preadaption*” (Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999, p. 258) involving categorization, as argued above. For example, before smoking came to be viewed as a health issue, smoker longevity would not have been particularly noted, although, needless to say, many

smokers would have died prematurely. These events simply happened without becoming bound up with the machinery of what might be, or might have been. But smoking could have been, and sometimes still is, viewed contingently in many other ways (e.g., as an aid to digestion, an identity statement, or a facilitator of social bonding). Once a contingency has been constituted through outcome categorization, it automatically generates a counterpart type of non-event. Occurrence and non-occurrence are bound up in a figure-ground relationship in which each requires the other, although their dividing line may shift dynamically (Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999, p. 265). Furthermore, the occurrence/non-occurrence binary structures time through differentiating an elusive present in which an outcome might or might not occur from a future in which one of these possibilities can be ruled out (Heyman et al., 2010, pp. 118–120). After an event, possibility immediately resolves itself into history, inviting retrospective forensic accounting, for instance if a serious accident has occurred.

To recap, contingency thinking depends upon the shoehorning of events into two or more possible, exclusive, and universal categories. Each contingency, realized as a category set, solidifies one issue from the unlimited fluidity of possibility. The notion that an outcome is contingent derives from observer uncertainty, not from the material existence of alternative trajectories, as does the remarkable but usually unnoticed human capacity to ‘observe’ what has not, but might have, occurred. **The crucial analytical step which enables the relationship between risk and culture to be adequately understood involves uncoupling the idea of contingency, originating in the human capacity to imagine possibilities, from its particular culturally derived forms, such as belief in divine justice or literal use of the randomness metaphor.**

The process through which imagining a contingency conjures it into existence, although without a guarantee of a lengthy or vigorous cultural life, is illustrated in Box 27.1, on p. 610, below.

#### ***The Problematic Status of Utility Calculation in Relation to Possibility***

The above analysis raises the question of whether some possibilities (e.g., the end of the world through divine retribution, invasion from another planet, a situation in which the UK or France would and could credibly threaten to use nuclear weapons independently of the United States) can

### Box 27.1 A Contingency Miscarriage

In 2009, an email concerning possible risks from compact disks (CDs) was circulated among forensic mental health service providers<sup>11</sup>. A patient had pointed out that CDs could be turned into sharp weapons, an outcome which the email writer had not previously considered. The email requested information from elsewhere as to whether others shared this concern, or knew of it happening. Nobody involved in the discussion group had come across a single case, but writers expressed concern that CDs or DVDs might be used as weapons in the future. Despite this fear, participants agreed that they should not be banned.

This example illustrates the risk-management implications of the conjectural status of contingency. Until the risk was envisaged, it could not be managed. Once articulated, it stimulated worry, which was not alleviated by recognizing that no cases had been locally recorded. Their absence did not preclude the possibility of adverse events having taken place elsewhere, or occurring subsequently. However, if preventative action had been initiated, patients would have been deprived of one of the few forms of recreation open to them, possibly generating new risks. At the same time, the overt contemplation of this contingency made those who considered it vulnerable to blame if the now imagined but never observed outcome actually occurred in the future.

rationally be given more or less weight than others. The present author has reviewed this complex question elsewhere (Heyman et al., 2010, pp. 65–76). In brief, the issue corresponds to that of measuring expected value, which has received gargantuan academic attention, particularly within the discipline of economics. The answer to the question posed above carries fundamental importance in science-based societies in relation to one of their principal strategic stumbling blocks, that of applying empirical methods outside the laboratory in conditions of real life complexity. Claims to rational grounding in risk-oriented societies depend heavily on the validity of utility quantification. It is easy to be mesmerized by the sheer volume of empirical work which relies on the assumption that expected value can be accurately measured.

Although not futile, the calculation of expected value can at best generate a variety of different, crudely plausible answers depending upon starting assumptions, for example about trade-offs between multiple values and about the temporal horizon to be taken into account (Peterson, 2007). Because expected value is so elusive, evidence for the charge of irrational contingency selection often draws upon the calibration of non-equivalence. For example, the contrast between the urgency given to the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the long period of calm indifference to larger annual leakages in Nigeria and Ecuador can be used to support the view that environmental harm counts for more if it occurs in the United States than if it happens in a developing country. Since circumstances always

differ, such comparisons can always be contested. Fortunately, the question posed above can be largely ducked in the present analysis of risk and culture on the grounds that social groups respond to the contingencies which they collectively prioritize, usually unreflectively, regardless of any utilitarian calculations or accusations of non-equivalence which critics may throw at them.

### The Concept of Risk

Uncoupling the ideas of contingency and risk makes it possible to view risk as the label for merely one way of thinking contingently, which has acquired quasi-universalistic status in the modern, science-based world. This crucial step prevents the absurd conclusion, sometimes found in the risk literature, being drawn that only modern peoples have attempted to control the future. Risk-thinking provides a historically novel formulation of contingency as governed by the combination of empirically established causal factors and randomness. (However, the notion of randomness will be demoted in the next section to a merely metaphorical status at least in the domain of everyday objects.) The origins of the risk-based approach to contingency are associated with the linked developments of science and capitalism in Europe from the time of the Renaissance (Bernstein, 1996). Hacking (1975/2006) locates the birth of the modern concept of probability precisely in the Europe of the 1650s.

One way to explore the shared but tacit mental work underpinning the cultural presence of a

risk is to expose the implicit assumptions buried in standard definitions, which are themselves scarce. As presented in the Abstract and repeated here for the reader's convenience, the Royal Society (1992, p. 2, with present author's additions in parentheses) defined risk as:

*the probability (3) that a particular adverse (2) event (1) occurs during a stated period of time (4a), or results from a particular challenge (4b).*

The two variants of the fourth risk ingredient, which refer to limited and indefinite time periods respectively, both address the temporal aspect of risk. This formulation was designed to justify the objective measurement of risks. However, each of the four elements of risk enumerated above can be reframed in a way which brings out the implicit processes of interpretation that underpin them. This reframing is summarized schematically in Table 27.1, below, which also includes a similar reframing of risk management.

The four enumerated elements of risk tend to be **projected** onto the external world, so that features such as adversity come to be experienced as intrinsic attributes of events themselves. A person considering a risk plays an active, culturally mediated, judgmental role, which can sometimes be obscured by habit and social consensus, illustrated in the next

section. The risk observer cannot avoid implicitly or explicitly:

1. Categorizing the contingent outcomes which become a selected focus of risk analysis;
2. Making value judgments about these outcome categories;
3. Developing expectations about the likelihood of these consequences, using the past as a guide to the future;
4. Placing temporal boundaries around a risk, without which it cannot be assessed. (Condition 4b in the Royal Society definition precludes quantification because it encompasses consequences extending toward infinity.)

The bottom part of the table draws attention to the interpretive work which underpins standard risk management steps such as drawing practice conclusions from evidence, reframed as “*encoding*” (Alaszewski, 2010). Risk management will not be considered further in the present chapter. However, it should be noted that the crucial question of what to **do** about a risk cannot arise until it has been constituted, as shown in the first part of the table, and that this sort of question can only arise in cultures which frame contingencies as risks. The four elements of the risk compound will be considered further in the second part of the chapter.

**TABLE 27.1 Two Views of Risk Elements**

Naturalistic view of risk	Interpretative view of risk
<b>RISK CONSTITUTION</b>	
(1) Event	Category
(2) Adversity	Value
(3) Probability	Uncertain expectation
(4) Time period	Time frame
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Service delivery</b>	<b>Service organization</b>
Evidence-based practice	Practice encoding
Information giving	Information representation
Regulation and safety	Control

Adapted from Heyman et al., 2010 with the permission of Oxford University Press.

## Four Components of Risk Thinking

As discussed in the previous section, perception of any contingency entails four usually implicit interpretive steps involving categorizing, valuing, expecting, and time-framing. Risk-thinking is differentiated from other ways of envisaging contingency only with respect to the third ingredient, through drawing upon the metaphor of randomness. These four components of risk-thinking have been analyzed at length elsewhere (Heyman et al., 2010). For the present purpose, each will be briefly illustrated with particular reference to the interrelationship of risk and culture.

### *The Categorization of Events*

Management of a particular risk will mostly be oriented not toward single outcomes, but toward constellations of linked predictive and causal antecedents and consequences. Regardless of the web of relationships in which any event will be enmeshed, risk management attention tends to foreground one negatively valued antecedent or consequent. For instance, a focus

on cigarette smoking as a risky behaviour would link this presumed causal antecedent to a greater chance of experiencing various diseases, directing attention away from benefits of smoking such as stress management and weight reduction. Alternatively, a negative outcome such as coronary heart disease might be considered in relation to multiple risk factors. The variable architecture of risk constellations has received little analytical attention, perhaps because the natural attitude toward risk does not lend itself to consideration of the socio-cognitive processes through which a risk is mentally carved out from the tangled web of causation.

Regardless of their position in a risk constellation, its constituent objects cannot exist without prior categorization, which will be considered in relation to a foregrounded outcome deemed adverse. Because events never repeat themselves identically, outcomes must be neatly packaged before they can become available to generalized risk analysis. This process entails three conjoint sub-processes, the **selection** of an outcome as worthy of attention, the **homogenization** of cases, and their **differentiation** from non-cases. For example, research into the risk of 'depression' is predicated on the assumption that this state can be clearly differentiated from everyday 'sadness' (Robertson, 2008). At the same time, estimating the probability that an individual will experience depression requires cases to be treated as equivalent so that their frequencies can be counted. But this step requires attention to be directed away from differences within a risk category, at least temporarily. McCormack, Levine, and Rangno (1997) provide "simple nomograms", essentially graphs with correction factors which doctors and patients can use to calculate a patient's probability of experiencing a "cardiovascular event" over 5- and 10-year periods in terms of known risk factors. These authors define "cardiovascular events" as including "angina, unstable angina, myocardial infarction or death from coronary artery disease." Thus, in order to quantify the chance of this 'event' occurring over a given time period, it must first be marked out by lumping together a diverse range of phenomena, as the above quotation demonstrates. However, this manoeuvre is not itself debated in the paper. Discussing category creation would direct attention toward the potential existence of alternatives which would generate different risk entities and probabilities of occurrence.

Inevitably, the categorization of risks generates dissonances in relation to the privileging of one contingency over another (selection), the suppression of

awareness of dissimilarities between cases (homogenization), and the exaggeration of boundaries between cases and non-cases (differentiation). The woman quoted below challenged the homogenization of Down's syndrome as a risk category (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 41).

**Pregnant woman:** *And it doesn't help, again, people making comments like, what he [acquaintance] just said, 'You could be changing someone's nappy at 21.' I mean, not all Down's syndrome are like that, are they? I have seen them walking around the town. And, apart from their visual looks, they are very intelligent, some of them.* (Research interview with pregnant woman, aged 39 years, who opted for amniocentesis)

Although the cause of Down's syndrome, three copies of the twenty-first chromosome instead of two, can be specified, its precise configurations and clinical manifestations vary immensely. The quotation points to a tension between the mental construction 'person with Down's syndrome', which enables its probability to be computed through counting its rate of occurrence, and the variability within this category, which its classification directs attention away from. In contrast, the next quotation from the same study (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 163) fends off challenges to the differentiation of Down's syndrome from the absence of the condition.

**Woman who had terminated pregnancy:** *I read a story [magazine article]. Reading this story has helped me cope with it [opting for pregnancy termination after Down's syndrome diagnosed] ... I think they [couple depicted in story] are bloody stupid ... They look like they are really over the moon because they are having this Down's baby.*

**Husband:** *I mean they will have been explained the same as everybody else as to what can happen, or what it is going to be like, and what it means for the future.*

**Woman:** *They can have chest infections ... I mean they are laughed, and they are scorned at.* (Research interview with woman aged 46 years and her husband after pregnancy termination for Down's syndrome)

This couple had been undergoing fertility treatment for many years, and had given up their last opportunity for biological parenthood, a loss which still distressed them deeply a year after the abortion had taken place. Understandably, they objected vehemently to a representation of Down's syndrome which undermined its differentiation from

non-cases, and thereby stimulated doubt about their painful personal decision.

The third conjoint component of risk construction alongside homogenization and differentiation, the selection and non-selection of outcome categories, can only occur for a risk category which has been created through homogenization and differentiation. Otherwise, there is nothing to accept. At the same time, the homogenization and differentiation of a risk category entails its selection as a candidate, at least, for organized concern. Hence, these three processes must operate together in order to bootstrap a risk into existence. Risk selection is illustrated in Box 27.2, below, in relation to a notorious case of risk blindness.

In conclusion, outcome homogenization, differentiation, and selection are undertaken conjointly. Mental representations of what might happen are simultaneously foregrounded, bestowed with common attributes and marked out from 'the rest'. This complex mental activity must be aligned for organized social interaction to be possible, but its grounding always remains fragile because outcome categorization can never capture the individuality of actual events.

### ***Value Judgments about Adversity***

The second component of risk-thinking mentioned in the Royal Society (1992) definition is reframed in the second column of Table 27.1 as negative valuing. The notion of a "*particular adverse event*" locates negativity in an observable property of the external world, like mass or temperature. However, badness can never reside in events themselves, but only in the perceptions of individuals who singly or collectively attribute negativity to outcomes (Rescher, 1983). The illusion

that adversity can be located in events rather than their perception arises from the **projection** of taken-for-granted, culturally shared values onto the external world, an unarticulated mental manoeuvre which leads to adversity being experienced as an intrinsic attribute. The Royal Society definition adopts this natural attitude, which unreflectively directs attention away from value questions.

The inescapable role of the observer in judgments about outcome adversity can be seen most clearly when the humanistic assumptions taken for granted (but not acted upon) in modern, developed societies are suspended. Aliens from another galaxy might view the demise of the entire human species as a positive event, a theme explored in countless science fiction movies. For racists, the destruction of 'inferior' ethnic groups is to be welcomed; whilst various religious groups have positively valued the destruction of the unfaithful. Conversely, believers in animal rights reject an implicit starting point in which humans are privileged above other species (Singer, 1990), thereby challenging the justification for animal experimentation. Such examples expose the unexamined presuppositions which any utilitarian calculation requires.

Even within the frame of Western liberalism, risk analysis is built upon many value assumptions which remain mostly unexamined. For the present purpose of exploring the interrelationships between culture and risk-thinking, one illustrative example of alternative values will have to suffice. Maternity services in the UK and many other countries are oriented toward preventing the birth of children with severe disabilities through screening and offering the option of pregnancy termination. Many parents wish to exercise this option, but some do not, and

### **BOX 27.2 An Example of Organized Risk Selection**

The Butler Inquiry (The Home Office/Department of Health and Social Security, 1975) dealt with a striking case of risk blindness, arising from selective risk perception, which stimulated the development of medium-security forensic mental health units in the UK. While confined to a high-security institution, Graham Young actively and openly pursued his interest in poisoning, for example borrowing library books on the topic. After being released, he promptly resumed his career as a poisoner. Physically and socially remote from wider society, staff working in high-security institutions may have become oriented toward internal risks such as patients harming themselves or others on the ward. They simply did not visualize an outcome which appeared glaringly obvious from outside the social system in which they were immersed.

Systems theory of risk (Japp & Kusche, 2008), outlined above, envisages endemic social disarray arising as an unintended consequence of increasing role differentiation. The Young case illustrates potentially tragic, but also blackly comical, consequences which can result when social actors selectively address different risk objects without appreciating their discordance.



experience may stimulate reappraisal. Oulton and Heyman (2009) found that some parents of children with severe and profound intellectual disabilities did not view their existence as an adverse event, a value judgment vividly illustrated by the following quotation.

*Her every little step she makes is just so phenomenal. And what grace she's got. And, ah, she's just a complete delight all the time.* (Research interview with mother of daughter with severe learning and physical disabilities)

Another quotation from the same study specifically articulates resonances, normally concealed, between outcome evaluation and wider cultural issues.

*There aren't many opportunities in twentieth century life in England to be a good person unless you seek it out. And, like a missionary or something, so caring for somebody, and the experience of loving somebody who is different, and damaged, and has certain problems is a very rewarding experience for me personally . . . it's a bit like Calvinism. You actually begin to feel as if you're of the elect, and of a very small banded set of special people who are different from everybody else . . . It's very dangerous to feel superior to other people. That's why you have to fight it.* (Research interview with the father of a daughter with severe learning and physical disabilities)

The brief exposition offered in this section has done no more than scratch the surface of the many complex value questions which underlie even the apparently simplest risk issue. That risk managers are not, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, paralyzed by doubt, attests to the quietly effective accomplishment of their culture, which supplies prepackaged, if not uncontested, answers to value pre-questions. The face validity of pragmatic assessments of 'what works' depends on such matters not being opened up to scrutiny and debate.

### **Probabilities/Expectations**

Probability is the third of the four components of risk-thinking alluded to in the Royal Society (1992) definition. It is reframed in Table 27.1 from an interpretive perspective as one approach to developing expectations. Categorization, valuing, and time-framing can be found in all forms of viewing possible events contingently. Probabilistic reasoning, in contrast, marks out risk-thinking as distinctive from other ways of viewing the world contingently. For this reason, it will be discussed in more detail

than the other three ingredients of risk-thinking. Reflecting its importance to risk, the Royal Society (1992) document immediately followed the definition of risk with a statement about probability.

*As a probability in the sense of statistical theory risk obeys all the formal laws of combining probabilities.*

This awkward, elliptical sentence unintentionally conveys the writers' unease whilst invoking abstruse mathematical "laws" as legitimation. Non-mathematicians, including the present author, tend to defer to such authoritative assertions which invoke a prestigious, mysterious world of science. Mary Douglas (1992, p. 50), challenged the prevailing official assumption that "*the ordinary lay person, the man in the street, is weak on probabilistic thinking*", arguing that human beings intuitively appreciate probabilities. Common mistakes in everyday probabilistic reasoning can indeed be diagnosed (Breakwell, 2007), for instance overgeneralizing from single cases, but should not distract attention from questioning this way of thinking, as the following quotation illustrates.

*Once upon a time I was an undergraduate majoring in mathematics and statistics. I attended many lectures on probability theory, and my lecturers taught me many nice theorems involving probability . . . One day I approached one of them after a lecture and asked him . . . "What is probability?". He looked at me like I needed medication, and he told me to go to the philosophy department.*

(Hájek, 2008, quoted author's emphasis)

This anecdote nicely captures the cultural process of deletion, discussed in the final main section of the chapter, through which unspoken shared presuppositions are kept away from reflective scrutiny. It will be argued below that probabilistic thinking draws upon the **metaphor** of randomness, and that its use to approximate the unknown but determinate carries very important consequences. Before this task is attempted, three ways in which qualitative or quantitative probabilities can be generated will be briefly distinguished, namely inductive reasoning, modelling, and motivation assessment.

### **THREE MODES OF PROBABILISTIC REASONING**

Firstly, when outcomes occur frequently, their probability can be estimated inductively, by using their past rate as a guide to the future. For instance, the chance of an individual dying from coronary heart disease (CHD) can be computed by counting

the number of such deaths in the recent past as the numerator, the total number of deaths as the denominator, and then calculating their ratio. More sophisticated conditional probabilities can be worked out for subcategories such as men versus women, or for different socio-economic strata. This rough and ready approach to grounding expectations directly in previous experience is not available for unusual events like nuclear accidents, which do not happen frequently enough to be reliably counted. In such cases, the quantification of probability, for instance the scientific consensus that there is a 90% chance of human activity causing catastrophic global warming during the present century, is based on mathematical modeling, a second mode of probabilistic reasoning.

Thirdly, when contingency involves voluntary action, expectation can be expressed in terms of a numerical probability, as when an individual asserts that he is 90% sure that he will turn up for a social event.

Expectations can be represented through numerical probabilities in each of these three strikingly different forms of reasoning, a difference which their common numerical representation obscures. Furthermore, their interrelationships, particularly that between statistical and psychological probabilities, are difficult to conceptualize. Human action can itself become the object of risk analysis at the collective level. Aggregate statistics such as an individual's chance of being a crime victim in a particular locality remain remarkably constant from year to year despite resulting from countless individual decisions. Similarly, the probability of an individual taking a risk-reducing action such as giving up smoking can itself be estimated inductively. The issue of genetic predisposition in relation to the attribution of criminal responsibility well illustrates the murkiness of the connection between voluntariness and randomness. Knowledge of statistical relationships between gene variants and crime rates can be used to argue **either** that the genetically predisposed should be given shorter sentences on the grounds that they cannot be blamed for their inheritance, **or** that they should be given longer sentences on account of their presumed greater propensity to offend (Farahany & Bernet, 2006).

The following discussion of probabilistic thinking will focus on the first of the three forms of probabilistic reasoning outlined above, inductive inference from frequently occurring events. But consideration of the very different cases outlined above demonstrates that probabilistic propositions

derive from expectations which can be grounded in diverse epistemological procedures.

#### PROBABILITY AND THE METAPHOR OF CHANCE

Risk-thinking invites its users to view the determinants of a negatively valued outcome as partitioned between risk factors and a residue of chance; and to regard this residue as resulting from indeterminacy rather than from prognostic limitations. Thus, uncertainty arising from lack of knowledge is **projected** onto events as the attribute of randomness, a process which parallels the perceptual metamorphosis of negative valuing into inherent adversity. The merely metaphorical status of chance in risk-thinking can be demonstrated through its application to historic but unknown events. For example, people who are screened for a condition such as colorectal cancer will be told their probability of experiencing an adverse outcome which has already occurred. 'Randomness' in such cases can only refer to the projection onto the external world of observer uncertainty about an outcome which has happened and is therefore utterly determined.

The same analysis can be applied to future outcomes which are clearly generated from the complex interactions of simpler forces, for instance, the end position of a spun roulette ball. Certain internet vendors claim to be able to provide systems of concealed cameras and computers which predict roulette outcomes with sufficient accuracy to beat the house odds, thus diminishing 'randomness'. In principle, there is no reason why such a system should not provide perfect accuracy, thereby banishing the scope for metaphorical randomness. In consequence, the probabilities of particular outcomes will change for anyone who is using this system. Meanwhile the roulette ball, although not the casino owners, will carry on blissfully unaffected by the changes to its chances of coming to rest on a particular number.

This outline of a classical closed causal system needs to be modified in two respects to take into account quantum uncertainty, and the indefiniteness of open systems such as the human body which are affected by an indefinitely large number of causal influences. Physics teaches that an irreducible randomness operates at the smallest scales of magnitude; and that, therefore, merely observing an attribute of a particle changes its behaviour so as to prevent the observer from obtaining 'forbidden' knowledge. Quantum processes may well

contribute to risk, for instance by tipping a cell into a cancerous state which the immune system fails to check. However, more generally, quantum effects and risks are connected only tenuously through shared use of the concept of chance. As argued in the next subsection, risk analysis, stripped of its pretensions, offers no more than useful cookbook pragmatism, and operates on a macro scale where quantum uncertainty can be ignored. Classical random systems and the more complex events which risk analysis addresses must be distinguished in one important respect, however. Whereas, the behaviour of a roulette wheel is determined by a small number of interacting forces, social and health phenomena are influenced by the interactions of a vast number of processes. Empirically grounded expectations about the latter can only be developed selectively. It is never possible to measure more than a small proportion of directly or proximally influential factors, and many different models with some predictive purchase can be put forward.

**CONSEQUENCES OF ADOPTING THE METAPHOR OF RANDOMNESS**

A number of practically important consequences follow from the projection of uncertainty as randomness. Their combined impact is not always appreciated because it is obscured by the tendency to take the metaphor of randomness literally. These consequences (Heyman et al., 2010, Chapter 5) are outlined in Table 27.2, and briefly illustrated below.

*Acceptance of the ecological fallacy:* The paradigm case of probabilistic reasoning involves counting rates in categories and attributing these statistics to future members, although, as discussed above, probability estimation does not always take this form. It, in effect, ‘spreads’ the calculated rates among

all members of a category, with each case deemed to ‘carry’ the same aggregate chance of incurring the predicted outcome. Refinement of predictive models can allow such demarcations of chance to be modified. For instance, personalized medicine, if its promise were ever met (Petersen, 2009), would allow those who will suffer side effects from a particular drug to be identified through genetic markers. At present, the chance of this undesired outcome is attributed to randomness equally affecting the entire population of medicine users. However, until perfect prediction is achieved, and risk thereby banished, a residue of unexplained variance will remain to be mopped up through tacit acceptance in practice of the ecological fallacy that all members of a nominated category share its aggregate statistics.

Two types of pragmatic gain can result from this usually unnoticed cognitive manoeuvring. Firstly, if presence in a marked risk category results from a causal link with the defining category attribute, as with smoking/lung cancer, and perhaps with obesity/coronary heart disease, modification of the risk factor will reduce the incidence of the risked condition in the sub-population flagged up as at higher risk. The belief that a causal connection, however imperfect, exists motivates the direct preventative endeavour targeted at the attribute category. The anticipated gains will only be achieved if the assumption of causality is correct. Secondly, even if no causal significance is attached to a category, its markers can be used predictively to target a class of individuals at greater risk for other forms of prevention, as with screening tests. However, such risk management gains come at the price of conflating the aggregated properties of a category with attributes of its individual members. Some further ramifications of this useful but crude heuristic (rule-of-thumb) are briefly outlined below.

*The ecological prevention paradox:* The ecological prevention paradox (Davison, Davey-Smith & Frankel, 1992) arises because every individual in a delineated category is deemed to possess the overall probability of experiencing the negatively valued outcome of concern, and, therefore, to merit the same risk management response. Moreover, this way of thinking is often applied even when high relative risk is combined with low absolute risk, indicating that a large majority of those in the higher risk category will not be affected. For instance, the finding of a raised rate of future hospitalization for schizophrenia among cannabis consumers (Zammit et al., 2002) has been employed to justify

**TABLE 27.2 Some Implications of Probabilistic Reasoning**

1. Acceptance of the ecological fallacy
2. The ecological prevention paradox
3. Multiple probabilities
4. The informational management of “personal” probabilities
5. Acceptance of the inductive fallacy
6. The inductive prevention paradox

its criminalization, even though the vast majority of users and non-users alike will not experience this outcome. Zammit et al. concluded that self-reported heavy cannabis users were 6.3 times more likely than self-reported non-users to be hospitalized for schizophrenia over a 25-year period. However, 3.8% of heavy users, compared with 0.6% of non-users, were found to have been hospitalized. High risk categorization spreads 'the problem' among the vast majority who are unaffected one way or the other.

*Multiple probabilities:* Because risks are attributed to individuals on account of their category membership, it follows that changing either the specification of categories or the assignment of individuals to them will alter 'personal' probabilities. In relation to category specification, for example, recent research has suggested that obesity risk is better captured by waist circumference than by the more widely used body mass index (BMI). BMI lumps together highly fit muscular individuals with those carrying larger amounts of fat (Janssen, Katzmarzyk, & Ross, 2004). The **category** of persons with high BMIs may experience a higher aggregate rate of health problems despite including some very fit persons. Although the choice of risk markers can be empirically grounded in selection of the most accurate predictors, suboptimal risk models may provide sufficient predictive purchase to justify their adoption. Until perfect prediction is achieved, banishing risk, stronger predictive models will remain to be discovered. Many alternative models may offer a similar degree of prognostic power while marking different attributes as markers of risk. Each will assign different probabilities to at least some individuals.

*The informational management of 'personal' probabilities:* Individual location within an established set of risk categories will depend upon the availability of information which assigns individuals to one or other alternative. Hence, individuals can change their risk status by deciding whether to inquire further (Heyman, Henriksen, & Maughan, 1998). For instance, the children of a parent with Huntington's disease may opt to undergo a genetic test which will establish with certainty whether or not they will develop the disease, or may choose not to be tested, leaving their probability at 50%. Some individuals make this choice because they do not want to risk having to live with knowing that they will definitely develop the condition in later life (Leontini, 2010). Similarly, pregnant women who are informed of their age-related probability of carrying a fetus with

Down's syndrome can choose to leave their probability at this level. Alternatively, they can choose to undergo a test which will either increase or decrease their risk. However, they cannot know in advance which of these probabilities will apply to them. The woman quoted below (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 153) had ruled out diagnostic tests and abortion, but, nevertheless, managed her personal probability (expectation) by gambling that a negative screening test would bring reassurance.

*And if I had the serum screening test, that would let me know when it was a high risk or a low risk. And if it were a low risk, well, I could practically rule out having a Down's baby anyway. So that was brilliant anyway because that gave me peace of mind.* (Research interview with pregnant woman, aged 37 years, who accepted serum screening for chromosomal anomalies)

Although unusual, this way of responding illustrates the possibilities for informational probability management particularly well. Since about 5% of women who underwent this form of screening were judged to be at higher risk, her strategy yielded a 95% chance of relocating her to a lower risk status. But if she had screened at higher risk, she would have had to live with this status until the birth because she had ruled out invasive diagnostic testing.

*Acceptance of the inductive fallacy:* Probabilistic reasoning based on frequency observation requires more than working acceptance of the ecological fallacy. In addition, a conceptual leap must be made from the past to the future. Without this assumption, expectations cannot be grounded in empirical observation. But its adoption requires pragmatic acceptance of the inductive fallacy. What happened in the past will not necessarily recur in the future, as the European discovery of black swans in Australia during the nineteenth century illustrates<sup>8</sup>.

Mortality risks provide a good example of familiar statistical 'facts' which contain implicit inductive assumptions. Individuals in marked categories such as those of gender, social class and lifestyle, are deemed to carry their aggregate rates of occurrence as personal probabilities, as discussed above<sup>9</sup>. But these statistics can only be estimated inductively through extrapolation into the future from the longevity of those who have already died. Direct extrapolation carries the fundamental limitation that it does not allow for historical increases or decreases in life expectancy. Even if such trends are taken into account, some sort of extrapolation

from the past to the future is inescapable. Observed regularities provide a practically indispensable rough guide to expectations. However, a price has to be paid for heuristic simplification, as with acceptance of the ecological fallacy, discussed above. If the past ceases to provide a guide to the future because some unknown causal condition has changed, inductive inference will systematically mislead.

It will be argued in the next section that this limitation becomes inherently inescapable when preventative efforts have themselves potentially altered the circumstances surrounding a risk.

*The inductive prevention paradox:* The inductive prevention paradox arises when preventative efforts remove from sight the pristine conditions which existed previously, precluding assessment of their future necessity. This predicament arises regardless of whether the harm-reducing measure is presently efficacious, as long as those managing a contingency think that it might be. If the Aztecs did carry out human sacrifices before dawn every day in order to appease the sun god, then their action would have prevented them from observing whether the sun would have risen regardless, as modern readers may suspect. Furthermore, their belief system about this contingency would have prevented them from putting the efficacy of human sacrifice to the test on account of the irreversible damage which they feared might have resulted if the sun god had taken umbrage and departed. Certainty is not required, merely fear about what might happen (i.e., about contingency).

Regardless of its historical accuracy, this esoteric example illustrates a predicament which equally affects modern risk management at both the individual and collective level. To illustrate the former, a frail older person who is injured in a fall outside their home might decide that they cannot risk going out again. By staying at home, this person cuts off the supply of evidence which might have suggested that such precautions were unnecessary. Similarly, patients with long-term conditions taking prophylactic drugs, for instance controlling Crone's disease with anti-inflammatory drugs, cannot know whether experimentally stopping their consumption would trigger irreversible flare-ups. At the collective level, the 'war on drugs' continues to be fought despite its evident failure, in case its abandonment would trigger an irreversible explosion of addict numbers (Califano, 2007). However the impact of decriminalization could only be observed if the present legal regime were to be suspended<sup>10</sup>. In the same way,

cervical cancer vaccination has been recently introduced in the UK and elsewhere alongside the established technology of screening. Whether screening will become unnecessary in a population with a high vaccination rate cannot be easily assessed as long as both are being provided (Kiviat, Hawes, & Feng, 2008). But the termination of screening programmes can hardly be contemplated because their withdrawal might generate serious consequences.

This section has analyzed the complex, implicit structure of probabilistic reasoning, identifying counterintuitive implications such as multiple probabilities, informational probability management and preventative inductive loops.

### ***Time Periods/Time Frames***

The analysis presented so far has attempted to unpick the interpretive work entailed by three embedded elements in risk-thinking: the categorization of contingent outcomes; negative valuing of at least one of the categorized alternatives; and the development of probabilistic expectations based on heuristic acceptance of the ecological and inductive fallacies. The final main section of this chapter will consider the fourth necessary component of risk-thinking, the segmentation of time within temporal horizons, without which probabilities could not be calculated.

The Royal Society (1992) definition refers to a risk spanning a "*stated period of time*," recast in Table 27.1 as a time frame. The definition also offers a variant on time periods, adverse events which result "*from a particular challenge*". The latter implies an open time frame encompassing all the future consequences of a risk. Given that consequences can extend indefinitely into the future through chains of causation, removing the outer limit would render the inductive estimation of probabilities impossible. For instance, radiation from nuclear waste might harm health directly for many thousands of years, but its consequences could extend even further through reproductive transmission of genetic damage. Not surprisingly, the nuclear industry has favoured assessing the health impact of storing radioactive waste over a relatively short 500 year period (Atherton & French, 1999), thereby placing longer-lasting radioactivity outside the temporal horizon for risk assessment, and reducing its apparent net disutility.

The metaphor of a temporal horizon suggests a boundary beyond which consequences become invisible. However, the distance to the horizon is

set by the observer's focus, which is determined by a mix of cultural, organizational, and personal influences (Heyman et al., 2010, Chapter 5). Although easy enough to recognize when attention is drawn in that direction, awareness of the unavoidable arbitrariness of time frames is particularly susceptible to collective taking for granted. Unless social actors are oriented toward similar time frames, organized coordination of their risk management efforts becomes almost impossible. In particular, those who set different time frames will draw different utilitarian conclusions even if they share the same values and probabilistic expectations, as illustrated above in relation to nuclear waste. However, this requirement to segment time in order to estimate expected value flies in the face of multiple causal pathways which do not fit into single time segments. For instance, women who decline prenatal screening for Down's syndrome in order to avoid the stress of being tested can argue that this stress would itself cause long-term risk to the baby on account of the link between pregnant women's emotional well-being and fetal health, a concern illustrated by the following quotation (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 150).

**Interviewer:** *How did you feel in the weeks that you were waiting for the results?*

**Pregnant woman:** *Oh it was awful. The result, waiting . . . Cos I was saying, "Ee, this baby will come out miserable little" . . . I mean, when you read the books and that, you think, "Oh well, you know, three, four weeks". But, like, you're wishing your life away, and it's awful, you know. (Research interview with pregnant woman aged 40 years who opted for amniocentesis)*

The juxtaposition of multiple time frames in the above quotation well illustrates the heuristic simplification required to confine outcome scanning within a particular time period. For the present purpose of reviewing the relationship between risk and culture, three further examples of time-framing drawn from the field of health care will be outlined below: randomized controlled trials; confidential suicide inquiries; and smoking cessation programs.

Randomized controlled drug trials for curative cancer treatments usually measure clinical effectiveness through 5-year survival rates. Adoption of this time frame makes research comparable, provides a cut-off which limits research costs, and allows timely product development. But a price has to be paid for this and any other time frame, in that it excludes longer-term effects which can only be identified

through the relatively ineffective method of post-approval adverse reaction reports. For instance, an annual recurrence rate of 1–2% after 10 years has been found for one form of testicular cancer (Dearnaley, Huddart, & Horwich, 2001).

In the UK, confidential inquiries into untoward deaths such as suicides of former mental health service users are undertaken if the person had been in contact with health or social care professionals less than a year before their death. Again, a cut-off, however necessary, interpretively dismembers the chain of causation at an arbitrary point. A mental health service manager (personal communication to the author) indicated that his trust would prefer a shorter risk ownership period, of 6 months. This shift would narrow the scope of service risk 'ownership', thereby reducing the number of adverse events for which they would be held accountable. The probability of discharged patients being involved in adverse events would be reduced, although, unfortunately, patient welfare would not be improved. Any apparent risk reduction would result solely from changing the temporal boundaries within which probabilities were calculated.

Finally, UK smoking cessation programs have adopted a *de facto* time horizon of 2 weeks for identifying "successful" quitting (The NHS Information Centre, 2008). This temporal cut-off ensures a high success rate because it excludes anyone who relapses more than 2 weeks after the outcome is assessed, thereby potentially inflating the 'chance' of success'.

The micro- and macropolitics of temporal horizon setting can easily be identified when attention is drawn to them. Although shorter time frames do not necessarily generate substantially different risk assessments, they do work against questions about longer term consequences being asked. Despite its significance, time framing remains largely invisible. Indeed, the collective *de facto* failure to extend global time framing beyond the next few decades is condemning the entire human species to almost certain disaster (hardly risk) through runaway climate change and resource depletion.

### **Risk, Culture, and Collective Deletion**

The final step in the present analysis of the interrelationships between risk and culture will gingerly explore one important implication of identifying the unexamined shared presuppositions on which all societal manifestations of risk must rest. Although more assumed than discussed in the social

sciences, the presence of a collective silencing process is implied by all interpretivist theories which point to concealed presuppositions at the heart of any social order. This issue is discussed below in relation to the idea of collective “*deletion*” (Law, 1995; Van Loon, 2002).

Risks, like all forms of contingency, are located in the minds of observers, in contrast to particular events which merely happen. Because absolutely anything might occur, individuals cannot avoid choosing which possibilities to concern themselves with. However, societies and social groups could not function if their members attended to wholly different risks. Cultures protect their members from this chaotic fate by encouraging them to share their orientations toward what might happen. Such alignments, however fragile and temporary, bestow an aura of materiality on the collective selection of some but not other contingencies. Social actors managing a particular risk tend to adopt the “*natural attitude*” (Schutz, 1962), treating it as a material entity, while directing attention away from the culturally shared interpretive steps without which it could not ‘exist’.

Van Loon (2002, p. 54), drawing on Law (1995), has argued that the societal establishment of a risk requires a collective deletion process which distances the necessary interpretive foundations from conscious scrutiny. Deletion transforms a small selection from the unbounded realm of possibility into ‘real’ and controllable risks, which are therefore worthy of organized attention, while backgrounding all others as either invisible or inevitable and so unmanageable. For a risk to acquire the status of an (apparently) material entity, the societal deletion process must itself be deleted, and so on, creating a fragile spiral of shared silence.

This analysis raises the further question of how deletion might be detected. Unfortunately for social scientists, the postulated silencing process works against its direct observation. Although inevitably controversial, it is possible to point to breathtaking risk blindness as evidence of culturally fuelled deletion on the grounds that individual human beings, left to themselves, could not display the required levels of stupidity! To put this point less pugnaously, an observer who detects massive discrepancies between social actors’ goals and utilitarian calculations might infer collective deletion. For instance, during economic bubbles, including the one which collapsed in 2007, financial players appear idiotically impervious to the inevitable credit crunch end-point, despite their historic

recurrence. Overwhelming non-urgency about the looming catastrophe of human induced runaway global warming provides the most alarming example because of its historic imminence and long-term disastrous consequences. In relation to public health, despite strong evidence from migration studies that *myopenigenic* urban environments greatly increase the prevalence of short-sightedness (Morgana & Rose, 2005), this now common childhood condition is not viewed as a risk to be managed. In these and many other cases, the absence of high level concern or resource mobilization provides false reassurance that there is not a contingency to be managed. Unfortunately, however, for this line of reasoning, what appears entirely rational from one cultural perspective will look insane from another. A snake-handling preacher in Tennessee, shocked that the author of *Salvation on Sand Mountain* did not have any snakes in his car, asked, “*What’s the matter with you boys? . . . Are you crazy?*” (Covington, 1995).

Qualitative research offers more direct glimpses of the postulated deletion process at the individual level through inviting reflectivity. The following extract from a research interview with a doctor who advised pregnant women about prenatal screening for Down’s syndrome (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 42), unusually, captures the deletion process in an answer to a thought-provoking question about clinical practice.

**Interviewer:** *Do you talk to them [pregnant women] about Down’s syndrome, about what Down’s syndrome is?*

**Doctor:** *No, I don’t actually . . . interesting. And yet, of course, that is addressed in the film [provided for pregnant women], isn’t it? Perhaps I should do.* (Research interview with doctor who advised women about chromosomal screening)

Another doctor working at the same hospital appeared more resistant to undeletion of questions about the nature of Down’s syndrome (Heyman & Henriksen, 2001, p. 42).

**Interviewer:** *Do you talk about Down’s syndrome?*

**Doctor:** *No.*

**Interviewer:** *What Down’s syndrome is?*

**Doctor:** *No. I assume that they understand, and they’ve read the leaflet before they came to see me, because we see about eight or nine new bookings every clinic. We don’t really have time to go through this.* (Research interview with doctor who advised women about chromosomal screening)

As these quotations illustrate, the cultural existence of a risk depends as much on what is kept off the agenda as with what is articulated.

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored the relationship between risk and culture. Given the vast scope of the latter, the analysis has been confined to late modern societies in which contested risk issues take centre stage. The discussion has focused on one aspect of culture, the implicit and partly shared presuppositions on which risk understandings are predicated. A concern with low visibility processes can be seen in major social scientific theories of risk, although conceptualized differently. Late-modern risk consciousness, has been variously viewed as resulting from struggles over recognition of the ecological crisis (Beck, 1992), the vulnerabilities of particular cultures (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983), systemic role fragmentation (e.g., Japp & Kusche, 2008) and the evolution of a new mode for transmitting social power (O'Malley, 2008). The present chapter has homed in on the shared but unstated presuppositions underlying risk-thinking itself.

The best starting point for the analysis of risk-thinking is contingency, a universal, linguistically mediated human capacity to envisage multiple possible future, or past but unknown, outcomes. Although experienced as real, contingencies cannot exist in nature where events simply happen, but must be located in socially constituted minds. Given the unlimited scope of what might come to pass, cultures have to coordinate contingency selection in order to make coherent organized social interaction possible. This collective feat of alignment tends to be achieved outside conscious scrutiny, which would undermine the prevailing social order by invoking the infinity of possibility. The forging of sets of shared, although always fragile, working assumptions about contingencies occurs at two levels: firstly, the formulation of contingency itself (e.g., as the outcome of divine justice, predestined fate or quasi-random processes); and, secondly, the construction of specific contingencies within a generic interpretive framework. In relation to the present focus, the study of risk as a type of contingency can be differentiated from the study of particular risks.

For events to be viewed contingently, the unlimited variety of nature must be interpretively reduced to a small number of homogenized and differentiated categories, these categories valued (otherwise a

contingency would not matter), and analysis confined within a time frame which makes it quantifiable and manageable. Risk-thinking, the currently dominant approach to contingency, differs from others not in these three respects, but through its use of probabilistic reasoning. The universal numerical expression of probability as a proportion of unity conceals a variety of inference forms such as modelling and motivation assessment. The present chapter has focused on a third form, induction from observed frequencies, the most important method for grounding probabilities in health and other fields which deal with large numbers of cases. The ubiquity of probabilistic reasoning conceals its esoteric but required working assumptions: that members of an assigned category 'carry' its aggregated rate of risked outcome occurrence; that currently unpredicted variance within a category results from randomness; and that past patterns provide a reliable guide to the future.

This interpretive architecture involves more than a cultural curiosity. It has important implication for fields such as health and social care. Many probabilities of an outcome category can be derived from empirical observation, making chance itself (the merely metaphorical projection of uncertainty in the non-quantum world at least) open to management. Individuals can acquire higher risk status and all that may go with it, including anxiety, stigmatization, and moral imperatives, simply by being assigned to a category. Preventative endeavours can create self-sustaining epistemological loops. These and no doubt other non-obvious consequences of risk-thinking can easily be observed, but remain largely unexamined.

## Future Directions

An interstellar journalist depicting life on early twenty-first century earth might point out that a small proportion of its rampantly dominant species enjoy pampered lives, while many others struggle in abject poverty, and other forms of life become extinct at an ever-increasing rate. He might note the widespread although not globally universal influence of risk consciousness, but then contrast huge investment in warding off military threats with organized indifference toward looming climate change and resource depletion catastrophes.

Delving into human history, he might comment wryly on the well-known but ignored exemplar of Easter Island, whose inhabitants chopped down every tree, thereby depriving themselves of



a life-supporting environment, and even a means of escape. Finally, he would look to explain this breathtaking injustice and short-sightedness, pointing to the might of organized commercial interests and the collusion of both lobbied politicians and the prosperous minority. Seeking to illustrate his report with a topical story about ecological recklessness combined with global injustice, he might compare the justifiable outrage which greeted a catastrophic 2010 oil spill in the US waters of the Gulf of Mexico with relaxed indifference to much larger routine annual spillages in poor countries such as Nigeria and Ecuador.

Such gloomy reflections appear to overshadow the interpretive niceties analyzed in the present chapter, making the latter appear trivial by comparison. However, these soft considerations are directly connected to hard material realities. Looking at risk thinking as a form of contingency thinking reveals a fundamental contrast between the infinity of possibility and the organized selection of a few outcomes for organized attention. Analysis of the metaphorical lens of risk can draw attention to the narrowness of the light beam shed on possibility by any form of collectively activated risk management. It thereby serves a constructively anarchic function, transmitted via the potentially explosive power of ideas. Subversive questions can be asked about the ontology of risk objects (e.g. depression, terrorism), the value judgements implicit in perceptions of adversity (e.g. the birth of a disabled child), the soundness of probabilistic reasoning (e.g. the calculation of life expectancy) and the setting of time frames (e.g. 5-year survival for drug treatments). The considerations outlined in this chapter, and in more detail elsewhere (Heyman et al., 2010) point to important issues about risk, which the social sciences have neglected, perhaps because even the gurus of this field have tended in practice to neglect the prior question of what risk is.

## Notes

1. O'Malley (2008, p. 56) usefully distinguishes 'governmentality' from 'Governmentality'. The former generic term refers to the many interpretive frameworks within which social power is or has been transmitted (e.g. public torture and executions in medieval Europe). 'Governmentality' depicts a specific late-modern mode in which social power revolves around the internalization of risk-based moral imperatives directed at the behaviour of individuals.

2. A distinction needs to be made between the ubiquitous presence of risk-thinking in every domain of late-modern life and the variability of its influence. For example, the existence of risk prescriptions for eating does not mean that all individuals will view eating primarily or even partly from this perspective. But

a focus on risk-thinking does draw attention to one important, available interpretive slant with the potential to shape experience and decision-making about foods. Only in risk-oriented cultures is it even possible to actively take risks.

3. Professor Sir Roy Meadow was initially struck off the UK medical register for making gross statistical errors which led to the unsafe murder conviction of Sally Clark. Meadow had advised the court that the chance of a second, unexplained natural cot death in a family was about 73,000,000:1, but a case review concluded that this probability was actually 200:1. He was reinstated after appealing on the grounds that his expert testimony was given in good faith (Samanta, 2006). Meadow was considered to have erred by straying from medical to statistical matters about which he lacked competence. This tragic example illustrates the quagmires which all self-proclaimed risk 'experts', including critical social scientists, get themselves into. The above judgment also raises questions about the status of medical expertise itself since probabilistic reasoning plays a fundamental role in its knowledge base.

4. Readers who have undergone elementary statistics courses may recognize the term 'contingency table' in relation to the chi-square test. A two-dimensional contingency table relates two or more categories of two variables, allowing conditional probabilities to be inductively estimated (e.g., the chances of men versus women living beyond their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday). The computational simplicity of such calculations belies the complex and problematic tacit categorisation processes on which they are predicated..

5. Luhmann (1993, p. 23) takes a different view, arguing that, "*Only in the case of risk, does decision making (that is to say contingency) play a role*". One difficulty with this analysis is that it generates borderline cases which might or might not be awarded the status of contingency because opinions can differ as to whether outcome probabilities can be influenced. Luhmann (1993, p. 26) has to insist rather primly that this attribution does not depend "*on the whim of the observer*". Such awkwardness can be avoided in a way which remains true to the experience of contingency, for example, of somebody waiting to hear whether or not they have terminal cancer, by separating a sense of alternative outcomes being possible from views about their controllability; and by insisting that contingency is properly located in the mind, not in events, which merely happen.

6. Although not uncontroversial, this widely accepted boundary is empirically fragile, since nobody knows the point at which global warming will become self-sustaining and beyond human control. Boundary-setting, however dubious, provides the necessary starting point for the challenging task of mobilizing international prophylaxis. This coordinating function can only work effectively if doubts, however obvious, are tentatively set aside.

7. The present author is indebted to Jaan Valsiner for drawing his attention to this historical connection. The analysis of contingency also resonates with Sartre's *Nausea* (1938/2000) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943/2003), but the present author does not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to risk pursuing these connections.

8. Surprise may arise from event rarity (e.g., a large asteroid colliding with Earth), or from sampling limitations, as with Europeans not observing black swans before they discovered Australia. (However, the notion that all swans are white might be conserved through the classificatory manoeuvre of defining black swans as a separate categorical entity.) Both kinds of jolt to expectation arise from practical limitations to inductive reasoning, which can never show that non-observed events might not happen in the future, or be discovered elsewhere.

9. For example, people living in areas of greater socioeconomic deprivation can obtain better annuity rates because they are assigned the lower life expectancy associated with their locality.

10. Recent press reports (e.g., *Scientific American*, 7/04/09), have drawn attention to the decriminalization of previously illegal drug consumption in Portugal. As this example illustrates, the inductive prevention paradox can be broken, but only through a leap into the unknown, which may be justified through theoretical analysis. Others can then learn from the pioneers.

11. The author is indebted to Lisa Reynolds of City University for this instructive example.

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### Abstract

In this chapter we discuss how people in present societies construct historical narratives. This topic, related to the field of the teaching and learning of history, extends to the debates in the last decade about the “history wars” maintained in numerous societies. All these cases share a process of consumption and production of historical narratives. To this respect, school history master narratives are analyzed in terms of six common features. On the other hand, a theoretical distinction between Romantic and Enlightened functions of teaching of history is presented. From this point of view, significant educational developments and research in this field are analyzed, showing the limitations and possibilities of both functions. Finally, the relevance of socio-cultural theories for the field of learning and teaching history is also presented, along with future developments in this area of study.

**Keywords:** learning history, historical narratives, national identities, constructivism

Questions regarding how people construct historical narratives in current societies have taken a center stage in recent public and academic discussion. Intense debates are taking place in different countries about the kind of historical contents that should be taught in the schools and through other formal and informal educational devices (Seixas, 2004). These debates started in the mid-1990s and are still alive in many countries. A vivid example is found in the recent controversy around the dictates of the Texas Board of Education in the United States. As a recent article in the *New York Times* (February 11, 2010) reports,

“Conservative activists on the Texas Board of Education say that the authors of the Constitution intended the United States to be a Christian nation. And they want America’s history textbooks to say so.” (Shorto, 2010)

The saliency and significance of this issue is revealed in the “History Wars” sustained in numerous societies

throughout the last decade (see Carretero, 2011, and Nakou and Barca, 2010 for comparative studies of different countries). As it will be shown below, these debates in different parts of the planet are the result of social and political changes related to the increasing globalization process and their implications on national identities (see Carretero, 2011, for Europe and Latin America; Eklof, Holmes, & Kaplan, 2005 for post-Soviet Russia; and The Academy of Korean Studies, 2005, for African and Asian countries).

### Inventing the Nation: Tailoring the Past

It is by no means casual that in a short span of time, the teaching of history—a topic often reserved to experts—became a prominent issue in furious public debates across the globe. History wars have led to the revision of the historical narratives in which, as Hobsbawm said, “the nation is invented” (1990; see also, Berger, Eriksonas, & Mycock, 2008). Research conducted in several

countries in the last 10 years has documented how the production of school historical narratives is closely related to the construction of national discourses (Carretero, 2011; Carretero & Kriger, 2011; Van Sledright, 2008). Interestingly, this revision of historical narratives coincides with, and probably originates from, the intensification of the globalization process and its social, political, and economic effects. Profound transformations such as the crisis of political identities, the emergence of new discussions about nationalisms, and the re-signification of the question “Who are we?” in any society affect the history that is taught to young people. In the context of the European Union, for example, several countries have undertaken a reinterpretation of the “national histories” taught in schools in light of the need to promote the notion of a common future. In a different context, Russia and the United States offer two salient examples of similar dynamics.

Within a very short period of time, from 1991 to 1992, all the history school contents in the former Soviet Union, as well as in many communist countries that were under its influence, were drastically modified (Ahonen, 1992, 1997). This entailed, among other things, that millions of students of different ages received a radically different version of their national past, and of the past in general, than what they had been taught in school up until then. After one decade and a half of introducing a liberal view of history in the schools, Russia is now again reconsidering its position about essential issues as Stalinism, in order to provide the Russian students a more positive view of their own past. Dramatic controversies have taken place in the last 5 years about the educational decision, originated in Vladimir Putin’s office, to require the use of an obligatory history textbook in any Russian secondary school (Halpin, 2007; Maier, 2005; Piattoeva, 2009).

In the United States, the neoconservative elite, which seized power in the 2000 and 2004 elections, impugned the new school-taught history contents, which had been designed by numerous specialists as a result of a meticulous, professional, and widely democratic work (NCHS, 1994; Symcox & Wilschut, 2009). The above-mentioned debate about the Texas Board of Education (Shorto, 2010) is clearly a continuation of these heated debates. Uncovering a new angle of this issue, Wineburg’s study on the communication across generations about the Vietnam War shows the process of

production of a national rhetoric that homogenizes popular views despite the complexities of the lived past. Wineburg explains how, “In a curious twist of historical revision, Vietnam, in the eyes of these young people, had become a war waged without supporters,” and uses the concept of “occlusion” to describe the process by which “stories, images, and cultural codes . . . become muted in the transmission from one generation to the next” (Wineburg et al., 2007, pp. 65–66).

That the history taught to young people is tailored to fit with current national discourses had already been evidenced in comparative analyses of the history curricula. Several of these studies show that the versions of the recent past taught to the citizens of historically related societies could not differ more from each other. In some cases, mandatory school contents are presented in an outright biased way and full of inexactitudes or falsities. In other cases, the interpretation of the past presents a vision that is hardly acceptable to the country to which the comparison is made. For example, Spanish school textbooks have traditionally omitted essential issues on the American colonization, such as the subjugation of indigenous people or slavery as generalized social and economic practices. In contrast, such issues are highlighted in Mexican or Brazilian textbooks (Carretero, Jacott, & López-Manjón, 2002). Similar findings are reported for France/Algeria, Great Britain/India, China/Japan (Ferro, 1984/2002) and Korea/Japan (The Academy of Korean Studies, 2005).

These different cases reveal intellectual and educational movements in which a reconsideration of the past is emerging, favoring the profound revision of national and local histories both at the academic level and at the school level. Despite the particularities of each case, they have certain features in common:

- a) The search for a significant relationship between the representation of the past and formation of identity, whether national, local, or cultural;
- b) The conflict between mythical and objectified histories;
- c) The social need to reelaborate past conflicts in function of the undertaking of future projects, and
- d) The still incipient utility of generating a comparison between alternative histories of the same past.

## ***Evolving Approaches to the Study of the Production of Historical Narratives***

Scholars in the field of history education have approached these phenomena in varied ways. Ferro's seminal study (1984/2002) on how the past is taught to children around the world introduced the important distinction between official and unofficial histories, the first being the narratives constructed and maintained by the Nation-State and the second being the counter-narratives of minority groups. Further studies have examined this distinction in more depth. The recent history wars revived an interest in studying the processes of ideological production and distribution of official histories, revealing through the analysis of curricula, textbooks, and the narratives of teachers and students how a hegemonic social and cultural device—the school history—contributes to create the cognitive and affective foundations of “imagined communities” (Wertsch & Rozin, 2000). Wineburg and colleagues (2007, p.70) in turn, discuss this in terms of Michael Schudson's (1992, p. 64) distinction between, *interest theories*, in which cultural meanings are predetermined by an underlying economic and political agenda, or *semiotic theories*, in which cultural products become, by definition, expressions of the search for meaning (see also Valsiner, 2010).

Building upon and extending this tradition of research, a new and important line of questioning has emerged: How do the conflicting narratives found in academic and public debates and in school textbooks, manifest in students' minds? How do the features characteristic of the process of social production of historical narratives translate into the processes of individual consumption of historical narratives? This paper expands on this last line of inquiry.

### **The Consumption of Historical Narratives *Pablos' Construction of the Reconquest: An Example***

The following example of a historical narrative offered by a Spanish college student illustrates the depth of these emerging questions. We will draw upon this example to discuss different layers of the problem, and corresponding lines of inquiry about the processes of production and consumption of historical narratives. The narrative in this example was collected during an interview conducted by one of the authors as part of a research project investigating the development of understanding of causal explanations in history (Carretero, López-Manjón,

& Jacott, 1997). The goal of the study was to determine if college students were able to understand significant historical events based on abstract socio-economic and political causes, as opposed to personalized motives that tend to be more concrete and typical of younger students. The interviewer asked a group of college students to explain what led to the defeat of the Arabs in the battle over Granada in 1492, when the last Muslim ruler surrendered his kingdom to Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. This victory, which led to the definitive expulsion of the Arabs from the Iberian Peninsula (the territory that is Spain and Portugal today), is considered an essential moment in Spanish history because it represents the starting point of the Spanish Empire, followed soon after by Columbus' “discovery” of America, in an expedition financed by the aforementioned king and queen.

Pablo, one of the interviewees (21 years old), provided an account of the victory of the Catholic monarchs that included most of the staple facts and motifs of current historiographic research that has made its way into high-school and college history courses. Dissecting the various pieces of his extensive account we learn that:

- The Arabs first arrived in 711 and expanded throughout the peninsula within a few years.
- They encountered a collection of disparate medieval Christian kingdoms that were establishing in the Iberian Peninsula since the collapse of the Roman Empire.
- There were many and frequent fights among Christians rulers, who on occasions allied with Muslim rulers in an attempt to defeat their opponents and conquer their territories.
- At other times Arabs, Christians, and Jews coexisted and developed peacefully.
- The frontiers of Arab and Christian domains ebbed and flowed as different kingdoms expanded and contracted throughout the 800 years in which the Arabs resided in the Iberian Peninsula.
- The Catholic king and queen were monarchs of the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, respectively.

Pablo's account displayed a relatively well-developed capacity to form complex causal explanations, which is not uncommon among students of his age and background. He considered multiple social, economic, and political factors, he weaved together long-term and mid-term processes with more immediate events, and he kept an accurate

record of the chronology of key events and turning points. Yet, shortly after completing this account Pablo paused for a few seconds and then offered an epilogue to his explanation that caught the attention of the interviewer: “Well, at any rate, the most important thing, which I didn’t mentioned before, is that nobody likes his own nation to be invaded.” The interviewer probed what he meant: “Which nation are you thinking about?” to which Pablo replied: “Spain! The Muslims had invaded Spain since 711. So really, what the Catholic King and Queen did was to finish up the Reconquest.”

Pablo’s epilogue revealed two competing narratives that coexisted in his mind. At this point, the narrative of the “Reconquest,” (or the Christian reconquering of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim invaders) displaced the more current historiographic version that organized the first part of his interview. Interested by this apparent contradiction, the interviewer probed further (see Carretero, Kriger, & Lopez, 2010; Lopez, 2010).

**Interviewer:** *Why did this happen (the Reconquest)?*

**Pablo:** *Well, because the Arabs had wounded, so to speak, the Spanish Christian pride. Then, as usual, you have to recover something that was taken away, at least you have to try, it doesn’t matter how long it takes.*

**Interviewer:** *And the area that you have drawn as al Andalus [Arab territory, about one-third of the Iberian Peninsula] was it, at that time, rightfully Arabic? What do you think?*

**Pablo:** *Well it is true that several centuries had passed, and it might be that they (the Arabs) had persuaded themselves that they had the same right as the Christians, or even more. But I still think that if that was at first a Christian territory ... what happened is that it took them a long time to regain their territory. I still think it’s legitimate Christian territory.*

**Interviewer:** *OK, we’ve been using about the word ‘Reconquest.’ Tell me a little about what that term means to you?*

**Pablo:** *Well, for me, to reconquer is to recover a territory that it was assumed it was mine. You know, if I have this whole table and I’m studying in it, and if you, or another guy comes along and ... if you ask me, then maybe I’d say half and half, maybe ... But if you just come and take over, pushing me out bit by bit, little by little ... if I put my books here but you still come a little closer ... Well, there has to come a time when I get angry and say: ‘Hey, what are you doing! Let me ...!’ But what we are talking about now is something of much more importance, because what’s mine is mine! Then, in my view, the goal of the*

*Reconquista was to retrieve something that was mine and had been forcibly taken away.*

On logical grounds, the first narrative undermines the second: The Christian kingdoms did not have control over the whole territory, and they did not conform to any sort of united entity. Thus, Spain, the historical subject of the Reconquest, did not exist when the Arabs arrived in 711, nor during the hundreds of years when they occupied the Iberian Peninsula. In consequence, strictly speaking, there was no territory to be reconquered. The first portion of Pablo’s account reflects this understanding. However, the very use of the concept of *Reconquista*, prominent in the more traditional historiography, determines how Pablo ultimately makes sense of the past. He draws upon the “natural anger” that anyone would experience when “having one’s nation invaded” to explain the moral force that drove the Catholic Queen and King to the final victory. Then, he redefines the unsteady and conflictive expansion of the Christian kingdoms as a long and concerted effort on the part of the Christian rulers guided by the shared ontological purpose of “recuperating” their vast territory lost to the Arabs since 711.

### ***Contradictions and Ruptures in the Construction of Historical Narratives***

How can Pablo sustain a complex causal explanation of this historical event together with a mythical account of it? The coexistence of these two competing historical narratives in Pablo’s mind suggests that the process of consumption, and the related attempts of meaning making, involve perhaps inevitable contradictions and ruptures. How do these happen? Where do they arise? How does the individual manage them? How do we account for them? These questions are central to the purpose of this paper, and the following pages discuss different approximations to them. Some emphasizes the socio-cultural processes that shape the individual’s construction of historical narratives, while other approximations emphasize the individual cognitive processes involved. We search also for interaction between the two.

#### **THE Pervasiveness of Ontological Narratives**

Although Pablo demonstrates a rather abstract and well-organized understanding of the past that derives from the recent circulation of a new historiographic narrative in school textbooks and public discourses, he simultaneously reveals a deep

internalization of an ontological and essentialist concept of the Spanish nation that is pervasive in his society. The following excerpt from a classical textbook (Alvarez, 1965/1997) captures that view that once dominated the teaching of history in Spain, and still today has a strong hold on a variety of cultural artifacts such as popular literature and movies, monuments, and casual conversations. See Box 28.1.

Demonstrating the pervasiveness and importance of this narrative of the *Reconquista*, former Prime Minister Jose María Aznar, claimed in a recent speech “the Arabs never apologized for having invaded Spain 13 centuries ago” (*El País*, September 23, 2006).

Content analysis of Spanish textbooks and their changes in the last decades (Carretero, 2011; Valls, 2007) coincide on the importance and ubiquity of the Reconquest narrative as a central constituent of the national identity. The construction of Spain and the Spaniards as heroic subjects, opposite to, and able to overcome the Arabs, is a purposeful cultural production. Spanish collective memory was first created during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a basic support for the construction of a national identity, and it has since been maintained on a basic opposition to the Arab identity (Alvarez Junco, 2011; Boyd, 1996). Within it, the notion of “reconquering” serves to organize the past in a narrative structure that defines a heroic character (Spain) endowed with an intrinsic purpose (recuperating its

territory). Both elements are rooted in an ontological assumption: Spain, the essential national spirit, preexisted to the foundation of the nation itself and led the actions of its people toward a predefined destiny. Once the central motif of the Reconquest is introduced in the account of the 800-year presence of the Arabs in the Iberian Peninsula, the past is reorganized in such way that serves to justify past, present, and future actions. In a mere chronological sense, 800 years is quite a long process to “recuperate” a territory. Still, national narratives tend to use time in such a mythical way<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Narratives as Cultural Tools***

Socio-cultural analyses of school history contents show how closely these constitute “official narratives” that purposefully seek to determine subjects’ representations of the past. The nation’s past, present, and future are organized in official versions of the so-called “nation’s history” that are distributed by schools. These official versions carry an argumentative continuity: an “identitary us” is constituted, and the typical nineteenth-century conception of the “nation” as a community of destiny (Smith, 1991) is transmuted into new imagined communities. Hobsbawm (1990) defined this as “the nation’s programmatic mythology.”

“National histories” were born to be taught. They are contained in a variety of records such as monuments and patriotic celebrations. Patriotic rituals play an important role in many countries. The case of Latin America is telling. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, or Uruguay, at least four historical and patriotic commemorations take place in school every year. They consist of dramatizations and discussions about the events, battles, and national heroes related to the processes of independence of each of these countries. In the United States we find these kinds of activities in many historical sites and monuments (Beckstead, 2012), besides the activities performed at schools. These scenarios, rather ignored until now by researchers, convey an important amount of historical content that influences students’ understanding of the history contained in the formal curriculum and textbooks (Carretero, 2011). Students consume and use national historical narratives that they learn not only from the history textbooks but also from these kinds of events, in and out of the school. The school record contained in textbook narratives is probably one of the most important and effective means in determining how people consume the narratives produced in their respective societies. School

#### **Box 28.1 The Reconquest: Asturias, León, and Castile**

The Reconquest: this is how we recall the struggle sustained by Christians during almost eight centuries against the Arabs in order to expel them from Spain.

Spain is among the nations that have contributed the most to the world’s civilization and had greater influence in world history.

To prove this, it is enough to mention: its defense of Europe during the Reconquest, when she stood between Europe and the Arabs; the discovery, colonization and civilization of America, as well as the heroism she deployed in the Independence War, which contributed to Europe’s salvation from Napoleon’s Caesarism.

This Spain is your Motherland. Know her history. Always take from her the virtuous and heroic examples offered to you by your ancestors and try to be their continuator at all times.



versions, usually heroic and celebratory, unite stories with different degrees of importance in a long narrative chain that links them by virtue of the role they play in the construction of what we might call the nation's "saga." Most of these sagas adopt a teleological form; destiny is already contained in the origins, and knowledge of the "roots" of a nation is indispensable for knowing how to act in the future. As Alridge (2006) and Straub (2005) have shown, these "master narratives" pervade underneath a variety of specific contents and through time. Although specific narratives may change frequently, these underlying master narratives rarely change, and manifest once and again in subsequent revisions. From the perspective of socio-cultural psychology, official narratives on the nation's origin constitute cultural tools (Wertsch & Rozin, 2000) that configure schematic templates in students' minds. These schematic templates define the underlying structure of historical narratives and of people's understanding of them.

#### USES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL FORMATS OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Although historical knowledge does not only occur in a narrative format, it often does. Barton and Levstik (2004) distinguish two specific types of narratives that appear prominently in education (and in other cultural practices): individual narratives and national narratives. The typical uses of these narrative formats have profound implications for students' construction of historical understanding.

Individual narratives focus on the personal lives of important historical figures, as opposed to those whose focus are more abstract entities and events such as economic systems, civilizations, processes of social change, and impersonal concepts of this kind. We can all recall these individual narratives from our own school experience: stories about Columbus, Julius Caesar, or Napoleon would be classic examples. Paxton (1999) and Alridge (2006), in comprehensive analyses of American textbooks, show that the narratives about "great" men and events that led America to an ideal of progress and civilization continue to be the prototypical way in which many historians and textbooks spread knowledge. Frequently, these figures are studied in isolation from other individuals and events that constitute its historical context, while the more controversial aspects of their lives are not reflected.

The use of these types of individual narratives is justified with the idea that a more abstract content

results in greater difficulty in understanding, and lower levels of student motivation. As pointed out by Barton and Levstik (2004) these individual narratives have the power to humanize historical contents. However, this kind of narrative greatly influences the way students understand and analyze information about the past, and they may result in a series of typical biases that hinder a more complex understanding. When the narratives are purely personal or individual, there is an absence of structural causal explanations based on social, political, or economic factors. In many instances they personify a historic event in a particular character, which is represented as the main actor and the cause of its development (Carretero et al., 1994; Hallden, 1994). We find examples of such embodiment in the "discovery" of America by Christopher Columbus, or the emancipation process by Abraham Lincoln (Alridge, 2006). This simplification of historical contents decontextualizes the events of the past, and relegates to oblivion other characters or social groups that participated in them.

National narratives are another type of narrative frequently found in schools and in daily life. In schools across the world, the study of history often focuses on the history of their own country. This is not surprising if we consider, as we will discuss later, how the teaching of history emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. National narratives diminish the importance of other stories: Students do not have access to the most controversial aspects of history, hindering their understanding of conflicts, dilemmas, and ultimately, the reality of democratic societies in which they live (Barton & McCully, 2010). In this way, they determine the type of explanations that students give to critical historical events. For example, in American textbooks, the vast majority of national narratives are organized around the concepts of progress and freedom, and students reuse these motifs to explain past events (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Thus, the resistance of Native Americans in the face of waves of European settlers is seen as an obstacle to achieve progress, and the Vietnam War is justified as an American response to the need to bring freedom to that country. In relation to other countries, where also native history is also part of the culture, similar contents can be found in both textbooks (Carretero, 2011; Clark, 2007) and students' minds (Carretero, Gonzalez, Rodriguez, & Carreño, 2010).

## *Features of the Production and Consumption of Historical Narratives*

Several studies (Carretero, 2011; Carretero & Kriger, 2011; Van Sledright, 2008) describe the features and functioning of historical narratives and explain their presence in the production of school history textbooks and other cultural artifacts that support the Nation-States. We can distinguish six salient characteristics:

- 1) Exclusion-inclusion as logical operation contributing to establish the historical subject.
- 2) Identity as both cognitive and affective anchor.
- 3) Mythical and heroic character.
- 4) Simplification of historical events around the main motive of search of freedom.
- 5) National narratives offer fundamental moral examples and directions.
- 6) Ontological and essentialist conception of the nation and its nationals.

Most of these features have been identified and explained in the process of production of historical narratives by cultural media (school history textbooks among others). What is less clear is how they manifest in minds of citizens who appropriate these narratives. A brief example will assist us in elucidating these features, both in the production and the consumption of these narratives.

Consider the following excerpt from a dialogue between Federico, a 6-year-old Argentinean boy who describes to a Spanish interviewer a school activity in which he and his friends dramatized the events of May 25th, celebrated in the country as the day of Independence from Spain. After recounting several details of their reenactment, the interviewer asked: "But, what was the celebration about?" to which Federico answered, "Well, I do not know really, but I think it was when we were able to be free." Probing his thinking, the Spanish interviewer paraphrased his words asking: "When *we* were able to free?" Immediately, Federico corrected "well . . . you were not. We were. This is to say, we, the Argentineans." "Oh, well, it is true," the Spanish visitor conceded, "you, the Argentineans, were free, but why, how did it happen?" Federico responded, in a very frank manner, "Well, I am not sure if I understood well the whole thing. I better ask the teacher again . . . but I think we were free when . . . we, the Argentineans, escaped from the Pharaoh" (Carretero, 2007, p. 127).

## **EXCLUSION-INCLUSION AS A LOGICAL OPERATION THAT CONTRIBUTES TO ESTABLISH THE HISTORICAL SUBJECT**

A salient feature of this example is the mastery of the distinction between "we" (in this case "Argentineans," but of course the historical subject could be of any nationality) and "the others" that the child shows. As different studies have shown, this distinction concerning the national "we" is already mastered by children between 6 and 8 years of age (Barret & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005), even though children are not able at that age to define precise attributes of this category. In our example, it is interesting to note that this national "we" is not only social and political, but also historical (Carretero, 2011). The very explicit "not you, but we, the Argentineans" evidences that Federico is already making a basic distinction based on a logical operation of inclusion vs. exclusion, which he will probably continue to use in his learning of history, in and out of school. Typically, this logical operation is performed in such a way that positive aspects are almost always assigned to the national "we," while any critical or negative aspects are assigned to "the others" (Todorov, 1998). Likewise, negative features of the national "we" tend to be ignored or justified. It is reasonable to presume that historical master narratives will be learned and developed later on based on this fundamental distinction (Barton and Levstik, 1998), where the national "we" is being used as very well-defined category.

## **IDENTITY AS BOTH COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE ANCHOR**

The distinctions concerning a national "we" vs. the "others" is probably based on emotional and affective features as much as on cognitive ones (Barret & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005). This emotional dimension facilitates a strong identification process. In this example, Federico uses the narrative in such way that includes him in a particular community, the Argentinean one. In this regard, it is also interesting to notice how the process of categorization in Federico's mind draws no distinction between past and present times: the "we" of the present that includes him (Argentineans) is the same "we" of the past (the patriots of the Virreinato del Rio de la Plata). This overlap, which makes no sense from a historical point of view (Argentina did not exist at the time of independence. *Sensu strictu* they were inhabitants of the Virreinato del Rio de la Plata,

not Argentines), makes perfect sense to Federico because, as the master narrative dictates, the essence of the Argentinean nation pre-existed the facts.

In order to fully understand how historical narratives are constructed it is essential to know much more precisely how these emotional and affective components of historical contents influence students' minds from an early age, and in particular, how they provide support to the logical distinctions of exclusion and inclusion.

#### MYTHICAL AND HEROIC CHARACTERS

One of the main differences between historical and mythical explanations is precisely the absence of time in the latter. It is totally irrelevant, for example, to know Oedipus' date of birth or any other specific temporal markers. Myths and mythical figures and narratives are usually free of time restrictions. In contrast, one can say that history is making its appearance when time and its constraints are introduced into a narrative. In our example, it is clear that Federico's understanding of Argentinean independence events does not include a firm grasp of the temporal dimension. Pharaoh's intrusion aside, it is telling that he links elements from a narrative of liberation in ancient Egyptian times with a narrative of liberation of the Latin American bourgeoisie during the nineteenth-century revolutions. In fact, this is a common characteristic of historical understanding at this age, in which children find it very difficult to understand and use chronologies and other conventional representations of time in history (Barton, 2002; Carretero, Asensio, & Pozo, 1991). The appeal of mythical national narratives probably builds on this developmental trait. Usually, children are not able to master chronological aspects of historical time until they are approximately 12 years of age.

One could hypothesize that as students grow and improve their understanding of historical time, core mythical elements of their historical narratives would subside. However, if we recall Pablo's account of the Reconquest of Spain from the Arabs, it is clear that mythical features remain in the historical narratives of children older than 6 years old. Although the temporal frame may adjust to disciplinary canons, the heroic tone and the essentialist understanding of the nation evidence the permanence of mythical narratives' core elements. This is, indeed, a striking permanence, at least from a developmental perspective. Besides the cognitive-developmental models of historical understanding, other developmental

theories would predict the gradual disappearance of mythical elements. For example, well-established theories of narrative development (Egan, 1997) claim that human beings develop a narrative ability that goes through a number of stages: somatic (0 to 2 years of age), mythical (3 to 6 years), heroic (7 to 10 years), philosophical (11 to 15 years) and ironic (15 years of age and onward). Thus, if national historical narratives often maintain their mythical and heroic components even during adolescence and adulthood, times at which individuals should be able to generate philosophical and ironic historical narratives, it is worth investigating what kind of socio-cultural mechanisms yield this result.

#### SIMPLIFICATION OF HISTORICAL EVENTS AROUND THE MAIN MOTIVE OF SEARCH FOR FREEDOM

National narratives tend to simplify the enormous complexity of historical processes and events around core common moral themes. These moral themes typically relate to the sense of destiny portrayed in teleological accounts of the past. Several studies have documented how this feature manifests in students' thinking. For example, Barton and Levstik (2004) and Penuel and Werstch (2000) studied how students understand the process of independence of their own nations, drawing upon a historical master narrative in which the search for freedom is the core theme, and the starting point of the new community. Their representations consist of a network of rather concrete concepts. Independence resulted from the intention of a group of individuals to be free from some form of domination. In the case of many American, African, and Asian countries, the independence narratives obviously relate to the domination of one of the European nations: Spain, the United Kingdom, France, and so forth (The Academy of Korean Studies, 2005; Ferro, 1984/2002). Abstracts and complex causal factors, such as economic relationships and interests, political developments, and international influences are basically absent of these narratives, even in the case of adolescents and adults (Carretero, López Manjón, & Jacott, 1997). The following examples (Carretero, Gonzalez et al., 2010) illustrate this feature as interviewees explain how the independence of their respective countries came to happen:

12-year-old Dario responded that: "*Yes, the Spanish dominated... It was when they used us as slaves, wasn't it? And we wanted independence.*"

Guillermo, one of the adult subjects interviewed expresses: “*Well, we said to ourselves, this is enough. And we were able to say this to the Spanish.*”

Moreover, it is common to find in such historical narratives that social groups and social conditions that put into question the central theme of the narrative are excluded or represented in misleading ways. For example, although a significant number of Argentinean children and adolescents think that Spaniards treated the American “colonists” as slaves, at the same time they ignore the enormous economic significance of the slavery of the African American population, which, in all countries, was maintained by the colonists well after the independence (Carretero, 2011).

Along similar lines, in the United States the historical master narrative of search for freedom organizes around the theme of progress (Barton & Levstik, 1998). This tendency to consider that society undergoes ever-increasing progress—both technological and in regards to the standards of living—is quite naïve and gives rise to oversimplification in historical understanding. Insofar progress is deemed as the teleological direction of a society, the complexity of a nation’s experience must be disguised.

#### **NATIONAL NARRATIVES OFFER FUNDAMENTAL MORAL EXAMPLES AND DIRECTIONS**

The moral dimension of historical master narratives is quite an obvious one, but unfortunately it has not been explored enough, particularly from an empirical point of view (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Interestingly enough, on the classical debates on the nature of historical knowledge, the view of White (1987) about historiography as a production of narratives having an important moral component has had an increasing influence. But this idea has not received much attention as an inspiring hypothesis in order to test if school master narratives are producing moral interpretations in students’ minds. To this respect, our expectation would be a positive one because historical contents are presented very often to students in a way closer to moral stories than to historiographical explanations.

National historical narratives, both in and out of school, play an important role as moral vectors, because they are designed with that goal in mind. This purpose is accomplished in at least two ways. First, the master narrative establishes the distinction between “good” and “bad” options, people, and decisions. Typically, the first one is associated with

the national “we,” and the second one is related to “they.” Thus, the logical and moral truth is always on the “we” side. For example, in our research (Carretero, Kriger, & Lopez, 2010) we have found how young adolescents considered that Christians have the right to “recuperate” the territory, inhabited by the Arabs for 800 years, because it was considered “Spanish territory.” On the contrary, according to the same students, the Christians have no right to conquer the American territories because they belonged to the natives.

Second, master narratives offer living examples of civic virtue, particularly of loyalty. As it can be easily inferred, this loyalty function was essential in the construction of the nation, and it can still be found in many symbolic forms. For example, if we consider the way that the World Soccer Championship is followed by any citizen in the world, it would be inconceivable that a citizen could support any team belonging to a different nation, even though that team may play better.

#### **ONTOLOGICAL AND ESSENTIALIST CONCEPTION OF THE NATION AND ITS NATIONALS**

In their effort to simplify the account of events, national narratives also reduce the subject of history to particular groups who participated in the events and achieved the predestined goals. This is an extension of the function of master narratives discussed earlier. The subject of national narratives may well be a collective one, but its features coincide with those of one single and particular group. We can anticipate that in the studies discussed above, the historical subjects of students’ narratives of Independence are influential Caucasian colonists, most of them established merchants and landowners. They are the sole protagonists of the narrative because they embody the struggle for freedom or progress. Interestingly, students tend to identify this generic and idealized subject with the present whole population of the nation, similar to what we saw earlier where students identify the “we” of the past with the “we” of the present. A clear example of this effect can be found in the historical meaning of the statement “We the people . . .” in the U.S. Constitution. Probably most students think that this subject included each and every inhabitant of the new nation, missing its rather restricted meaning that excluded the African American and Native American population, along with women.

Similarly, the end result or main achievement portrayed in these narratives is represented in ontological terms. This end result is the creation of the nation, but the nation is understood by most of the subjects as an essentialist entity that preexists the very process of creation. Pablo's account of the Reconquista, and Federico's account of the Independence, both illustrate this feature. Respectively, they consider that Spain and Argentina existed much before the historical formation of each nation. The national essence exists independently of historical developments. Thus, in one of our studies (Carretero, Gonzalez, et al., 2010), Argentinians (young students and adults) were asked if the colonists who participated in the first political demonstration in favor of a broader political autonomy by 1810 were Argentinians. As a matter of fact, and *sensu strictu* they were not Argentinians yet, because they were colonists questioning the political power of Spain. Thus, taking into account that this event happened 8 years before the Independence took place, our participants considered those colonists as definitely Argentinians because, as some expressed, they think Argentina and the Argentinians always existed. Thus, it can be concluded that the historical process of being member of a Nation-State tends to be seen as something that is already predetermined, in an ontological and essentialist way, and not as a result of different political, social, and economic influences (Leinhardt & Ravi, 2008).

### **The Hidden Tension of Romantic and Enlightened Goals of the Teaching of History**

So far we have discussed the construction of historical narratives, emphasizing the function they serve in supporting the construction of national identities. We have highlighted the mythical format that these narratives often adopt as they rely on ontological and essentialist concepts of the nation, and the resulting discursive functions they serve. But if national narratives were the only element in the picture, we would not see a rupture in Pablo's account, and in fact the process of construction of narratives would be far less interesting and intriguing.

What is interesting is the combination of discourses in his account, which reveals, among other things, that despite the pervasiveness of national historical narratives, and the influence they have in shaping peoples' understanding of the past, they have not gone uncontested in academic reflection

or in educational practice. The inconsistencies and ruptures present in Pablo's account of the victory of the Catholic King and Queen over the Arabs in the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 are an eloquent example of the deep contradictions that define the construction of historical narratives in the minds of individuals. In order to better understand this phenomenon, we must take a closer look at how historical knowledge became part of the school contents, and the kind of transformations that occurred to them since.

### ***The Coexistence of Goals***

History has been part of the national curricula since the late nineteenth century in almost any country that established a public educational system. In fact, the constitution of history as an academic discipline occurred very close to its presence in the school curriculum. What was the purpose of such early inception in the educational system? Most nations considered, since their very origins, that learning history was an essential part of the formation of their future citizens. History education was one of the pillars in the foundation of modern nations. However, from early on, this ultimate purpose of shaping the desired citizens translated into two parallel goals that generated and developed competing views of school history still present in today's practice and discourse.

Different researchers have considered the existence, implicit or explicit, of competing objectives of school history (Barton, 2008; Carretero, 2007; Cuban, 2002; Wineburg, 2001) In this chapter we redefine those objectives as *Romantic* and *Enlightened* because their features and functions stem from their respective intellectual roots in Romanticism and the Enlightenment. In other words, history is taught in any national school system attending to two different goals: to make students "love their country" (Nussbaum and Cohen, 2002) and to make them "understand their past." Based on this distinction, we analyze the continuous and seemingly irreducible tension that exists between the identity-formation function and the critical function played by historical knowledge in the construction of historical narratives (see Carretero, 2011 for an extended development of this idea). Can these two goals be simultaneously achieved? Can people love their own country, and at the same time develop a critical understanding of its functioning? This chapter attempts to make a contribution to understand these issues.

## THE ROMANTIC GOALS

From the very beginning, school history was inspired in the Romantic Goals of creating and maintaining a cohesive national identity that supported the emerging centralized political project of Nation-States. According to Anderson (1983), this process required the constitution of imagined communities whose members' uniform stories, symbolic representations, and abilities superposed to the territory and state administration. History education was a singular but fundamental strategy used to achieve this goal, and it is still today.

Research on the history of history education and school textbooks (Carretero, 2011; Ferro, 1984/2002; Foster & Crawford, 2006; Nakou & Barca, 2010) shows that history has been recurrently positioned in the school curriculum to instill in the future citizens, from a young age, the symbolic representations, the sentiments, and the values that guarantee:

- a) A positive assessment of their own social group's past, present, and future; both local and national.
- b) A positive assessment of the country's political evolution.
- c) Identification with past events and characters and national heroes.

Barton and Levstik (2008) synthesize the different ways of achieving these goals, by selecting topics that focus only on the groups with which students should identify, focusing the content of teaching on establishing a common origin, developing imagined communities around which such loyalties should form, glorifying the country's past, and providing historic models of civic virtue (pp. 358–361). As the French historian M. Ferro, author of a pioneering work in this field, has sentenced sparing no clarity: "The image of other people, or of ourselves for that matter, reflects the history we are taught as children. The history marks us for life" (1984, p. IX).

Why should these goals of history education be considered "Romantic"? There are at least two important reasons. First, because the emergence of the Nation-States cannot be fully understood without the influence of the Romantic ideas and their intellectual context. The whole idea of the nation as a specific ethnic group that is under a process of awakening and finally it constitutes itself in a community of destiny, cannot be conceived without the contribution of the Romantic ideal. Precisely historical narratives, in and out of schools, express

one essential component of that Romantic ideal. Secondly, the Romantic goal of history education is achieved through an intense and rapid process of identification with one's own nation through emotional, affective, and social-interaction mechanisms. To love a country is certainly an expression that does not denote specific reasoning or cognitive processes, but mainly affective ones. As a matter of fact, national identification processes and their final results are considered by political forces, such as nationalism or patriotism, as the necessary prerequisites to be willing, in case of necessity, to die for the motherland (fatherland).

## THE ENLIGHTENED GOALS

Aside from the Romantic focus, history education has also pursued enlightened goals of fostering critical citizens capable of informed and effective participation in the progress of the nation, including a possible criticism to the own local or national community (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002; Habermas, 1990). From this perspective, the specific capacities that develop through the disciplined understanding of the past and its relations to the present are important contributions to the cultivation of a democratic mind that has great civic value in liberal societies. Barton and Levstik (2008) review several contributions that have been often attributed to the teaching and learning of history: The ability to form well-documented and plausible critical interpretations based on reasoned considerations of evidence from multiple sources, an understanding of societal systems of relationships and dynamics of continuity and change, the possibility of tracing the origins and evolution of current issues, the capacity to consider the value dimensions of public issues, and the ability to contextualize the differing perspectives of people (pp. 355–356). This Enlightened tradition places at the forefront the development of rational abilities; and it displaces the management of identities, values, and emotions that may cloud a critical understanding.

In its most current manifestation, Enlightened goals translate in several countries into disciplinary and cognitive objectives that generally consist of the following:

- a) To understand the past in a complex manner, according to age and educational level, which usually implies mastering the discipline's conceptual categories (Carretero & Voss, 1994).
- b) To distinguish different historic periods, through the appropriate comprehension of

historical time, in order to understand social problems and issues, situated at different periods and having distinct characteristics (Carretero, Asensio, & Pozo, 1991; Barton, 2002; Lee, 2005).

c) To understand the complex historical multicausality, in which individual and collective motivations interact with causal factors in intricate ways (Carretero et al., 1997; Bermudez & Jaramillo, 2001; Perkins, 2008).

d) To relate the past with the present and the future; this entails an important link with other social sciences and also with civic education (Von Borries, 1994).

e) To approach the methodology used by historians in ways that allow the student to learn history in an intellectually active way and to understand historical knowledge as a depository of problems that can be solved with objectification systems (Perfetti, 1994; Wineburg, 2001).

These Romantic and Enlightened goals of history education coexisted from the very beginning and developed over time. Often, when Romantic goals took the center stage, the Enlightened goals receded to a side stage, and vice versa. Yet, this ebb and flow defined a long century of pedagogical practice and academic reflection, that help us understand how citizens in present societies consume and construct historical narratives, and how we understand and explain that phenomenon.

The Romantic approach to the teaching of history was the dominant discourse and practice in different countries up until the postwar era. As we discussed at length earlier, this approach placed at the forefront of the teaching and learning of history the management of values and sentiments for the sake of building homogeneous national identities. Simultaneously, it displaced the idea of fostering through the teaching of history any form of critical rationality that threatened the cohesiveness of the national projects.

Beginning in the 1970s an Enlightened approach reemerged and dominated the field for the next three decades, installing a new perspective on the nature of historical knowledge and the purposes of teaching and learning it. Countering the Romantic tradition, Enlightened approaches in different countries advocated from early on for a teaching of history that explored the complexity of historical developments, recognized divergent experiences and multiples perspectives, contested national myths, scrutinized

the darker episodes of the national past, and challenged the celebratory narratives (Barton & Levstik, 2008, p. 361). Taken as a whole, the Enlightened approach highlights reasoning and the development of thinking skills, and the mastery of explanation and plausible argumentation.

### **Different Ways of Explaining Ruptures**

The evolution or transformations in the goals of history education explain how we account today for the ruptures and contradictions in the construction of historical narratives.

#### ***The Early Version***

Early manifestations of the Enlightened goals appeared during the first decades of the twentieth century in Europe and the United States. In the spirit of progressive movements it was proposed that history education should serve purposes other than furnishing the cultural memory of youth with glittering heroes, robust political landmarks, and other patriotic symbols. The idea of developing a rational understanding of the past through school curriculum and pedagogical practice were part of the progressive effort to open the classroom to the pressing complexities of social life (industrialization, urbanization, and immigration at that time) and to reframe the role of schooling (the teaching of history and social studies included) as the formation of habits of mind and thinking skills necessary for a reflective engagement in democratic citizenship (Dewey, 1910/1933, 1916; Rugg, 1921; Osborn, 1939; Griffin, 1942).

In the late 1950s and 1960s several programs for the teaching of social studies and history were developed following these Enlightened goals. Two prominent influential forces shaped this. In the United States, new developments in the social sciences made their way to the school context, when the “new social studies movement” engulfed the teaching of history. By and large, this approach saw the discussion of controversial issues as the necessary strategy to educate reflective citizens, and grounded its practical models on an *inquiry-based pedagogy*.

The emerging discourses of the “new social studies” recommended practices for teaching that proposed to help students acquire the knowledge and methods of inquiry of the social sciences. For example, the now classical work of Hunt & Metcalf (1955, 1968) outlined a curriculum for a “rational inquiry on problematic areas of culture.” Massialas and Cox (1966) insisted on an “emphasis on ideas

and hypothesis,” “a stress on analytical rather than descriptive processes,” and “the functional use of facts.” Terms like “value analysis,” “evaluation of data,” “skills of definition, classification, and generalization” were the typical language of proposals that claimed that these were the kind of abilities that competent citizens would need in a democracy, and the teaching of history and other social studies could and should develop those capacities in citizens.

“The revolution in education has at last reached the field of social studies,” wrote Massialas and Cox (1966)—with great enthusiasm. In their view, “the conditions of the society made it imperative that the schools accept as its role the ‘progressive reconstruction’ of the culture” rather than affirm itself as “a conserving agent of the past achievements of the culture” (p. 21). “Today’s society presents the school with conditions of change, instability, and disjunction. Although many of these conditions have historic roots, many others are new configurations, which are direct products of industrialization and technology” (p. 6). In the face of these challenges, they questioned the conservative Romantic approach because “this position minimizes or totally discounts cultural changes or the growing edge of the culture in deference to that which is traditionally good, classical, or ‘established truth.’” Instead, the school should be “deliberatively critical and creative in its selection and examination of the values of the society, carefully avoiding an over-identification with any segment of the culture” (p. 21). Accordingly, the function of social studies instruction should be to “furnish the forum for the analysis and evaluation of normative propositions or value judgments about man and society,” and the end result of such practice of inquiry should be “the production of a body of tested principles and generalizations about human relations and societies” (p. 24).

Similar proposals in the fashion of the Enlightened perspective can be found in other contexts, but this example from the American context suffices to illustrate the tension existing from early on between the Romantic and the Enlightened goals of the teaching and learning of history.

### **Constructivist Developments**

Despite the early appearance of these and other critical efforts, an Enlightened approach to the teaching of history only began to settle in a more generalized way in the 1970s. Exploratory and innovative pedagogical practices transcended to the wider curricular frameworks in several countries,

hand in hand with the development of constructivist and developmental theories of learning and education. Importantly, the decades of 1980s to 1990s saw not only new pedagogical practices and curriculum developments based on Enlightened goals, but also a developing research program. Research on history teaching and learning flourished during these last two decades. A significant body of literature emerged on how children and youth come to understand the complexities of the past and how they make sense of the process of knowing history.

For the most part, this work was influenced by the developing research in cognitive and developmental psychology. Basic psychological principles and concepts imported from Piagetian theory influenced research on the process of understanding historical knowledge (Burston & Thompson, 1967; Carretero, Asensio, & Pozo, 1991; Coltham, 1971; Hallam, 1967, 1970; Peel, 1967). For example:

- 1) Research was aimed to describe the development of underlying cognitive structures (general structures across disciplines, not specific to history).
- 2) Phenomena were analyzed as to how structures of reasoning support or create obstacles to mature understanding of core concepts (Time, abstract categories, hypothesis testing).
- 3) The stress was on the difficulties of teaching abstract history at young ages.
- 4) The importance of developing general cognitive skills that could transfer and be applied to the learning of history was emphasized.
- 5) Advanced research on common misinterpretation and challenges of conceptual change in history and social sciences contexts was carried out.

These constructivist and developmental views of the teaching and learning of history had an influential impact on the Enlightened research program. This, however, involved important debates and transformations. Already in the mid-1970s, but most consistently throughout the 1980s and 1990s, research that had begun in Britain established what is commonly known as the *discipline-specific approaches* that advocated for a constructive teaching of history that is organized around core historical concepts, and recognizes the particularities of history as a discipline that has developed specific ways of knowing society and knowing the past. Much of this work wanted to challenge the overbearing generalization of Piagetian models as proposed by Peel



(1967) or Hallam (1967, 1970). This discussion is evident in work by Dickinson and Lee (1978) or Booth (1987). Based on this claim about the epistemological specificity of historical knowledge and inquiry, research in this tradition investigated how young people learn to master core historical concepts such as causality, time, change, or empathy, and learn to think about the past in disciplined ways (Dickinson, Gordon, & Lee, 2001; Lee, Dickinson, & Rogers, 1984; Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby, 2001; Portal, 1987; Shemilt, 1980, 1984, 1987)

Simultaneously, research in other countries in Europe and in the United States progressed in a somewhat different direction. Influenced by cognitive research, studies on how students come to understand the complexity of historical knowledge tracked changes in students' ideas typically representing intellectual growth as a progression from naïve to expert models of reasoning (Carretero & Voss, 1994; Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, & Odoroff, 1994; Limón & Carretero, 1999). For example, as it has been well-established in this research program, adolescents develop their causal explanations going from intentional and concrete forms to more abstract ones where political and socio-economic aspects play a more important role. Also, early adolescents tend to consider only one or two causes in order to explain a historical problem, whereas young students and adults usually are able to provide more complex multicausal explanations of historical phenomena.

These different traditions within the Enlightened research program have established some dialog and basic consensus. Three decades of international theoretical reflection and empirical research have left us with rich models of how children and adolescents develop the competencies needed to engage in "rigorous historical inquiry," including an understanding of the intricacies of historical evidence, the differences and similarities between past and present, the short- and long-term processes of social change, the layered webs of historical multicausality, and the contextual meaning of beliefs and practices that appear foreign today (Carretero & Voss, 1994; Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000).

These constructivist developments contributed to the growing tensions between the Romantic and the Enlightened views of the teaching and learning of history, and the construction of historical narratives. Different progressive movements in the social sciences were already questioning the elitist and biased representations of the past contained in

Romantic narratives, and advocated for more inclusive, pluralist, and critical accounts. Adding to this, constructivist and developmental research emerging in the 1970s provided a psychological rationale that supported the proposal of Enlightened goals, and questioned the notions of a passive consumer of social narratives and the unidirectional process of meaning making that typically underlies to much of the Romantic tradition. Furthermore, advocates of the Enlightened goals increasingly pushed for school history contents that adopted a "scientific" explanatory and expository format. To be sure, these expository accounts are also cultural artifacts, socially produced and transmitted by the schools. Yet, they distanced the Enlightened pedagogy from the use of the traditional personal and national narratives typical of the Romantic approach, forever changing our understanding what it means to construct historical narratives.

### ***Limitations of the Enlightened Approach to Teaching and Learning History***

The wealth of constructivist research on the progression of historical thinking provides us with valuable conceptual tools to examine Pablo's account of the defeat of the Arabs in Granada in 1492, and to understand the strengths and limitations of his explanation. Based on this research we can say that Pablo has the precise chronology of the changing occupation of the Iberian territory by Christians and Muslims, holds a fairly sophisticated understanding of the interplay of multiple causal factors leading to the final expulsion of the Arabs, and reconstructs the changing power dynamics. It is also clear that what happens in Pablo's case is that he superposes an expository account focused on causal factors to a narrative account focused on the motivations that lead the Christians to victory. But, why does Pablo, who demonstrates a fairly sophisticated critical ability, ultimately resorts to an essentialist narrative that, in its very basic assumptions, contradicts the logical argument of his "historiographic account"?

Constructivist research falls short when it comes to make sense of this kind of incongruence. The argument put forward from this perspective would typically be that the *previous ideas and misconceptions derived from cultural narratives stand in the way of effective conceptual change* needed to construct accurate representations (Limón & Carretero, 2000). In fact, in much of the research on the development of historical thinking capacity, the introduction of values and emotions that emanate from

these narratives are regarded as cognitive obstacles that hinder the development of explanatory complexity, and ultimately stagnate the development of a *mature understanding of the past*.

To be sure, throughout the transformations described above, values, emotions, and identity discourses continued to be inseparable ingredients of the historical contents taught in the classroom, but exactly how they appeared was open to change. In the curricular domain, positions were split. Several constructivist curricular reforms in the fields of social studies and history continued to justify their new approaches by stressing civic value of historical thinking skills. The belief was that students would develop critical attitudes and commitment to democratic values such as supporting judgments with evidence or considering different perspectives that would then apply to their action as citizens (Barton & Levstik, 2008, Oliver & Shaver, 1966, 1974). To a certain extent, values and emotions become objects of rational analysis. Yet, others argued that the purpose of the history curriculum should be the development of historical understanding rather than any current civic purpose (Barton & Levstik, 2008, p. 362; Lee, 1984) The rationale for this position is that if history is taught for the sake of present purposes, history may be instrumentalized and denaturalized. An unqualified integration of moral questions may distort both the authenticity of historical experience, and the rigor of historical thinking. These concerns are long-lived among historians who coined two terms to name the greatest sins that a historian may be tempted to commit: presentism and anachronism.

The situation in the field of research was different. Questions about the role of values, emotions, and identity lost prominence in a research program concerned with the reconstruction of the cognitive structures and processes that underlies to the development of understanding (or misunderstanding). With few exceptions (see for example Von Borries, 1994; Hahn, 1994), researchers in the Enlightened tradition displaced these themes to the backstage, when they did not entirely dismiss the role they play in learning and knowing the past.

The constructivist claims may hold some truth, but they still cannot explain why individuals reach these obstacles and struggle to overcome them. In our view, the problem lays in that the theoretical apparatus of constructivist research is limited. Interestingly, it is precisely the features that define its strength that also constrain it. The strength of

the constructivist paradigm rests on its capacity to describe the cognitive or logical structures underpinning a historical account (e.g., number of causal factors considered, accurate representation of change and continuity, coordination of a variety of sources, etc.), and to map the pathways of transformation they undergo as they develop. In order to capture these structural features, and the similarities, differences, continuities, or transformations between them, constructivists separate form from content, and the structures of logical reasoning from the substance of meaning making. As a result, the process of reasoning is abstracted from the social and cultural context in which the individual reasons.

Indeed, the selective focus on the cognitive or logical structures underpinning a historical account allows us to grasp its disciplinary adequacy. However, in doing so, it overlooks three important dynamics of meaning making: (a) how individuals draw upon narratives available in their society and culture in order to make meaning of the concepts and facts learned in school (Haste, 1992); (b) how they engage in a variety of discursive activities through which they negotiate the implications of new historical knowledge for their personal and collective identities, and for the interpersonal and social relationships they participate in (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Billig, 1987, Harré & Gillet, 1994; Harré & van Langehove, 1999), and (c) how they mobilize and manage a host of values and sentiments that link the process of knowing to the process of negotiating identities and social positions in a particular context. The constructivist research formula lacks the conceptual tools necessary to explain the role that socio-cultural context, identity, values, and sentiments play in historical understanding.

Within this paradigm, we are at a loss when we try to understand why Pablo does not extend his critical skills to examine the narrative of reconquest that was socially transmitted to him. This is not a minor limitation if we consider that much of the constructivist paradigm rests on the assumption that students will transfer the thinking skills developed in the history classroom to real-life situations in which a disciplined historical perspective can afford them a better understanding of the social issues and questions they encounter in their daily lives. In fact, there is no empirical evidence that shows that the transference of skills from the classroom to the everyday life actually happens (Barton & Levstik, 2008). Despite the efforts of teachers and researchers to engage students in the mastery of core historical

concepts, this does not effectively lead students to change the historical narratives they bring to school. In fact, people do not change their theories but rather pick and choose conveniently. Evidence shows that students do not readily modify their prior narrative understanding when they encounter new or conflicting information (Limón & Carretero, 1999). For example, Barton and Levstik (1998) have found that U.S. students, who struggle to reconcile their knowledge of topics such as the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, and continuing instances of racism and sexism with the overarching historical narratives of progress, tend to reinterpret such events to more closely match the broad theme that dominates American culture. Similarly, research conducted by Barton and McCully (2005) shows how students in Northern Ireland draw selectively from the curriculum in order to bolster the sectarian narratives that they encounter outside of school. Other authors point to the similar conclusion that students use religiously grounded narratives to ignore, reinterpret, or distort historical information so that it does not conflict with the prior ideas (Mosborg, 2002; Porat, 2004).

Where do we go from here? What are we left with? Are the identity and the critical dynamics in construction of historical narratives irremediably antagonistic? Are the Romantic and Enlightened traditions necessarily at odds with each other in their efforts to explain how and why historical narratives are constructed? The body of research on historical understanding has generated a number of questions about the knowing of history and the construction of historical accounts/narratives that cannot be addressed from within its own Enlightened paradigm. However, in our view, the latest wave of research informed by a variety of socio-cultural perspectives in psychology and social sciences challenge these dichotomies and open new possibilities for research and understanding.

### ***The Reemergence of Romantic Goals***

After three decades in which Enlightened goals and assumptions extended throughout pedagogical practice and constructivist research, the interest in the Romantic themes of identity and the role of values and sentiments is moving back to the center stage of the current research agenda.

Not surprisingly, these interests have reemerged in two different ways: within a neoconservative tradition on one hand and within a critical socio-cultural tradition on the other. Both approaches highlight

the narrative structure of historical knowledge, they stress the connection between the processes of knowing the past and constructing identities in the present, and they reposition sentiments and values at the core of knowing the past. Yet, they do so from very different perspectives and with significantly different implications.

#### **ROMANTIC GOALS IN A NEOCONSERVATIVE TRADITION**

In the neoconservative tradition, the reemergence of Romantic goals continues to be coupled with patriotic and nationalist concerns that emphasize issues of loyalty, attachments, and unity. For example, in recent years in the United States, several authors have argued that the liberal views of teaching history (i.e., the constructivist views), in which the past is made object of critical analysis, have eroded the *cultural literacy* that is the basis of cohesion of a national identity and the sense of civic virtue (Bloom, 1987; Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1988; Cheney, 1988; Ravitch & Finn, Jr., 1988). In their view, the renewal of the nation depends on reestablishing a shared historical narrative and on enacting the values that this narrative embodies. Such reaffirmation of national unity is deemed fundamental in the face of external threats, as well as internal threats such as the challenges brought by ethnic and linguistic pluralism. This approach is generally didactic, and students are told what traits are embodied by historical figures and why they are good (Barton & Levstik, 2008). Here again, there is little room for interpretation or ambiguity, and little role for critical rationality that is repelled for having scrutinized and destroyed the creeds that sustained community and nation.

#### **ROMANTIC GOALS IN A CRITICAL SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITION**

The socio-cultural approach contrasts with the conservative version in at least four important ways:

- (a) It tends to portray historical narratives as cultural artifacts rather than as essential distillations of national character, or a set of basic objective facts.
- (b) Because of that, it usually recognizes diverse and contentious views of the past rather than positing the existence of one shared narrative.
- (c) It claims an active rather than a passive role for the individual in the process of constructing

historical narratives, and locates this process in its socio-cultural context.

(d) Because of that, it tends to examine the interplay of rationality, values, and emotions, rather than dismissing one or the other.

Interestingly, some of these characteristics also explain that the current socio-cultural approach has new tools that constructivist views lacked, which afford the possibility of solving some of its limitations. In the pages that remain we will discuss some of these features in terms of the potential contributions that the current socio-cultural approach to the Romantic goals of teaching history can make to the research on the construction of historical narratives.

### ***Contributions of the Socio-Cultural Approach to Romantic Goals***

The latest generation of research and discussion on the teaching and learning of history is marked by a strong influence of socio-cultural theories. Recasting history to a narrative format, emphasizing the connection between the processes of knowing the past and the processes of constructing identities, and repositioning sentiments and values and the core of historical consciousness, socio-cultural approaches come as a refreshing force, raising new questions, shedding light on new phenomena, foregrounding new controversies, and suggesting new dilemmas.

Interestingly, much of this transformation in the research agenda has been propelled by the adoption of socio-cultural approaches without abandoning the basic constructivist tenets, either because researchers draw upon a *Vygotskian tradition* that organically integrates both, or because constructivist researchers migrated, bringing some of their conceptual heritage. For example, Barton and McCully discuss one of their recent pieces of work in the following terms:

“This study is grounded in a constructivist and socio-cultural perspective on historical understanding. For most of the last two decades, theory and research in history education has been part of the larger constructivist tradition in education and psychology. From this perspective, neither children nor adults passively absorb information, whether at school or elsewhere. Rather, they engage in a process of active construction in which they interpret new information—encountered in a variety of formats and settings—in light of their prior

ideas and their ongoing attempts to make sense of the world (Levstik & Barton, 2001). A student’s historical understanding, then, is not simply a mirror of external information but a unique set of mental schemata resulting from the interaction between the individual and environment. Yet, socio-cultural theory emphasizes that this process is necessarily situated in social contexts, and that the information to which students are exposed has been historically and socially constructed.”

(2005, p. 90)

The recognition of the active role of the individual in the process of construction of historical narratives has important implications. For one thing, it has propelled the distinction between the processes of production and consumption of historical narratives (Wertsch, 1997). The former refers to how history textbooks, mass media and other sources deliver official history versions (Ahonen, 1997; Luczynski, 1997) and the latter has to do with the process by which individuals appropriate those historical narratives, even though their narratives may not necessarily be identical to those produced.

Research conducted in different countries in the last 10 years has documented, along these lines, how students engage with a variety of historical narratives in active processes of negotiation that involve stances of endorsement, resistance, or challenge—as they construct the meaning and of their own identities. In the work cited, Barton and McCully call into question any simplistic notion of the relationship between historically grounded identities and formal study at school: “students neither reject school history outright nor use it to replace prior, community-based historical narratives. Rather, they draw selectively from the school curriculum (and other sources) to support a range of developing historical identities” (2005, p. 85).

While recognizing an active role for the individual in the process of constructing historical narratives, socio-cultural research also addresses the social and cultural processes involved in learning history, knowing the past, and constructing historical narratives.

Haste (1993), in her research about people’s construction of notions of self and morality, makes an argument that proves helpful here. In her view, “there is a major, and for some irreconcilable debate in developmental psychology . . . between those who search for the basic process of morality inside the head of the individual and those who search for it

in the interaction between persons, between those who assume that meaning is constructed by the individual and those who assume that it is a social construction transferred to the individual" (p. 175). "No one denies that there is interaction," Haste clarifies, but in the face of debate there is "a fundamental, almost ideological, division between those who view the individual as the phenomenon to be explained and those who treat the individual as the end of the social process" (p. 184).

Constructivist models in the research of history teaching and learning, which tend to adopt the first position in this conflict, assume indeed that other individuals play a role in providing challenges and generating disequilibrium. However, such "interactions among individuals" are not analyzed as embedded in social and cultural processes. In fact, social and cultural context are seen as unproblematic. In contrast, conservative and neoconservative approaches to the study of history education rest on principles akin to the second position described by Haste. These traditions tend to conceptualize the self and knowledge as products of socialization, and therefore, argue that the primary process to be explained is "that of inculcating the growing child into a socially constructed world of meaning." As Haste explains, "the social context provides frameworks for concepts and values, and this is regarded as sufficient explanation of an individual's development, with no need to address actual processes at the individual level" (Haste, 1993, p. 176, 182).

Among other things, the dichotomy described by Haste helps to explain why plain constructivist research has had little room to consider that "Identity matters" matter when it comes to constructing histories. Likewise, it sheds light on why the traditional Romantic perspectives rarely recognize that historical narratives have an active mind behind them. In contrast with the limitations of the Romantic and Enlightened traditions of research in their conventional forms, it becomes clear that what is needed to understand the construction of historical narratives in its full complexity is a synthesis that renders as problematic, or in need of explanation, both the process of individual active consumption of historical narratives, and the social and cultural processes of production of those historical narratives and their meaning.

### Future Directions

Our synthetic approach implies the investigation of three important dynamics of meaning making in

the construction of historical narratives, and we have begun to see work emerging in some of these areas:

a) How individuals draw upon social and cultural narratives in order to make meaning of the concepts and facts learned in school, as shown in the works of already cited authors as Barton, Seixas, Van Sledright, Wineburg, and others. In our opinion, a number of aspects of school history narratives need to be studied more deeply in the future not only in school settings but in informal learning environments, particularly museums, exhibitions, TV shows, etc. Particularly, in relation to the six features presented in this chapter. For example, we do not know in detail what is the influence of cognitive development on the processes of construction and consumption of historical narratives. It could be hypothesized that older students could understand and use historical narratives in a more complex manner than younger ones, following a progression from mythical and concrete narratives to ironic and abstract ones. To this respect, also teaching and learning factors should be taken into account. Thus, it is important to consider that very often school history education is carried out in order to promote Romantic and patriotic values and not really historiographical understanding. This implies the possibility of not having a real disciplinary progress in student's minds. To this respect, it would be very important to study in a very detailed way the possible influence of social and cultural factors in the process of interiorization of the mentioned narratives. Particularly the influence of the Nation-States educational policies, which are very often interested in developing just mythical and heroic historic representations.

b) How citizens mobilize and manage a host of values and sentiments that link the process knowing to the process of negotiating identities and social positions in a particular context. To this respect, we think the moral dimensions of historical master narratives should be explored in more detailed way, particularly in relation to the consumption process. A number of theoretical (White, 1987) and empirical contributions permit to expect a strong influence of moral issues on the way citizens consider historical narratives. It is plausible to expect that this moral influence would be very much related to the process of belonging to a certain national, ethnic or cultural group. To this

respect, the relation between national or cultural identity and citizens' moral interpretation of historical issues is, in our opinion, a very promising hypothesis to be explored in the future.

c) How individuals engage in a variety of discursive activities through which they negotiate the implications of new historical knowledge for their personal and collective identities, and for the interpersonal and social relationships they participate in. Coming back to the example of Pablo's narrative about the Reconquest in Spain, presented above, we think much more work is necessary about how the interaction between production and consumption of school historical narratives is being produced. A recent paper (Hammack, 2010) considers the strong influence of these narratives on youths' collective identity, suggesting that identity is both a burden and a benefit at the same time. This shows how complex and counterintuitive the mentioned interaction could be.

The location of individual meaning within socio-cultural contexts affords these new approaches the possibility of examining the interplay of rationality, values, and emotions, rather than dismissing one or the other. Hence, a salient contribution of the socio-cultural approaches is its potential to explore a variety of possible interactions between Romantic and Enlightened traditions and goals that have largely been kept separate in previous work.

## Notes

1. This chapter was written with the support of Projects PICT 2005–34778 and 2008–1217 (Agencia de Investigacion de Argentina), and Projects SEJ2006–15461 and EDU2010–17725 (Agencia de Investigacion, Spain), and the Fellowship at the D. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (Harvard University) to the first author during 2009–2010. We would like express our gratitude for that support.

2. Consider, for example, the Israeli narrative about Palestinian territories arguing the need to recuperate a land from where the Israeli people were expelled 2,000 years ago. Sand (2010) has brilliantly studied the “invention of the Jewish nation.”

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PART 7

# Emergence of Culture

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Riin Magnus and Kalevi Kull

**Abstract**

This chapter begins by introducing the background, basic constituents and principles of the *umwelt* model and theory developed by the Baltic German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) in the first decades of the twentieth century. This is followed by a discussion of the features of the *umwelt* concept that has provided the impetus for interpretations of human activities and cultural processes. The once biology-bound model has by now found its way into very diverse traditions of thought. We concentrate on four major trends in interpreting cultural phenomena with the help of *umwelt* theory: (1) the Uexküllian functional circle model of perception and action as a predecessor of models that couple human forms of impression and expression; (2) the mediated versus immediate character of human in contrast with animal worlds; (3) the bridging of natural and cultural phenomena via semiotic processes; (4) the integration of the cognitive and the social interpretations of (human) mind via two facets of *umwelt*. The chapter includes some hints on the aspects of the *umwelt* model that could be elaborated further in the analysis of culture.

**Keywords:** functional circle, impression and expression, modeling systems, semiosphere, Uexküll, *umwelt*

**Culture, Semiosphere, Umwelt**

According to the semiotician and culturologist Juri Lotman, cultures have a structure that is analogous to individual human minds in several of its fundamental features. In some of their general structural aspects, as well as in some rules of their dynamics, these complex semiotic systems are isomorphic to each other (Lotman, 1984, 1990). Both a culture and an individual world are fields of sign processes. Both entail many codes, several sign systems, translation processes, heterogeneity, asymmetry, borders, center and periphery, continuity and discreteness, unpredictability, and a certain processual logic. Both are embedded and molded by communication and dialogue, which are primary in respect with individual languages. The general model Lotman proposed for describing personalities, texts, and cultures as semiotic systems and their

interweaving in a common semiotic space is named the *semiosphere* (Lotman 2005).

The semiosphere is a necessary medium for all sign processes as well as the totality of sign processes itself. Like the biosphere, which is the organic totality of living matter as well as the precondition for the persistence of life, the semiosphere is the result as well as the precondition for the development of culture (Lotman, 2000, p. 125). Departing from Thomas A. Sebeok's (1920–2001) thesis, according to which the origin of *semiosis* (sign process) coincides with the origin of life, we can assume that sign processes (as the basis of recognition, discrimination, signification) characterize human minds as well as animal minds. We can therefore describe the semiosphere of the worlds of organisms, all living organisms included. This is how the concept of semiosphere is used in contemporary *biosemiotics*—the branch

of semiotics dealing with the organic part of the semiosphere (Cobley, 2010; Hoffmeyer, 2008).

A predecessor of such a semiotic view in biology was the Baltic German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) with his concept of *umwelt*. Umwelt is the world an organism creates, in which it lives. It is the meaningful world based on sign relations. A quite common definition states that *umwelt* is the personal world of an organism, or a self-centered world, “the world as known or modelled” (Cobley, 2010, p. 348). This definition, although correct in itself, may not emphasize the relational aspect of the *umwelt* concept enough. Therefore we can also complementarily define *umwelt* as a set of sign relations an organism has in an ecosystem (as in a semiosphere) (Kull, 2010b).

Thus, if *umwelt* is made of relations, of semiotic bonds, we can conclude that organisms are derivatives of (sign) relations. Umwelt (as a relational, i.e., a meaningful world) exists even prior to the capacity to use representations, since organisms can often be involved in sign processes without building representations. Conversely, of course, there cannot be an *umwelt* without life. Life is centered on organisms, in their agency; therefore, *umwelten* are also individual and individualized.

All organisms participate in the construction of their *umwelten*. Organisms participate in making their *umwelten* because this is generally a communication (including autocommunication) process that modifies and constructs *umwelten*. Building and modifying one’s *umwelt* is simultaneously a communicative process and a modeling process.

As Thomas Sebeok has pointed out regarding the scientific use of the term “*umwelt*,” “the closest equivalent in English is manifestly “model” (Sebeok, 2001, p. 75). The description of a particular *umwelt* will mean the demonstration of how the organism maps the world, and what, for that organism, the meanings of the objects are within it. How the formation of individual worlds entails meaningful operations was likewise described by Jakob von Uexküll in his *Theory of Meaning (Bedeutungslehre)* (Uexküll, 1982 [1940], pp. 64, 69):

Meaning in nature’s score serves as a connecting link, or rather as a bridge, and takes the place of harmony in a musical score; it joins two of nature’s factors. [...] Each meaning-carrier was always confronted with a meaning-receiver, even in [...] earlier *umwelten*. Meaning ruled them all. Meaning tied changing organs to a changing medium. Meaning connected

food and the destroyer of food, enemy and prey, and above all, male and female in astonishing variations.

That semiotic systems are simultaneously modeling systems was also emphasized in the 1960s by the Tartu-Moscow School of semiotics (Lotman, 1967; Levchenko & Salupere 1999; Kull, 2010a). Here modeling systems (which encompassed languages as well as arts) were understood as the structure of elements and the rules of their combination that stood in an analogical relationship to some object of cognition (Lotman, 1967, p. 130). Modeling systems provide the means for comprehending the outside world and yet, they are themselves the primary sources of world formation.

Connecting the ideas of Jakob von Uexküll and Juri Lotman, we could also say that culture is continuously created via human *umwelt* making. Cultural modeling as *umwelt* making includes all of the building, shaping, and design humans do in their surroundings (i.e., besides “texts” in a narrow sense, also clothes, tools, technologies, architecture, and landscape). The *umwelt*-based semiotic approach to culture may further widen the understanding of the borders of culture by including semiotic processes of an ecosystem into a single whole with human culture proper. This means widening the basis of culture from language to semiosis.

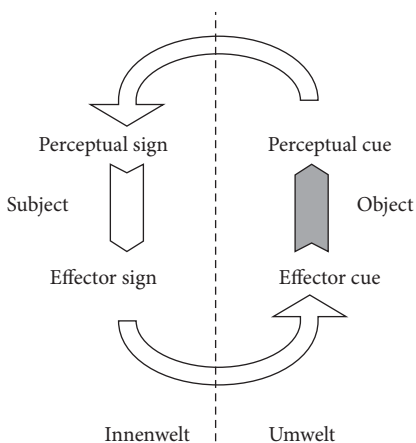
A semiotic interpretation, to which we will come back later, is just one way of linking the idea of *umwelt* with culture-specific constructions. In order to bring forth the variety of those links, we will further sketch the chief impetuses the *umwelt* idea has provided for interpretations of human activities and cultural processes. We shall demonstrate how different interpretations of the *umwelt* concept allow the integration of otherwise contradictory approaches to culture.

### Jakob von Uexküll’s Umwelt Model and Its Constituents

Although the common German word “*umwelt*” is traditionally translated into English as “environment,” its use as a loanword refers to the specific concept worked out by Jakob von Uexküll in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

*Umwelt* is the world as accessed and formed by the organism via its specific sensory and motor devices. The section of reality that a biologist should describe, according to Uexküll, is thus of the organism’s own making. In other words, *umwelt* is the set of perceptual and action-based distinctions, shared in a large extent by the members of one species and described by an external observer.

Umwelt as the world of meaningful objects, is always paired by its intraorganismic counterpart—*Innenwelt* (inner world). If *umwelt* denotes the outside world as it appears to the animal via its perceptual and motor apparatus, then *Innenwelt* refers to the experience side of the phenomena as experienced by the organism. However, the organism never feels itself as such. What is felt is some object of the *umwelt*, which indirectly refers to the subjective center of world formation via the meaning it carries to the animal. It is also the external object that serves as a ground for the species-specific coordination between the perceptual and motor apparatus. “Just like the factors of *umwelt* are objective, also the effects that they bring about in the nervous system have to be treated in the same manner. These effects are also organized and regulated by the building plan. They together form the *Innenwelt* of the animal”<sup>2</sup> (Uexküll, 1909, p. 6). The overarching principle that binds *umwelt* with *Innenwelt* is mentioned here as *Bauplan* (building plan)—the specific anatomical and physiological structure of the animal. The *Bauplan* concept encompasses both the developmental pathways of the organism as well as the functional aspect of the organism’s perceptions and actions. Although the focus for this *umwelt* concept is on the operation of sense organs and motor systems, when the formation of the *umwelt* is described, these systems are always to be seen as embedded in the totality of the organism itself. The key elements and characteristics of the *umwelt* formation process were modeled by Uexküll as a schema, which he called a functional circle (*Funktionskreis*) (see an adaptation of Uexküll’s schema in Figure 29.1).



**Figure 29.1** An adaptation of Jakob von Uexküll’s functional circle model.

When in contact with some object, a particular perceptual sign (e.g., a sweet taste) is first received by the organism and then projected to the outside world as a perceptual cue of that object (the sweetness of a fruit). The complex of the perceptual sign and perceptual cue further induces the formation of an effector sign. The effector sign is the image of the action that is to be carried out in respect with the object (e.g., biting the fruit). Like the perceptual sign, also the effector sign is projected outside as a cue or property of the object (the “bitability” of the fruit). If the necessary action is accomplished, a new perceptual sign can emerge and a new circle will begin. The circles of perception and action follow one another until the need that initiated them has been satisfied (e.g., until the animal has satisfied its hunger).

The model can also be seen as a hybrid of reflex arc schemes from biology and later communication models. At first glance, the *Innenwelt* part of Uexküll’s model could be interpreted as a unification of the afferent and efferent pathways of the reflex arc. The perceptual and motor cues, in turn, could be termed as equivalents of stimuli, initiators of irritation. As a remarkable difference from the reflex arc scheme, linear logic models do not work here. The explanation needed is therefore closer to the one used by complex systems theory, where downward and upward causation have to be accounted for simultaneously (see Gilbert & Sarkar, 2000). Incorporating all elements of the functional circle under the word *welt* denotes that the departure point for the observer of the animal’s behavior should be the whole set of meanings with all the characteristic relationships between them just as well as particular acts of perception and action. Individual causes and effects, and the extraction of single stimulus and response pairs, can be derived only from an already understood set of possible meanings, but the world-formation is itself observable and accessible only via the individual acts. We will return to this principle of part-whole mutual conditioning when describing the Romantic philosophical roots of Uexküll’s *umwelt* theory.

Comparing the functional circle model with classical models of communication<sup>3</sup> may allow us to see the subject as both a sender of messages about its physiological state to the outside world and as a receiver of responses to those states by the object-as-a-sender. However, the functional circle model does not articulate the difference between the active and passive object in the process. It does not therefore

permit a distinction between the acts of perception and communication.

### *From Reflections to Coordination: How the Umwelt Concept Emerged*

In order to track the road from umwelt to culture and to explain how some principles of cultural existence are to be viewed if umwelt is seen as their predecessor, we need to visualize the road leading to the basic model of umwelt theory itself. Jakob von Uexküll started his career by researching the physiology of marine invertebrates. While working in the physiology laboratories in Heidelberg and Naples, he concentrated on the muscular movements of sea urchins, brittle stars, octopuses, etc. (cf. Rütting 2004, p. 39; Mildenerger, 2007). It is exactly here that the empirical grounds of the developed umwelt theory are to be found: in those early works on muscular tonus accompanied by research on reflex movements and the nearly 200 years of debate about the exact mechanisms behind them.

The eighteenth-century explanations of involuntary movement that preceded the nineteenth-century reflex concept, exhibited disagreements on several grounds. One set of disagreements concerned the (in)applicability of optical theories of reflection to the biological relations of irritation and movement. Georges Canguilhem has demonstrated how the period encountered on the one hand convictions that the irritation-movement pair functions according to the mirror law.<sup>4</sup> According to this principle, the texture of the medulla serves as a “mirror” upon which the incident irritation falls and reflects back to the motor nerves. Those claims were countered by authors (e.g., George Prochaska and Robert Whytt) who denied the sufficiency of optical parallels for explaining medullary mediation of irritation and movement and who asked for the formulation of specific biological laws in order to clarify the issue (Canguilhem, 1994, pp. 179–202).

Several classical models of a reflex arc in the second half of the nineteenth century followed the physicalist line of thought while explaining the organism as a thing among things, comparable to a physical body by which the same impulses always result in the same reaction. Reflex arc models, which depicted the nervous system as a mechanism of simple motion transfer (cf. Bains, 2006, p. 61), received significant criticism already at the time of their wider distribution. The earlier critical fronts came not just from physiology, but also from

psychology and philosophy (esp. pragmatism) (cf. Phillips, 1971; Bredo, 1998).

John Dewey’s 1896 article “The reflex arc concept in psychology” identified the persistence of two kinds of older dualisms in the dominant models of the reflex arc: (1) the dualism between sensation and idea—as being repeated in the dualism of peripheral and central structures, and (2) the dualism of body and soul—as still present in the dualism of stimulus and response (Dewey, 1896). Dewey argued against the separation of stimulus-response as two distinct physical absolutes, tied to sensation and reaction respectively.

What shall we term that which is not sensation-followed-by-movement, but which is primary; which is, as it were, the psychical organism of which sensation, idea and movement are the chief organs? Stated on the physiological side, this reality may most conveniently be termed coordination.

(Dewey, 1972 [1896], p. 97)

Coordination is always present in each act of sensation or reaction as an “ideal” from which the two have deviated as conflicting parties and try to regain the initial state of coordination. Coordination is thus presented by Dewey as a process whereby the dynamic stability of the organism is achieved.

Jakob von Uexküll and his colleagues Theodor Beer and Albert Bethe published in 1899 an article where they suggest a new objective nomenclature for physiology. In the article they claim that physiology should be purified from the ambiguous terms like “light” or “sound” and terms indicating the physical origin and properties of objective stimuli should be used instead (Beer, Bethe & Uexküll, 1899). Here they seem to identify themselves with the tradition of a physics-bound physiology rather than with the more organism-specific perspective. Solely because of the position presented in this article, Uexküll’s research was received as a representative of the mechanistic-behaviorist physiology, even in his later career when he distanced himself from his earlier theoretical grounds (see Mildenerger, 2006; Mildenerger, 2007, p. 58).

Closer examination reveals that even this objectivist manifesto already contains ontological threads leading to the later *umweltlehre*. What is lacking in the latter and saliently present in the manifesto is a significant discrepancy between the ontological and the epistemological standpoints. While proposing a new nomenclature for sensory physiology, the authors differentiate between the objective stimulus,

the physiological proceeding, and the eventual sensation. The footnote to the objective stimulus, however, states:

We admit that the stimulus is nothing but an objectified sensation, but we stay by the conviction that natural scientists, in order to retain a stable ground, should take an unbiased standpoint, from where one could observe the outwards projected *Erscheinungswelt*<sup>5</sup> as materially present. (Beer, Bethé & Uexküll, 1899, p. 517)

The new nomenclature is therefore suggested because of merely heuristic reasons; the authors attempt to deny asserting any reality to the objective stimulus. Uexküll's later writing on *umweltlehre* resolved this former discrepancy by adjusting the theoretical framework according to his ontological axioms.

How could such a step be taken? What enabled the initially self-determined scientific methodology to be attuned to the “demands” of biological reality?

Above all, this leap in Uexküll's ontological commitments is caused by the synthesis of philosophical and scientific standpoints. The philosophical perspective, traditionally bracketed out from strictly scientific investigations, was brought in to take part in the explorations of the living world. Only through the coordination and integration of ideas belonging to different realms of human knowledge (either to scientific, philosophical, or artistic) could organisms be understood as entities who themselves base their existence on coordination and integration.<sup>6</sup> This synthetic understanding of human knowledge, which formed the epistemological foundation of the *umwelt* idea, was the legacy of Romantic theories of human mind. First, it followed the Romantic ideals of the entwined architectonics of human comprehension. Secondly, it considered the principle of the isomorphic relations between the object and the tools of research. Goethe figuratively expressed the latter in the introduction to his *Colour Theory (Zur Farbenlehre)*, quoted also by Uexküll: “If the eye were not sun-like, it could never behold the sun. If the sun were not eye-like, it could not shine in any sky,”<sup>7</sup> and in his statement that “similar can be recognized only by a similar” (*nur von Gleichem werde Gleiches erkannt*) (Goethe, 1810, p. xxxviii). The structural principles of the object and the descriptive system have to match with each other. Such matching and likeness of the observer and the observed does not require an overlap or

superimposition of one of the systems on the other. On the contrary, the central concept for describing these relations is *punctus contra punctum*—they have to match like two notes in a chord. The principle of responsive, counterpoint-like correspondence is central for understanding how it is possible to proceed from the perceptual systems to the communicative, dialogical ones. This key factor also opens up the possibility for *umwelt*-based research to serve not just as a descriptive system, but also as a tool for understanding. The animal in this case is not merely an object of scientific observation but a response to the research question posed by the researcher's own perceptual and cognitive schemes. Partaking in the communicative act provides the researcher with as much knowledge about his own mind as it does about the communicatively observed animal. And the more conscious one becomes of one's own perceptual restrictions, clarifying thus the structure of one's own research tools, the more the understanding of the other will correspond to the features of the other. Scientific truth in this case does not need to choose sides between idealistic or realistic premises—it is formed only while participating in the mutual exchange of information, where the object explicates the subject's characteristics and vice versa.

### *Umwelt Theory as a Springboard for Models of Culture*

Uexküll himself did not provide significant reflections on how his *umwelt* theory could be applied particularly to human beings (setting aside his constant reminder that all researchers are bound with their own perceptual boundaries, even when talking about the *umwelt* of another species, and his rather loose transfer of the *umwelt* concept to describe the characters of his friends). But Uexküll's writings on the *umwelt* concept have served as an impetus for later philosophers and representatives of other humanities to delve on the issue of its applicability to human beings.

For the sake of conciseness, we are not aiming at describing all directions of influence, as the idea has found its way into very diverse traditions of thought (*for overviews see* Kull, 2001; Mildnerberger, 2007; *on the additional aspects, see* Berthoz & Christen, 2009; Chang, 2009; Kliková & Kleisner, 2006; Magnus, 2008). We therefore focus on four kinds of topics in *umwelt* theory that have triggered discussions on the question of specifically human *umwelten*: (1) the perception-action pairing as a fundamental



property of “being alive” and as a source for the further developments of human-specific impressions and expressions; (2) the immediacy vs. mediatedness of animal and human action; (3) the semiotic embeddedness of all living beings, which leads to the view of life as the primary threshold of semiotic activity; (4) the integration of the perspective of the subject and the perspective of the system.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF COUNTERPOINTS: RELATING IMPRESSION WITH EXPRESSION

Let us first examine the first of those four—to what extent is the basic model of the functional circle applicable to human sensations and expressions? According to Uexküll, all objects enter the animal’s *umwelt* via their perceptual as well as effector cues by inducing clearly distinguished perceptual and effector responses. Such a twofold process of receiving information followed by returning it reworked in an organism-specific form is characteristic for all living beings. Although there is a long evolutionary distance between the recognitions carried out by the cellular receptor proteins and signaling molecules (as perception), and corresponding genetic expressions, metabolic changes, or apoptotic behavior (as effects), and the orientation of vertebrates via highly differentiated sense organs (as receptors) and the limbic system (as effectors), both systems involve the establishment of a coded correspondence between the receptor and effector activities as their basis. This does not amount to stating that the same impulse always results in the same response. The organism with its specific form and current physiological state serves as a translation matrix that uses the correspondence between the perceptual and the motor systems in order to preserve its own organic form with each object-oriented functional circle. The coded duality of perception and action is simply a device via which the organism encounters meanings essential for its specific form of existence. Interpreting the organism as a translational matrix means that it provides an interpretational framework, in which all perceived objects are approached as actionable and actioned objects as perceivable.

We may thus infer from this that the specific linkage between what the organism perceives about the environment and how it responds can be formed only via a common meaningful framework between the two. Further, it is important to note that once such a relation has been established, its functioning becomes a necessity for preserving the meaningful framework itself. Thus the particular form, as well as

activities of an organism, rely on the encoded difference between its perception and action, impression and expression. The latter principle—the necessity of twofold activities for the preservation of complex phenomena or forms—is a topic that has provided common discussion ground for the philosophy of biology on the one hand and phenomenology of perception and philosophy of art on the other. One of the central authors uniting those two fields is Maurice Merleau-Ponty who also found a strong impetus from Uexküll’s *umwelt* theory, particularly for his courses on nature held at the Collège de France from 1956 to 1958.

Merleau-Ponty’s idea about the compulsory twofold nature of the body as a perceiver and as perceived can be summed up with his central motive of the “double sensation,” when my one hand touches my other hand (*see* Merleau-Ponty, 2002 [1945], p. 106, 1968 [1964], p. 141, 2003 [1995], pp. 74–75). It explains how one and the same body serves as a ground for acting and being acted upon and yet can never be in the two positions simultaneously. This temporal hiatus between the always reversible states of touching and being touched, seeing and being visible, as Merleau-Ponty explains, does not result in an ontological void between the two states, but “is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world, it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968 [1964], p. 148). Merleau-Ponty further postulated that the principle of reversibility does not reside just in one’s own body, but also among different organisms, which he designated with the word *intercorporeity*. By perceiving we thus also perceive the others as perceiving, as far as sensibility is unbound from its belonging to one and the same consciousness. This sort of a possibility for the perception of the other as a perceiving subject is absent in the Uexküllian *umwelt* model. Here, the reversibility of *umwelt* and *Innenvwelt*, of the perceived objects and the perceiving subject, is not possible, as the subject’s identity is solely based on the specific contacts with the objects as counterstructures. All objects in the world of an animal are directed toward its own existence; there is no object for another. Uexküll thereby remained true to the Kantian treatment of the subject, where “I can grasp the unity of the I only through its productions” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003 [1995], p. 22). In the Uexküllian approach, there is a correspondence between the different *umwelten*, but it is not caused by the subject’s perception of the other as a subject

and an object simultaneously, but it is caused by a general, supra-subjective plan of nature.

The function of presenting oneself as a perceivable object can be elaborated by special organs which exteriorize the organism in the same manner as the sense organs interiorize the world. This is the manner in which the Swiss zoologist Adolf Portmann discussed the function of the skin and other body surfaces as phenomena that have developed with the potential of being perceived by someone else (Portmann, 1990; cf. Kleisner, 2008). Firstly, the merely physiological function of several morphological traits has been enriched with a communicative function during evolution. The hair and plumage of warm-blooded animals became organs of communication besides their initial role of fixing stable body temperature; the skin's capillary network intensifies the color of the skin and thus serves as a sign for the psychosomatic state of the animal (Portmann, 1961, pp. 77–97). Secondly, there are multiple examples of morphological features that have never served any specific physiological function for the organism at all and to which Portmann attributes the role of the “self-expression/ or presentation” of the organism. Those traits may also attain a communicative function in the course of time, as is the case with some color patterns that acquire a mimetic value or begin to operate as warning signals.

Yet another variation on the topic of the anticipation of action in perception (and vice versa) as a binding phenomenon of humans and other living beings is provided by the American philosopher of art, Susanne Langer. Like Merleau-Ponty, Langer turned to biophilosophical questions in her later works while also integrating critical accounts of the *umwelt* theory (Langer, 1986 [1967]). The central notion upon which Langer builds her theory of the rootedness of artistic expression in the biological experience is “feeling.” As for an organism, what is felt is an action in the organism, either in the form of an impact or as autogenic action (Langer, 1986 [1967] pp. 23–24). Prior to the arousal of feelings, the simpler organisms already based their existence on perception containing “values for action.” With the development of the nervous system, feeling arises not as a property, but as a phase of vital activity (like ice is a phase of water), providing thus several physiological processes with the new status of “being felt.” The arousal of the domain of feeling is necessarily accompanied by its transfiguration into an expression. Thus if the organism's condition

prior to feeling adhered perception to action, feeling then becomes attached to its reverse in the form of expression. This kind of a “felt life” unites and serves as a foundation both for biological expressions such as gestures, postures, etc., as well as for artistic presentational symbols (see Weber, 2002). The latter are distinguished from discursive symbols, as they express not merely ideas, providing access to the more basic levels of organic existence.

Biological expressions as well as presentational symbols both express a certain significance and value that impressions have for the particular form of life. By filtering and sorting out only those bits of information that are meaningful for the particular living being, the peripheral organs already act toward the preservation of the form of which they constitute a part. Langer (1988 [1972], p. 55) has noted:

[...] The primary characteristics which animals see are values, and all the qualities of form, color, shape, sound, warmth, and even smell, by which we would naturally expect them to recognize things, enter into their perceptual acts only as they enter into their overt behaviour as values for action.

Susanne Langer's philosophy of presentational forms highlights the role of perception in opening up the world for signs, taking sense-data as receptacles of meaning (Langer, 1956 [1942]). “Eyes that did not see forms could never furnish it [the human mind] with images; ears that did not hear articulated sounds could never open it to words” (Langer, 1956 [1942], p. 73). However, in the Uexküllian *umwelt*, the meanings occur always together with forms. As far as all forms are functional and function is based on meaning, there is no before or after the meaning, as those categories are already abstractions unattainable to the animal itself.

#### POOR ANIMALS AND DEFICIENT HUMANS

Both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Susanne Langer had explicated a particular organism-centric mode of existence that opens the organism up for the world and yet, at the same time, encloses the organism in its specific modes of appearance. Both had stressed the importance of seeing the anticipation of action in even the most primitive perceptual contacts with the world; perception was understood as already being attuned to the behavioral setting and to the set of possible actions, (Merleau-Ponty, 2002 [1945]; cf. also Harney, 2007) or carrying values for the subsequent activities (Langer, 1988 [1972]; cf. Weber, 2002).

The *umwelt* theory provided quite a different impetus for two other thinkers—Martin Heidegger and Arnold Gehlen. Although using different arguments and bodies of knowledge, they both maintained the impossibility of departing from the notion of *umwelt* while tackling any of the essential questions concerning human beings. They both appreciate Uexküll's contribution to the description of the fundamental conditions of "being an animal," but demand a new contrastive principle for the explication of human conduct.

Gehlen found that human imperfection (*der Mensch als Mängelwesen*) in relation to any specific environmental condition is striking when comparing it with the perfect matching of the animal and its environment.<sup>8</sup> He traced the idea of the deficient human being, lacking all means that would allow him to attach, to fix himself to any environmental affordances, back to J. G. Herder's reflections on the origin of culture (Gehlen, 1997 [1940]). Inapt to face any demands of the environment by means of specialized organs, humans had to choose a different strategy for getting by. Culture was thus established as a compensatory mechanism for biological insufficiencies. In the biological sense, man is not yet ready, according to Gehlen; he is a task for himself.

Unlike Arnold Gehlen, Max Scheler, and Adolf Portmann, philosophers Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer<sup>9</sup> did not take specific morphological traits of man nor the adaptive inaptness accompanying them as a departure point for describing man's exceptional position among other living beings. Both Cassirer and Heidegger focused more strictly on man's specific mental modes of relating to the outer world. In broad terms, they both disclosed the semiotic or symbolic hiatus between man and animal, the human escape from the restraints of immediate physiological reactions. In his "An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture," Cassirer, when discussing the human entrance to the world of symbolic forms, also considers the new coercion that is thereby set on man (Cassirer, 1944). Once the novel sphere of symbolic interactions is opened up, man becomes fully enmeshed and enclosed in it. From then on, symbolic filtering becomes the single pathway leading from the self to the world, although, in essence, it always results in auto-communication, with man being caught in the forms of knowledge that establish his own identity.

Martin Heidegger's concern with the human world, free from the captivity of the immediacy that

is characteristic to all nonhuman worlds (Heidegger, 1983), is echoed also in the work of his otherwise critical student, Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka (Patočka, 1998 [1995]). Patočka contrasts the animal, embedded in the relations of immediate relevancy, forced into the constraints of constant presence, with the human, who is open not just to the domains of past and future, but also to all possible forms of past and future, which he calls quasi-structures (quasi-future, quasi-present) (Patočka, 1998 [1995], p. 32).

Excluding the aspects of past and future from the activity of any living being is highly problematic if the preservation of organic form is to be explained. Each act and activity of an organism already anticipates some further biological state, thus contributing to the presence of the specific organic form in the future. Each value and meaning that an animal encounters in the objects of its environment is at the same time an encounter with a possible future state. The "not yet" of the organism is touched upon with each perceptual act, giving way to the continuation of the self without reducing duration to an extracted present. A living being, therefore, is never a point in space, but an ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic extension, without a fixed moment of beginning and end, but with definite choices for the self-specific persistence.

All interpretations of Uexküll's *umwelt* concept introduced in this chapter, refer to it as a model that explicates the strict adaptations and deterministic, although species-specific, attachment of animal to its environment. In the next chapter, we return to the semiotic interpretations and see how the above-mentioned versions were challenged by a number of authors who questioned the claim that mediated access to the world is a privilege of humankind.

#### ACROSS THE SEMIOTIC PASS

A new merging of *umweltlehre* and the humanities in the form of a semiotic synthesis took place in the mid-1970s. It was a time when the language- and culture-bound discipline of semiotics started to seriously question its scope and extent. The coming years featured intensive discussions on the need to lower the semiotic threshold, i.e., to realize that the human mind and language are not the first instances of semiotic activity, but that animals, plants and in fact the whole living domain is based on the use of signs and the functioning of sign processes. Those new questions and research perspectives led to the establishment of a field called *biosemiotics*, which

concentrates specifically on the semiotic character of various biological processes (from immunological recognition to animal communication).

As the establishment of any new field is accompanied by the awakening and construction of its dormant historic background, so was the case for biosemiotics. After clarifying its basic principles, biosemiotics began with a search for the confirmational past. One of the founders of biosemiotics, Thomas A. Sebeok, with his primary interest in animal cognition and communication, found his predecessors mostly from ethological circles (Heini Hediger, Jakob von Uexküll) (Sebeok, 1999, 2001). The list of forefathers grew with the expansion of the field itself to include scientists from a number of subfields of biology; for example the embryologist Karl Ernst von Baer and the psychologist James Mark Baldwin. This biosemiotic quest for ancestors stemming from biology ran parallel with the rereadings of the classical authors of semiotics. Although American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce was to become the historical mentor for a significant part of biosemiotic research (Thomas Sebeok had called him the loadstar of semiotics (cf. Deely, 2004)), it is perhaps even more interesting to see how authors strictly bound to the humanities were linked to discussions of biosemiotics and to biological *umwelt* models.

Thus Jakob von Uexküll's son, Thure von Uexküll (1908–2004), who related the *umwelt* theory to very different models of semiotic processes, linked it even with a theory that is otherwise considered to be in opposition with biosemiotic principles. He explicated a homomorphic relationship between the principles of Jakob von Uexküll's *umweltlehre* and the structural semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>10</sup> According to T. von Uexküll, Saussure's distinction between the abstract language system (*langue*) and the concrete speech acts (*parole*) (Saussure, 1998 [1916]) might be seen as corresponding to Jakob von Uexküll's differentiation between plan of nature and its concrete realizations in life activity (T. v. Uexküll, 1992, pp. 4–6). T. von Uexküll made an important distinction between biological and linguistic sign systems, however, naming the former *perceptual or monological systems* (based on innate codes) and the latter *dialogical systems* (based on learned cultural codes). The classical authors of semiotics whose ideas Thure von Uexküll integrated with those of Jakob von Uexküll, included Charles Morris, Gottlob Frege and C. S. Peirce (T. von Uexküll, 1982, 1992, 1999).

## THE INTEGRATION OF TWO MEANINGS OF UMWELT

Despite centuries of debate, contemporary sciences of man still find themselves in what have been called the “turf wars between sociology and psychology” (Watson & Coulter, 2008, p. 2), i.e., the debates between the social versus cognitive interpretations of the human mind. Whereas the contradiction inside the humanities has gained further support from a corresponding institutional segregation, a number of philosophical endeavors, from phenomenology to pragmatism, have aimed at undermining the battleground. Extending and contextualizing the problem of mind, incorporating knowledge from areas separated by disciplinary borders, and inventing fully novel research arenas have all granted some assuagement, to a certain extent at least. Seen in the light of these developments, the theory of *umwelt* and its later cultural theoretical adaptations also face two alternatives—to join the debaters on either side of the cognitive-social divide or to adhere to the challenging efforts.

The *umwelt* concept could contribute to either one of the sides, if suitable threads of thought are extracted from the full web of the theory. Thus the cognitive enclosure of an animal (including humans) results in fully one-sided construction of all objects, unless the organism itself is simultaneously explained as a product of the constitutive ecological or social relations. On the other hand, the (biological) subject's meaning-initiated activity dissolves into a chain of causal reactions to environmental stimuli, unless the role of the organism as an active center of meaning formation is taken into account. In order to not thereby tear apart the subject-as-meaning-provider and subject-as-relations-induced, it is essential to find a framework of analysis that would maintain the two meanings of *umwelt*: as a world initiated and comprehended by the subject and as a node in the set of ecological relations encompassing the whole biosphere. Those two could also be referred to as the phenomenological and ecological facets of the theory of the *umwelt*. Only the simultaneous presence and usage of the two can guarantee a steady position outside the above-mentioned dilemma.

The essential question therefore is whether we could indicate some primary integrative mechanism that guarantees and produces the coherence of the two, and that logically explains their simultaneous presence? Uexküll himself has suggested what he called *planmäßigkeit*, as a ground for the synthesis (Uexküll, 1927, 1973 [1928]). As the word

seems to hint to a metaphysical grounding based on a preestablished harmony, preformationism, teleology, and an idealized state of affairs, it has not found many elaborations by later authors (*although see Hoffmeyer, 2004, 2008, pp. 172–173; Cheung, 2004*). However, several additional processes have been suggested for what could also ground the integration of the phenomenal and the ecological in *umwelt* theory, irrespective of whether *planmäßigkeit* is accepted or not. They can all be seen as mechanisms capable of establishing the relative autonomy of some entity, applicable at the same time to a number of natural and cultural phenomena (thus the phenomena of mind just as well as cells, organisms, and whole ecosystems can be included).

Frederick Stjernfelt, for example, has used subject-dependent categorical perception as a bonding mechanism between different species-specific phenomenal worlds:

[...] the condition of possibility for nature to link up in these strange ‘harmonies’ between different species’ *umwelten* depends precisely on categorical perception: the perceptual categories form the tones in the metaphor, and it is their categoricity only that permits them to enter into counterpoint between the single *umwelten*. (Stjernfelt, 2007, p. 236)

The traces of categorization and the complementarity of the categories of different species are observable by any kind of spatial and temporal discreteness. Unless the form and expressions of one species and the perception of another—e.g., the movement speed of the prey animal and the predator animal’s perceptual time-sectioning, the resolution of the insect’s eye and the size of its food object, the sound range of the male bird’s voice organs and the female’s hearing range—correspond to each other, the two species or organisms lack the means to enter one another’s *umwelt*. The dependence of ecological relations on perceptual units and categories appears thereby evident.

Individual percepts and categories never operate as individual units, as though demanding some extra mechanism for their integration. They never appear outside of the regulative and homeostatic self-maintenance process of the whole organism. Although the latter terms are mostly used for describing how the ontogenetic continuity of one organism is preserved in the fixed limits of certain parameters, self-regulation of the individual organism would not be possible unless it is supported by the coupled constancy of the environment, the

two constancies calling forth one another. The self-regulative and self-maintaining capacities of the organism had been a research interest of physiologists at least since the works of Claude Bernard in the mid-nineteenth century. Observations and discussions about the corresponding properties of ecosystems, however, were just emerging in the 1920s and 1930s (in the works of, e.g., Frederic Clements, John F. V. Phillips, Victor Shelford), at the time Uexküll wrote his major works. As the theories of the self-regulation of ecosystems were still in their outset in the first decades of the twentieth century, it may have been one of the reasons why Uexküll, in an organicist manner, used at some occasions the metaphor of the organism for describing the regularities in whole ecosystems, instead of discussing the characteristics of the ecosystems proper (cf. Uexküll, 1909, p. 196).

## Conclusion

We indicated a variety of ways in which Jakob von Uexküll’s theory of the species-specific *umwelt* has been thus far applied to the analysis of culture and the human mind. These concrete derivations have departed from different aspects of the theory while using it as a springboard for inferences concerning man. The following associations between *umwelt* theory and its cultural implications can hence be brought out:

1. If *umwelt* theory is interpreted as a demonstration of how biological form and behavior expose the sensory impressions an organism is capable of receiving, it may also draw attention to questions of the coupling of artistic forms of expression and the underlying impressions;
2. If *umwelt* theory is read as a theory of ideal biological adaptations and specialization of all living beings, except man, then culture appears to be an extension of the same vital need to cope with the environment, although of a different kind than all the previous morphological and physiological ones;
3. If we direct attention to the questions of meaning and sign-relations as expressed in the concept of *umwelt*, then research on the common semiotic footing of all living beings is to follow;
4. If *umwelt* theory is seen as a way of integrating the subjective and the systemic perspectives, then a possible solution to the cognitive-social divide in humanities may be suggested.

All this has given umwelt theory a remarkable place in several approaches to culture. The foundations of umwelt theory have passed through significant transformations every time they have entered a new cultural theoretical paradigm. In the face of this, we don't see a reason to strive for a purified essence of the theory, independent of all its interpretations and therefore suggest that umwelt theory itself can be seen as a good indicator of cultural theoretical change. It offers a number of culture-bound elaborations, the character and concrete realization of which is specified by the cultural and philosophical environment where it finds itself.

### Future Directions

Bearing in mind what we inferred in the conclusion, we can only rather generally suppose, what could further be the culture-bound questions, whereby umwelt theory can be employed.

First, there is still enough work for cultural studies to be done on how language itself functions as a system of perception and action and what are its relations to other sign systems that humans possess. A number of studies belonging to the field of embodied cognition, situated cognition, enactivism that have in the past decades demonstrated the sensorimotoric embeddedness of linguistic categories provide a strong foothold for further studies that might also encompass the principles Jakob von Uexküll delineated in respect with sensorimotoric coupling and its role in the formation of meanings. All those theories have paid attention to how the symbolic domain of language is strongly tied with the human bodily reactions and perceptions and Uexküll's contribution might help to clarify how the connections of the latter are brought about in the first place.

Another possible future investigation thread may lead to the questions about the transitions from perception to communication. Is Jakob von Uexküll's model of the functional circle still applicable, when the two interconnected entities are mutually "talkative," both carrying their own values and meanings? To think that there is always another who has a say toward a subject's actions, does not concern only situations where two or more living beings are directly involved. It comprises any situations where interests are in play. The other may therefore be present only indirectly, through the claim he may have for the same thing the subject is striving for. This means while making a choice (whether it's a living place, a piece of food or something else) taking

into consideration for whom else may the object in question be valuable. The acknowledgement of the interest fields that surround the objects should not be seen as a source of competition, though. That might rather lead to the establishment of shared interests and to a search for creative solutions for how the interest fields could further accommodate the diversity of subjects that they attract. That would also mean seeing other subjects behind oneself's actions, to the recognition that no activity can be only self-directed.

### Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT) and by the Estonian Science Foundation Grants ETF 8403 and SF0182748s06.

### Notes

1. The term "umwelt," if used as a loanword in English, may also refer to the milieu concept of the French philosopher and historian Hippolyte Taine (as the outer world that affects the organisms) and to the modern common-sense meaning of umwelt in German (Sutrop, 2001, p. 458). For the historic overview of the development of the terms "milieu," "environment," and "umwelt" see, e.g., Canguilhem (2001 [1948]) and Chien (2005).

2. "Ebenso objektiv wie die Faktoren der Umwelt sind, müssen die von ihnen hervorgerufenen Wirkungen im Nervensystem aufgefaßt werden. Diese Wirkungen sind ebenfalls durch den Bauplan gesichtet und geregelt. Sie bilden zusammen die Innenwelt der Tiere."

3. Under the classical models we understand here the linear models of communication (e.g., Wilbur-Shramm's, Shannon-Weaver's, and Jakobson's communication models). Although we are aware of the differences between them, such differences may be discarded in the context they are used here.

4. The mirror law or the law of reflection in physics characterises specular reflection, where the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection.

5. *Erscheinungswelt* (the world of appearances) is the world of meaningful objects as it appears to the subject. Unlike umwelt, it is not accessible to the external observer.

6. From Uexküll's legacy, we find a significant number of articles and essays on philosophical issues in science. These writings touch first and foremost on the differences in the physiologist's and the biologist's approaches to living phenomena. As Uexküll described the physiological approach as a mechanical one, he identified his own position with the one of biologist.

7. *Wär' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft / Wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?* (Goethe, 1810, p. xxxviii).

8. Max Scheler (1874–1928), who like Gehlen, belonged to the circles of German philosophical anthropology, reflected upon the same principle of nonadaptation as a biological impetus for the evolution of human species. Scheler called the latter an *organological dilettantism* (*organologische Dilettantismus*). He relied hereby on the evolutionary theories of the German physical anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch (1863–1916) (Scheler, 2001).

9. For in-depth studies on the relations of Uexküll's Umwelt theory and Cassirer's philosophy see Chien (2006), Krois (2004), Heusden (2001), Weber (2004); for the relations of Uexküll and Heidegger, see Buchanan (2008), Chien (2006).

10. Thure von Uexküll defines homomorphic relations as based on "[...] a fundamental conformity repeated on various levels of complexity, each time in a different way, but basically always in the same form [...]" (T. v. Uexküll, 1982, p. 5).

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## Culture and Epigenesis: A Waddingtonian View

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### Abstract

The relationship between biology and socio-cultural phenomena can be studied within either causal or metaphoric frameworks. Although *causal* analyses try to isolate biological factors and processes associated with cultural phenomena and work out how they bring them about, the *metaphoric* approach uses models and metaphors in one field to advance the other. This chapter outlines a metaphoric approach to studying socio-cultural phenomena that is based on the epigenetic landscape model developed by Waddington. The dynamic stability of socio-cultural phenomena is seen as a result of interrelated patterns of plasticity and canalization operating at different levels of organization and working through different mechanisms: social-structural, cultural, and biological. The chapter begins by distinguishing our view from other prevalent approaches, and then proceeds to explain Waddington's epigenetic approach and apply it to a well-researched sociological question—the reproduction of urban poverty.

**Keywords:** cultural evolution, epigenetic landscape, canalization, plasticity, Waddington

The relation between biology and culture—the effect of human culture on human biology, and the effect of human biology on human cultures—has received a great deal of attention in recent years. A cluster of approaches, differing in some ways, yet all inspired by biological evolutionary theory, is particularly influential (*see* Richerson & Boyd, 2005). Far less attention is given to analogies between developmental (e.g., embryological) processes and cultural processes. The open-ended nature of cultural transformations and the highly constrained, seemingly deterministic nature of developmental processes seem at first sight to make such an analogy inappropriate and no less problematic than that offered by approaches that stress specific genetic bases for culture. However, the problems facing studies of culture and society, and those facing studies of biological development are often similar.

Researchers studying embryological development, like those who study the dynamics of culture,

face an extremely complex system of relationships. In both cases, from an array of contingencies and interacting processes, a relatively coherent complex of phenomena emerges. For example, although both developmental biological and socio-cultural systems are in permanent flux, there is also a great deal of stability—what sociologists have been calling, for quite some time, “the problem of order.” We suggest that recent changes in the way biologists regard development—a greater stress on open-ended plasticity on the one hand, and on processes of canalization on the other (West-Eberhard, 2003)—make such biology “good to think with,” as Levi-Strauss would have put it.

In this paper, we outline such an approach inspired by developmental epigenetic research, and use insights from this field as metaphors that may be useful for thinking about some socio-cultural dynamics. We suggest that a nonreductive analysis of cultural phenomena can benefit from using

Waddington's (1957, 1968) view of developmental dynamics. We use Waddington's schema as a generative metaphor for socio-cultural dynamics; we do not assume that embryological dynamics can be seen as causal agents for cultural determination. Rather, we argue that, confronted by similar questions, sociologists and cultural anthropologists may benefit from the schema developed by Waddington.

We start by presenting and criticizing some of the most influential ways of thinking about the relation between biological determinants and socio-cultural configurations. We then move to define key concepts developed within the framework inspired by Waddington and discuss their application to cultural processes, focusing on a particular case—the reproduction of poverty. Throughout this chapter we make the point that since the relationship between the biological and socio-cultural levels is complex, “plastic,” and based on many (non-linear) feedbacks, any direct determination of a causal link from the biological to the cultural would be very partial, and often theoretically reckless. Biological and socio-cultural studies should, however, trade metaphors. Because they are engaged with similar dynamics—a study of multiple causes, of regularities and changes in a complex system—such trade, as we demonstrate, would be a fruitful endeavor.

### **Causal and Metaphoric Links between Culture and Biology**

Our approach stresses the “metaphoric links” between culture and biology. Although we agree that specific causal relationships between biology and culture may exist (in both directions) and although it is both clear and trivial that biology offers a template upon which culture evolves, this template is itself far from rigid, primarily providing a set of affordances that people socially and culturally mold in a variety of ways (Gibson, 1977). We argue that even in those cases where biological factors are to be taken into consideration as causally relevant for enabling cultural dynamics, they should be considered as inputs into a rich web of relationships in which they do not have a privileged status. Our approach is therefore close to that recently developed by Wimsatt and Griesemer (2007), who advocate a view of culture that focuses on processes of reproduction and co-reproduction among biological agents and cultural artifacts, rather than processes of replication and diffusion. Although they use the metaphor of *scaffolding*—social processes and embodied products that support and facilitate

the reproduction of complex behaviors—we focus on the processes that generate trajectories that lead to the reproduction of the same social-cultural state, even when these trajectories and many of the specific social products that are generated are variable. Thus, we see Wimsatt and Griesemer as providing a view that complements our own by specifying one class of stabilizing mechanisms.

Our view is, however, different from the dominant evolution-inspired approaches to culture, which we discuss in the sections below, so we first need to clearly distinguish it from them. In each case, having summarized the views put forward by the advocates of other approaches, we point to the kind of problems that make that view, in our eyes, partial, problematic, or even untenable. We differentiate between three major evolutionary approaches:

- a. A *memetic* approach, which regards cultural evolution as the result of the selection of memes, units of culture that are analogous to genes (Dawkins, 1976; Blackmore, 1999);
- b. The *massive modularity* view, which sees culture and cultural processes as powerfully influenced by preexisting mental cognitive and affective modules (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992, 1995; Pinker, 1997). This approach, which takes several forms, assumes strong, domain-specific, and partially encapsulated psychological processing devices, which are evoked by external social inputs;
- c. The *dual inheritance population* approach—an approach that focuses on selection by individuals of cultural variants, inspired by population genetics and quantitative genetics models, but not committed to distinct replicatable cultural units (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Richerson & Boyd, 2005). It uses general social-cognitive biases, such as the tendency of people to follow the majority habit or copy prestigious individuals, as important determining factors of cultural dynamics.

### ***The Memetic View of Cultural Evolution***

This evolutionary approach is inspired by Dawkins' selfish gene idea and can be seen as an (analogical) extension of this view into the cultural domain (Dawkins, 1976; Blackmore, 1999). According to this view, cultural units, *memes*, are cultural replicators, and cultural evolution is governed by the selection of memes. Memes are determined by cognitive neural processes within individuals,

which may control the evolution of their carriers in a way similar to that in which viruses control their hosts. Like the selfish gene approach, where genes are the units of analysis, the memetic view suggests that ideas are the replicatable units for the analysis of culture, and people are but the carriers of such “replicators.”

This metaphor, however, has several serious problems. First, the nature of the memes is extremely fuzzy—memes are sometimes thought of as transmissible behaviors, sometimes as cultural products, and sometimes as circuits in the brain. Secondly, and most importantly, the idea that cultural behavior is “replicated” involves unrealistic assumptions about the way cultural meanings are acquired, a view that sees learning as a simple process of imitation, rather than as a pragmatic reworking of a given problem. This approach is therefore misleading—cultural behaviors are not replicated. Rather, culturally meaningful behaviors are developmentally acquired and constructed during individual ontogeny and social history. Since we regard developmental construction and reconstruction as an elementary aspect of culture and socio-cultural processes, disregarding it means, in our opinion, that the meme theory cannot properly explain the most fundamental facts about cultural dynamics—innovation, dynamic stability, and change (*for detailed critiques see* Sperber, 1996, 2011; Avital & Jablonka, 2000; Jablonka & Lamb, 2005).

### ***Evolutionary Psychology and the Massive Modularity Thesis***

The second approach is held by most twenty-first-century evolutionary psychologists. On the basis of widespread similarities in human behavior across different cultures, this view holds that “human nature” is reflected as a large collection of specific psychological adaptations that evolved about two million years ago, when our ancestors appeared and lived as hunter-gatherers (Pinker, 1997, p. 21). Following James (1890), who thought that human beings are flexible and intelligent because they have more, not fewer, instincts than other animals, evolutionary psychologists believe that the variety of problems faced by our ancestors led to the evolution of many specific modules: “hundreds or thousands of modules,” to quote Tooby and Cosmides (1995, p. xiii).

The idea that biological biases in psychological processes are organized as modules is taken from Fodor’s treatment of perceptual modules (Fodor,

1983). Modules are assumed to be functionally and neurologically distinguishable from each other, with each module having its own database, its own set of inputs that is specific to a particular empirical domain and that acts as a trigger, often during a critical period of development. In addition, modules have dedicated processing procedures, and domain-specific outputs (Fodor, 1983; Sperber, 2005). Evolutionary psychologists generalized this view, so that every strong behavioral human-specific tendency or behavioral bias is referred to as a module. Humans are supposed to have modules for humor, for mate choice, for food sharing, for cheater detection, and so on. According to this massive modularity thesis, then, the reaction to inputs is a process of evocation rather than construction (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). The specificity and number of modules is the weakest point in this thesis (*for detailed criticisms, see* Karmiloff-Smith, 1994; Uttal, 2003; Sterelny, 2003; Jablonka & Lamb, 2005). Although some domain-general mechanisms (e.g., working memory) are accepted as important, and it is acknowledged that modules may have complex interactions with environmental inputs (*see* Buss & Reeve, 2003; Sperber, 2005), the assumption of massive modularity is maintained. In other words, evolutionary psychologists resist the idea that many of the “modules” they posit can be the effects of an interaction between a small number of domain-general procedures with socially constructed stimuli and processes. According to the massive modularity approach, instead of the interactions, the modules themselves are understood as specific.

Although the modular organization of some biological structures is not in doubt (West-Eberhard, 2003), this does not mean that specific psychological regularities must result from a specific modular cluster, or that these clusters have the properties assigned to them by such evolutionary psychology. The metaphor of the brain as a collection of modular “organs” is associated with several problematic assumptions. First, the difference between a species-specific organ-like module that requires little learning (such as inborn fear of snakes in some birds), and a module that requires substantial active learning is not very clear (Mameli & Bateson, 2006). Most normal people exposed to schooling who can read and write develop what may be viewed as a “literacy module” which can be selectively impaired, as cases of dyslexia prove; however, it is clear that “triggering” and “evoking” cannot describe the complex and learning-dependent process of constructing

literacy practices. There was no genetic evolution specific to literacy, and this is clearly a case of a specific interaction between more general cognitive-biological affordances and a specific social situation. Secondly, it seems that entrenched *individual* habits may have a cognitive structure which is quite similar to that attributed to a module. For example, a chess master may develop something resembling a “chess module”, and a professional football player can be said to develop a “football module.” In fact, every learned habit or cognitive obsession, with its developmentally constructed semispecialized and semilocalized brain mechanisms, can be described as a module, with more or less genetically guided aspects. Assuming that these modules are all specifically evolved is an unwarranted stretch of the imagination. Finally, the evidence from neurobiology for the existence of innate specialized cognitive modules is almost nonexistent. The only good example is the “language module”, and this too can be interpreted in less rigid terms than required by a massive modularity view, stressing the emotive, social, and learning-dependent aspects of language evolution (Tomasello & Slobin, 2005).

In short, the hypothesis that there are cognitive, sensory, and motor biases in humans, as in other animals, seems valid and nonproblematic (although, of course, such biases cannot be invoked at will); the assumption that they must be organized as distinct modules—with all the baggage that the term carries—is, however, unwarranted. The massive modularity approach downplays the significance of the formation of a vast number of new and changing neural connections between different areas in the brain during conscious behavior, the great open-ended plasticity of human behavior, and the major role of social factors.

### ***Dual-Inheritance Theory (DIT) Approaches***

A third approach, which is related to the view we take in this chapter, stresses mostly the analogies between the dynamics of social and cultural change and biological-genetic population processes. The proponents of this view (see Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Richerson & Boyd, 2005), revive parts of the diffusionist approach to cultural evolution, which was prevalent during the late nineteenth century, but add to it a rigorous methodology and a theoretical rationale. They argue that population thinking is the key to understanding cultural dynamics. Individuals acquire and use cultural information,

modify it (either accidentally or deliberately), and transmit it to others, both kin and nonkin. Some of the cultural information is beneficial or gratifying at some level, and persists. Other types of information are deleterious and are weeded out. However, simple benefits that enhance biological fitness are not sufficient, for there are additional processes that affect cultural dynamics, such as the tendency to act as the majority of people do (a conformity bias), and the tendency to imitate powerful individuals (a prestige bias).

The evolutionary effects of culture according to DIT are modeled by using (appropriately modified) population and quantitative genetics models. A well-known example is the selection of the alleles for breaking down the lactose sugar in milk, a trait that was favored in some human populations following the domestication of cattle (*for a basic review, see Jablonka & Lamb, 2005, Chapter 8; for a recent ramification, see Tishkoff et al., 2007*). According to the DIT theorists, the basic cognitive architecture of human beings constrains culture, but this constraint is far looser than that suggested by evolutionary psychologists. Instead of an encapsulated module in the massive modularity model sense, it is a bias or an affordance.

The DIT approach assumes that culture and genetics act upon each other, rather than that there is a uni-causal direction from genes to culture, and it uses population genetics models for thinking about cultural diffusion. Although we sympathize with both of these positions, we believe that as far as the metaphor goes, the DIT model can be improved. Population genetics models do indeed throw light on some aspects of cultural dynamics, but they provide only a partial account. The assumption that meaning diffuses because it is better “adapted” at the biological or cultural level is debatable. It seems to overlook some of the important ways through which cultural diffusion has worked throughout history—through forced diffusion, coercion, and conquest. Catholicism, for example, is not better “adapted” than Incan religion; it did, however, use guns—something that had a very tangential relationship to Catholicism. Although DIT theorists accept force (and other macrosocial phenomena) as the initial context for change in populations, they analyze it in terms of within-population dynamics and not in terms of global politics and macroeconomics, a perspective that is undoubtedly of importance for such cases.

In other words, the mapping of the relation between cultural “parents” and cultural “offspring”

provides only a partial view of cultural dynamics: the way that institutional practices, social products, political coercion, and economic constraints affect individual behavior is not just a background and a “selective environment.” These structural constraints are produced by individuals but can also direct and overwhelm transmission biases. *Macroevolutionary* processes like wars and global political processes are ever-present, always affecting the *microevolutionary* processes of diffusion within populations. Although DIT theorists focus on the diffusion of practices, propensities, etc. within populations, with the large-scale economic and political processes being construed as a background of necessary initial conditions, it may be more useful to situate the economic and political factors in the foreground as dynamic processes, no less important than the mechanisms of transmission of cultural practices among individuals within a population. Indeed, although the diffusion of cultural meaning cannot be reduced to political/economic conditions (*see* Alexander, 2003), these conditions always co-constitute the processes of diffusion. Thus, although the dynamics of transmission/acquisition are, as the DIT theorists claim, a constitutive part of cultural processes, they are one set of mechanisms, interacting in complex ways with other factors and mechanisms.

### Summary of Criticisms

In summary, we regard the lack of a developmental perspective in the memeticists’ and most evolutionary psychologists’ approaches as a serious flaw. We sympathize with the DIT approach, and think that many of the insights and methodologies it offers are useful, but we do not think that a population view is sufficient for explaining cultural phenomena and processes. Although, as we explain in the next section, processes of selective stabilization are central to our development-oriented approach, Darwinian population genetics describes only one type of such stabilization, and is not sufficient for the explanation of cultural dynamics. Indeed, in many situations it may be detrimental, leading us to think about adaptability of meaning where no such adaptive edge exists. In some ways our view is close to Sperber’s, although we do not subscribe to his massive-modularity assumption. In order to explain our view, we start by presenting Waddington’s epigenetic approach to the development of organisms and the assumptions underlying his model of an “epigenetic landscape.”

### Waddington’s Epigenetic View

The term *epigenesis*, which is the inspiration for the modern term *epigenetics*, refers to the Aristotelian view (although Aristotle himself never used it) that the characteristics of offspring are not preformed in the material transmitted by their parents, but rather arise sequentially during embryological development through qualitative changes in both material and organization. This approach was an alternative to what became known as the *preformationist* view, which posited that development consists of an unfolding of preexisting organization (Fry, 2000).

In the 1940s and 1950s, Waddington (1940, 1957) in Great Britain, and Schmalhausen (1949) in the Soviet Union, initiated studies of development and evolution that were centered on the complementary aspects of developmental canalization and phenotypic plasticity, two processes that decouple genetic and phenotypic variations. This view is known as an epigenetic view. The term epigenetics was suggested by Waddington who wrote in retrospect:

Some years ago (i.e. 1947) I introduced the word ‘epigenetics’, derived from the Aristotelian word ‘epigenesis’, which had more or less passed into disuse, as a suitable name for the branch of biology which studies the causal interactions between genes and their products which bring the phenotype into being. (Waddington, 1968, p. 12)

The “genetics” part of “epigenetics” points to Waddington’s awareness of the crucial role of genes in development, while the “epi” part of the term, which means “upon” or “over,” reflects Waddington’s intention to study developmental processes that go “over” or “beyond” the gene.

This epigenetic approach, which was somewhat neglected during the 1970s and 1980s, has recently been revived and expanded by a growing number of theoretical and experimental biologists. Modern epigenetic approaches stress the importance of the developmental dynamics of cellular and intercellular networks of interactions during the individual’s development, and sometimes also between generations of individuals. In addition to the emphasis on development and on the relation between genetic and extragenetic factors, the current epigenetic approach is guided by a set of heuristic concepts that are associated with Waddington’s views. The most important of these include “plasticity,” “canalization,” and “phenotypic accommodation.” Since

our approach to culture should be seen in the light of these, we first define and describe them.

*Plasticity* is defined in biology today as the ability of a single genotype to generate variant forms of morphology, physiology, and/or behavior, in response to different environmental circumstances. The responses can be reversible or irreversible, adaptive or nonadaptive, active or passive, continuous or discontinuous (West–Eberhard, 2003). The repertoire of alternative plastic responses to new conditions may be limited and predictable, as it is, for example, with seasonal changes in the color and patterns of butterflies' wings. Plasticity can also be, however, broad and relatively open-ended. Such open-ended plastic responses include unpredictable, novel adaptive responses, as seen when animals learn new behaviors through trial and error, or when humans engage in cultural behaviors such as building cathedrals or writing novels. Such open-ended plasticity is of central importance for understanding cognitive and cultural behaviors.

The mirror image of plasticity is canalization. *Canalization* is defined as “the adjustment of developmental pathways so as to bring about a uniform result in spite of genetic and environmental variations” (Jablonka & Lamb, 1995, p. 290, based on Waddington, 1957). In other words, canalization leads to the production of a stable output despite changes in inputs and/or in developmental trajectories. It leads to robustness and stability in a “noisy” world in which both the genetic milieu and the external environment are constantly changing. A single typical phenotype is generated by many different underlying genotypes and in many environmental conditions.

Canalization and plasticity are closely and intimately related: almost every case of canalized development (in the face of genetic and environmental “noise”) assumes plasticity at underlying or overlying levels of organization. There are many examples of this. Thus, to take an example from neurobiological research, it has been established that inputs from other brain areas during early embryonic development, influence the formation of specific cortical areas. For example, if retinal input is rerouted to the auditory cortex, the latter develops visual properties (Roe, Kwon, & Sur, 1992). Similarly, the ability of the adult neocortex to change its structure during the lifespan of an individual is also quite striking, and many examples of experiential modifications in the organization of the brain have been reported, in both normal and sick subjects. Following various

injuries, cortical areas devoted to certain functions undergo rearrangements, as is found after limb amputation or stroke episodes. In stroke patients, measurements employing brain imaging techniques during finger movements in a previously paralyzed hand have demonstrated complex patterns of brain reactivation; activity in certain areas of the cortex increases (Weiller, Chollet, Friston, Wise, & Frackowiak, 1992; Weiller, Ramsay, Wise, Friston, & Frackowiak, 1993), as changes follow rehabilitation treatments (Liepert, Bauder, Miltner, Taub, & Weiller, 2000).

Moreover, the plasticity mechanisms that enable brain reorganization have more than compensatory functions. Novel functional organization, which has never been seen in the ontogenetic or phylogenetic past of the individual, can become evident. The set of developmental processes that lead to novel phenotypic outputs has been called *phenotypic accommodation* (West-Eberhard, 2003, pp. 140, 146). The notion is perhaps best exemplified by a morphological example, the case of a two-legged goat that was described by Slijper in 1942. This goat was born without forelegs, and with the help of a caring farmer adopted a semi-upright posture, ending up hopping, kangaroo-like, bipedally and independently, on its hind legs. After its death, postmortem examination revealed many coordinated changes in its morphology, which were the consequence of its unusual mode of locomotion. In addition to a changed hind leg and pelvic structure, it had a curved spine, an unusually thick and large neck, and various functionally correlated changes in its skeleton and musculature (*see* West-Eberhard, 2003). Less spectacular, but still striking examples of phenotypic accommodation are found in normal subjects challenged with unusual tasks: for example, in the case of skilled string players, who use their left hand in playing music, the sensorimotor cortical areas in the right (but not in the left) hemisphere are enlarged (Elbert, Pantev, Wienbruch, Rockstroh, & Taub, 1995). Similarly, expanded sensorimotor cortical finger areas are seen in healthy Braille readers (Pascual-Leone & Torres, 1993).

Phenotypic accommodation is a consequence of general biological properties such as mechanical flexibility—the many partially overlapping regulatory elements—and, crucially, processes of “exploration” and “selective stabilization,” not only at the cellular and physiological levels, but also at behavioral and social levels. Exploration and selective

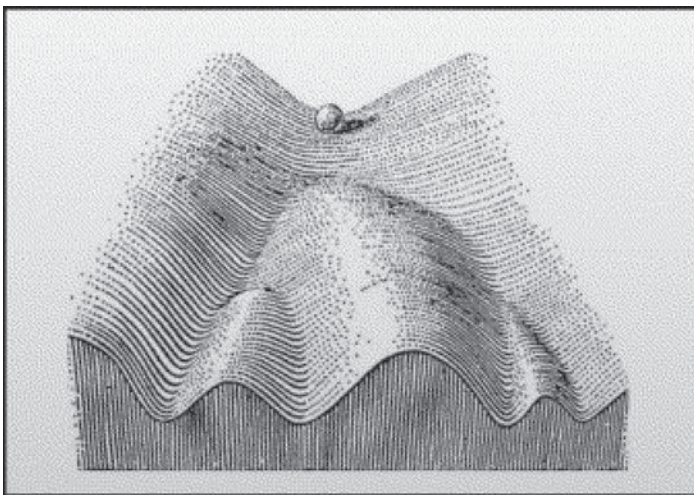
stabilization processes are based on a common principle—the generation of a large set of local variations and interactions, from which only a small subset is eventually stabilized and manifested. Which particular output is realized depends on the initial conditions, the ease with which developmental trajectories can be deflected away from their current paths, and the number of possible points around which development can be stably organized. Following convention, we refer to these points as “attractors,” since they are stabilizing end-states toward which the system seems to “strive.” This, of course, should not be understood as a classical teleological view, because the end points do not literally attract the processes leading to it. Rather, “attractor” is a shorthand to describe a process in which a large number of interacting factors tend to co-regulate and to reinforce each other in ways that regularly produce a specific end point. There could be different permutations and plastic shifts in many of the underlying processes, creating a number of variations in trajectories, but the end point would be similar. Put concisely, the selective stabilization processes that lead to an attractor involve both canalization (at the output level) and extensive plasticity manifested as extensive exploration and trajectory variability.

An example of a selective stabilization is the exploratory behavior of unicellular organisms, like bacteria or paramecia. A paramecium that has its path blocked starts moving in random directions. Its movement is only stabilized and directed when it encounters an attracting stimulus, such as light or food. Exploratory, initially random, behavior is also observed in plants’ growth trajectories: for example

the movements of the stem of a plant that is grown in the dark are erratic, and growth only becomes directional when the plant encounters the directing stimulus (light in this example), which leads to the stabilization of growth in the direction of the light (West-Eberhard, 2003, pp. 38–39). Other examples are the selective stabilization of synaptic connections during development and learning (Changeux, Courge, & Danchin, 1973; Edelman, 1987), and, at the behavioral level, trial-and-error learning in animals. Sperber highlights the role of attractors—both cognitive biases, and cultural structures and products—in the evolution of culture (Sperber, 1996, 2005, 2011; Claidière & Sperber, 2007). He argues that attraction can lead to cultural stability even in the face of variations and a low fidelity of copying.

The dynamic stability of the macrolevel in the face of microlevel variations and processes is the key feature of canalization and is best understood through Waddington’s diagrams of his “epigenetic landscape” model of development (Waddington, 1957; see Fig. 30.1 and Fig. 30.2).

Development is represented as a ball rolling down a tilted landscape, with many hills and branching valleys descending from a high plateau, which represents the initial state of the fertilized egg (Fig. 30.1). The attractor toward which the ball rolls is a morphological, physiological, or behavioral state, which is relatively stable: A functioning heart, a functioning eye, locomotor ability in a human child (see Thelen, 1995). The downward slope represents temporal movement, with the bottom representing the final state of affairs and the top representing the initial state. The steepness of a valley can be thought of as biases and propensities, constraints and specific



**Figure 30.1** An epigenetic landscape. Taken from Figure 4, entitled “Part of an Epigenetic Landscape” on p. 29 of Waddington’s *The Strategy of the Genes* (1957).

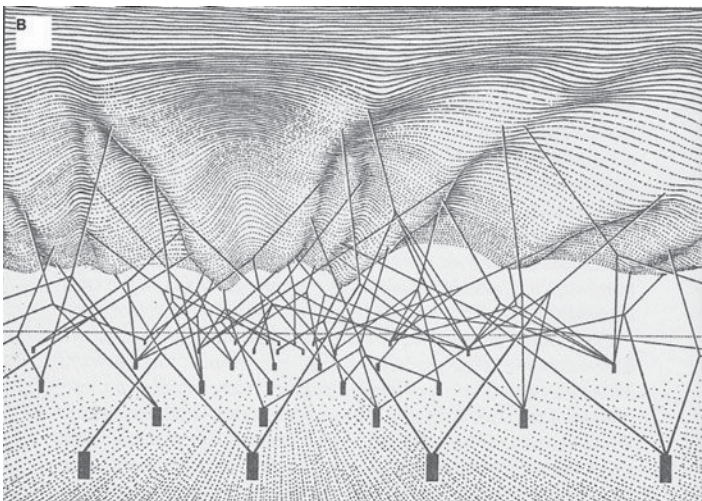
affordances, and it indicates how much the system can vary—how well-buffered it is.

The landscape is underlain by a network of interacting elements (Fig. 30.2). It is shaped by the tension of guy ropes that are tied to pegs in the ground. As can be seen in the figure, which is like an X-ray picture of the hidden dynamics below the surface, the topological relations of the interacting pegs and guy ropes determine the architecture of the visible undulating landscape (Figs. 30.1 and 30.2). These interactions could be described by network-theory models, in that the different pegs are themselves related to each other in complex ways that make some pegs more “central” than others, because they have connections with many other pegs, while other pegs are more “redundant.” As stressed in network theory, it is not only the number of different pegs (different interacting units) that is important, but the way they interact (*see, for example*, Bonacich, 1987; Brandes & Erlebach, 2005). In Waddington’s schema, the pegs represent genes, and the guy ropes represent their biochemical and regulatory effects. The specific developmental trajectory toward the attractor can change—there are many routes that can be taken, processes of exploration generate alternative routes that stabilize once the attractor is reached, whatever the route and trajectory taken and whatever the precise initial conditions. Although in certain circumstances the existing biases and propensities may be overcome and a different attractor may be reached, this requires that a new challenge (e.g., strong stress) alters the multiple interactions among the elements, and generates a new network of interactions that divert the ball from its normal course. The steepness of the valleys, and hence the

outcome of development, can be altered through natural selection. In other words, attractors, and the ease or difficulty of reaching them, can change during evolution.

### *Social Landscapes and Cultural Attractors*

We can use this visual model to describe the formation of new behavioral and cultural attractors. We must, of course, spell out what this social-epigenetic landscape may stand for, what the time axis is, and what the underlying interacting factors are. Unlike the embryological landscape, the social landscape in Figure 30.1 is not one of unfolding differentiation from a relatively simple to an increasingly differentiated state, but rather the outcome of the dynamics of the processes underlying it. Unlike the pegs in Waddington’s picture, which are usually different from the guy ropes emanating from them (in Waddington’s landscape, pegs are genes and guy ropes are proteins and different types of regulatory elements), there is no such clear distinction between social pegs and their effect. For example, if the quality of the school in a poor neighborhood is a “peg” in a landscape that depicts the reproduction of poverty (*see next section*) the behaviors of the pupils, their parents and their teachers both constitute the peg and are the guy ropes emanating from it. Figure 30.2 shows just part of a larger network (aspects of the social environment in the wide sense). The inclining slope leads to several large attractors (not seen in the picture) that are different socio-cultural phenomena. Depending on the initial conditions and the specifics of the landscape from which it starts, an individual is likely to reach one particular attractor state.



**Figure 30.2** The networks underlying and constructing the landscape.

Taken from Figure 5, entitled “The complex system of interactions underlying the epigenetic landscape” on p. 36 of Waddington’s *The Strategy of the Genes* (1957).



As a preliminary example, let us look at the cultural stability of a particular hypothetical culinary culture. Imagine a society with a culinary tradition in which salty and spicy, well-cooked food is strongly preferred, and assume that in this society the tradition, which involves the preparation and consumption of specific dishes, has been stable for many generations. What are the interacting factors, and why does the network they form lead to a stable, persistent, tradition? In this case the interacting factors are likely to be ecological, social, and biological:

a. *Ecological factors*: The area is hot, food spoils easily and the well-cooked, salted, spicy food is safer than food prepared differently. Plants from which spices can be made grow in the area, and the use of spices, and the cooking methods, enhance the safety of the consumed food.

b. *Social factors*: Spicy food has come to be identified with this society, and begins to identify individuals as members of this particular group. Specific dishes come to have important social-symbolic (e.g., religious) meaning, being eaten during festivities or other important occasions (weddings, funerals). Eating very spicy food gives an individual special prestige, as does preparing spicy dishes. The food is therefore related to a whole network of significant social activities and processes, which are mutually dependent. Economic activities that are centered on the growth, selling/buying, and preparation of the food used for cooking reinforce its value. Some spices that are not readily available are imported from several other localities. Economic activity is also associated with medicinal practices, since the spices have, or are believed to have, specific medicinal effects, used in the local physicians' practices.

c. *Biological and psychological factors*: Young children are exposed to the food during early childhood, and develop a lifelong preference for it. Moreover, pregnant women transmit food traces to their offspring through the placenta and through milk, and the offspring develop food preferences similar to those of their mothers (Mennella, Jagnow & Beauchamps, 2001). Exposure at early stages (in utero, as neonates, during early childhood), reinforces the same food preference, which becomes dominant (for a review of animal examples, see Jablonka & Lamb, 2005, Chapter 5). It is possible that in some populations, where the culture has persisted for a long time, there has been some

selection for genes coding for proteins that are related to the reaction to food intake.

The example above already includes some of the elements of a metaphoric use of Waddington's schema. Clearly, and contrary to Waddington's own use of the model, we do not assume that the pegs are all genetic. Rather, the pegs are the interacting processes and factors (in which individuals and groups are active agents) that lead, in this example, to cultural stability. Some of these may be the ecological, epigenetic, and genetic factors that biologists feel comfortable talking about, but others are symbolic, economic, and social aspects that cannot be reduced to the biological. What ties them together in an epigenetic-like landscape is that these are all mutually reinforcing mechanisms that lead the individual to a shared outcome (or "attractor"), namely eating spicy food. We can imagine a situation in which an individual leaves the community, breaking with the symbolic aspects of liking spicy food (even thinking that it is silly to treat spicy food as a symbolic boundary), but nevertheless still likes spicy food because of the preferences garnered in utero and early life. Similarly, we can imagine an individual who absolutely detests spicy food, but will still eat it, because she wants to be considered a competent member of the community. In both examples, the underlying variability in preferences and specific behaviors is still strongly canalized, leading to the attractor.

In the example above, the attractor state has biological adaptive significance for the individual because we assumed that the ecological factors make the consumption of the food beneficial (it is "healthy"). However, it is easy to relax this assumption, by assuming, for example, that a group of immigrants from the locality settled down in a different place, where medical care renders the consumption of spices completely irrelevant for health. But even though the spicy food is no longer beneficial, the tradition will still persist. In fact, one of the interesting aspects of the landscape model is that it can be used to interpret not only cases where there are some benefits to the outcome (when the attractor provides a positive selective advantage at the physiological level, the cultural level, or both). Rather, it can also be used to interpret cases where the attractor is clearly nonadaptive. The regulatory architecture of the dynamic network may have properties that overwhelm the chances of reaching alternative, more adaptive attractors. A representative case that can be interpreted in these terms is the reproduction of urban poverty.

## Realizing the Metaphor: The Case of Urban Poverty

We now move to consider ways in which thinking in epigenetic terms—specifically through Waddington’s epigenetic landscape metaphor—may help sociologists and anthropologists who deal with meaning and social structures to make sense of the patterns of action that people construct and decode, and into which they find themselves born. One thing that makes Waddington’s model useful is its similarity to current thinking about stability and change. Thus, whereas order was once seen as a non-problematic social point of reference, and change and conflict were seen as the phenomena we needed to explain, current theorizations of social life focus on the dynamics of both change and stability. As in Waddington’s model, the assumption is that any outcome is an end point in a long series of interactions, many of them highly contingent. Structure is not something that exists independent of these contingent interactions, and indeed, if structure “exists,” it exists as a process (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992). Thus, like Waddington, sociologists have moved to think about the *dynamics of stability* as much as about the dynamics of change.

Thinking along these lines, we take one general problem that has been central to urban anthropologists and sociologists—the reproduction of urban poverty. This is a potentially useful topic to think through, because, as will become apparent, it displays the two “Waddingtonian” dynamics we have presented above: A highly complex system that is constantly shifting, and a relatively stable outcome. Additionally, the question of urban poverty has received sustained attention, which allows us to bring together different claims made in this context.

Although some mobility exists, and people do move from one socioeconomic category to another, urban poverty can be thought of as “hereditary.” This “heredity” does not work in any biological sense, but simply in the sense that people who grow up poor tend to stay poor, the myth of the self-made man notwithstanding. Indeed, the degree of income correlation between generations is extremely high in the United States, and children born in the lowest quintile (20%) of the socioeconomic ladder have only a 1% chance to end up in the highest 5% (Herz, 2006). This is compounded in the case of poor blacks in the United States, where 63% of black children born into the lower-income quarter,

will remain there as adults (Herz, 2006), and this percentage is higher if we make our scale finer, and go lower down the socioeconomic status ladder. In other words, remaining poor can be seen as a strong attractor, a dynamically stable point people tend to reach if they are born into a specific economic stratum—although replication is not perfect, poverty is a strong attractor.

Why, exactly, poverty is such an end point is of course a matter of some debate. Some aspects are obvious. Poorer people don’t have the family connections that often provide good jobs, they usually live in blighted areas in which the only available jobs are rotten, the schools are bad, and children are expected to be working-class when they grow up, rather than being expected to go on to be lawyers, businessmen, etc. The parents’ position also affects their children through education. Thus, if there are no books in the home, or if parents cannot (or do not have time to) help children with their homework, and do not have the money to have them tutored, the effects can be predicted. Systematic discrimination, where it is harder for blacks to even obtain jobs, does not help (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Other aspects that work into the reproduction of poverty are less widely recognized. Wilson (1987), for instance, argued that the low socioeconomic mobility of poor blacks in the United States is directly related to the decisions of the few that actually “make it out” of the ghetto. Simply put, they disappear. They move out to middle class neighborhoods, and often sever the friendships (and kinship) and ties they had with their poorer social network. In effect, there is no collective efficacy, and the poor are now worse off, as those elements in their social network that could have helped them gain mobility are no longer there.

So far, the evidence for canalization is clear, but the evidence for plasticity is missing—the stability of poverty seems inevitable and mostly divorced from the question of meaning. A series of studies of the black ghetto and other working-class contexts, however, shows how poor urban blacks and other working-class residents attempt to “make it” in their environment; how they imbue their surroundings with meaning, and try to make sense of themselves as actors in such an environment. Thus, Newman (1999) shows that many residents in these blighted neighborhoods try to yank themselves up by their bootstraps, fostering a middle-class ethic of work, which they put into the worst jobs available—the “McJobs” at food establishments.

Other studies (Bourgois, 2003) show how drug dealers are attempting to realize a dream of mobility through their dealings, while simultaneously fostering a street “savvy” that gains them respect on the streets (*see also* Anderson, 1999).

People also try to cope with the poverty, constructing “niches” of respectability within it. Thus, for example, Duneier (1999) shows how homeless men and women in New York’s Greenwich Village make sense of their surrounding, selling magazines that they pick up from the trash of others, building up an ecology in which they can both survive and make sense of themselves as moral individuals. In other words, the end point of poverty is dealt with in different ways; there is quite a lot of plasticity and variation in the ways that people deal with their surroundings.

However, what makes Waddington’s metaphor “work” in this context is that these different strategies are all canalized. Thus, workers in McJobs, where there is very little occupational mobility between ranks, remain poor. They may get a sense of themselves as decent breadwinners, or see their jobs as “slaving” (Newman, 1999, p. 133), but they will almost certainly remain poor, with jobs that pay minimum wages. On the other hand, upon close inspection the “lucrative” allure of drug dealing turns out to be a myth. Not only is there the constant danger of being shot or arrested, but most drug dealers, if they carefully counted their earnings, would realize that they make little more than the minimum wage. Drug dealers’ illusions that they make “fast cash” stem from the fact that their work involves sudden cash flows, but this is punctuated by long lulls where they make nothing. Although the lives of drug dealers and McWorkers are different, both “plastic” adaptations are thus canalized into the same general socioeconomic outcome.

This relationship between plasticity and canalization can perhaps be best seen in Willis’ (1981) study “learning to labor.” One of the poignant points in Willis’ work is that the sons and daughters of working-class families often rebel at school. Knowing that their life trajectories are predetermined (and overdetermined), they try to kick in all directions, flunking school and fostering a masculine image of themselves as rebels in the process. Yet, without having a high school diploma or credentials, they are doomed to follow in the footsteps of their parents; it is exactly through their attempts to rebel against their condition that their condition is reproduced.

The striking point in all these cases is that different strategies and contingencies end up reproducing a specific socioeconomic position. In Waddington’s terms, the variations among the cases show that there is a high degree of plasticity, but the emergent consequences are strongly canalized. The “lads” in Willis’ work remain working-class, the unhoused remain poor, and those who develop a “code of the street” often find this code to be highly problematic when they look for jobs outside the ghetto; each of these strategies ends up flowing into the same set of conditions. On a larger structural level, urban poverty is reproduced. But the point is not only that without reorganization “from above” poverty will end up reproducing itself (*cf.* Wacquant, 2002), but that urban poverty is overdetermined, and—at least on a statistical level—each of the permutations ends up flowing to the same attractor: urban poverty.

Using Waddington’s metaphor, we then shift the way we think of the “pegs” from genes to different (in this case almost exclusively social) processes and mechanisms. Thus, in the case of urban poverty, we can distinguish between at least three different kinds of pegs. First, there are social-structural pegs. These include the kinds of jobs available, the education of parents, the quality of schools in the inner city, the structure of the state welfare system. A second order of pegs includes the meaning-making processes people use in order to make sense of the conditions they find themselves in, their ways to define themselves and their relationships. These pegs are not uniform and range from the rebellion of teenagers and selling drugs to the attempt to find steady employment in a McJob and other ways of handling the situation. Where the first kind of pegs relates to social structures, the second denotes local cultural and subcultural meaning structures. Another set of “pegs,” which is probably not very salient in this case, may include some biological factors—e.g., where the cheapest food is junk food, mothers’ and even fathers’ poor nutrition may have a lasting effect on the life chances of their children.

Of course, sociologists know this. Using different vocabularies—of “overdetermination of causes,” to take one example—they make a very similar point. Why then would the Waddingtonian schema be useful? We think it is useful in several ways. First, thinking through this metaphor would force researchers to explicitly study the complementary dynamics of change and stability. Adopting this viewpoint, “the problem of order” is not seen as somehow opposed to the constant dynamics of

change. Rather, in a complex system, certain outcomes are reproduced both in situations where one mechanism works against others (as when poor people try to “better themselves” through minimum-wage labor), but also *through* changing internal dynamics. These dynamics of stability are not deterministic, so that although canalization means that certain social conditions (“genotypes”) tend to produce the same social “phenotypic” outcome, this is not necessary. This probabilistic view needs to be kept in mind especially in the social world—where 63% of reproduction is considered very high.

Secondly, students of culture are often seeking for the “golden practice”—the piece of the puzzle that would explain the difference between conditions. Raised on Mill’s (1843/2002) “method of difference,” they (like other scientists) often look for the *one* practice that would account for the difference between conditions. Thinking through Waddington’s metaphor, however, would make this project highly dubious. If indeed sets of practices are canalized toward a specific outcome, then the comparative study of meaning should not focus on specific practices, but rather on the system of canalized relationships, and the combinations that may subvert a well-canalized attractor. Although one well-placed change can cause a different course to be more common, this would be rare. In most cases, it is only a combination of changing relationships that produces change. The task shifts from a specification of cause, to thinking about networks of relationships that produce a similar effect. A good example of the need to think in terms of networks of interacting processes that can lead to change (rather than of a single “major” cause) is the dynamics of persistence of famine in Northern Ethiopia. In this case, described and analyzed by De Waal (1997, Chapters 5 and 6) complex political/religious struggles for power play a decisive role in the maintenance of famine; sadly and ironically, foreign aid, which may be naively seen as a measure to relieve famine, has been used to sustain the political interactions that maintain the famine state.

The interactive, network-focused aspect of Waddington’s schema resembles recent developments in “Actor-Network Theory” in the sociology of science. Latour (1987) and others (e.g., Callon, 1986) focus on networks of relationships among different actors as the basis of their analyses. Within each specific situation, actors pursue their own ends through constructing a network of other actors (both human and nonhuman) that they manage to

align with their project. The Waddingtonian landscape may be seen as a further specification of this theoretical thrust in two ways. First, the networks we are led to think about through this metaphor are networks of relationships, not actors. Secondly, focusing on the temporal movement toward an attractor, and on the complementary nature of plasticity and canalization, moves us to think not only about process, but about the kinds of regularities that appear in overdetermined, canalized, structural dynamics.

Lastly, thinking about social phenomena in terms of plasticity and canalization would be useful in providing a spectrum of different conditions—a scale that goes from the well-canalized process (such as the reproduction of poverty) to more precariously canalized phenomena that are thus reproduced with less fidelity. Thinking along this continuum would allow sociologists to create a scale of effect-canalization, and thus a comparative tool, without making the unrealistic assumptions that Mill’s method of difference implies; at the very least, it would take this question of difference to a higher level of organization.

## Discussion and Conclusions

We have suggested linking biological and socio-cultural processes through the developmental metaphor of the epigenetic landscape. This bridging metaphor allows us to consider the many factors and processes that make up the social landscape without a priori granting a privileged position to one type of factor or process. We do not wish to downplay the role of biological factors, as they may indeed be important in some circumstances, providing “a difference which makes a difference” (Bateson, 1979). However, in most cases these factors may play only a very minor role. This role, when there is one, is overwhelmed by more dominant social factors. In fact, even when the existence of specific biological biases in a certain direction is demonstrated, it is still a long way from explaining symbolic culture. Indeed, an analysis of cultural processes may show that many aspects of culture go against the grain of our biological-cognitive biases. Our approach therefore incorporates these aspects, but does not prejudge their significance. Crucially, the adoption of the model is not intended to suggest a causal analysis of culture starting with genes and cellular epigenetic regulation processes, but its use as a metaphor highlights the similarities between the processes described by developmental biologists and

those described by anthropologists and sociologists (*see also* Wimsatt & Griesemer, 2007).

We use Waddington's model of epigenetic landscape as a way of thinking about the dynamics of stability and change in complex sociocultural matrixes. Like Waddington, we assume that there is very rarely, if ever, a situation in which an attractor, or a recurrent state of affairs, is underlain by one causal process. Waddington's schema assumes that any stable attractor is the effect of a dynamic network of processes. This schema describes the dynamics of social structures as a pattern of interactions among pegs supporting a landscape. The regulatory structure of these interactions raises the chances of a particular outcome, so that even if any one of the pegs changes or disappears altogether, and even when the landscape changes (in the sense that the ridges and valleys are altered), the final stable state will nevertheless be reached.

As we pointed out, the pegs and guy ropes in the social landscape belong to different domains, and what the pegs are in a given landscape depends on the kind of question we want to ask. If our question is about why spicy food is preferred in a certain society, we will have one attractor, and set of specific pegs (including possibly but not necessarily some genetic pegs, some epigenetic pegs, some ecological pegs, and many social/symbolic and economic pegs). In the case of the reproduction of urban poverty, our pegs would be very different, with no genetic pegs and with very different sets of social and economic pegs. Moreover, something that is an attractor for one question may be a peg for another. For example, in the case of the cycle of poverty we described, we could conceivably ask a question regarding the culture of masculinity in the ghetto. In this case, the cycle of poverty will be considered a peg (albeit a very central one).

We believe that the epigenetic landscape metaphor can be useful for thinking about cultural and social relations. By providing a landscape model of dynamic stability, we suggest a way for thinking about the relative stability of social and cultural phenomena as an emergent property of different mechanisms working simultaneously. We do not assume that processes are necessarily complicit, in the sense that they strengthen one another or depend on one another to work (*see* Bourdieu, 1984), nor that any one mechanism, or a priori assigned category, holds primacy over the social process. Both for questions of change and of stability, the interaction and dynamic stabilization of multiple processes, occurring at different levels, provides a tool for understanding how

the dizzying array of social mechanisms come to reproduce relatively stable social phenomena.

Although the landscape metaphor is a very general way of thinking about cultural development, a *particular* social landscape (such as that underlying the reconstruction of urban poverty) provides a framework for hypotheses about the particular nature and interactions among the underlying factors. A hypothesis has to account for the observed specifics of the architecture of the particular landscape, and for the specifics of its observed temporal dynamics (in the case of urban poverty—its dynamic stability). The landscape metaphor, like any other good metaphor, therefore provides a framework for articulating and testing hypotheses.

### Future Directions

In this chapter we have taken first steps toward translating Waddington's epigenetic approach in a way that makes it suitable for tackling questions in the study of culture. In order to further develop this approach, there are several questions that need specification and other areas that need to be addressed. Although we are sure that more issues will come up as researchers use the metaphor, some preliminary questions include the following:

- What is the strength of canalization for different phenomena? This is a question that needs to be addressed both for every particular case, and comparatively. On the comparative level, are there regularities in the strength of canalization of particular kinds of phenomena (such as inequality)? Is there a relationship between the structure of the landscape and the constraints on its change across different kinds of phenomena?
- What is the relative closure, or the relative autonomy of the part of the global landscape we focus on? In many cases we may find that within the immense, global network of social mechanisms, which are all interconnected to some extent, there are areas with a lot more interactions, clusters that lead to a specific attractor. What might these areas be?
- What are the relative effects of different kinds of pegs and what do they depend on? In what conditions are different types of pegs (social-structural elements, cultural meanings, ecological constraints and affordances, epigenetic inheritance, and genetic inheritance) more important than others? This question needs to be answered empirically for different domains.

- How are the pegs themselves constructed and how do they change? The pegs may be composite and have their own construction rules. What are they?

This chapter suggested a metaphor that researchers of sociocultural phenomena may find useful in tackling the kinds of questions they routinely face—questions regarding the intersection of different mechanisms, and regarding the dynamics of reproduction and regularities they observe. Like any metaphor, its usefulness lies in orienting researchers to specific kinds of problems. Like the “tool-kit,” the “network,” or the “game,” the strength of a metaphor is not in providing answers, but as a way to provide more, and hopefully better, questions.

## Glossary and List of Abbreviations

- Attractor:** The set of properties that the system tends to reach (the state it tends eventually to settle in), regardless of the conditions from which it started and the specific trajectory taken.
- Canalization:** The adjustment of developmental pathways so as to bring about a uniform result in spite of genetic and environmental variations.
- Dual-Inheritance Theory (DIT) approach:** A theoretical approach to evolution and cultural diffusion that assumes a two-way causal relationship between culture and genetics, and that takes population genetics as its model for cultural diffusion.
- Epigenetic Landscape:** A visual model suggested by C. H. Waddington to describe the dynamics of embryological development and its underlying genetic network of interactions.
- Exploration and Selective Stabilization:** The generation of a large set of local variations from which only a small subset is eventually stabilized. Selective stabilization occurs when the system reaches an attractor.
- Massive-Modularity Thesis:** The view that the mind is made up of many different, innate, domain-specific computational mechanisms or “modules.”
- Memetic View:** The view that culture can be conceived as a set of replicatable units, analogous to genetic replicators, and that selection of memes underlies cultural evolution. People are seen as “carriers” of replicatable cultural “memes.”
- Phenotypic Accommodation:** The set of developmental processes that lead to novel phenotypic outputs. Phenotypic accommodation is based on the plasticity of existing biological affordances interacting with (physical, biological, and social) environmental inputs.
- Plasticity:** The ability of a single genotype to generate variable forms of morphology, physiology, and/or behavior in response to different environmental circumstances.

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# From Material to Symbolic Cultures: Culture in Primates

**Christophe Boesch**

## Abstract

Recent wild animal studies have led to the realization that some of the population differences observed in some species possess close similarities to human cultures. This has inflamed a long-standing debate about the uniqueness of human cultural abilities. The accumulation of such detailed observations from wild animal populations has provided more and more convincing details about the cultural skills in different animal populations, which has resulted in a shift away from the question, “do animals possess culture?” to the question, “what differentiates humans’ cultural abilities from other animals?” The growing body of evidence of cultural differences, not only in chimpanzees but also in macaques, capuchin monkeys, orangutans, and other primate species, opens the way to a precise ethnography of culture in different species. Chimpanzee culture is observed as well in the material domain as in the symbolic and social ones and is disseminating by social-learning mechanisms, allowing in some cases for cumulative cultural evolution. To further a precise understanding of the social-transmission mechanisms involved in cultural transmission combining detailed field observations with ecologically and socially valid experimental studies would be timely and welcome.

**Keywords:** Culture, symbols, cooperation, cumulative cultural evolution, ecological validity, chimpanzees, humans, primates.

*Culture* is probably the single most central concept in twentieth-century anthropology, as noted by the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1996). Although not wanting to attempt to formally define “culture,” this encyclopedia mentioned that “culture is what a person ought to acquire in order to become a fully worthwhile moral agent” (p. 136). This illustrates one side of the culture debate, which has been raging for decades as a consequence of the increasing number of observations of behavioral differences seen between populations in different primate species. Although these have been labeled as “cultural differences” by primatologists (Goodall, 1970; Boesch, 1996, 2003; McGrew, 2004; Panger et al., 2002; Perry & Mason, 2003; Van Schaik et al., 2007; Whiten et al., 1999), for many anthropologists and psychologists,

culture applies only to human beings, and, therefore, a direct reference to ourselves is often implicitly made when defining the concept (e.g., Barnard, 2000; Kuper, 1999; Galef, 1992; Tomasello, 1999; Povinelli, 2000). For many others, however, culture is first and foremost a social process and should be defined as such without reference to any particular species (e.g., Borner, 1980; Kummer, 1971; Boesch & Tomasello, 1998; Whiten & Boesch, 2001).

The tone of the culture debate has, in a sense, been set by Marshall Sahlins, in his famous 1976 book titled *The Use and Abuse of Biology*, in which the reluctance of some in the human sciences to discuss humans with an open comparative eye was clearly formulated. This seems to reflect some people’s fear that by opening anthropological concepts to other species, human beings might be “threatened” in their humanity. For



example, when the famous anthropologist Louis Leakey learned about spontaneous tool use in wild chimpanzees in the early 1960s, he remarked, “Ah, now we must redefine tool, redefine man—or accept chimpanzees as humans!” A century earlier, after learning about Darwin’s theory of evolution, the wife of the Bishop of Worcester said, “Humans descended from the apes! My dear, let us hope that it is not true, but if it is, let us pray that it will not become generally known.” Interestingly enough, this view was still expressed in a paper published in *Science* in 2009 when White et al. (2009) wrote that a new description of *Ardipithecus ramidus* showed that “humans did not evolve from chimpanzees.” However, this is a view that biologists have never expressed. As Desmond Morris said so wisely in his book *The Naked Ape*, humans’ “climb to the top has been a get-rich-quick story, and, like all nouveaux riches, we are very sensitive about our background.” At the same time, we may very well be the only species that is curious to know what makes us different from other species, and, therefore, many biologists and anthropologists feel that it is important to keep an open approach. Only in this way can we progress in answering the question, “what makes us human?”—instead of relying on just-so stories that do not reflect our humanity.

### **Culture as It Happens**

I shall adopt this last attitude in the present chapter and will present some of the knowledge that has been gained in the last three decades, as a result of field studies of primates in their natural environments. For the first time in history, this research has allowed us to gain a detailed view of what primates really do in the wild. For this purpose, following a broad consensus, a behavioral trait is considered to be cultural once we have shown it to be a group-specific socially acquired trait (e.g., Kummer, 1971; Bonner, 1980; Galef, 1992; Kuper, 1999; Barnard, 2000). It is often also required that these behavioral traits should be independent of any genetic and ecological factors; however, if the first aspect make sense, the second is never required when talking about humans and its relevance to the cultural debate should therefore be questioned (Boesch, 1996, 2003; Laland & Hoppitt, 2003). The example of potato washing in Japanese macaques will nicely illustrate this aspect of the cultural debate.

### ***Imo the Culture Wall-Breaker***

Imo, a juvenile female Japanese macaque, was a member of the Koshima troop, which lived on a

small islet in the Japanese archipelago. This troop was provisioned by animal keepers, who threw sweet potatoes on the beach for them daily. The macaques rapidly learned to come to the beach and eat the potatoes, and at the same time tolerated the close presence of human observers. One day, Imo carried a sweet potato from the sandy beach into the water, and after washing the sand off the potato, ate it. This new behavior, which resulted in sand-free and saltier-tasting potatoes, was performed by Imo again the next morning. Interestingly, until this time, the macaques avoided the water, but this new innovation required that they now, at a minimum, come into contact with water. The peer playmates of Imo were the first to copy her behavior, and next were the infants in the troop. Later, the mothers of the different potato washers also learned the behavior. In the end, other than some of the large adult males from the troop, everyone acquired Imo’s innovation. Remarkably, while potato washing, the macaques started to enter deeper and deeper into the water, so that the newborn babies lost any kind of aversion to the water, and started to play and swim. A few years later, the same Imo invented a new behavior: she collected a handful of wheat grains that the caretakers were throwing on the sand and carried them to the water where she threw them all in. Only the wheat grains floated on the surface of the water and she was able to eat them much more rapidly than if she had had to sort them from the sand, as before. This new invention also propagated to the majority of the group. Thanks to Imo’s innovations, several new cultural traits, including potato washing, wheat grain throwing, and bathing, playing, and swimming in water, spread through the troop.

When reporting these observations as far back as the 1950s, the Japanese observers did not hesitate to use the word “culture” without limiting its application to humans (Imanishi, 1952; Kawai, 1965; Kawamura, 1959, 1965). This was because they were less affected by the anthropocentric glasses that we tended to wear in the occidental world (de Waal, 2001). They were not disturbed by the fact that such changes resulted from human interventions, as, for generations, the macaques had been living in contact with humans in Japan and they had become part of the Japanese culture. To them and to many others in the fields of anthropology and psychology throughout the world, Imo and her playmates’ behavior opened the door to discussions of culture in animal species other than humans for the first time. However, not everybody shared our enthusiasm!

Some recent reviews of the concept of culture in the field of anthropology do not even mention these observations, and consequently, there is also no hint of a discussion about the possibility that cultures might be observed in other animal species (Kuper, 1999; Barnard, 2000). Others have looked carefully at the speed of acquisition of these new behaviors and have suggested that the transmission was too slow to warrant the designation of cultural transmission (Galef, 1990, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello, 1999; Laland & Hoppitt, 2003; *but see* McGrew, 1992; Boesch, 2003 for alternative social explanations for this).

It remains impressive that Imo invented two new techniques that spread through her social group and that resulted in a series of behavioral changes related to water. If precise analyses of the spread of the behavior are important to characterize how innovation spreads in macaques, it should not distract us from the fact that macaques have this ability to learn from others, and totally new behavior patterns can be acquired by most group members within a few years. These observations show that macaques exhibit important behavioral flexibility that was previously thought to be restricted to humans. To many, this is a nice example of cultural change!

### ***The Cultural Debate after Imo's Breakthrough***

Although the primatological community reacted positively to such new developments, some psychologists adopted a more critical stance and reminded us that, as cultural traits disseminate within social groups through a social-learning process, we should expect this to happen “relatively” quickly (Galef, 1990, 1992; Heyes, 1994). This has led to endless discussions about how quickly a behavioral trait should spread within a social group when it is supposed to be cultural transmission, and how we can differentiate such a social-transmission mechanism from a pure individual learning process (e.g., Lefebvre, 1995; Boesch, 1996; Tomasello, 1999; Laland & Janik, 2006). It should come as no surprise that in the absence of any rational argument about the expected speed of such a spread, opinions would diverge; some believed that the macaque observations show that the speed of spread indicates the absence of cultural transmission (e.g., Galef, 1990, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello, 1990), while others saw it as strong support for a cultural spread as the spread followed precisely the social interactions network prevailing within a macaque

group (e.g., Kawai, 1965; Whiten, 2005; Boesch, 1996; Leca et al., 2007).

From another perspective, some psychologists have argued that cultural transmission requires *faithful copying* of the behavioral trait and have claimed that this can only be guaranteed through imitation or teaching (Galef, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello et al., 1993). They argued that other social-learning mechanisms, such as social facilitation or emulation, whereby individuals copy the context or the way objects are used but not the behavior itself, might lead to the acquisition of a behavior but with much less fidelity. In their view, neither had been shown in the case of the Japanese macaques and, therefore, that although the acquisition of potato washing was impressive, it could not be labeled as “cultural.” Others rapidly argued that human data did not show that cultural transmission required either of these mechanisms but, instead, that other forms of social learning equally contributed to cultural transmissions (Boesch, 1996; Waal, 2001). Following the arguments of the Japanese researchers, biologists, on the other hand, have argued that the sheer presence of such invention and propagation within a social group is strong evidence of the cultural abilities of this species (Bonner, 1980; Waal, 2001).

More generally, psychologists tend to argue that animals' abilities to adapt to the ecological constraints they face in their daily life are well-documented, and that both present and past small *ecological factors* could have affected the occurrence of specific behavioral patterns. Furthermore, they suggest that, in natural settings, it would be almost impossible to exclude such ecological effects and that natural observations, therefore, do not allow us to make any claims about the cultural abilities of animals (Galef, 1990, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello, 1990, 1999). This view has become dominant in some circles of experimental and comparative psychology and has led to an increase in studies done in captive settings.

### **PROBLEMS WITH “CULTURE OUTSIDE OF CULTURE” STUDIES**

However, such studies of “culture outside of culture” falter on their two key assumptions. First, they assume that captive animals face the same social-learning challenges as their wild counterparts, and second, they assume that all behavior patterns are learned via the same learning mechanism, independent of the ecological relevance of the behavior. For example, they would argue that captive macaques

would learn to rake food within arm reach of a human model based on the same copying mechanism and motivation as Imo's playmates learn to wash potatoes. The stance a scientist takes toward experimental data with captive animals is a function of their stance on these two assumptions. For a number of experimental psychologists, these assumptions are perfectly reasonable and broad claims made from such experimental studies have been thought to reveal limitations in the cultural abilities of different animal species.

On the other side, the validity of this "culture outside of culture" approach has been viewed much more critically by the majority of behavioral ecologists, anthropologists, and philosophers, and the broad claims made from such artificial studies with animals who are often socially impaired are greeted with skepticism (Byrne, 1995, 2007; de Waal, 2001, 2006; Bekoff et al., 2002; Allen, 2002, 2004; Boesch, 2007, 2008; McGrew, 2004). For one, the "artificial" nature of the ecology of captive settings has no parallel in nature and, therefore, no one can really assess the "ecological validity" of such studies. To some, this renders captive experiments useless. Furthermore, the artificial nature of the social groups in captive settings is patent and the effect of this is again very difficult to assess, although we know that early social upbringing conditions have a large influence on later cognitive development. At the very least, this should require one to carefully assess the validity of captive studies in contributing to our understanding of the culture phenomenon in primates.

### Chimpanzees as Culture Generalists

As this debate was developing, new data was being published on what has emerged as the most major discovery in chimpanzee behavior of the two last decades, namely the unexpectedly large behavioral diversity observed among different wild populations. This was observed in a diverse assortment of contexts, including the sexual, social, demographic, tool-use, and hunting contexts. This important dimension of chimpanzee behavior was the center of three international conferences, which each resulted in an edited volume. These were titled *Understanding Chimpanzees* (Heltne & Marquardt, 1989), *Chimpanzee Cultures* (Wrangham et al., 1994), and *Great Apes Societies* (McGrew et al., 1996). This has progressively placed the chimpanzee in a special position, as the more we are learning about wild chimpanzee population diversity, the more similarities we are finding

between chimpanzee and human cultures. This has been mainly possible thanks to the special treatment of chimpanzee studies in primatology; because of the genuine interest we have in our closest living relatives, more different populations living in diverse habitats have been studied in chimpanzees than in any other primate species.

It is important to realize from the start that the study of culture in chimpanzees has followed a different approach than the one adopted with macaques; if a *dynamic diffusion approach* based on the acquisition of novel behavior caused by human intervention was central to the study of culture in macaques, an *ethnographic approach*, in which established behavior patterns in different populations were compared, has been taken with the study of culture in chimpanzees. Such an ethnographic approach to culture proceeds by exclusion, whereby ecological and genetic influences must be excluded before any behavior is proposed to be cultural (see Goodall, 1973; Nishida, 1987; Boesch & Boesch, 1990; Nishida et al., 1993; Boesch, 1995, 1996, 2003; McGrew, 1992; Boesch & Tomasello, 1998). The main rationale for utilizing such a different approach lies in the fact that, since wild animal populations live in stable ecological conditions, it is extremely rare to see the acquisition and dissemination of new behavior elements within a social group. Hence, the ethnographic approach is often the only one available.

In the case of the chimpanzees, this approach has proven very successful, in the sense that it has allowed for the first time to gain more precise knowledge of important characteristics of the cultural phenomenon in this species. Here, I will go through what researchers have seen as some of the key elements of the culture phenomenon in chimpanzees over the years:

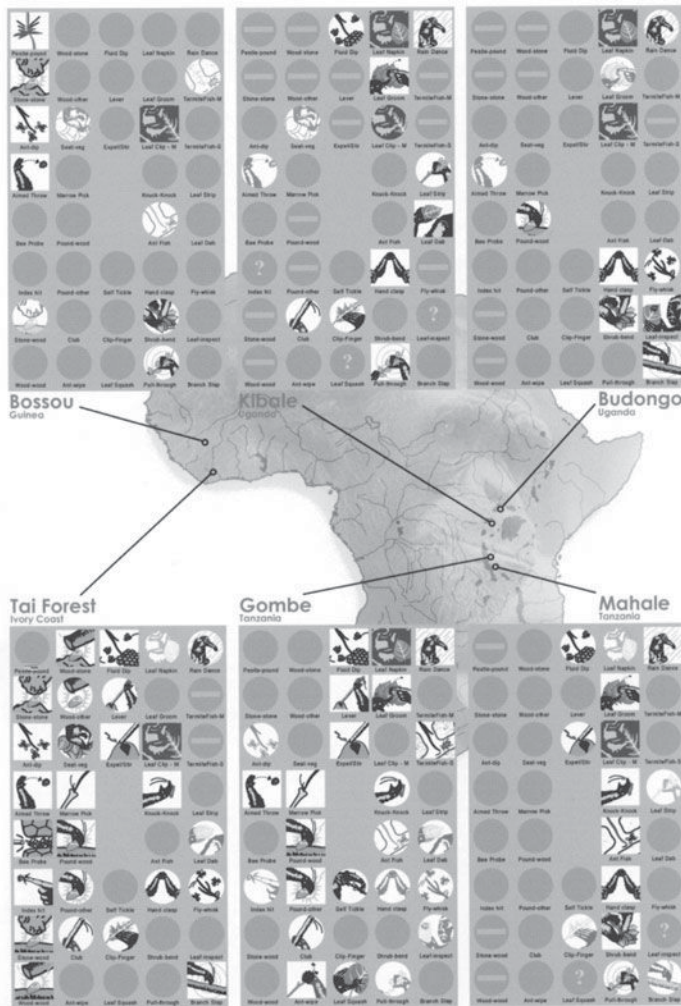
1) *Large cultural repertoire*: First, field researchers have started to compare aspects of the behavioral repertoires of their study populations with the knowledge gained by others on other populations and have proposed an ever-growing list of potential cultural elements (Goodall, 1973; McGrew, 1992; Boesch, 1996). Then, in an attempt to understand the breadth of the variability in the cultural repertoire of each population, field workers who followed eight different populations of wild chimpanzees in different regions of Africa gathered together to compare their knowledge about chimpanzees. This resulted in a preliminary list with 38 behavioral traits that were proposed to be cultural in the

species and independent of any ecological influences (Whiten et al., 1999, 2001). At the time of writing, a second similar exchange between field workers is underway. This meeting includes the addition of researchers who study three new chimpanzee populations, so that a much more extensive list of putative cultural elements is being produced (Whiten et al., in prep.).

The main lesson to be taken from such a listing exercise is that, in chimpanzees, *each* population can be distinguished from the others thanks to a specific cultural repertoire, which always includes a multiple complex of different behavioral elements. Like a fingerprint, knowledge of these elements makes it possible to determine the population origin of any individual chimpanzee with certainty. The map of the original publications presented here illustrates the distribution of the 38 cultural elements across six wild chimpanzee populations (Fig. 31.1). For

example, Tāi chimpanzees exhibit 26 of the 38 cultural traits, while Gombe chimpanzees perform 24 of them, but only 16 of these are shared with the Tāi chimpanzees. Similarly, the Bossou chimpanzees, whose territory is only 200 kilometers north of the Tāi forest, exhibit 11 of the 38 elements, and share only six with Tāi and four with Gombe chimpanzees. So, each population of chimpanzees is characterized by multiple different cultural elements, and it is this mix that is population-specific.

The second point is that cultural differences are not merely a question of presence or absence of a trait, but also a question of the *form and context* under which the trait is performed in each population. For example, ant dipping (the third icon from the top of the map, in the left column of each population cultural card) is performed with short sticks and one hand in Tāi chimpanzees, but with longer sticks and both hands in Gombe chimpanzees



**Figure 31.1** The cultural repertoire of six different chimpanzee populations (Whiten et al., 1999). For each population, the repertoire is synthesized on a card with the 38 potential behavior elements, where each element present in that population is earmarked with a colorful icon; a square icon stands for the element being observed in the population, a circle icon stands for an alternative form of the behavior element, and a blue circle indicates the element was not seen in the population with no obvious ecological reason. When a clear ecological reason explained the absence of the element, a horizontal minus bar is marked in the blue circle.

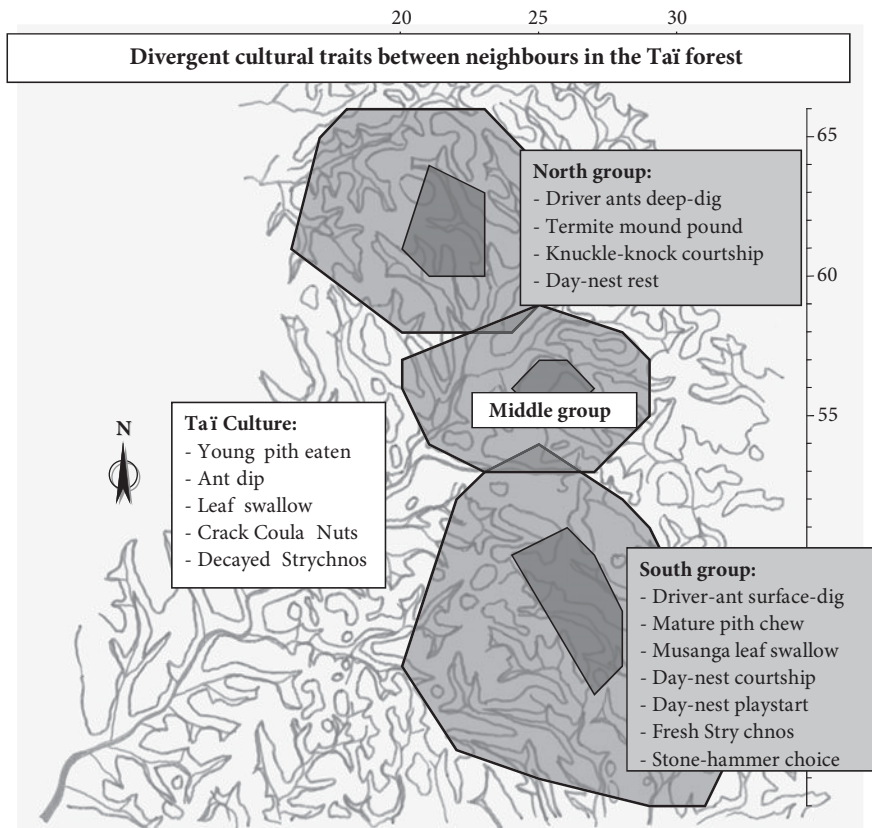
(Goodall, 1968, 1970; Boesch & Boesch, 1990). This is illustrated by the icon on the map with a squared or round shape, as can be seen for ant-dip. On the other side, for example, leaf-clip (the second to last icon from the right in the third row from the top) is performed in a very similar way in each population but the context and its attached meaning varies extensively (see below).

2) *Cultural fidelity*: In some limited instances, researchers have followed and made detailed observations about two neighboring chimpanzee groups living in the same forest block. For example, in the Mahale Mountains of Tanzania, field researchers followed two neighboring chimpanzee communities, the K- and the M-Group, and the larger of the two, the M-Group, was seen to push the smaller K-Group out of their range during certain seasons of the year (Kawanaka & Nishida, 1968). They have found

behavioral differences that persist despite the very close proximity of the two groups, and exchanges of individuals between the two groups have been recorded. As such groups are neighbors, we can be certain that genetic differences do not explain these observations, and additionally, it is straightforward to control for possible ecological differences. This has allowed researchers to make strong claims about cultural differences (Boesch, 2003, in press; Whiten et al., 1999; Langergraber et al., 2010).

In the Taï forest, three neighboring communities have been followed and reveal strikingly important cultural differences in 11 behavior elements. These behavior elements have been seen as well in the material domain, related to the acquisition of food, as in the symbolic domain, related to courtship and play initiation (Fig. 31.2) (Boesch, 2003).

The important aspect here is that, in chimpanzees, *cultural transmission and fidelity within groups*



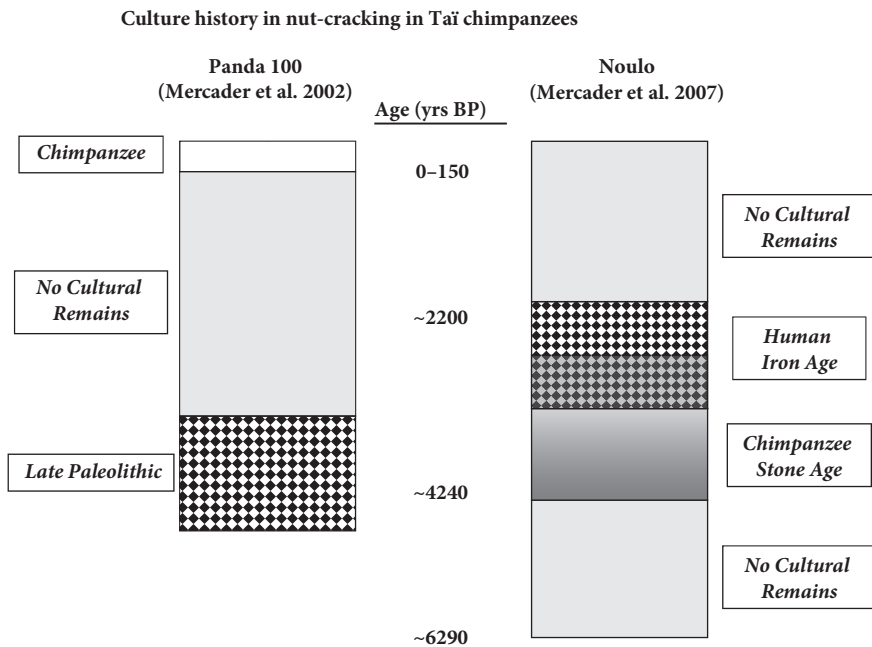
**Figure 31.2** Map of the territories of the three neighboring chimpanzee communities in Taï National Park, Côte d'Ivoire, with a preliminary list of their specific cultural elements (Boesch, 2003). In addition to the general specific cultural elements shown already in Figure 31.1, Taï chimpanzees possess community-specific cultural elements, both in the material and social domain, that show a high level of conformity, being observed in all community members, and a strong level of fidelity, prevailing for many years.

*persist for extended periods of time*, despite females transferring between communities at menarche. This dispersal pattern could lead to a homogenization of the behavior patterns across neighboring communities over a very short period of time, as females who transfer from their natal community to a new one, at an age when they have already acquired the full behavioral repertoire of their natal group, could continue to perform it in their new group. However, the opposite was observed in both Mahale and Taï chimpanzees, in the sense that community-specific culture elements remain extremely stable and the new immigrants adapt rapidly to the culture of the new group (Luncz & Boesch, in prep.). It is too early to say anything about either the mechanisms making the immigrant females adopt the behavioral culture of their new community or about the benefits of doing so. In conclusion, high fidelity to group-specific cultural traits and conformity to new group-specific cultural habits are characteristics of chimpanzee culture.

3) Cultural history: An important part of culture is its historical dimension as this also emphasizes the social transmission aspect of the behavior trait. Many of the claims about human cultural fidelity rest on archaeological studies that have shown that some cultural products, like arrows, hammers, or

shelters, have maintained themselves for numerous generations in human groups. However, detecting the age of a behavior pattern is impossible, unless it produces long-lasting artifacts. The nut-cracking behavior of chimpanzees may well be the only primate behavior that might allow for such a study, as it is a cultural behavior in which chimpanzees often use stone hammers or anvils to crack nuts.

To answer the question of how long nut-cracking behavior has been present in chimpanzees, we initiated an archaeological project with the hope of uncovering some old nut-cracking sites (Mercader et al., 2002, 2007). By applying traditional archaeological methods to a *Panda* tree, where we had seen regularly chimpanzees crack nuts, we could show that they had been cracking at that particular tree for over 150 years (Panda 100 in Fig. 31.3), and had left hundreds of stone flakes behind. In a closely adjacent area, we were able to reach old soil layers dated to 6,000 years old, and found stone artifacts produced by cracking nuts in layers that were between 2,200 and 4,300 years old (site Noulo in Fig. 31.3) (Mercader et al., 2007). These artifacts were found mixed with some typical Iron Age human artifacts and the older samples were found below the human occupation layer. This represents a first estimate that could be shifted back in time once excavations are



**Figure 31.3 Stratigraphy of two excavation sites in the Taï Forest.** The first on the left represents a known recent Panda nut-cracking site (Panda 100), and the second is at an old nut-cracking site (Noulo), where chimpanzee stone artifacts that were uncovered were partly mixed with and below human artifacts typical from the Iron Age (after Mercader et al., 2002, 2007).

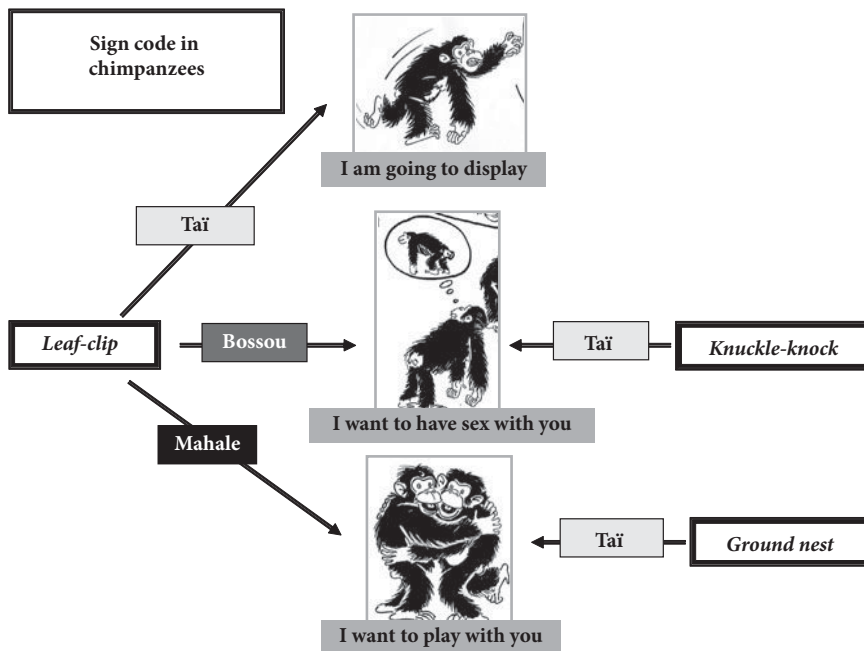
done on older soil layers. However, this result already shows that, in the case of nut cracking, chimpanzees have used a cultural behavior in a very similar way for over 200 generations. To give an idea of the time interval this represents, the human Iron Age began in this region of Africa about 2,500 years ago, and so the *Chimpanzee Stone Age predated the Human Iron Age* by some thousands of years.

This behavior remains the only cultural behavior trait where it is possible to show that chimpanzee culture has been transmitted over hundreds of generations. However, that simple observation suggests that the ability to copy a behavior pattern over generations is present in chimpanzees and may be observed in many other cultural traits.

4) *Symbolic culture*: Communicative behavior elements are used to convey information between social group members and, therefore, by definition are based on some shared meaning if they are to be of any use. In chimpanzees, some communicative traits follow some group-specific norms, by which it is the meaning of the trait that differs and not the form (Boesch, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2008). The most complex example is the leaf-clipping behavior element that is present in three of the six well-studied populations: In Tāi chimpanzees, leaf-clip is used

by adult males just before a display to signal their intention; in Bossou chimpanzees, it is often used by youngsters to get others' attention and invite others to play; and in Mahale chimpanzees, it is used by sexually active males to attract estrus female to mate with them (Nishida, 1987; Sugiyama & Koman, 1979; Boesch, 1995) (see Fig. 31.4). So, within a group, one behavioral element can acquire a specific meaning that is shared between all members, although the form of the behavior and the sounds produced remain exactly the same and do not refer to the meaning. In other words, the meaning of a behavior element results from a social construct that is shared between group members in chimpanzees.

The flexibility of these social meanings in chimpanzees is further revealed by the fact that a similar meaning can be expressed by different behavior elements in different social groups (Fig. 31.4). For example, although leaf-clip means "I want to have sex with you" in Mahale chimpanzees, this specific meaning is expressed by knuckle-knock in Tāi chimpanzees. Leaf-clip in Tāi chimpanzees means something different than in Mahale chimpanzees, while this last meaning is performed by knuckle-knock. To complicate this further, leaf-clip in Bossou chimpanzees, which means "I want to play with you" is

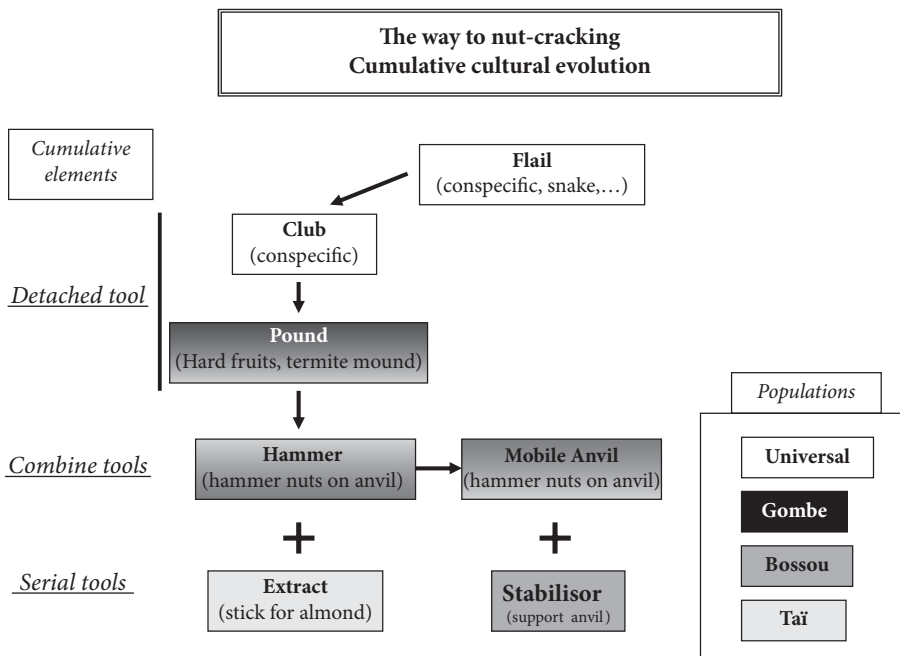


**Figure 31.4 Symbolic culture in wild chimpanzees.** The three behavioral elements performed by chimpanzees in three populations are framed in bold with the name of the population indicated on the arrow specifying the meaning the element has in this population. Two of the meanings have been seen to be supported by different signs in different populations.

also used by Tāi chimpanzees, but is expressed by making a coarse day-nest on the ground (Boesch, 1995, 2003).

Arbitrary shared meanings that are group-specific are obviously among the main characteristics of human language, and it is very intriguing to find that behavior signs in wild chimpanzee populations have similar properties. If the example of leaf-clip is still a long way from being a language, we need to keep in mind that uncovering such a “sign code” (see Boesch, in press) in another species requires from the human observers an expertise in this code, something no one anticipated to be present. In other words, if it was hard for Europeans to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs, doing so for sign code differences between Tāi and Gombe chimpanzees may prove even harder. Thus, the leaf-clip sign codes might be just the tip of the iceberg in a new dimension of chimpanzee communication still unknown to us, or it may remain what it appears to be now—an intriguing sophistication that never developed. Until specific studies comparing chimpanzee populations are done with expert eyes, we will not know.

5) *Cumulative cultural evolution*: Some of the cultural elements proposed in chimpanzees are characterized by a relatively high level of technological complexity, in the sense that they incorporate different elements that each produce a behavior element that fulfills a function on its own and is seen to be used in only some populations. For example, all chimpanzees in all studied populations pound hard-shelled fruits against hard surfaces in order to break them open and get at the seeds or the flesh found inside. Some chimpanzee populations in Western and Central Africa have incorporated the use of a hard tool in this universal behavior pattern, whereby the tool is hammered against the hard-shelled fruit to pound it open (Fig. 31.5) (Boesch & Boesch, 1984, 1990; Morgan & Abe, 2006). The integration of a second object in the pounding movements, as seen in Bossou and Tāi chimpanzees, allows the chimpanzee to crack open much smaller and harder fruits that would not have been accessible with the first, simpler technique. Finally, in regions where roots, which are used as anvils, are hard to find, as in Bossou, chimpanzees have been seen to place nuts on mobile stone anvils instead (Fig. 31.5) (Matsuzawa, 1999).



**Figure 31.5 Cumulative cultural evolution in chimpanzees:** All chimpanzees in all wild populations have been seen to use branches, clubs, or saplings to hit at conspecific or dangerous species, such as snakes or wild cats. This object can be attached or detached from their substrate. As a second innovation, a food source could directly be pounded against a hard surface, as seen in Gombe, Bossou, and Tāi chimpanzees. Third, a hammer has been added to the behavioral sequence to pound harder food sources in Bossou and Tāi chimpanzees, while only Bossou chimpanzees have been observed to use mobile anvils that they can transport to the nut-producing trees. Furthermore, chimpanzees in Tāi and Bossou have been seen to use other tools to either extract more of the kernel out of the shell or to stabilize the mobile anvil.



But from there on, we saw two additional incorporations that are possible, either the use of sticks to empty nuts as seen in Tai chimpanzees, or the use of a second stone to stabilize mobile anvils in Bossou chimpanzees (Fig. 31.5).

An additional, very complex example of cumulative cultural evolution in chimpanzees is seen in the honey-extracting techniques performed by Central African chimpanzees (see review Boesch et al., 2009; Sanz & Morgan, 2009). Here, different elements have again been progressively integrated in the technique, so that each step in this cumulative process produces an efficient technique seen to be used in some chimpanzee populations (Boesch et al., 2009). As seen in the nut-cracking example, chimpanzees add innovations to a universal technique, in this case, the common behavior for chimpanzees extracting a food resource from a hole in either a tree trunk or the ground with their hands. In some chimpanzee populations, we observed the first incorporation of a tool in the technique, either a twig for ant dipping in Gombe, Goulougo, and Tai chimpanzees, or a sturdy branch, a pounder, to break open bee nests for honey in Goulougo, Loango, and Tai chimpanzees. Then, after they succeeded in breaking open the nest with the first tool to extract tree honey, a second tool, a collector, was added by the Loango and Goulougo chimpanzees. This was not, however, seen in Tai chimpanzees. Finally, a third tool can be incorporated for large nests. In Loango, the accumulation of elements can go in another direction for terrestrial bee nests. The Loango chimpanzees use a perforator, a complexity not seen in Goulougo chimpanzees, to extract honey (see Boesch et al., 2009).

New observations of nut cracking and honey extraction present some of the most detailed cases of cumulative cultural evolution in chimpanzees, analogous to those proposed for human artifacts, such as the hammer or a screwdriver. Boesch (in press) has emphasized the fact that such cumulative processes were also apparent in different communicative cultural traits.

### **Orangutans, Capuchins Follow the Culture Track**

Once described only in macaques and chimpanzees, the idea of animal culture has gained credibility in larger circles in science, and biologists have garnered the courage to look for culture in other animal species and have adopted a similar approach by comparing behavior patterns in different populations.

It follows then that ideas about the uniqueness of human culture have lost some of their preeminence, and in their place, the urge to understand the distribution of different animal species' cultural practices has arisen. The legitimacy of culture in animals was gained through an ethnographic approach, by which the behavioral repertoire of different populations within one species was compared to the ecological conditions they were facing. By excluding ecological factors, the ethnographic approach suggested that the potential differences were of a cultural nature. The main requisite to the implementation of such an approach is the necessity of detailed studies on enough different wild populations in a given species. Even today, this situation exists for only a handful of species, and, therefore, our understanding of the real distribution of the cultural phenomenon in animals remains limited by definition.

The ethnographic approach applied to wild populations has uncovered fascinating new facts about important population differences that exist within a species, and cultural abilities have been proposed in such diverse species as orangutans (van Schaik et al. 2001), capuchin monkeys (Perry & Manson, 2003; Panger et al., 2002; Visalberghi et al., 2007), macaques (Leca et al., 2007), as well as in whales and dolphins (Rendell & Whiteside, 2001). Not only does the ethnographic approach stimulate the incorporation of a comparative approach in different animal species, but, when observing one population, such approaches allow us to discover what is population-specific and what is representative of the species as a whole. This further stresses the complexity of the interactions between ecology and culture.

Capuchin monkeys are particularly interesting as, in some ways, they present very similar patterns to the ones observed in chimpanzees. A handful of wild-bearded capuchin monkey (*Cebus libidinosus*) populations have been seen to crack wild nuts in Brazil, while this behavior pattern is absent in others (Visalberghi et al., 2007; Canale et al., 2009). In another species, the white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus*), a series of differences have been observed between three populations in the way they process 20 food species before eating them (Panger et al., 2002). In addition, a certain number of social behavioral traits have also been observed to differ between populations, such as hand sniffing of others, sucking on the body parts of others, and the "finger-in-mouth" game (Perry & Manson, 2003). Some cases of new social games were invented when researchers were around and the diffusion within the

group could be followed (Perry & Manson, 2003). From these and other primate species observations, we see that some of the simpler forms of cultural abilities seem to have been present very early on in our evolutionary history and that abilities proposed to be uniquely human in the past are possibly shared with many in the primate family lineage.

### **The Cultural Debate after the Wild Animal Culture Explosion**

The important progress made in recent years to our understanding of the cultural phenomenon in different animal species has led to a second shift, one that is still in progress. The central question in the culture debate has become, “what distinguishes the cultural practices in different species?” rather than, “is culture a uniquely human ability?” This shift in focus in the culture debate has been enthusiastically adopted by primatologists and some behavioral ecologists, while contemplated with more skepticism in some human science circles (Boesch, 2003; Whiten et al., 2003; Laland & Janik, 2003; Byrne, 2007).

This shift in trying to understand the width of cultural diversity in different species is still underway but there are many stumbling blocks. The first is sample size, as this differs dramatically between species. In humans, we have access to observations from hundreds of different populations or more, while we have detailed observations from only 12 populations of chimpanzees, the second-most-studied animal species. There are only six populations of orangutans, the third on the list. In other words, because of the terrible paucity of data on nonhuman animal species, cultural breadth and abilities might by definition be much less-developed.

An additional hurdle to comparing cultural abilities across species is that, since adaptation to ecological conditions has long been observed in animal species, including insects and fish, ecological influences must be excluded for a behavior to be recognized as cultural in nonhuman animals (Galef, 1992; Tomasello, 1990; Laland & Hoppitt, 2003). The addition of this criterion, never considered in humans, has by definition decreased the number of potential behavioral elements that could be considered as cultural in animals (Boesch, 1996; Boesch & Tomasello, 1998; Whiten et al., 1999; Van Schaik et al., 2003). However, we all know that a vast part of human culture includes artifacts, clothes, foraging tools, and many other items that are all related to the specific ecological conditions a population faces. For example, many of the differences in material

culture between Eskimos and Pygmies are, first and foremost, because of the drastically different ecological conditions that they face. It is important to bear in mind that if we want to compare cultural abilities between different species, we need to use the same set of criteria to define culture. Sadly, such an aspect has rarely been considered in the conclusions made when comparing the cultural abilities of humans with other species.

Two ways of progressing toward a fairer comparison have been pursued. The first solution to narrowing this gap was to address the sample size issue by studying more and new groups of wild populations belonging to species known for their cultural abilities. The gaps in our knowledge in chimpanzees have been especially dramatic, as the largest population of this species lives in Central Africa, and they have been totally neglected for decades. It is only very recently that two long-term studies have been initiated to fulfill this gap, the first in the Goualougo Triangle in the Republic of Congo (Sanz & Morgan, 2007, 2009; Sanz et al., 2004) and the second in the Loango National Park in Gabon (Boesch et al., 2007, 2009). Both have already unraveled surprising new and sophisticated forms of tool use that have not been described before. This nicely illustrates how much our knowledge of chimpanzees, a species who we have studied so much, is still very fragmentary. Similarly, new studies with capuchin monkeys have adopted a much more comparative approach and included many more populations (e.g., Canale et al., 2009).

The second solution directly addressed the shortcomings of experimental approaches. For many psychologists, a transmission mechanistic approach should be favored over the ethnographic approach, based on the argument that what counts in the culture phenomenon is not necessarily the end result of population-specific behavioral patterns but, instead, how a behavior is transmitted between individuals. Furthermore, they argue that only an experimental approach is able to identify such a mechanism, as individuals in the wild are exposed to so many simulations and experiences that it would be almost impossible to identify the precise mechanisms at work (Galef, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello & Call, 1997). However, it has been difficult to interpret the results of experimental studies on social learning of novel behavior patterns, which showed strong limitations in this ability in captive chimpanzees (Tomasello et al., 1987; Heyes, 1994; Povinelli & Vonk, 2003). The favored experimental procedure

was to present a single individual in an isolated room with a demonstrator located in another room through a window. To prevent any uncontrolled influences, the social dimension of cultural learning was completely excluded. Furthermore, the novelty of the tasks was more important than their ecological validity, so individuals were tested with artificial tasks such as throwing sand or raking food (Tomasello et al., 1987). Nevertheless, to some, a consensus developed that such experiments were enough to prove that culture, as understood in humans, was not present in nonhuman primates and that the population-specific behavior observed should be based on a totally different process (Povinelli, 2000; Tomasello & Call, 1997; Tomasello, 1999). However, such a conclusion remained in strong contrast to observations in the wild and no attempt was made to explain the differences between the ethnographic approach and the captive experimental studies.

The impressive array of cultural behavior differences documented in wild primates concerning group-specific socially learned behaviors has led other psychologists to question the validity of the above-mentioned experimental procedures and to develop alternative ones, in which some of the aspects presented to the tested individuals would be as similar as possible to the situations faced by wild animals in the cultural domain. One of the most innovative procedures was done by keeping the individuals within their normal social setting during the experiments rather than isolating them. In this way, the social transmission of a novel behavior as well as the development of group-specific traditions could be mimicked in captive social groups (*see* Whiten et al., 2005, 2007, 2009; Horner et al., 2006; Hopper et al., 2007, 2008; McGuigan et al., 2007). This proved to be very successful as it was possible to follow the whole chain of social transmission from one expert individual to all group members and then from one group to up to four different neighboring groups. Such dispersal of novel behavior was accompanied by a strong fidelity to the expert's behavior, which maintained itself over long periods of time and during the dispersal process between groups. In other words, some of the key aspects of cultural transmission could be reproduced in such innovative cultural diffusion experiments.

This success has led the team to explore another aspect of culture that was proposed to be unique to humans, namely the ability to imitate one another. Some have proposed that culture can develop only

as a result of imitation, as this was suggested to be the only social-learning process that guaranteed a high level of fidelity in the copied behavior (Galef, 1990, 1992; Heyes, 1994; Tomasello, 1990; Tomasello et al., 1993). However, in the absence of a complete theory as to when and why imitation should be used within a species, experimenters have been looking for imitative evidence with behavioral tasks selected randomly with mixed results. Although the results of group diffusion experiments have convincingly shown that imitation is not required to reach a high level of fidelity in copying a behavior pattern in chimpanzees, it was found that chimpanzees copy more by imitation when the individual cannot understand all the physical complexities of a task (e.g., when copying the way to get access to food contained in an opaque version of a box), while they will use more individual skills if they can understand them (e.g., when facing a similar but transparent version of a box with food inside) (McGuigan et al., 2007). In both cases, the demonstrator was the highest-ranking female of the group and therefore a trustful social partner. This convincingly showed that imitation and transmission are social behaviors and that chimpanzees are very sensitive to this. Without taking great care to preserve the social dimension, the results of experiments are not very helpful.

The main lesson about such studies is that culture is a social phenomenon and that the "culture outside of culture" approach adopted in so many captive studies has shown very strong limitations in its ability to understand the cultural abilities in nonhuman animal species (Boesch, 2007, 2010; de Waal, 2001). The main progress to experimentally understand some aspects of cultural transmission was achieved when the social dimension could be reintroduced into the experiment paradigm. This social approach was so successful that it could be replicated in other primate species, such as capuchin monkeys (Dindo et al., 2009). Field studies remain the prime source of information about the breadth of the culture spectrum and the cultural abilities.

## Conclusion

Being as selfish as we are, the question of human uniqueness has always drawn a lot of attention and been an area with numerous unsupported strong claims (e.g., de Waal, 2001; Whiten et al., 2003; Boesch, 2009). To avoid such well-known pitfalls, I shall try to limit myself to comparisons between species for areas where direct observations are available,

as reviewed above, and avoid anthropocentric claims as much as is humanly possible. The newest data on wild animals reveal that, in many species, cultural differences are present. Such cultural traits that are concentrated on feeding techniques and therefore contribute directly to an individual's survival represent important characteristics of life. In other cases, cultural traits are also observed in the social and communicative domains but these tend to be less common than those seen in the material domain (Boesch, in press). For the first time, this progress offers some hope toward a resolution of what parts of the culture phenomenon are uniquely human.

This review would open the way to distinguishing some of the differences observed between animal species in their cultural abilities. To do this, I tried to include all we know about wild animal cultural behavior as well as some important experimental results. This review allows us to propose that, at a minimum, humans share the following attributes with many animal species:

- Acquisition of spontaneous group-specific behavior traits,
- Presence of cultural traits that are not influenced by ecological and genetic conditions,
- Social learning of cultural traits from group members,
- Persistence of cultural traits for extended period of time,
- Presence of nonadaptive cultural traits.

In addition, I propose that the overlap between human and chimpanzee cultural abilities is larger, as they include the following attributes:

- Cultural cumulative evolutions in material and social domains,
- Multi-generational history in cultural traits,
- Faithful copying from dominant prestige-carrying models,
- Conformity to new social groups,
- Active teaching and imitation of cultural traits,
- Symbolic social norms in cultural behavioral traits.

At this stage, it would be tempting to argue that those cultural abilities not listed here are uniquely human. This may be true, but we should not forget that our knowledge of other animal species fares very poorly compared to what we know about humans, and, therefore, more observations will certainly increase the list of similarities. I fully realize

that such a statement is very frustrating, as all primate species are threatened in one way or another, and because of this, we may never fully know how similar our abilities are.

Wild animal studies have led to the realization that some of the population differences observed in some species possess close similarities to human cultures. The accumulation of such detailed observations from wild animal populations have provided more and more convincing details about the cultural skills in different animal populations, which has resulted in a shift away from the question, "do animals possess culture?" to the question, "what differentiates human cultural abilities from other animals?" The growing body of evidence of cultural differences, not only in chimpanzees but also in macaques, capuchin monkeys, orangutans, and other primate species, opens the way to a precise ethnography of culture in different species.

By turning away from wild animal studies, comparative psychology faces the risk of eventually reaching an impasse, as only experimental studies with captive animals are considered without any concern for the ecological validity of such approaches. Luckily, studies have recently been started that will, in complement to wild animal studies, help us to address the question of animal cultural abilities. However, time is running out and all primate species suffer from habitat degradation and direct hunting against them, which could prevent us from collecting enough data on them before we can determine the specific cultural abilities of human and nonhuman primate species.

### **Future Directions: Toward a Resolution of Understanding Human Uniqueness**

One way to find a provisional answer to the question of human uniqueness is to look for cognitive abilities unique to humans that are important for cultural transmission and acquisition. This would include speech, which is notably absent in other animal species, as well as modern human means of communication like writing, radio, and Internet. These communication media allow for the transmission of cultural traits between individuals who do not meet face-to-face, either because they are not visible to one another or because one of them might already be dead (Boesch, 2008). In addition, even in a face-to-face situation, such improved communication permits the cultural transmission of skills out of context, namely without having to demonstrate or practice the skill. Such cultural transmission modes,

which are not available to any other animal species, would facilitate the transmission of more complex cultural traits.

Another possible way to answer such a question will come from careful and ecologically valid comparisons between how chimpanzees and humans learn social skills from group members. Recent work on imitation reveals that, although both species readily imitate, humans have a much stronger tendency to overimitate than chimpanzees, in the sense that they will faithfully copy unnecessary or irrelevant actions (Lions et al., 2007; Whiten et al., 2009). This tendency to blindly imitate irrelevant actions in adults might contribute to a stronger tendency in humans to adopt irrelevant and maladaptive cultural traits (Whiten et al., 2009). In a process similar to mate choice in birds, where individuals have been seen to simply copy the choice of others rather than to select the best mate, humans may be copying what they see group members doing without going through the time-consuming process of evaluating the benefit of each cultural trait, and thereby nonadaptive or opaque cultural traits can spread more readily in humans than in chimpanzees.

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PART

8

Human Movement  
Through Culture



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## Encountering Alterity: Geographic and Semantic Movements

Alex Gillespie, Irimi Kadianaki, and Ria O'Sullivan-Lago

### Abstract

This chapter analyzes the semantic consequences of crossing national borders. When crossing borders, identities change, and alterity is encountered. We ask: what are the semantic structures, or meanings, that enable alterity to be either embraced or resisted? We start by distinguishing between movements in geographic space and semantic movements of meaning. Our aim is to link geographic movements to semantic movements, but not in a linear way. The semantic consequences of geographical movement can be diverse and reverberate for many years. We draw upon empirical examples from studies of immigration in Greece and Ireland to show how alterity is resisted, how representations of nationality and belonging are used to stabilize identities, and how feelings of being stigmatized can be deflected without leading to reciprocal denigration. We speculate about the potential role of geographic movement in providing people with externality over their own experiences, as it enables them to step out of themselves and see themselves from the perspective of others. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Immigration, dialogism, identity, semantic barriers, movement

Humans move. They move from one place to another, from one job to another, from one social group to another, from one life stage to another. It is therefore overly simplistic to consider contemporary society as a collection of people and groups belonging to mutually exclusive identities. Movement can make locals become migrants and in-groups become out-groups. The present chapter analyzes the relation between geographic movements on the one hand, and the meanings that such movement generates on the other. This relation is complex because geographic movement does not have a linear effect on the way in which self and other are re-represented. Movement across national borders usually has different meanings for the people who move compared to those who are either left behind or those in the host community. The extent to which people who move are aware of these different meanings and integrate them into more general meanings is one of

our concerns. Movement between geographic locations is mutually exclusive: our bodies cannot yet be in two places at once. Meanings, however, even when contradictory, are rarely mutually exclusive: our thoughts can be in many places at once. In the present chapter we will examine how the multiple meanings are not only present within the thoughts of people who move, but also how these multiple meanings interact.

Starting with a discussion of the extent to which people travel across national borders, we move on to the impact of those movements on how people are identified and identify themselves. We then introduce data from two studies and demonstrate the ways in which crossing national borders disrupts and redraws identity boundaries. Our analysis places emphasis on the way in which geographic movement leads to encounters with alterity: other individuals and other groups. We analyze semantic structures

(i.e., at the level of meaning and not discursive practice) that enable alterity to be resisted, identity boundaries to be stabilized, and also those that create an openness to alterity. Our key question is: what are the semantic structures, or meanings, that enable the alterity encountered through geographic movement to be either resisted or embraced?

### **People on the Move**

Commercial aircraft transport over one billion passengers per year. Most of these passengers are making trips of relatively short duration, with over 922 million international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2008 (UNWTO, 2009). However, some international travelers have one-way tickets. Although it is difficult to estimate the exact number of migrants in the world today, a recent UN report (UNDP, 2009) has estimated that there are over 190 million worldwide. Clearly, geographic movement is an important phenomenon for a large portion of humanity. Moreover, a recent survey by Gallup (Esipova & Ray, 2009) indicates that 16% of the world's population, or 700 million people, would move to another country permanently if they had the chance. Actual geographic movement must be considered alongside the larger pool of hopes, dreams, and fears that motivate people to actually move, whether for touristic pleasure or making a new life.

While geographic movement may have reached new heights, the phenomenon is not new. For example, the heterogeneous makeup of people living in the so-called "New World" is evidence of a long history of movement. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Luke, 2004), the U.S. population is made up of 70% non-Hispanic European descent, 12.5% Hispanic descent, 12.3% African descent, 3.8% Asian descent, and over 2% mixed descent. Less than 1% of the population are of Native American descent. What this latter fact also reveals is that even if one does not move, the geographic relocation of others can have an enormous impact. The Native American group became "natives," hosts to those that migrated, and later, because of the volume of individuals who arrived, a minority group in their own land.

### ***Social Psychological Consequences***

The movement of people across national and cultural borders has been shown to have large-scale social and political consequences (Mountz, 2004; Ellis, 2005; Hubbard, 2005; Abu-Laban & Garber, 2005; MacÉinrí, 2006). But, what about

the social-psychological impact of such movement? From a social-psychological point of view, geographic movement is interesting because it is a basis for encountering alterity, that is, other people and alternative ways of viewing the world and one's own position within it. Theories of human development and identity put significant emphasis on interactions with alterity. Researchers developing the work of Mead (Hobson, 2002; Gillespie, 2006; Martin, 2006), Vygotsky (Valsiner, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), and the early Piaget (Perret-Clermont, 1980; Psaltis & Duveen, 2007) have argued and shown that social relations are central to the development of higher mental functions, the capacity for self-regulation, and the transition to more differentiated and integrated psychological processes. In addition, researchers working in the field of identity have argued, on the basis of countless studies, that alterity is central to the emergence and transformation of self-definitions (e.g., Howarth, 2002; Jovchelovitch, 2007). If we accept that encountering alterity is a basis for human development, what implications does the unprecedented movement of people across national borders have for how people think about themselves and others?

There is an established body of research examining the relation between geographic movement and identity. Encountering the other, particularly cultural others when individuals relocate, is not a simple task for the self. Be they immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees (O'Sullivan-Lago, Abreu, & Burgess, 2008; Kadianaki, 2010a), tourists (Gillespie, 2006), or international students (Märtsin, 2009), the action of moving in geographic space and coming into contact with alterity forces individuals to construct new identities (Moghaddam, 2002) and engage in processes of identity negotiation. This is caused by their encounters with novel social others, and also because of direct or indirect encounters with their home communities (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Kadianaki, 2010a, 2010b). As they move, individuals must come to terms with the identity transitions from being a "local" in their home culture to being a "foreigner" and "immigrant" in the new culture. How they are positioned in their home communities is also altered, however: there is, as such, "no home to go back to" (Hall, 1987, p. 44).

Because of their geographic movement, individuals encounter previously unfamiliar identities that are often racialized and devalued in the particular social context (Deaux, 2006). Yarbrough (2009) describes how migrants coming from Latin

American countries to Atlanta, USA, encounter a previously unfamiliar identity, that of Hispanic/Latino(a), in their everyday social interactions with native-born residents. Physical characteristics and language accent are often used by native-born residents to build racialized assumptions about the new migrants, which lump together all Latin American nationalities into an overarching identity or misattribute all of these nationalities as being Mexican. In the new situation, the migrants also move into positions of “immigrant” or “asylum seeker,” identities that are often highly stigmatized and laden with social meanings that need to be negotiated (O’ Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2009; Kadianaki, 2010a). Verkuyten and Steenhuis (2005) point out that although the “asylum seeker” category is often misinterpreted, it is very socially meaningful, featuring in everyday thinking and raising emotional reactions. Often, particularly in the case of “asylum seekers,” the label is applied to, and must be negotiated by, individuals who do not even belong to that category (O’ Sullivan-Lago, 2009).

Immigrant identity can be seen to be caught between asymmetrical social discourses and stigmatized representations in the community of residence and “contradictory discourses related to home, tradition, community, nation and loyalty” to the community of origin (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 304). The immigrant self often constitutes ambivalent and conflicting identity positions (Bhatia, 2002; Hermans, 2001). In the next section we analyze more closely the relation between geographic movement and the semantics of identity.

### Theorizing Geographic and Semantic Movement

Our distinction between geographic and semantic movements is based on Koffka’s (1935) differentiation of the geographic and behavioral environment of organisms. Koffka pointed out that there can be a difference between the geographic environment (the physical environment as it is independent of its perception) and the routines and meanings that organisms associate with that environment. The *behavioral environment* refers to the meanings, that is, *semantic associations*, that organisms have with the geographic environment. In what follows we develop Koffka’s distinction to theorize movement within the geographic and behavioral, or semantic, environments. Simply put, we want to theorize the relation between the movement of human bodies

in geographic space and the movements of self and other at the level of meaning and representation.

While it is accepted that identities are bound into geographic and social contexts (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000), it does not follow that as people move from one context to the next they take up new identities and completely disregard their previous identities. While bodies can be only here or there, at the level of identity and representation we can occupy multiple and even contradictory positions. For example, before immigrants-to-be actually move, they think about moving, they imagine their possible future in another country, and thus before they have physically moved they have engaged in semantic movements. Instead of describing people as moving from one identity to the next, it has been argued that it is more accurate to describe them as accumulating identities that, in relation to each other, stand in various states of tension and harmony (Gillespie, 2007a). The self stretches back to encompass all the positions we have occupied and it can stretch forward to imagine future ones we may occupy. For example, in his analysis of Malcolm X’s dialogical identity, Gillespie (2005) has shown that in his trajectory through the social world and movement between different social contexts, Malcolm X accumulated the identities of being oppressed, a hustler, minister, and human-rights activist. Toward the end of his life, it was the interaction between these accumulated identities that characterized his uniqueness.

In further opposition to the geographic body, the semantic world enables us to move between and occupy many social, temporal, and imagined geographic positions simultaneously or in rapid sequence. At a semantic and psychological level, the past, present, and future can coexist along with counterfactual presents, imagined pasts, and wished-for or feared futures. For example, tourists in Northern India have been shown to inhabit a semantic world in which what is observed and experienced merges with what has been seen in films and books (Gillespie, 2007b).

In the geographic world, the difference between self and other is absolute because self and other occupy mutually exclusive space-time trajectories (Mead, 1932). However, at a semantic level, the oppositions between self and other; between us and them; between me and you; can shift and slide, sometimes collapse or even reverse (Gillespie, 2007a). We live in a perspectival social world: a world in which other people and groups have

different ideas and identities, and what is key is that as social actors, we are to some extent aware of their different ideas and identities. The difference is not only “out there;” it is also within us. Humans experience alterity, represent it, and position themselves in relation to it.

### *The Relation between Self and Other*

The distinction between geographic and semantic environments provides conceptual clarity when talking about the relation between self and other. While self and other are fundamentally distinct in the geographic world, they are inter-related in the semantic world, gaining meaning through their relationship. At a semantic and psychological level, others are an important part of the self: this includes not only one’s friends but also one’s enemies. Insofar as the self is defined in dialogical relation to the other (Marková, Chapter 22), the other is an essential part of the self. To make the same assumption of groups, that the out-group exists “out there,” apart from the in-group, is to commit the psychologist’s fallacy and confuse what is in the mind of participants with what is in the mind of researchers (James, 1890). In a context of intergroup conflict, the out-group is central to the in-group’s identity: it structures the way in which in-group members think about themselves and their world. Within the dialogical self, the other is a central counterpoint: not only a point of comparison, but also a perspective from which to view the self (Simão, Chapter 18).

Thus, at a semantic level the other can be within the self. At an empirical level this manifests when someone refers directly or indirectly to the point of view of another. For example, “my mother thinks I am a good student, but I’m not sure I am.” In such an instance, we can see the mother refracted semantically within the student. Yet, we must also be aware that at a semantic level the individual has a self-concept that will often exclude not only their enemies but also their friends. Returning to the example of the student, she would likely distinguish herself from her mother yet, these are *her* ideas about her mother (her mother might think differently). That is to say, people tend to see themselves as isolated and fail to see that the others with whom they interact and continue various dialogues with, are in fact, part of their own selfhood at a semantic level. The present chapter aims to explore in detail exactly how alterity, encountered through geographical movement, enters into and transforms the self.

### **Crossing Greek and Irish Borders**

In order to examine the relation between geographic and semantic movement empirically, we draw upon research from two studies. These projects share their focus on the encounters between people of different cultural worlds in one place as a result of geographic movement across borders. Our aim is not to introduce new data, but rather to integrate existing data from these two previously published studies in order to develop more generalizable theory.

The first corpus of data is from a project on immigrants living in Greece conducted by the second author of this chapter (Kadianaki, 2010a; Kadianaki, 2009). Immigrants who participated in the project came from a variety of countries, mainly South American and African. All participants were living in Athens, their residence in Greece spanning from 2 to 30 years. The data presented comes from individual in-depth interviews, group discussions and ethnographic observation in three immigrant communities from August 2007 to April 2008.

The second data corpus comes from research by the third author of this chapter with immigrants, asylum seekers, and Irish locals living in Ireland (O’Sullivan-Lago, 2009; O’Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2009, 2010). The immigrant participants were mainly from European countries. The asylum seekers were mainly from Africa and the Middle East. The participants had resided in Ireland for very varying lengths of time: from a matter of months to over 20 years. All of the participants, including the Irish locals, were residents in Cork in the South of Ireland. The data presented comes from in-depth individual interviews that were conducted between July 2007 and February 2008.

In both of these comparable empirical contexts, geographic movement put people with different languages, accents, physical characteristics, economic and symbolic power, beliefs, values, habits and so on, into contact. Both empirical contexts are thus instances in which alterity is encountered and identity transformation is likely. While the Irish locals may not have moved geographically, we will demonstrate that the movement of the other has an impact on their identity, as contact with migrants forces the recognition and evaluation of cultural identities.

Our analysis focuses upon discursive data in terms of the identity positions being sustained (i.e., local, immigrant, asylum seeker, cheater, contributor, and so on), and any movement within the

discourse between these identity positions. This analysis of movement at a semantic level led us to also analyze the ways in which movement in the representation of self and other can be both blocked and facilitated.

Throughout the presentation of the excerpts we use the following transcription conventions: square brackets ([ ]) are used to insert explanatory text, pauses ([pause]) and the removal of some utterances ([...]). Underlining indicates the presence of alterity, usually alternative representations, which is being encountered and negotiated in the excerpts.

### ***Geographic Movement: Semantic Consequences***

The representations of immigrant/local usually entail a rigid self/other opposition that are reinforced by such things as language barriers, skin color, and cultural practices. The distinction can also be reinforced by commonplace beliefs about competition for economic and social resources. Despite the rigidity of this self/other differentiation, it is geographic movement that has brought about the distinction: all immigrants were locals before they left. Although the movement from the geographic location where they were “local” to the geographic location where they are an “immigrant” might only take a few hours, the semantic movement into a self-representation as an immigrant usually takes much longer and is often resisted. Consider the following excerpt from Helén who moved from Spain to Ireland:

My mother used to say, she used to cry a lot, ‘why don’t you come home?’ always the same question, ‘why don’t you come home?’ And one time she mentioned the word immigrant and I thought, ‘but I’m not an immigrant’ because before, their generation, the generation before, they were immigrants in my view because they had to go abroad because of money, because of circumstances, being poor or whatever [pause] I didn’t consider myself an immigrant because I didn’t really have to leave my family and go because I needed a better life or money or anything like that, I just went because I wanted to [...] so I know very much that I’m not Irish and never will be, but I’m not an immigrant in that way.  
(Helén, 45 years old, Spanish, living in Ireland for 21 years)

Helén has been living in Ireland for 21 years and in a technical and legal sense, Helén is an immigrant. However, she does not consider herself to be one. The idea that she is an immigrant is an alternative

self-representation that she resists. The underlined text indicates the intrusion of the alternative self-representation (self as immigrant) into Helén’s discourse. The alternative self-representation, initially given voice to by Helén’s mother, is that Helén is an immigrant who has gone abroad out of a tragic financial necessity. Helén vehemently resists this being represented in that way, arguing that she is not an immigrant “in that way.” Each time the alternative self-image intrudes, she resists it, counter-arguing that she is different because she has moved out of choice and does not see the move as sad.

In this resistance, however, we can also see that the geographic movement to Ireland has repositioned Helén. She admits she is an immigrant in some ways: she does come from a different country, she has left her family behind and has a different culture, but she still resists the categorization. Thus we see that although the geographic move from Spain to Ireland is absolute, the semantic movement into the identity position of immigrant is not.

Moreover, the semantic movements occasioned by the geographic movement to Ireland do not end with a self-representation of being an immigrant. After a certain number of years, some immigrants feel, and want to be seen as locals. For how many years one has to live in a country to become “local” is contested, and often self-identifications come into conflict with the way in which they are identified by others. Consider the following from Antonia, a refugee from Romania:

People will ask me, even after 7 years, ‘where are you from?’ and I get so bothered, I’m becoming bothered and tired after seven years to say ‘oh I am originally from Romania’ and I will say sometimes to joke, ‘I’m Irish, I’m from Carrigaline’ and they say ‘ok, you are from Carrigaline but where are you from?’” All the time people will see me as being from another country. So that’s a little bit, you know, not such a good feeling. But I have to get used to this because this is it, what I am in the Irish eyes, I will never be one of the Irish even though I consider myself and I say, ‘come on, I’m an Irish citizen now.’

(Antonia, 41 years old, Romanian, living in Ireland for 7 years)

There is a disjunction between Antonia’s self-representation and how the Irish locals see her. The (underlined) alterity she encounters punctures her thoughts and discourse. Antonia wants to represent herself as Irish, but she is blocked by the views she encounters—her desired identity is

not recognized. Having moved 7 years earlier, she now asserts her Irish citizenship and belonging, but because her nationality and accent remain, the people she meets see her first and foremost as a foreigner. What is central to the semantic consequences of geographic movement is encountering alterity, other people and alternative representations: as with Helén, it is in the eyes of the other that the semantic consequences of geographic movement become salient.

Movement in the geographic environment does not lead straightforwardly to repositioning of identity at the semantic level of representation. There can be issues of lag, of coming to terms with a new identity position, and even acts of resistance and discrepancies between the identity positions that are claimed and the ways in which one is positioned. People are rarely free to choose their identity positions, and recognition from others is essential (Howarth, 2002). An overarching semantic consequence of geographic movement is a disjunction between how people see themselves and how they are seen. Geographic movement brings people into contact, and in that contact each discovers that they have a relevancy or surplus meaning (Gillespie, 2003) for the other that is somewhat at odds with the way in which they have previously represented themselves.

### Semantic Barriers: Resisting Alterity

It is not sufficient simply to be in the geographic presence of alterity to actually encounter alterity. Encountering alterity necessitates being open unto the other (Levinas, 1991), that is, representing the other as beyond self and representing self as potentially transformed by the other. However, because of threat of change, there is often a semantic effort to deny alterity and stabilize preexisting representations of self and other.

Moscovici (1974/2008) and Gillespie (2008) have begun to identify the semantic barriers used to resist alternative representations. Semantic barriers are ways of speaking and thinking that block transformative engagement with alterity. Semantic barriers, including creating rigid oppositions, negative associations, prohibitions, clear-cut separations, stigmatizing the other, undermining their motive, or presenting the other as having mere “beliefs” and “thoughts” about the world (rather than valid experiences), can all inhibit transformational interaction between ideas, representations, and perspectives. In the following analyses, we present

empirical examples of how these barriers work to block alternative representations.

In the encounter between immigrants and locals, there are many examples of semantic barriers being used to dismiss or block the alternatives presented. In the following excerpt Aidan, an Irish local, gives his rather blunt justification for not engaging with asylum seekers:

I just don't like to talk to most asylum seekers, like, especially you know that most of them are either on the run from the law in their own country and if they go back to their own country they'll get prosecuted for this or that, and our country doesn't wonder why they're so afraid to go back to their own country, 'oh they'll probably get killed' or something like that, you know they make up all these excuses. Why can't they request their criminal background from that country? This person could have been just saying this and this and this and like, 'I'll go back and I'll get killed' and this, but they never look past that and think they could have got in trouble with the law. The possibility of them being done for kiddy-fiddling, kidnapping, rape, anything—you could number a list of things that they'd be nervous about going back for because he doesn't want to go back to jail, so he makes up an excuse and how's our government supposed to check up on that?

(Aidan, 23 years old, Irish local)

In this explanation for his avoidance of asylum seekers, Aidan represents them as having an ulterior motivation for being in Ireland, namely, to escape legitimate punishment for grievous crimes. The alternative representation (underlined) is that the asylum seekers can't go back to their country of origin because “they'll probably get killed.” Even though this fear of persecution is the definition of what an asylum seeker is, it gains no traction with Aidan. He constructs a powerful semantic barrier to block the alternative representation of these individuals seeking asylum for genuine reasons. The extreme case formulation of his semantic construction (Pomerantz, 1986) leads him to distrust. Indeed, the vigor of their protestations could even be interpreted by Aidan as further evidence of their horrendous crimes and desire to escape punishment. The implication is that people who have committed grievous crimes will say anything to escape prosecution and thus nothing said can be believed. Dialogue with the other is accordingly presented as a waste of time for an honest person, which is why he doesn't “like to talk to most asylum seekers.” In

the absence of trust it is impossible to have open dialogical communication because what the other says and does loses value because of the possibility of an ulterior motive (Marková & Gillespie, 2007).

Another common alternative ulterior motive, voiced by the Irish locals, is that immigrants and asylum seekers are only in Ireland for generous social welfare payments. In both cases the representation creates a fundamental distrust of the other, which not only ossifies the self/other boundary but makes it very difficult for the other to challenge the distinction: their protestations, no matter how sensible, are not given any credence because of the block, boiling down to a suspicious, “they would say that, wouldn’t they?” This powerful semantic block halts further elaboration of the justification (Valsiner, 2002), because nothing said is trusted.

Openness to dialogical engagement entails perceptions of mutual trust and respect. It is difficult to be open unto the other if one perceives the other to be stigmatizing, distrustful, or dismissing. This is particularly evident among migrants who feel that their new community of residence is closed to them; this representation in turn, closes them to their new community of residence. Consider the following excerpt from Alike, who came to Ireland from Nigeria to seek asylum:

They think of us as pests, as bodies. That’s what they think of us. At times when I go to the post office to pick up my weekly payment I feel ashamed of myself because even if they are not looking at me, I feel their eyes on me saying, ‘Look at them, they are one of those people who come.’ So we are bodies to them. That is my belief. In as much as I know that not all of them think that of us, but we know it is a general thing that they feel. They feel that the asylum seekers are no good [...] that we are bodies who have come to use up their tax-payers’ money without contributing anything.

(Alike, 32 years old, Nigerian, 1 year in Ireland)

This quotation illustrates how stigmatization and overgeneralization (“that’s what they think of us”) inhibit dialogue with alternative points of view that might lead to a more nuanced conception. According to Alike, all Irish people see asylum seekers, including her, as “pests” and mere “bodies.” The alternative representation (underlined) of the Irish, that “not all of them think that of us,” makes a brief appearance, and if elaborated, it might have created points of commonality, but it is cut short by an overgeneralized feeling (Valsiner, 2002) reflected

in the utterance “but we know it is a general thing they feel.”

If one tendency in the face of alterity is to resist and stigmatize, as Aidan does, then it will be the case that in encountering alterity, one is likely to encounter stigma. While an easy response might be to counter with reciprocal resistance and stigmatization, such a response is a likely basis for escalating semiotic barriers. The alternative representations of self and other are threatening, and thus both parties tend toward protective stigmatization of the other, making the alternative representations of self and other more threatening, and so the cycle continues.

### *Nationality and the Representation of Difference*

In order to block out alterity, it is necessary to create a rigid opposition between self and other. Many strategies can be used to achieve this end, but particularly salient are representational resources that bring into play ideas of nationhood, belonging, and “essential” difference. These representations, which are fundamental to our culture, are “ready-made” templates for stabilizing self/other difference. In the following excerpt one can see how an Irish local uses multiple semantic barriers, and especially the idea of belonging, to block out the egalitarian point of view that “they’re just like us.”

Ireland is mostly just a place for foreigners. Everywhere you go you see a black person or a colored person or a Chinese or refugee or something. You see them everywhere you go. Inside in Dunnes, especially up in Lidl’s [supermarkets]. I was out there yesterday: it’s just all them. Too many of them are coming in, so it’ll be us leaving. And then our country will just be all colored, and no more Irish, we’ll all be gone. Too many of them are coming in and they’re all just leaving them come in. It’s not fair on us. It’s alright to be saying that they’re just like us, that’s alright, but they have their own country, they don’t belong here.

(Sinéad, 19 years old, Irish local).

Despite not relocating herself, the geographic movement of immigrants into Ireland has caused a change for Sinéad. Using an example of her recent visits to supermarkets as representative of societal changes (Bowen, 2008; O’Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010), she relays her fears of being outnumbered (and therefore other) within her own country. Again we see that geographic movement can, at a semantic level, reverse seemingly rigid identity positions. Sinéad reacts to these changes by creating a



rigid opposition between “foreigners” and the Irish. Using words and phrases like “everywhere,” “all,” “just,” “too many,” and “no more Irish” to create a catastrophic representation of the situation. These extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) legitimize claims of complaint, accusation, justification and defense and can also be used in negotiating claims about identity and category labels (Verkuyten & de Wolf, 2002; Figgou & Condor, 2007).

Toward the end of the quotation, an alternative representation (underlined) makes an appearance: “they’re just like us.” As was the case with Alike, if this representation were expanded, it could lead to a collapse of the distinction between self and other, but it is quickly silenced and blocked by the stronger representation of nationalistic belonging. First, the alternative is bracketed: it is presented as something that people are “saying.” Opinion is not to be taken as fact. Second, the idea that everyone has a country to which they “belong” is used to establish a rigid opposition. Within the logic of such “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995), an individual can only belong to one country and this belonging cannot change. Thus, it is argued, even if “they’re just like us” it does not matter because “they don’t belong” in Ireland. Nationhood, in Sinéad’s (and in Celia’s words below), is discursively represented as a natural category. National distinctions are talked about as essentially autonomous and unproblematic, reproduced through mundane phrases such as the use of “us” and “them” so that the speaker does not feel the need to explain (Billig, 1995).

### *Essentially Different*

The idea of nationhood and belonging to one’s place of birth is not only used by locals to differentiate immigrants, but it is also used by immigrants to differentiate themselves from locals. Consider the following quotation from Celia, a Colombian who immigrated to Greece, following her Greek husband. She relates a conversation she had with a Chilean immigrant in Greece:

I met this man from Chile and he said, ‘I am Greek but I was born in Chile...’ [pause] I told him, ‘You are either Chilean or Greek: you have to choose. If you like more Greece, you can say you are Greek, but let me tell you one thing—what’s your name?’ ‘Manuel.’ ‘Let me tell you one thing, Manuel: the person who denies his land denies his mother—so why? Chile might have this name of pickpockets, of this and that, but no, my friend: you have to love your land because this is where you were born.

Your land carried you, rose you up [...] You are not Greek.’ ‘Yes I am Greek.’ I told him, ‘I have the Greek nationality, but I was born in Colombia and I am Colombian until I die.’

(Celia, 54 years old, Colombian, 31 years in Greece).

In this excerpt, the (underlined) alternative representation is presented at the outset, namely the idea that one can be born in Chile and call oneself Greek. Celia is incensed by the idea. Powerful semantic barriers are used to block the alternative representation of either Manuel or Celia as Greek. According to Celia, the self cannot and should not give up the identity given by birth. Self and other are represented as “essentially” different by birth. Celia’s argument is so strong that we can sense a prohibition at work blocking certain thoughts: claims of being Greek are presented as an unthinkable betrayal to one’s nationality. A powerful metaphor of kinship is introduced here in order to seal the argument of national distinctions: the country is the mother who carries and raises her children. Celia has Greek citizenship in a legal sense, but this is overshadowed by her representation of nationhood and belonging.

In both excerpts above, there is a representation of nationality at work, which creates a self/other difference that is primary to any legal documentation, personal experience, or preference. In both excerpts we can see a similar representation of nationhood acting as a semantic barrier inhibiting any dissolution of the asserted self/other difference. This type of semantic barrier, what could be called a representation of essential differences, has been discussed by Raudsepp and Wagner (in press) in their study of the intergroup tensions between Estonians and Russians. If one considers the way in which the discourses of genetics, race, and culture are often deployed, it seems reasonable to assume that any representation which posits an essential or natural difference will serve to reinforce self/other distinctions. However, representations of essential difference coexist with representations that all people are “essentially” the same.

### **Counterpoint: Essential Sameness**

In the same way that representations of an “essential” difference between groups can act as a powerful enforcer of difference, it is equally the case that representations of “essential” sameness can promote identification and movement between self and other positions. The idea of “essential” sameness and how it is able to overcome the representation of

“belonging” to a nation is illustrated in the following exchange:

**O’Sullivan-Lago (ROS-L):** What does that mean to you? Being Irish?

**Aidan:** It means fuck all really—let’s be honest. I’m going to be truthful with you—it means fuck all. Jesus, if I was born in Spain I’d be Spanish, if I was born in Italy I’d be Italian, if I was born in America I’d be American, or if I was born in England I’d be English. All it is that it kind of gives you a place in the world. It’s that people are all ‘oh I’m from here’ and ‘oh what are you?’ Well, I’m from Corcaigh—so what? It’s not where you come from, it’s who you are—that’s what matters over all.

(Aidan, 23 years old, Irish local)

Aidan quotes other people as voicing an alternative representation (underlined) of nationalistic and cultural belonging: “I’m from here” and “what are you?” This representation, however, is blocked and dismissed by saying, “I’m from Corcaigh—so what? It’s not where you come from, it’s who you are.” Aidan’s basic idea is that nationality is happenstance and that people should focus on who people are as individuals. This is oppositional to the idea of nationality as an essential difference. It is also oppositional to his previous idea of the ulterior motivation of immigrants for being in Ireland (i.e., escaping severe crimes). Thus Aidan seems to move between quite different orientations, unaware of the potential contradictions.

Asylum seekers in Ireland also use the idea of essential sameness to resist the way in which some Irish locals perceive asylum seekers as different. Consider the following utterance from Janári who moved to Ireland from Albania:

I have been to friends’ houses, but I can’t bring them here [to the accommodation center for asylum seekers]. I can’t tell them where I live because I know I’m going to lose them. So that’s not good, that’s bad. Just I hope people understand that all the people are from one world, you know? So, all the people have one God. You might pray like that, I might pray like that, but all of us pray to God, you know?

(Janári, 31 years old, Albanian, 2 years in Ireland)

Janári is aware of essentializing representations that would posit him as essentially different if he were identified as an asylum seeker. Despite being familiar with these representations, he does not agree with them. Janári resists the differentiating representation that would mean being ostracized and the

loss of his friendships because of his “difference,” on the basis of an essential sameness—people are from the same world; despite religious and cultural differences, everyone still prays to God. The idea that all humans are essentially the same protects Janári from being more deeply affected by the stigma he perceives.

Both Janári and Aidan invoke the idea that the differences between people are inconsequential and humans are essentially the same. They present a contrast to the previous excerpts, which showed people talking about essential difference. That said, however, it does not follow that differentiating is in any way connected with being closed unto alterity, and “sameness” or identification implies being open to alterity. In the next section, we see how immigrants often invoke differentiations (albeit nonessentializing ones) in order to avoid stigma and thus remain open unto local communities.

### *Deflecting Stigma, Remaining Open*

In our discussion of the resistance people often enact when encountering alterity, we pointed out the potential for mutually escalating stigmatizing representations, as each side tries to protect themselves from the views they attribute to the other. In this section, we examine the ways in which the stigmatizing views attributed to the other can be blocked, or rather quarantined, so as to prevent an escalation. The basic strategy is to isolate the stigma either in a minority of the out-group or as an obvious misperception.

The following excerpt demonstrates how immigrants in Greece try to differentiate Greeks who are respectful from those who are stigmatizing and racist. This excerpt is from a conversation with Maria and Celia from Colombia and Elvira from Santo Domingo:

**Kadianaki (IK):** Many people now learn Spanish here in Greece and learn how to dance, how do you see this?

**Maria:** It is very nice!

**Elvira:** One feels as if... [pause]

**Maria:** I feel proud that they want to learn the language and the culture.

**Elvira:** Because I always, one has felt all this rejection of our traditions, of the tradition we have and now that they see it and it is pleasant and they like it and they say, ‘Look—Jennifer Lopez.’ I remember many times they have told me, ‘Oh, shit, look—Beyoncé! Did you see that?’ Well, so, these things they please

you, because they see you and they compare you with somebody, you see? With something, with a person who is something, important, they don't see you as trash, like they have always wanted to see you, like for the floor, like very low, like you are nobody. Like you came to this place and you are an unhappy, dying from hunger, and you came to eat. Like many have told me, 'you came to take our food.'

Maria: What happens is [pause] sorry for interrupting you [pause] what happens and I have seen it too [unclear] the Greeks, not all of them, [pause] but some are racists.

Elvira: Not everybody, yes.

Celia: There are racists everywhere.

(Maria, 52 years old, Colombian, 17 years in Greece; Elvira, 52 years old, Santo Dominican, 18 years in Greece; Celia, 54 years old, Colombian, 31 years in Greece).

The fact that some Greek locals learn to speak Spanish and learn Latin American dancing gives Maria, Elvira, and Celia confidence that they are respected by Greek people. Elvira comments on how proud she has felt when she was identified with Latin American superstars like Jenifer Lopez and Beyoncé. In explaining her enthusiasm, she raises the alternative representation (underlined) that the Greeks have “always” seen Latin Americans as “trash” and as “nobody.” The stigmatizing alternative representation gains traction for Maria, and she expands upon it saying that not all, but some Greeks “are racists” and Elvira agrees.

While Alike and Aidan, discussed above, homogenize their respective out-groups and refuse to make differentiations within the out-group, Maria and Elvira are able to engage with the idea that there is racism within Greece without it becoming overwhelming, which would lead them to take an identity position firmly opposed to Greeks. The way in which they achieve this is primarily through differentiating between the Greeks—“not all of them” are racist. Celia also achieves the same end by declaring that “there are racists everywhere”—the implication being that the women should not feel threatened by Greeks in general. By constructing racism as particular to a minority of Greeks on the one hand and commonplace on the other, these women manage to maintain a sense of pride and recognition in the eyes of the Greeks in general.

An additional means of silencing stigma is to understand the source of the discrimination, and to forgive it. By claiming to understand the source of the discrimination, the perceived discrimination

becomes neutralized and nonthreatening. This process is evident in the following excerpt, which is a part of a group discussion with women from a variety of African countries. Here, Lysette from Sierra Leone explains during a group discussion:

You know in Greece they have mythology, we were taught a lot in the school in my country, I learnt a lot of myths about Greece and I was thinking, how can they be like that?! [Everyone laughing] I was thinking of them as mythical beings, they had the twelve Gods, and all this made me see Greeks when I was there, like that, mythical, it is the same with those who believe that Africans are cannibals. We learnt about Hercules, about the twelve Gods, about Athena, it seemed like another world to us, you see what I mean? That is why I can't be concerned with people who believe that Africans are cannibals.

(Lysette, 43 years old, Sierra Leonean, 24 years in Greece)

Lysette gives voice to the idea that Africans are cannibals. What is interesting is that this alternative representation gains no ground; it is treated as ridiculous and is therefore laughed away and poses no threat. Being attributed to a minority of people neutralizes this potentially stigmatizing representation. Lysette raises herself above it through her construction of it as a phantasmagorical illusion. Indeed, the presentation of this particular alternative seems to reverse the trajectory of the stigma such as it falls back upon the stupidity of anyone who held such a view.

Encountering alterity can be threatening, and semantic barriers provide a means to dismiss alterity and maintain existing ideas about self and other. However, if discriminating representations are elaborated on both sides, then there is likely to be mutual escalation as the challenge posed by the other becomes exacerbated. This is not a necessary outcome, however, and in the present section we have shown how semantic barriers can also be used to silence discrimination, quarantine stigma, and thus diminish the challenge of alterity. In this way semantic barriers can be used to remain open to transformation by alterity.

### Unplanned Semantic Movements

Geographic movement is usually intentional and planned, but semantic movement is often unintentional and sometimes not even noticed. The adjustment of the representation of self and other to the changed geographic circumstance is a gradual process. Moreover, representations of self and other are

context-specific, and accordingly, insofar as people occupy multiple contexts, they participate in multiple representations (Wagner, Duveen, Themel, & Verma, 1999). Consequently, movements of migration can lead to semantic reverberations years later, when disjunctions can result in unplanned semantic voyages.

Consider the following excerpt from Carla, a Peruvian immigrant in Greece. She is talking about the places she has lived in Athens and particularly why she moved out of an area of predominantly immigrant inhabitants:

IK: How long have you been living here?

Carla: It's about 2 to 3 years, and [pause] I liked it, because I wanted my children to learn Greek from Greeks, because I was living in Aharnon [an area near the center of Athens] where there are many migrants. It is not that I discriminate, everybody, myself I am a immigrant too, but next to me there were some Albanians, and on the other side some Romanians, so my son, what was he going to listen to? It would be Greek that no [pause] so I didn't want a place like that.

(Carla, 40 years old, Peruvian, 10 years in Greece)

Carla says that she left an area where "there are many migrants" because she wanted her children to grow up among locals. As she speaks she becomes aware of a potential contradiction: not only might she be perceived to be discriminating against immigrants, but she herself is an immigrant. The contradiction is that while she is trying to sustain a difference between herself and immigrants, she still remains an immigrant herself. The distinction she is trying to sustain dissolves—indeed the immigrant category expands to include "everybody." Yet, the dissolution of the difference is only a temporary collapse (Gillespie, 2007a). Despite reversing self/other positions, she continues regardless. The difference is reconstructed on the basis of her neighbors being "Albanians" and "Romanians" and the fact that she wanted "something different" for her son.

Unplanned semantic movements are also evident amongst the Irish locals receiving immigrants. Ireland has a long history of emigration and thus there is a point of historical commonality between immigrants and the local Irish. In the following excerpt we see how Eoin, an Irish local, in the process of criticizing a subgroup of immigrants comes to see the Irish as the same. The collapse of the self/other boundary occurs because of the collective Irish history of economic migration to America and

the shared "immigrant" identity of self and other. The collapse is uncomfortable and Eoin rebuilds the differentiation in a new way:

So as I said, I know a few of them alright and they're getting along ok, and there are a few, the ones that come over and try to scam everyone and that just bugs the shit out of me. I don't know: it's like why come over and rip people off? You're coming over to have a better life and all you do is rip people off. But as I said, those that go away and get a job and do everything right, I've no problem with. It's just, you know, the ones that scam off everything and just try and try, you'll hear them, "Oh my brother went over and got this, that and the other thing, so I'm going to go over." Now, fair enough, the Irish do it all the time, we go over to America. A friend of mine went over to America [...] went over with a sleeping bag and got over, "right, where am I staying?" [...] They're over illegally as well, like, so they just go ship to ship, making their money. Now there are people over here doing the same thing, I've no problem with that, but if my friend went over to America and said, "Right, I can get a free house and free this, I can get free that." There's no, there's no, it's just sickening.

(Eoin, 24 years old, Irish local)

Initially, Eoin discusses some immigrants he knows who are "getting on ok" in Ireland, but also points out that there are many who are "scammers" that are "ripping people off." In short, as discussed in the previous section, he is differentiating the out-group. While he is very positively disposed toward immigrants who "get a job and do everything right," he is hostile to those who try to gain profit without contributing anything. He then gives voice to an imagined immigrant saying, "Oh, my brother went over [to Ireland] and got this, and the other thing, so I'm going to go over." This utterance comes close enough to the common collective Irish experience of emigrating to America so that the distinction between the Irish and the "scamming" immigrants collapses. As if responding to a voice pointing out that this is what the Irish have done, Eoin accepts, "Now, fair enough, the Irish do it all the time," and recounts the experience of a friend who went to America and worked there illegally. To maintain some distinction from the other, however, Eoin proceeds to qualify his complaint, restricting his identification to working immigrants and blocking the identification with immigrants who abuse the system and take what they can.

Geographic movement leads to semantic movement, both for those who move and for those who

receive, and often for many years later. The geographic movement of immigration creates huge semantic reverberations, as all the people affected by the movement reposition themselves in relation to that movement.

### **From Geographical Movement to Semiotic Regulation**

Encountering alterity cannot be reduced to contact in the sense of co-presence in the same geographical space. For a genuine encounter with alterity to occur, the perspective of the other has to permeate the self and to some extent, transform the self. In the empirical examples above, we explored how semantic barriers within the self are built and used to regulate this encounter, sometimes resisting and sometimes opening up to alterity. In the same way that living tissue expunges alien objects, semantic barriers operate within the semantic realm to expunge discomfiting ideas; just as the body regulates what enters it, the self regulates what enters the semiotic realm.

Semiotic regulation refers to the way in which meanings and actions regulate the thoughts and actions of self and other (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994). To regulate these meanings, as we have illustrated, the self can construct semantic barriers so that the content of ideas (the semantics) can block other ideas, specifically the perspectives of other people or groups. The focus of semantic barriers is not on strategies per se, but on the idea complexes, or social representations (Marková, this volume), which have a semantic logic that undermines the perspective of the other—such as beliefs about essential difference grounded in blood, genes, or culture. Ideas that the other is essentially different or fundamentally untrustworthy provide a basis for expunging their perspective from the semiotic system of the self. Equally, believing that all humans are essentially the same can potentially give the perspective of the other credibility within the semiotic system of the self.

Semiotic regulation, and its specific form in the work of semantic barriers, is forward oriented. Whether the use of signs is internal or external, there are always implications for the past, present, and future (Valsiner, 2001). Equally, semantic barriers exist in a temporal realm, and also have implications for the past and point toward the future. Why do Aidan, Alike, Sinéad, and Celia all work to circumvent the perspective of others? If the perspective of the other were entertained, it is likely that it would

have had uncomfortable future implications for the self. For example, if Aidan considered the idea that refugees might have legitimate reasons for seeking refuge, it would imply both that his previous claims were wrong and that he would need to change his behavior toward asylum seekers in the future.

Semiotic mediation is focused upon resolving practical and semiotic problems within a here-and-now context (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005) and the process is fundamentally open-ended. Thinkers and speakers can never be fully aware of where the trajectory of their semiotic regulation will lead (Valsiner, 2001). Equally, in the use of semantic barriers we have seen how both immigrants and locals tackle situated questions within an interview context, how they guard themselves from the implications of alternative points of view, and how the trajectory of their discourse can lead to unplanned outcomes. For example, Carla began by differentiating herself from immigrants, only to acknowledge that she too was an immigrant. And Eoin moved from differentiating immigrants in Ireland from the Irish, but ended up pointing out similarities.

Research on semiotic regulation has tended to focus upon the way in which thoughts and feelings are regulated, promoted, inhibited, or transformed. For example, Josephs and Valsiner (1998) analyzed the way in which people circumvented generalized beliefs that could not be easily ignored in such a way as to be able to act contrary to those beliefs without challenging the beliefs directly. In the present chapter we have been analyzing the way in which people can circumvent the perspective of the other. The appearance of alternatives that need to be dealt with by the individuals demonstrates that the perspective of the other can be difficult to ignore, especially in an interview context. However, using semantic barriers enables tarnishing the other as essentially different or untrustworthy and thus makes the act of dismissing their point of view much easier. As such, semantic barriers are a form of semiotic circumvention, where the object being circumvented is an alternative and somewhat discomfiting idea or perspective.

A key question is: how do the different perspectives of the various stakeholder groups get within the self? In each of the excerpts analyzed above, there is more than one perspective interacting. How do these different perspectives get within the discourse of one individual? Specifically, how is it that immigrants are able to see themselves from the perspective of the people they left behind in their

home country in one moment and in the next from the perspective of the host community? This is a variant of the long-standing problem of internalization. Namely, it is empirically evident that people's thoughts and discourse navigate alternative points of view, but it remains less clear how these alternative points of view become internalized by individuals. Geographic movement may provide one aspect of an answer to this.

Geographic movement provides a mechanism through which diverse perspectives can infiltrate the self. Simply put, before any individual leaves their country of origin, they are locals. As locals they encounter immigrants as "other" (i.e., the immigrants who come to their home country). Accordingly, immigrants-to-be already have the perspectives of locals toward both the people who leave and the people who arrive. Once the immigrants-to-be leave and become immigrants, these previous perspectives toward others can be reversed and turned upon the self. Thus, previous experience of others as immigrants becomes mapped onto self and the immigrants are, to some extent, able to see themselves from the perspective of nonimmigrants. One of the core problems of the development of self, according to Mead (1932), is how people can get outside of themselves and thus become self-aware. In geographical movement, people are, in a sense, stepping out of themselves and becoming other (Gillespie, 2006), and thus the previous exteriority they had in relation to others becomes exteriority they have in relation to themselves.

The excerpts analyzed in the present chapter illustrate the role of geographic movement in semiotic regulation. Helén, for example, first had the experience of other people leaving her home country of Spain, then when she moved to Ireland, she was, through the words of her mother, able to turn these previous experiences of others toward herself and, with some discomfort, see her self as other. Equally, Lysette takes her own experience of misunderstanding the Greeks, inhabiting a mythical realm, to forgive the Greeks who misunderstand her and her African heritage. In both of these cases we see how geographic movement enables a stepping out of the self, and thus self-reflection and self-regulation.

But what of the Irish who have not moved geographically? It is possible, although they have not migrated, that geographic movement does still have an important role to play, this time at the level of collective history. Aidan and Eoin, for example, had the imagined migration experience of the Irish

throughout history, and Eoin additionally had the imagined experience of his friend, to draw upon. Using this experience allowed them to semiotically regulate the alternative representations of migrants as essentially different or only migrating to "rip people off." Thus we see that people are able to regulate meanings about the self and self-reflect, not only from social positions actually occupied, but also from social positions inculcated and imagined, possibly with the aid of elaborate symbolic resources—such as Irish national narratives of migration.

### Future Directions

The overall aim of this chapter has been to follow the consequences of the geographic movement of immigration into the semantic movements that result. We have also shown the ways in which geographic movement leads to encounters with alterity, which can be threatening because of the alternative representations of self and other that are encountered. We have focused on the boundary between self and alterity, and tried to analyze the way in which the self either tries to expunge alterity or remain open to it. In this final section, we outline potentially fruitful lines for future research.

At a general level, we encourage research to focus upon movement: geographic movement, semantic movement, and above all, the relation between the geographic and semantic movement. By studying this relationship, we suggest, researchers can develop a genuinely social and material analysis of semantic and psychological processes. Within this orientation to future research we want to raise four specific lines of research.

First, which representations, or semantic content, enable people to dismiss or silence alterity? We identified ideas about nationality and belonging as being a basis for postulating a taken-for-granted essential difference (Billig, 1995). Are there additional representational complexes that can be used in this way? Do representations about genetics, mental illness, terrorism, specific religious or national groups, and so on, reveal similar properties? Can we understand the representations that colonialists used to have in relation to their colonies as serving similar functions (Said, 1978)? In any case, what are the key aspects of a representation that enable it to be dismissive of alterity?

Second, would the identified semantic barriers and essentializing representations be evident in face-to-face or mediated contact with alterity? Our analysis has not pertained to any actual contact zones,

but from intragroup discussions and interviews, and we have analyzed how participants engage with the voice of the other, which they themselves have given voice to. We have shown how the voice of the other is silenced, and equally, how stigmatizing views are blocked, but would either of these happen when the self is in actual contact with the other? There has been a lot of research on whether contact can overcome intergroup conflict and it would, we suggest, be profitable to analyze the interactional processes within such contact. Specifically, we ask, are semantic barriers and essentializing representations evident in actual interactions? And perhaps most interestingly, how would the other respond to encountering essentializing and silencing representations?

Third, why do some people at some points in time feel threatened by alterity and feel the need to dismiss it? How does the content of the alterity interact with their own semantic being to produce a threat to be resisted? Semantic barriers do not cause the silencing of a representation. Rather, they are the tools that are used to do so. In many cases, alternative tools could have been used. Why, for example, does Sinéad draw upon the idea that people naturally belong to different countries, while Aidan draws upon the idea that belonging is irrelevant? And perhaps, even more interestingly, what is that makes the same person shift between his/her use of semantic barriers blocking or enabling the same alternative? We saw how Aidan contradicted himself, once arguing about the ulterior motivation of immigrants and then enabling sameness between self and other. Future research can focus on the social conditions that make alterity threatening and on the ways that individuals psychologically negotiate and semantically move between these. This takes us to questions of motivation, and the overall, often overgeneralized, feelings that guide people (Valsiner, 1998).

Fourth, what are the conditions for more or less transformative dialogical engagement? Numerous theorists and researchers whose work originates with Mead, Vygotsky, and Piaget have shown how development hinges upon encounters with alterity, and sometimes even conflictual encounters (Psaltis & Duveen, 2007). Why then is it that people often resist alterity? And specifically, what are the conditions that lead at an individual level to a developmental encounter and, at a social level, to the production of more perspective-transcending knowledge? We have shown how semantic barriers can block the

elaboration of alternative representations; does it then follow that blocking the elaboration of alternatives closes down the potential for dialogical transformation? Or, might the converse be true—that the existence of semantic barriers and the resistance that motivates them is in fact evidence of a tension and thus the presence of change?

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## Crossing Thresholds: Movement as a Means of Transformation

Zachary Beckstead

### Abstract

Any cultural practice in human life is accomplished by some kind of movement within the culturally organized environment. This includes movement in our everyday environments (e.g., home to school and work) and travel that extends beyond our home community. While going from our home to the grocery store entails some form of border crossing (e.g., private < > public), long-distance travel brings us into contact with unfamiliar lands, sights, smells, and people, and involves taking up a social role and position (e.g., soldier, tourist, immigrant, pilgrim). In an age when human mobility is increasing with an emphasis on speed and efficiency, pilgrimage remains a popular form of movement where many varieties of transformation is the goal. Thus, pilgrimage provides a concrete historical and cultural framework for human travel. Pilgrimages can be viewed socially and structurally (e.g., Victor Turner's ideas of *communitas* and the debates surrounding this), personally and culturally (through looking at material culture relevant for the persons on the move), and in terms of tourism as a version of secularized and commercialized pilgrimage. This paper builds an understanding of pilgrimage from a developmental, cultural, and psychological framework. Elaborating Turner's notion of *normative communitas*, I examine how pilgrims are guided and constrained toward episodic moments of deep affective value and how these experiences overgeneralize and feed-forward to the pilgrims' future encounters with the world.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage, social guidance, semiotic mediation, externalization and internalization process, sacred

Our modern world is filled with rapid movement and expanding mobility. Distances that people travel are increasing, while the time it takes to reach these far-away locations is decreasing. Flow of goods, ideas, and people circulate around the globe in large quantities and at dizzying speeds. It is little wonder that “travel” seems to have become the “image of the age” and that:

... porous borders, portable allegiances, virtual networks, and elastic identities now more than ever evoke the language of mobility, contingency, fluidity, provisionality, and process rather than that of stability, permanence and fixity.

(Euben, 2006, p. 1)

Boundary crossings are commonplace, and successful travel is largely measured by how fast people and information can be transported from place to place. However, travel has not always been commonplace and marked by efficiency. Indeed, the English word *travel* is derived from the French word *travail*, and so historically travel has been connected to hardship, effort, and suffering. Traveling to distant (and even not-so-distant) lands entailed large time commitments, physical exertion, crossing rigidly protected borders, entanglements between countries, collectivities and nations, the uncertainty of finding lodging and food, and a host of other dangers that existed in unknown lands and on the paths to these places. Travelers

across Europe for centuries encountered rutted roads that violently jostled carriages and the seas of course were a precarious place for anyone. Indeed, traveling was etymologically related to childbirth as it suggested labor, toil, and trouble (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2011).

### **Different Forms of Movement**

Since humans emerged on the scene of Earth's history, we have been moving, migrating, and spreading out over the Earth, leaving behind our genetic and material traces. Like all organisms, human beings have frequently moved to follow food, find shelter, and temporarily escape harsh environmental conditions. As nomadic or semi-nomadic forms of movement gave way to a more sedentary lifestyle, human beings established more-or-less enduring centers or locations for their clans, villages, cities, and homes. Large-scale movement of human populations slowed without completely ceasing, as many diasporas illustrate. Yet large scale movements of migrations have always coexisted with more small-scale movements of people in their everyday, ordinary settings. In addition to the survival functions of movement, human beings move for social purposes. That is, we not only leave our homes to fetch water, but to also fetch a spouse. Social and cultural activities provide the impetus for much of our movement as we make small journeys to work or school, to visit family and friends and to return back home. Movement is thus interwoven in all of our experiences and flavors the texture of our lives as we travel between places in our local settings.

We can also move far from our local communities through various forms of border-crossing travel. While going from our home to the grocery store entails some form of border crossing (e.g., private < > public), long-distance travel brings us into contact with unfamiliar lands, sights, smells and people, and involves taking up a social role and position (e.g., soldier, tourist, immigrant, pilgrim). With each particular form of travel, ordinary people take up social roles and positions. That is, movement outside of our everyday settings entails that individuals become a soldier, explorer, tourist, pilgrim, business person, traveler, or anthropologist. From the perspective of those who encounter travelers, knowing if a person is a tourist or soldier has implications on whether or not the person offers money-making opportunities or potential death. For the person traveling, these social roles call forth different paths of action and ways of relating with the world. Obviously the

soldier performs different actions, wears a different uniform, engages socially with others differently than a pilgrim would. However, these social roles and identities are fluid and can blur together, as the case of the Crusades highlights (see below for the tourist becoming a pilgrim). Indeed, these roles *suggest* but *do not determine* how a person relates with the world (or how the world relates to the person).

Human exploration of unfamiliar lands is ancient and can be found in many varieties and for various purposes: trade, quests for knowledge, and conquest. On the one hand, travel has functioned to open groups and individuals to novelty in the form of goods and ideas (Euben, 2006; Turner & Turner, 1978). Through the work of merchants and traders, bridges were made between diverse countries and markets, as each was enriched materially and educationally from the other. Trade between countries and communities also led to the construction of roads and technological advancements in how people traveled. Extensive Roman roads and Great Silk Roads are but two examples of how early trade between countries and groups expanded travel for not just merchants and traders, but also for common people in search of the unknown, knowledge, pleasure, or their particular deity (Löschburg, 1979). Travel for the pursuit of knowledge can be found in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (transcribed 1900 BCE) where “the attainment of wisdom was linked to direct experience of the radically unfamiliar” (Euben, 2006, p. 20–21). Interestingly, Plato argued for the importance of travel and firsthand experience for the benefit of political life and the development of *theōros* (Euben, 2006, p. 22).

Yet, travel has also been utilized as an act of conquest or subordination of the other. War has been a ubiquitous form of movement in which otherness is confronted and subjugated. Although conquests and the quest for knowledge and riches can be separated in function, they have often been intertwined. For instance, Alexander the Great's famous expeditions included philosophers and early naturalists such as Aristotle along with soldiers. Scientific knowledge expanded along with the reach of the Roman Empire. As noted above, the Crusades of the Middle Ages provide a stark example of when two different forms of travel (war and pilgrimage) have been blended. The Crusades were principally a military expedition, blessed by the Pope, and secondarily a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in which soldiers were granted indulgences. In spite of the obvious horrors of war, conflicts offer individuals

of poor economic standing the opportunity to visit new and unfamiliar lands.

In historical terms, traders have been called the first known travelers who “realized that outside their narrow circle there were other people, other goods and even treasures” (Löschburg, 1979, p. 9). Although certain forms of travel have become more salient throughout human history (e.g., pilgrimage in the Middle Ages and tourism in this era), the various forms of travel have been interlinked making a chronology of travel difficult, if not impossible. What is important to note is that the experience of traveling is influenced not only by the reasons for traveling (and the corresponding social roles), but also the means (e.g., cultural tools) people use to travel. Natural elements, animals, and human beings have each been used for transporting goods and people, and have also constrained and shaped where human beings can travel and how fast—or in other words, their experience as travelers. Except for certain periods in history—specifically during the Roman era and the construction of their road system (Löschburg, 1979), travel had been a slow, difficult, and arduous activity. Traveling and crossing boundaries posed many risks, and travelers encountered discomfort at almost every step. One unknown traveler lamented:

Oh, hard is travel and severe,  
It makes my belly ache.  
Lice bite on my bed of straw.  
I miss my soft white sheets,  
A fool I am to travel,  
Then, and why?, I ask.  
(cited in Löschburg, 1979, p. 31)

It is perhaps easy to forget the challenges, uncertainty, and threats facing travelers of the not-too-distant past. Indeed, this lament generally diverges from our modern experiences of travel that are marked by comfort, leisure, and speed.

In the midst of this period where speed and efficiency of movement are highly valued, travel for the sake of the experience created by the travel itself—historically known as pilgrimage—remain a popular and even increasing form of travel. This fact poses a paradox. On the one hand, pilgrimage is animated and supported by our modern mobility paradigm and technical advances, and on the other hand, it offers an alternative to the frenetic pace of life and overarching technological frameworks in which human beings are enmeshed. Although the business traveler tries to arrive at the destination as quickly as possible, the same person going on a pilgrimage

may elect to move toward the goal as slowly as possible. Pilgrimages provide opportunities for people then to go “offline” and explore the world at a decelerated speed (Slavin, 2003). Moreover, and in contrast to a business trip, pilgrimages are self-initiated journeys to places and objects of exceptional personal and social value where the form of movement is an essential. Hardships and difficulties of travel are not trivial annoyances to be avoided, but rather prepare the travelers for some form of personal or social transformation.

### ***The Pilgrimage: Cultural Psychology of Spirituality in Movement***

Pilgrimage is an ancient form of travel and therefore has common-sense as well as academic connotations. That is, we speak colloquially of going on a pilgrimage to see and stand where John Lennon was killed (Kruse, 2003) as readily as we describe our visits to Mecca or Jerusalem. Pilgrimages have also extended beyond typical religious traditions as people have made pilgrimages to battlefields (Gatewood & Cameron, 2004). Nevertheless, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity have long-standing traditions of pilgrimage as part of their faith practices. For instance, Hindus travel to sacred places such as Varanasi where they bathe in the waters of the Ganges River and visit temples and shrines. Gesler and Peirce (2000, p. 225) note that the city of Varanasi derives its sacred character because it is considered by many to be the center of the universe and is associated with mythical events, is linked with the abodes of the gods, and is a microcosm of all other sacred places in India and therefore transcends (for many) all other places. The deceased (human) are transformed into ancestral spirits (nonhuman) along side the banks of the Ganges at Varanasi. Additionally, India also is the birthplace of Buddhism and thus the sites related to the major events of the Buddha’s life are central to Buddhist pilgrimage. However, as Buddhism spread and the possibility of adherents visiting India decreased, Buddhist practice supported the construction of proxy pilgrimage sites. That is, in order to offer adherents access to holy sites that were out of their reach, “copies” of many original pilgrimage sites were re-created in the new land. For instance, in Japan, pilgrimages to the Thirty Holy Places of Kannon in the Western Provinces, the Saikoku Pilgrimage at Seigantoji at Nachi on the coast south of Kyoto, and the Eighty-Eight shrines on the Island of Shikoku continue to draw many

pilgrims follow a circular course and circumambulate a series of temples and shrines and encounter sacred relics along the way (see MacWilliams, 2004; Foard, 1982).

#### WHAT IS A PILGRIMAGE OR WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL? (TURNER AND TURNER, 1978)

Finding a widely accepted definition of pilgrimage can be difficult as scholars and social institutions grapple with issues of religion/tourism, length of distance and time required to be considered a pilgrimage, and mode of transportation (e.g., whether a pilgrimage can be made by vehicle or needs to be on foot). Victor Turner described pilgrimage as mysticism externalized (and mysticism is pilgrimage internalized). Foard (1982, p. 232) describes pilgrimage as a “religious journey, both temporary and long, to a particular site or sites, which are invested with sanctity by tradition.” Similarly, Chélini and Branthomme (1982) conceptualize pilgrimages as marked by three interwoven components: the existence of a sacred place; spatial distance to be covered; and special ritual acts to be done by the individual or group prior to, during, and after the trip, and while at the sacred site. We can observe that Foard and Chélini and Branthomme offer a broad definition of pilgrimage that situates it as a spiritual or religious activity with long- and short-term travel. Both definitions seem to restrict pilgrimage to religious travel; however, Foard (1982) observes that historically pilgrimages and what we would now call tourism have been intertwined.

In order to go beyond emphasizing the structural elements of pilgrimage (i.e., the distance to travel, required ritual attitudes and prescriptions, etc.), I suggest that the complex phenomenon of pilgrimage should be understood along structural (form), functional (purpose), and experiential (e.g., as a spiritual experience) dimensions. Each type of pilgrimage has its own dynamic structure (e.g., rules, prescriptions, built-up environment, types of encouraged movement) and therefore exists only within social and historical contexts. Moreover, pilgrimage serves institutional and personal goals; it has been prescribed by religious and social institutions for their own goal orientations (e.g., to promote faith, or to encourage war as in the case of the Crusades), and people make pilgrimages out of devotion, curiosity, desire for healing, to increase their status or understanding and for other mutually overlapping reasons. Furthermore, pilgrimages are marked by episodic moments of deep relevance

that are experienced by the person as spiritual or somehow transcendent as they encounter religious and/or in some way sacred artifacts.

What is also of note is that pilgrimages entail movement directed at sites that are considered by communities and individuals to be sacred sites that are supported and sanctified by tradition. These places have been transformed by human and (asserted) supernatural intervention, and contain a form of *charisma* and power to the perspective of the pilgrim because of their association with divinity (i.e., theophany), sacrifice (i.e., battlefields), beauty, and/or with some other social virtue (e.g., creativity, honor, celebrity). As Victor Turner noted,

self-initiated journeys by individuals and groups to far-away places brings people into contact with places and objects that are “intimately associated with the deepest, most cherished, axiomatic values of the traveler . . .

(Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 241)

One characteristic unifying the manifold types of travel to distant places is the desire for transformation. People travel and make pilgrimages in order to effect change and to be moved in profound ways. The target of transformation is often the self. People make pilgrimages in hopes of forgiveness (modifying God-individual relationship), for physical healing, to gain merit for the next life, or for hoped-for-futures (e.g., success in business, health in childbearing). Humility, faith, and charity become a key virtues for many pilgrimages as individuals travel far from home to powerful places and must rely on the kindness of others and as they encounter sacred objects of their faith. Pilgrimages thus become the catalyst for reorganization of a person's value system (Beckstead, 2010; Beckstead, in press). The expectation and hope is that the return traveler is not the same as when he or she left and that there has been significant change in the personal realm because of the journey to a sacred or extraordinary and far-away location. The pilgrim should bring back not only stories, photos, souvenirs, and mementos, but also a less tangible yet significant insight or feeling that modifies their relationship with the world. As I expand below, this transformation of the self and the person-world relationship is related to the social suggestions in the immediate material environment. Pilgrims taking the Camino de Santiago encounter numerous signs such as sea shells, smaller shrines, and relics that point the way and prepare the pilgrim for their arrival and transformative experience.

Targets of transformation can also at times include social others and the environment. The Crusades had the intention to take back the Holy Land and rid it of Muslims. Sax notes how transformation through pilgrimage in Hinduism includes and extends beyond the individual:

By journeying to these powerful places and performing certain actions there, pilgrims achieve some kind of transformation, either in themselves or in their circumstances. Pilgrims may be bodily transformed or cured of disease, or the deity itself may be transformed. . . . A pilgrim's relatives may be transformed. . . , or his prospects—of prosperity, fertility, liberation. Pilgrimage places can themselves be created or transformed by the actions of pilgrims.

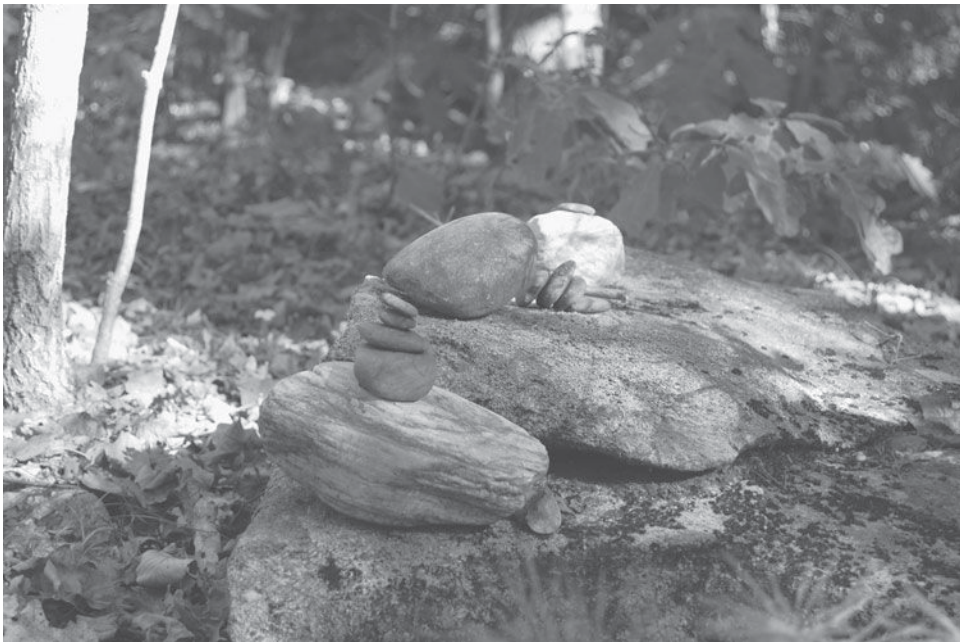
(Morinis 1984, p. 279)

In all religious faiths, the actions of pilgrims modify the places visited in terms of the built landscape and for those living at or near the pilgrimage place (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Pilgrims leave behind their “footprints” as they join together in ritual activity, inscribe their name at critical places, make cairns on the side of the road (see Fig. 33.1), and spend money contributing to the economic development of the pilgrimage site and surrounding areas. Thus, places that pilgrims visit are transformed in both mundane and sacred ways.

There also exist “mini-pilgrimages” in the social secular worlds. Children are sent on field trips to city halls, temples, shrines, and a host of other locations of great social value with the desire and expectation that they will return home affected in some way. Self-initiated journeys are likewise made so that systemic changes occur in intrapersonal and interpersonal realms, and between the person and their environment. Foard notes the similarity between pilgrimages and *shūgaku ryokō*, the school trips senior high-school students make in Japan to the temples, shrines, and national historic sights (Foard, 1982, p. 248):

The initiatory overtones of these trips are obvious, down to their antistructural rambunctiousness. These students are not, of course, being brought to revere Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and kami, but to make the Japanese tradition their own.

These ubiquitous “field trips” serve to promote institutional goals and provide opportunities for children to internalize the social suggestions, or to “make the Japanese [or any other] tradition their own” (Ibid). Through these mini-pilgrimages young people are socialized and affectively guided toward reconstructing the values and traditions suggested by the goals-oriented social institutions that organize and frame these journeys. Of course these mini-pilgrimages are not only for children; every age



**Figure 33.1** Cairns (indexical signs) constructed at the side of a pilgrimage path to the Peace Pagoda in western Massachusetts.

group visits museums, battlefields, and other more culturally organized secular sites. As with religious pilgrimages, secular pilgrimages draw on “guides” to assist the individuals on their journeys (Bharati, 1963; Foard, 1982).

What are the conditions that lead to these changes? How does the pilgrimage experience facilitate social and personal development?

### **PILGRIMAGE AS CULTIVATION: THE LENS OF GEORG SIMMEL**

Travel to distant places is intertwined with change and is a process that fits what Georg Simmel described as *cultivation*, an analogy used for the development of natural organisms applied to human beings. This notion provided the basis for his conceptualization of *culture*. Cultivation implies that something changes from one state to another, and more specifically for Simmel, it entails the unfolding development of a thing beyond its “previous developmental possibilities” (Simmel, 1971, p. 228). Simmel uses the example of a pear tree to illustrate how a gardener only takes the latent “natural” potential of the wild pear tree and “brings it to the most complete unfolding of its own nature” and transforms it into a tree that bears edible fruit (p. 228). Cultivation then is not only development of an organism, but development in accordance with inner core or deepest dispositions. Cultivation entails some form of intervention that guides the organism toward its potential, and this applies to things found in nature and to human beings. However, in discussing cultivation in the realm of human beings he makes the critical point that,

... culture exists for only if man draws into his development *something that is external to him*. Cultivation is certainly a state of the soul, but one that is reached only by means of the use of purposefully created *objects*.  
(p. 229, emphasis in original)

For Simmel, then, cultivation occurs when human beings and institutions draw upon “purposefully created objects” for their development or to arrive at a “heightened existence” (Simmel, 1971, p. 233). *Objective culture* refers to things in a state of embellishment and growth that guides or points the psyche to its fulfillment or path to be taken in order to achieve an elevated existence. Semiotic devices—language, rituals, cultural images and artifacts, and practices—can be considered elements of objective culture that are set up to guide human feeling and

thinking (Valsiner, 2000, 2007). *Subjective culture*, Simmel describes, is the process of drawing on objective cultural objects and “its measure is the extent to which the psychic life-processes makes use of those objective goods and accomplishments” (p. 234). Subjective culture and objective culture do not exist independently since subjective culture can only be accomplished through the use of objective culture. Simmel’s insights point to the mutuality between person and culture, and as Fuhrer (2004, p. 73) argues,

... the general insight underlining the concept of cultivation as a reciprocal feedback process refers to Simmel’s conviction of the human being’s unique capacity to complete his/her personality by internalizing influences external to his/her personal sphere. That is, Simmelian cultivation means the elaborative change of inherent opportunities that the developing individual cannot reach out to on his/her own without socio-cultural ‘structures’—i.e., in my terms the external mind—external to him or her. What this also means is that establishing, expressing and transforming a person’s subjective culture—i.e., in my terms internal mind—through external, material things is a process that continues throughout the life-span.

Person and culture are intertwined and mutually related, each transforming the other. Pilgrimage is one exemplar of a cultural practice that is supposed to lead people toward a “heightened existence” as people journey to the places imbued with social and religious relevance.

### **Cultural Psychology of Pilgrimage: Building a Theoretical Account**

Before exploring how pilgrimage experiences become a source for transformation, let me briefly clarify the theoretical framework I am adopting in this chapter. Contemporary socio-cultural psychology is filled with theoretical claims—usually based on empirical work—that lack clear grounding in the wider methodology cycle (Branco & Valsiner, 1997). The axioms I take as the basis of this theoretical exposition come from basic developmental science and social psychology of the constructionist kind.

#### **THE AXIOMATIC BASES**

Firstly, I take as axiomatic that human development and meaning-making processes unfold in irreversible time (Bergson, 1913, 1944). This notion posits that time flows from an infinite past to an

infinite future and no event ever repeats itself; hence, the future is inherently uncertain and unpredictable. This is an inevitable given in all biological systems, or open systems. As defined by von Bertalanffy (1968), an open system is characterized by the interactions of its components with the environment and the nonlinearity of those interactions. Open systems—in contrast to closed systems—engage in exchange relations with their environment. Novelty is only possible in open systems.

Secondly, because of the openness and general unpredictability of the future, human beings and institutions develop signs to overcome this uncertainty and ambivalence to make what is fluid more stable (Shweder, 1995, pp. 41–42; Josephs, Valsiner, & Surган, 1999). Cultural tools like roads and paths as wells as meanings or signs (e.g., the notion that “travel is exciting”) promotes movement and increases human exploration of unfamiliar realms that is necessary in any form of travel. Of course paths and roads are also evocative of feelings and ideas of uncertainty. Thus, signs or meanings mediate between the past and future and provide stability in an inherently ambiguous world.

Thirdly, there exist perceptual and cognitive limits upon relating with environment. We can only follow the length of the road or path with their visual system up to the horizon, but there is knowledge that something exists beyond. Like all other organisms, humans can use roads and paths as a way to go from A to B because of the perceptual cues the path affords and our particular bodily configuration. However, given our species-specific ways of relating to the environment (our *umwelt*), a path or road may have a meaning that goes beyond what it affords (i.e., the meaning of movement or *transportation*; see Chang, 2009 for a discussion of *umwelt*). Paths connect and bridge known and unknown far-away places. Victor Turner (1969/2009) has noted that Ndembu hunters would “blaze a trail” by leaving a series of marks on trees in order to find their way back home from unknown territory (p. 15). Indeed, ritual practice bore the meaning of connecting the unknown and known realms for the Ndembu and of bridging the sensorily perceptible realm of the living with the invisible realm of the dead (p. 15). Similarly, pilgrimages offer sensorily perceptible markers and ritual practices that not only connect living and dead/deity, but also orient people toward their uncertain futures.

Fourthly, I draw on the notion that our experiences within the world leave traces in us. We speak

to our neighbor about the weather, play with our children, or visit a museum, and these interactions lead to reconstruction of new signs intrapersonally and feed forward into our future encounters with the world. Our experience and action can also leave behind traces and signs in the environment. These signs can be apprehended and experienced by others and can take the form of utterances or perhaps embodied in the built-up environment or made available in some other material form. In various ways the signs of the world become “translated into internal signs (or internalization), and inner signs find an expression in shared signs (externalization)” (Zittoun, 2010, p. 174). This translation and sign-exchange process can be conceived as a semiotic process and builds on Simmel’s notion of culture-as-cultivation (Fuhrer, 2004).

Fifthly, human development and semiotic processes occur in specific settings, which are organized to guide and enrich the semiotic processes (Innis, 2011; Murakami, 2011). These settings can be schools, the workplace, home, church, or a myriad of other places in our everyday world or they can be memorials, temples, shrines, and other sacred or quasi-sacred settings. Human beings are wholes (e.g., open systems) and embedded in the environment, and actions only make sense against the wider social milieu. Thus I draw on the socio-genetic viewpoint that considers personalized meaning-making activities as unfolding and always guided by others (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). Social institutions guide and constrain human development in socially desired directions by setting up affective boundaries (i.e., “how one should feel here”) through the activities and material cultural objects that make up these settings (González-Ruibal, 2011; Beckstead et al., 2011). Pilgrimage sites and the pilgrimage route offer rich settings that are organized through discursive and non-discursive strategies and elements to immerse and guide people toward encounters with *sacred* places and objects. However, people actively interpret (constructively internalize) these social messages and suggestions and can resist (or ignore), modify, and offer alternative interpretations and understandings. This builds on the notion of *inclusive separation* of human beings and the environment where both are parts of a larger whole (Valsiner, 2000). Both the external environment and person co-develop in relation to each other.

This chapter, then, offers a cultural psychological perspective of pilgrimage rooted in semiotics. People

move through the environment encountering people, buildings, and other artifacts that—material and symbolic traces of human living—of which they make sense and internalize. Culture is thus the process that relates people to the world through signs or semiotic mediation and guides individuals' experience and sense making (Valsiner, 2007). Through the construction and use of signs (both intrapsychological and in the environment), here-and-now settings are transformed for human beings. Human relating to the world through culture thus “entails simultaneous closeness to, and distance from, the actual situation the person is in” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 72).

#### FINDING THE WAY ALONG THE PILGRIMAGE PATH

The notion of the path provides a rich metaphor of the journey of life—as we move from birth to death. The path or road was seen in Japanese society as an important element of the development and realization of the self (Tobin, 1992, p. 24). Traveling away from home and one's family allowed the person to gain important experience by meeting social and concrete “others.” The path in many diverse religions indicates the way—providing people with potential answers to fundamental questions and longings. The routes, paths, and trails taken by the traveler can be viewed as an exceedingly important aspect of the pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a form of path taking and path making, as pilgrims leave behind their traces in the roads they take, objects they leave behind, and narratives they share afterward. Path making then is a semiotic device of culture, and as Christopher Tilley (1994) notes,

... a journey along a path can be claimed to be a paradigmatic cultural act, since it is following in the steps inscribed by others whose steps have worn a conduit for movement which becomes the correct or ‘best way to go.’  
(p. 31)

The path is a cultural transformation of the natural environment that, in the case of pilgrims, tourists, and other sojourners, enables them to seek answers to fundamental questions (e.g., why live?) and makes sense out of religious and spiritual values. In this sense, paths and symbolic movement of pilgrimages provide social guidance through the traces of others and orient pilgrims toward the future (this point is developed below). Paths are therefore a quintessential aspect of *objective culture*

that societies and individual people draw upon to guide them in their development and can be considered liminal structures that are between and betwixt past and future, familiar and unfamiliar, and ordinary and extraordinary. Not surprisingly then, the metaphor of paths and concrete paths, roads, and routes have been conceived as important in fostering social and personal development.

#### Liminality and *Communitas*: Freedom and Constraint

Understanding how pilgrimages may lead social communities and individuals to a “heightened existence” has largely been predicated on the notions of *liminality* and *communitas*. Victor Turner expanded Arnold Van Gennep's (1960/2004) work on rites of passages and his provocative notion of liminality. Van Gennep posited that any rite of passage (or rite of transition) was marked by three separate but interrelated phases—separation, liminality, and aggregation. With the first phase, the individual physically and symbolically is separated from the social community. The liminal or marginal phase finds the individual or community in an ambiguous realm or state where previous social conditions (e.g., status) no longer exist (or are temporarily suspended) and the new social state is not known or is at least uncertain. In the third and final phase, the individual or group returns with a new social status to the stable and mundane life conditions where they are expected to reintegrate into the society and follow the norms of the community that accompany their new status. In other words, the individual moves from a stable state to a highly fluctuating transitional period before physically and symbolically returning to the social order in a new social state. Van Gennep developed his framework while working in “primitive” societies and argued that rites of passage were obligatory.

Victor Turner (1978) took van Gennep's notion of liminality and developed its meaning to entail more than a transitional period but also a transformative phase. He argued that “liminality is not only a transition but also a potentiality, both what is ‘going to be’ and more importantly also ‘what may be’” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 3). Separation from one's society has a liberating effect as one moves from the center to the social and spatial periphery. What differentiates the rituals Turner explored from that of Van Gennep was that they were marked by a high degree of voluntariness. Hence he made the distinction between *liminal* (obligatory) and



*liminoid* (voluntary) phenomena. As religious life had become increasingly intertwined with the secular and mundane aspects of daily living (even in monastic life), Turner argued that pilgrimages were prime examples of a liminoid and transformative phenomena since the pilgrim set out voluntarily from their place of residence and the structured social orders, crossing into new lands and ambiguous states and statuses. The physical separation from one's home community and journey to a new place provided a rich metaphor for transformation from one social status to another, and the possible becoming realized. Alex Gillespie (2006) notes that the pilgrim and tourist become "nobody" since they lose their familiar social positions, roles, history, and expectations. They are free to play with their identity and how they present themselves since they move beyond their home community and the social expectations (Gillespie, 2006, pp. 62–63). On the social level, liminality has been associated with anti-structure and seen as an important condition for fostering group cohesion and *communitas*.

### ***Examining Social Transformations in Pilgrimage***

Pilgrimage as a cultural activity that intervenes and guides people toward a "higher existence" is expressed in Turner's concept of *communitas*. Indebted to Durkheim, Turner (1969) saw pilgrimages as a process ideally overcoming group division and leading to social unification. For him, pilgrimage leads to a "relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community or even communion of equal individuals" and echoes Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship when he describes it as a "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities" (pp. 96, 132). Pilgrimage is a socially regenerative ritual because it operates partially outside of social structure and everyday settings of interaction marked by social stratification and obligation. That is, outside of everyday social structures and social roles that often shape our human interactions, pilgrimage's liminal phase space allows for fellow pilgrims to (often temporarily) spontaneously and generously relate to each other as they approach and interact at the pilgrimage center. Pilgrimage in this light can be seen as a ritual activity oriented toward overcoming divisions and cleavages in the social fabric of a group that inevitably occur in the day-to-day interaction of group members. Leaving behind one's home community, according to Turner, engenders freedom from social obligations and entrenched patterns of

interaction, thus allowing individuals to relate to each other out of a sense of love and fellowship. As the pilgrim travels away from their particular communities, they encounter symbolic markers and engage in ritual activities that convey more universal meaning (e.g., "we are all one"). Status differentiation is symbolically erased as pilgrims put on the similar clothing and unity is amplified because of the temporal and spatial distance from everyday life. These symbolic markers, joint travel, and social distance are then seen as leading to a "community of feeling" that is not bound to blood or particular locations, but rather toward more abstract notions of humankind (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 201).

The pilgrimage path as marginal space played a significant role in breaking down structure, combining the sacred and profane, and revealing dangers and freedom of travel. Pilgrims of all segments of society shared the same route and interacted together outside under unusual circumstances. Patterns of typical social interaction could be reconfigured in this context. Much like birth and death, travel in the form of pilgrimage could be considered a great equalizer (Foard, 1982, p. 239). Thus liminality opens up possibilities for challenging and questioning dominant structures in one's social environment.

Turner's conceptualization of *communitas*, marked by freedom, unity, and community, however, has been widely challenged as utopic and essentialist (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Critiques have pointed out that non-Christian pilgrimages do not fit the model of *communitas* and so it has little generalized value outside of the Christian context. Other pilgrimages are marked by status distinctions instead of social homogenization and unity (Eade, 1991). Graham St. John (2001) articulates a common criticism that is leveled at Turner's notion of *communitas* when he states that within events such as pilgrimages, "performative homogeneity is delineated at the expense of open-ended political maneuvering and contestation" (p. 49). That is, critics argue that instead of faithfully promoting unity or similarity of experience, pilgrimages often contain contested viewpoints and meanings, and exist in a highly political zone of conflicting interests. Instead of seeing pilgrimage as a vehicle that transforms difference into similarity, these scholars emphasize the competing voices, interests, and groups that engage each other.

However, *communitas* is predominately treated as an either/or prospect, as if unity and difference could not coexist synchronously or diachronically. There are examples in the literature for both

pilgrimages that lead the (temporary) abandonment of social hierarchies and social cohesion as well as the maintenance and instantiation of social hierarchies and division between social groups (Coleman, 2002). Moreover, as Coleman (2002) argues, both *communitas* and *contestation* should not be seen as antagonistic, but rather as in many ways complementary and sharing common ground.

Although scholarship on pilgrimages has generated a plethora of research and writing on Turner's model of *communitas*, focusing on the validity of this model has certain drawbacks. First, *communitas* is either assumed or negated *a priori* and thus the very mechanisms that are employed to foster cohesion and socially sanctioned messages, as well as the strategies used to challenge and resist them, are neglected. Second, the emphasis on treatment of *communitas* often fails to distinguish between *existential communitas* and *normative communitas*. Many accounts of *communitas* read Turner as eschewing structure and social guidance and therefore fail to keep his distinctions between different forms of *communitas* in mind. The latter notion can highlight the ways that social control and guidance is part of the pilgrimage process and a constitutive aspect of the pilgrimage experience. As I examine below, social guidance plays a significant role in orienting pilgrims' sense making and fostering moments of deep affective value. Third, and in a related vein, emphasizing the model of *communitas* has perhaps obscured Turner's phenomenological analysis of the unfolding process of pilgrimage from the standpoint of the pilgrim, particularly as they approach their destination. Nevertheless, critiques of the *communitas* model are indeed valuable in arguing that pilgrimage experience is interwoven with an intricate and dynamic socio-cultural setting.

### **Cultural Psychological Perspective on Pilgrimage**

How do abstract social values and messages that pilgrims glean become "internalized" and powerfully felt meanings? In other words, how do pilgrimages lead to a "heightened existence" for the individual pilgrim? I do not mean to assert that pilgrimages have only been investigated as a social phenomenon as opposed to a personal or individual phenomenon. Neither do I wish to explore the personal instead of social aspects of pilgrimage. Rather, my intent is to examine how social and personal worlds constrain each other in the context of pilgrimage. In order to accomplish this task, I consider how pilgrimage

is a personal and social process and draw on and elaborate Turner's notions of normative *communitas* and the approach of the pilgrim to the holy site.

### ***Pilgrimage as an Unfolding Social and Individual Process***

Pilgrimage is a communal activity in which people move about and eat together, engage in conversations, and participate in ritual acts of devotion with their fellow believers. Even if pilgrims begin their journey alone, they soon encounter fellow travelers and strangers along the path, especially as they draw near to the pilgrimage center. Pilgrimages are dramatic rituals that occur in public settings, and pilgrims encounter living social others and the traces of those who have passed before (and perhaps passed away). However, these journeys are "individualistic" in the sense that they are voluntary and "each is a personal act, following a personal decision, and resulting in a wide range of personal experience" (B. Lewis, cited in Turner, 1974, p. 175). Pilgrims on the same path and going toward the same destination may have similar though not the same goals, experiences, and hopes and expectations. Pilgrimage is a general process and undertaking people make for particular reasons and aims (even if these aims are similar and shared with others), and therefore each pilgrim's journey has a unique developmental trajectory.

We can also understand the unique and personal aspects of pilgrimages if we reexamine the notion that human development and meaning making take place in irreversible time (Bergson, 1913, 1944; Abbey, 2007). Recall that this axiom states that time flows from an infinite past to an infinite future and no event ever repeats itself; hence, the future is inherently uncertain and unpredictable. This suggests that the conditions of environments are constantly changing, requiring organisms to preadapt to possible and never given situations (Josephs et al., 1999). Existential uncertainty requires that human beings create signs and strategies to anticipate the tentative futures and regulate their relationship with the environment (Valsiner, 1998; Shweder, 1995). Pilgrimages thus allow people to adapt and orient themselves to uncertain futures. Because of this preadaptation function and the distancing function of leaving one's everyday environment, pilgrimages provide individuals (and groups) the critical distance from their ordinary life settings and encounters with socially and personally important artifacts that guide and suggest how individuals should relate to their

environment (e.g., concrete others, deceased loved one's, institutions, and themselves) and to the development of their personal ways of being and value systems (Beckstead, in press).

#### HOW PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION WORKS

Reorganization and modification of one's value system through pilgrimage is exemplified in Malcolm X's *Autobiography* (Malcom X, 1966). The pilgrimage to Mecca is a religious obligation for every orthodox believer and must be made at least once, if health and circumstances permit. Thus, Malcom X undertook this journey, hesitantly, and after his sister financed his trip (Malcom X, 1964/1999, pp. 325–326). After reaching Mecca and worshipping with a diverse group of believers, he writes that:

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen and experienced has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought-patterns previously held and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions. . . . During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug)—while praying *to the same God*—with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and actions and in the deeds of the 'white' Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I had felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.  
(p. 347)

Malcolm X's experience "re-arranged" his value system and re-framed how he saw and related with others in the interpersonal domain. The "white" person no longer meant to him "power" and "corruption" after worshipping together and praying to the same God, and as those familiar with the life of Malcolm X, his worldview and relating with others shifted in dramatic fashion. Malcom X's transformation of worldviews was based on a communal experience rooted in rituals (*both ordinary and sacred*) and shared by a variety of people of different races. Of course race and racial issues played a major role in Malcom X's life prior to his Hajj to Mecca. However, for the purpose of this chapter, the point I wish to convey is that what often is transformed in a person's value system may be a by-product of their journey and not what was initially intended: the "outcome" of Malcom X's Hajj to Mecca was not

inevitable or anticipated by Malcom X (and indeed it was "shocking" at least for others).

In spite of the different circumstances under which pilgrims make their journey, there are always personal reasons and hopes that motivate and frame their experience. Of course Malcom X's experience demonstrates only one path (trajectory) of transformation. That is, pilgrimages allow individuals to come to terms with their illnesses and inevitable death, gain strength to deal with and flee from abusive relationships (Jansen & Kühl, 2008), seek redemption (Murakami, 2011), and decide about possible future job opportunities (Hoshino, 2007) among other things. Indeed, as with the case of Malcom X, even those with major illnesses often return with a new perspective on their illness instead of a cure. Asking what the causal agent is for these transformations would be misleading from the theoretical perspective I outlined above. Since human beings are open-system and actively construct meaning, actions and meanings therefore are not caused in a mechanical fashion. In other words, pilgrimage experiences orient people toward uncertain futures, allow them to anticipate possible fates, and reconfigure their relationship with their world.

Pilgrimage is rooted personal desires, questions, longings, and needs. However, pilgrimages do not occur in a context-free zone, free of constraints where people can explore, evaluate, and reorganize value and meaning systems, and anticipate the future. Pilgrimages transpire and unfold in particular organized settings. The next section examines how pilgrimages—especially paths pilgrims take—constrain and enrich the semiotic processes of pilgrims and contribute to the transformation and development of the person–world relationship.

#### *Social Organization and Guidance of Pilgrims*

Although freedom from social obligations, roles, and mundane concerns is often a desired and realized aspect of pilgrimages, Turner refutes the notion that pilgrimage is a completely open and uninhibited zone for social and personal development. Turner posited that pilgrimages typically begin as unorganized and relatively unstructured movement toward a holy site and then "under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources to keep the members of a group alive and thriving, and the necessity of social control among the members in pursuance of these and other collective goals, the original existential

communitas is organized into a perduring social system . . ." (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 169).

Rules, codes, and norms and material structures (e.g., way-stations, hospices, vendors, churches, etc.) become established for pilgrims at the pilgrimage center. Turner calls this form of pilgrimage normative communitas since it is an attempt by social institutions to guide pilgrims toward collective goals (and to offer safety), and subsequently order and organization is introduced to reach this end. For Turner, then, social guidance and control plays a significant role in the pilgrimages. Social guidance comes from collective systems and institutions that run pilgrimages, and from other groups—for instance local parishes and churches (Eade, 1991) and tourist companies that develop over the course of time to support and assist pilgrims.

We can observe how social guidance begins prior to pilgrims' physical journeys as they become oriented to both the everyday and symbolic dimensions of their journey and surroundings through the use of symbolic resources. Pilgrims hear and read accounts of previous pilgrims, look at photographs, and become more familiar with the settings, local customs, and history of where they will be visiting. Guidebooks, maps, pilgrimage accounts, pilgrimage accounts, and other symbolic resources function in similar ways: to prepare pilgrims for the everyday and mundane necessities of life (e.g., where to eat and sleep); orientation toward interacting with foreign people; history and meanings of the holy site; and normative ways of acting at the pilgrimage center. On the journey pilgrims encounter a plethora of signs that can offer literal direction (e.g., shells found along the Camino to Santiago de Compostela, letting pilgrims know they are going in the right direction), in both the literal and metaphorical sense.

#### APPROACHING THE GOAL

Turner focused on the socially regenerative nature of pilgrimages, but also examined pilgrimage from the perspective of the individual pilgrim within the social context. Nowhere is the perspective of the pilgrim more apparent for Turner than in his brief discussion of the pilgrim's approach to the pilgrimage center or holy site. He noted that as the pilgrim draws nearer, he or she is increasingly hemmed in by sacred relics and through the vividness and trials of the long journey becomes more vulnerable to the religious and social messages (Turner & Turner, p. 10). The purpose of the approach, Turner argued, was to build up a "considerable load of reverent

feeling, so that the final ingress to the holiest shrine of all will be for each pilgrim a momentous matter" (pp. 22–23). What is particularly noteworthy in this account is: (a) that Turner treats the pilgrimage as an unfolding process across time and space, and (b) he treats "sacredness" (here discussed as "reverent feeling") as a dynamic phenomenon that emerges in the subjective realm through the pilgrim's movement and encounters with objects in the environment. In some sense, we can observe constraint systems becoming more operative—since they are never entirely absent—as the pilgrim draws nearer after encountering traces or external signs of previous pilgrims (cairns and other inscriptions) and from collective meaning systems (e.g., religious artifacts). Pilgrims are thus immersed in the pilgrimage field, canalized toward understanding and relating with the objects as sacred objects (instead of ordinary objects). Key to this guidance is the complex spatiality and material cultural objects that constitute the pilgrimage environment (González-Ruibal, 2011; Beckstead et al., 2011; Beckstead, in press).

From the perspective of the pilgrim, then, there is movement (physical and in the subjective experience) from the ordinary/everyday environment, to the unfamiliar, and to the sacred realm (*see* Fig. 33.2). This is not to say that the sacred is not to be found in everyday environments, but rather to argue that the sacred (or extraordinary) is differentiated from the ordinary or mundane in the process of pilgrimage as the pilgrim moves toward his or her destination (or destinations as in the case of many forms of pilgrimage) and as they approach the sacred site. What is *cultivated* in the pilgrim is a sense of "sacred"—as a more- or less-developed and articulated sign—that modifies how pilgrims relate to the holistic field. As I noted above, Turner argues this movement toward the sacred site is intended to increase the "load of reverent feeling" in order to make the final ingress a "momentous matter" (Turner & Turner, 1978, pp. 22–23). Moving from the ordinary to the sacred, the pilgrim crosses a threshold—a boundary—which is itself an evocative experience.

Christopher Tilley makes a similar point regarding how monuments are approached. Referring to Günther Schlee's (1992) research on Kenyan-Ethiopian camel herders' journeys to their lineage origin sites, Tilley states that "the shortest route to a ritual mountain from any point on the plain is not taken but rather a prescribed walk in which it can be approached and seen from the propitious



**Figure 33.2** Ascending the hill toward the Peace Pagoda.

direction” (Tilley, 1997, p. 28). Tilley emphasizes the importance of the way that humans encounter monuments in movement and states, “there is an art of moving in the landscape, a right way (socially constrained) to move around in it and approach places and monuments. Part of the sense of place is the action of approaching it from the right (socially prescribed) direction” (Tilley, 1994, p. 28).

Turner might add that social guidance mechanisms used to draw in and immerse pilgrims in the field function to constrain the flow of feeling for the pilgrim and prepare them to internalize the more abstract messages that a collective system wants to emphasize (e.g., sacrifice, love, peace) (Turner & Turner, 1978).

The approach of a pilgrim is captured in Hoshino’s (2007) account of a pilgrim on the Shikoku pilgrimage route in southern Japan. This pilgrimage is comprised of 88 temples that are traditionally associated with Kobo Daishi. Wherever the pilgrims started from, they made a circuit route visiting each temple. Pilgrims pass through the four provinces of Shikoku (Awa, Tosa, Iyo, and Sanuki) and travel nearly 1,400 kilometers. The following comments were made by a pilgrim as he approached the final temple:

[Early morning arrival at temple] . . . Today I was alone, so I could chant slowly and loudly. Within

one or two minutes I got the feeling of completely sinking into a different world. The chirping of the cicadas in the trees around me is more intense. I feel as though I was the only one existing in the world. I feel as though I am at the centre of the universe.

I have gained the knowledge that ‘I am not *living*, but rather that I am *being allowed to live*.’ . . . As soon as I was certain that the eighty-eighth temple, Okuboji, was getting closer, my eyes overflowed with tears, and there was nothing I could do to stop them. I walked along without thinking, repeating ‘thank you, thank you’ over and over, waving clenched fists with huge tears running down my cheeks.

(Hoshino, 2007, p. 70; emphasis included in original)

Hoshino notes that this pilgrim did not consider himself religious or even very spiritual, though he did feel reverence for Buddha. He had taken this journey to cleanse his mind and body from the impurities of the world (Ibid, p. 68). Yet his experience led to feeling communion and a deep intimacy with his immediate surroundings and humanity. There is an almost willful passivity orientation that evoked or was evoked as the pilgrim approached. Indeed, it was even prior to reaching the final temple that this pilgrim began to experience overwhelming (positive) emotions. This deeply emotional experience had a corresponding

relation on the meaning system through the insight that he was “not *living*, but rather . . . *being allowed to live*” and so his relationship (at least temporarily) with the world (and himself) had been reorganized. What is important to emphasize is that the very abstract notion of “I am not *living*, but rather I am *being allowed to live*” is more than an abstract utterance, but rather is deeply felt. Perhaps this pilgrim has heard the idea of “being allowed to live” before, but here it becomes internalized and linked with deep affective value. We could interpret his approach—his chanting, movement, and prior experiences along the route and at other temples—as preparing him to be open to and to internalize this message.

Pilgrims are situated in this spatially and temporally bounded field with sensuous and symbolic dimensions that function in the intrapersonal realm. Although the pilgrim’s development is intertwined with the here-and-now setting, they also have the uniquely human capacity to go beyond the setting to imagine other worlds of “what has been” and “what could be” (Abbey, 2007; Josephs, Valsiner, & Sorgan, 1999). Pilgrims then can be closely connected to the environment and at other times enter into abstract reflection that distances them from the here-and-now context. These offer two different modes of engagement—one intimate and connected and the other distanced. In the context of pilgrimage, it is not too difficult to imagine how these processes might be recursively related; the pilgrim upon entering the grotto where Christ was reportedly interred might reflect on what it was like thousands of years ago (distance) and feel more connected to the place because of this reflection. Abstraction and reflection can either distance one from the field or bring one into more intimate connection with it.

#### **THE CONTINUITIES OF THE PATH: HOW PILGRIMAGE HAS LONGEVITY**

Although social guidance is operative prior to and during pilgrimages, it often continues after a pilgrim returns home. Pilgrimages encompass more than the period that the pilgrim is on the path and at the holy site. Each pilgrimage includes prior preparation and individuals share their experiences and insights with their family and friends. Occasionally pilgrims are invited to speak to larger groups about their journey, which then may then resonate with others listening, even in the distant future (Watson, 2006). Almost always pilgrims return with mementos,

souvenirs, photos, journals, or some other material artifact that functions as a mnemonic device and is suffused with meaning by the person. These objects afford discussion about the pilgrim’s experience with others and with the pilgrim him or herself. In addition to the relics a pilgrim brings home, his or her status may be transformed, as is well-known in the case of the pilgrimage to Mecca or Hajj. In very concrete and symbolic ways, the pilgrimage experience has longevity.

Furthermore, pilgrims often are socially guided to share their experiences, go to church, and participate more fully in the activities of their religious organization. For instance, pilgrims visiting Lourdes are encouraged to return to their churches and share their experiences with each other after making their journey. Likewise, I have observed religious services dedicated to the experiences of Mormon pilgrims returning from their youth-oriented pilgrimage (what is colloquially called *trek*). Often these include young people and adults who attended the pilgrimage standing before the congregation and talking about the trails, blessings, and lessons learned from their experience. I have never heard a “testimony” that has been negative, and many follow a pattern in which young people talk about their initial apprehension about being away from family, friends, and technology and finding happiness, fellowship, and the “spirit of God.” Many people seem deeply moved in retelling their experiences and insights. We could posit that the intended audience of these testimonies are twofold; the other members of the congregation and the self (i.e., person sharing their testimony). These instances of talking to others are also form of an auto-dialogue in which individuals can reconstruct and reframe their understandings and experiences in the social arena while talking to themselves. Social others encourage—though do not enforce—this activity, promoting talk as a way of continued internalization/externalization (see Valsiner, 2007, pp. 112–116) after the pilgrim has returned home.

If we consider pilgrimage as a fluid phenomena transpiring in irreversible time, then orientation and guidance can be found at two levels: first, pilgrims are oriented toward addressing mundane concerns and relating to the immediate and particular environment; and second, pilgrims search for and are guided toward more general meanings and futures that extend beyond the pilgrimage setting. Extending and modifying Turner’s notion of normative *communitas*, which focuses on the legalistic

aspects of pilgrimages, we could postulate that social guidance functions to:

1. facilitate the everyday basic needs and concerns of pilgrims,
2. constrain and orient pilgrims toward noticing the “holy” or otherwise salient features of the landscape,
3. prepare pilgrims for moments of heightened emotional responses and internalizing abstract social values,
4. integrate pilgrims’ generalized insights and changes upon returning home.

Social guidance, therefore, has immediate and more long-term consequences for pilgrims and guides the semiotic process of pilgrims in the *here-and-now* environment of the pilgrimage field and orients them toward *then-and-there* contexts after their journey is complete. Pilgrimage experiences that become internalized then are extended to new situations. Yet we still can examine how pilgrims are guided toward “momentous moments” or episodic moments of deep affective value. This occurs through the movement of pilgrims from extraordinary to sacred settings and is related to the discursive and nondiscursive signs and devices that differentiate the sacred from the ordinary (Beckstead, 2010). The sacred < > nonsacred (or ordinary < > extraordinary ordinary) sign complex (see Josephs et al., 1999 for a discussion of sign complexes) is a powerful social regulator and facilitator of personal transformation.

### **The Secular Transformation: Pilgrimage and Tourism**

Pilgrimage has typically been conceived as a “religious journey” and linked with spiritual goals, attitudes, and activities. However, different forms of travel such as tourism have proliferated and beg the question of how openly should pilgrimage be defined and understood. Are pilgrimages only religious journeys? How are pilgrimage and tourism related or distinguished? Often there is a line drawn between the tourist and pilgrim that distinguish the tourist as a pleasure seeker on a leisure quest and the pilgrim as devotee on a spiritual quest. At first blush, there are certainly differences between the pilgrim and tourist. Many modern representations portray the tourist as searching for exotic and novel locations and sites and constantly with camera ready to pounce on the best photographic opportunity. The

pilgrim, on the other hand, has struggled and traveled (and travailed) much to reach their symbolic destination and have acted out of a deep belief of the healing or saving powers of the place imbued with a sacred presence. Thus the reasons for pilgrimages and tourist travels are often seen as opposed; the pilgrim is motivated by faith, hope, redemption, or any other religious sentiment and a tourist is propelled by hopes of pleasure, self-education, and a desire for encounters with exotic cultures.

However, this distinction and dichotomization—while offering an economic typology—has been criticized as entirely too reductionistic (Foard, 1982). For instance, pilgrimages also include activities that would traditionally be labeled tourist acts (e.g., sightseeing, consumerism, pleasure seeking). Pilgrimages have historically involved actions oriented toward devotion *and* pleasure. Almost since its inception, the Ise pilgrimage included entertainment, the enjoyment of special foods, and even trips to pleasure quarters (Foard, 1982, p. 238). Discussing Christian pilgrims in the Middle Ages visiting Italy before continuing their journey, Löschburg (1979) notes that:

Agents and ship chandlers kept office in the open, offering among other things, excursions and sightseeing trips of several weeks into the surrounding countryside. They also contracted longer passages. Contracts were made for the return journey, including berth, two daily meals, fresh drinking water and the cost of sightseeing, safe-conduct and rent of a donkey. Everybody profited from the pilgrims’ travel, Venice, other ports of call on the way, the Turks who had to be paid for safe-conduct, the authorities in Jerusalem who charged entrance fees everywhere . . . It was a well thought-out business not unlike modern tourism. Pilgrimages were organized just like the packaged tours of our day. (p. 36)

Commercial and religious activities have long been intertwined as economic structures emerge in relation to spiritual centers (Dahlberg, 1991; Turner & Turner, 1978). Elements of pleasure have been associated with pilgrimages, but the reverse is also true: spiritual experiences also accompany tourism (see Fig. 33.3) (Gatewood & Cameron, 2004; Foard, 1982). Taking time and the constructive nature of meaning making into account, we might recognize that people at various points may participate in activities and feel like a pilgrim or tourist. This is not to say that there is no



**Figure 33.3** Trail leading to Ginkakuji Temple (Kyoto) where people pass by stores before arriving at the Temple.

meaningful difference between tourism and pilgrimage. Certainly the destination and meanings ascribed to the symbolic settings will necessarily vary for the pilgrim and tourist, but both are searching to reach a “heightened existence” (Simmel, 1971, p. 233) via spatially distant encounters with meaningful locations. The tourist and pilgrim are both on a quest and the symbolic settings become “divine go-betweens” in the pilgrim’s attempt for salvation (Mullins, 1974, p. 1) or self-reconstruction. Pilgrims and tourists travel to effect change and giving a fixed boundary between the two could lead us to overlook the experiences of *pilgrims becoming tourists* and *tourists becoming pilgrims*.

### Tourists Becoming Pilgrims

My preceding argument is that the lines between tourism and pilgrimage are not sharply defined, in part, since historically sightseeing, pleasure seeking, and purchasing of local goods have been intertwined with pilgrimages. Moreover, the trajectory can be reversed in that “tourists” have spiritual experiences that are more associated with pilgrimages (Hoshino, 2007). That is to say that tourists can *become* pilgrims even when their initial activities and reasons for travel are not understood

(by themselves) as falling within the domain of pilgrimage. Yet their experiences and meanings constructed from these experiences reconfigure their intentions and create moments of elevated feeling that feed into their relating to the immediate environment and overgeneralize to texture their lifeworld. This tourist *to* pilgrim transformation can be illustrated in the following account. My friend and colleague from Turkey recounted her visit to the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus, Turkey, which I later asked her to write down. Long having been considered the last residence of the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition, this site is today venerated by Christians and Muslims alike. Pilgrims have traveled to the Ephesus since an invalid German nun reported having detailed visions of a house where the Virgin lived. Years later a French clergyman searched for the House of the Virgin Mary and found a house matching the nun’s description. Pilgrims visit in large part for the healing waters that are associated with the spring that runs under the house. Tangible markers of healing are left behind (e.g., crutches, walkers) by those who have reportedly been healed by the sacred waters.

My colleague, Cedy, had visited the house when she was younger and wishes she had made had come true after visiting and taking some of the water. She connected her fulfilled wishes to the water and Mary, and had promised to return to pay respect and offer her gratitude. Cedy was raised as a Muslim though she did not “wholeheartedly practice it.” At this point in her life course, she considered herself to be agnostic. Yet she looked forward to returning to fulfill her promise. On the day she visited the House of the Virgin she visited touristic places around Izmir (near Ephesus) with a group of friends:

Having seen the antique city of Ephesus a few minutes ago, I was in a mode of a happy and a little bit *tired tourist*. I was not quite in my religious mode but I was also excited having come to accomplish a promise that I failed to keep for years. Having come to the House of Virgin Mary was more like accomplishing a dry task for me. (emphasis added)

Cedy had considered the House of the Virgin to be similar to other touristic places she had visited and it is evident that she considered herself a (tired) tourist and not a pilgrim. At this point her visit had little spiritual significance for her and instead was more of checking something off of a to-do list. This



experience of being a tired tourist shifted dramatically as she entered the House of the Virgin:

However, as we walked into the garden of the House, my mind was filled with a sudden peace of mind which was far different than a relaxation that would come up from an accomplishment of a task. Also, I felt like I was surrounded by a very serene atmosphere. All of my anxieties and psychological burdens which usually make up my very default existence were away from me. I remember that I accepted this mode quite naturally, enjoyed the serenity and thought that I could stay there forever. I do not quite remember people around me or anything that impressed me to step into such a state of mind. I rather found myself in such a tranquil mode. I felt like I really appreciated the *Holiness* of the place.

(emphasis added)

Moving through the entrance triggered a sudden and surprising shift in the feeling-tone of Cedyā. As I argued above, approaching symbolic places is especially evocative and thresholds are usually marked by ornaments that function to guide the person's affective relating to the field. Not surprisingly Cedyā could not remember what evocated this elevated "state of mind" though for her there was an unmistakable modification in her affective feeling field. What was a touristic experience and place became to her marked by the hypergeneralized feeling field (Valsiner, 2007) that was later described in terms of holiness, peace, and serenity. This elevated affective response and meaning then fed-forward and regulated how she related with her immediate environment and impacted her future expectations.

I prayed in the church there. I drank the holy water and made new wishes. And I said 'I will come back here and I will visit here as much as I can.' Of course I made wishes that I really would like them to come true; and if they come true I was supposed to visit the House.

Cedyā recalled that her experience at the House of the Virgin was so unexpected because her experience there was so incongruent with her earlier experiences visiting sites around Izmir. She had not gone there expecting to have a moving and spiritual experience.

Later, I remembered it and told about it to my friends a few times. Some friends told me about the Jerusalem syndrome. I do not feel like my experience fits into something like Jerusalem syndrome, because

even people with me did not notice that I was experiencing something special, neither did I tell them anything about it.

Cedyā came to the House of the Virgin with similar belief and value system (nonreligious, Muslim background) to her friends and, yet with a unique history and relationship to the place. Her friends attributed her experience to the Jerusalem Syndrome, which Cedyā refuted since, as she told them, she kept her experience private. This statement is interesting because it demonstrates how the trajectory an individual is experiencing can branch off from the joint activity and supposed consensual experience and activity of the group. Cedyā's lived experience and meaning construction diverged from her friends' and was to a large extent hidden from them.

#### **HUMAN BEINGS: CAUGHT BETWEEN THE MUNDANE AND THE SPIRITUAL**

People make "sacred journeys" thereby crossing boundaries from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Yet utilizing a simple dichotomy of sacred/profane would suggest that sacred is what is out there, unfamiliar, and wholly other. In this sense, the sacred is something one would not encounter in a local environment since our local life settings are familiar. Does this imply that one would have to leave our normal settings to have elevated spiritual feelings? Of course the sacred/profane structure is untenable for many reasons. One weakness is that sacred objects are constantly circulating, especially as pilgrims return with holy water and dirt (or sand) and other artifacts of devotion. Sacred objects do not simply remain in a single place; rather they circulate and cross boundaries from far away to near. Shrines and relics become part of ordinary life settings inside or near the home (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2003). Museums are one secular place that operates between the boundary of mundane < > spiritual that does not always require long-distance travel and yet affords settings for moments of deep affective value.

Pilgrimage and similar travel is purposeful movement toward something that is highly valued. Yet sacred ornaments saturate our settings that people pass by and typically only catch in their peripheral vision (Valsiner, 2008). Churches, small roadside shrines, and other architectural structures can be the focus of movement (e.g., church attendance), but in our everyday routines they are bypassed. What functions do they serve in the intrapersonal domain? What communicative messages do they

convey? For instance, roadside shrines marking the death of someone are commonplace in the United States. Why does someone construct this object? What does it communicate? For whom? Under certain conditions it seems that they can provoke episodic escalation of feeling in spiritual directions. In other words, material objects in our everyday settings can episodically trigger shifts in a person's affective field (see Fig. 33.4). This brings to focus that, as González-Ruibal (2011) posits,

There lies the power of things: they keep us remembering us other things, people, places and events to which they are associated, whether we want it or not. (p. 154)

Many of the material artifacts that we encounter in our everyday life settings can become the catalyst for “hyper-abstract and overgeneralized higher-level total feelings” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 312).

### Conclusion: Guided Exploration of Liminal Worlds

Pilgrimage is a transitory phenomenon constituted by movements of people from various points of departure to sacred centers. Geographic movement has consequences for the movement of meaning and reverberations in the psyche of the traveler (Gillespie et al., 2011). Any travel in which borders are crossed has the potential to become a destabilizing experience. Victor Turner's notion of liminality emphasized the possibility of “what might be.” Pilgrims leave their ordinary environments and gain a critical distance from their everyday world as they move toward and

encounter artifacts of great significance. Grounded in everyday realities while reaching toward the numinous, pilgrimages join together the elevated and ordinary, sacred and profane, structure and antistructure. This is apparent as the pilgrim is faced with the mundane aspects of securing lodging, finding places to eat and relieve themselves, boredom, and fatigue. These everyday concerns and objects occur and exist in close spatial and temporal proximity to the encounters with holy and sacred objects. Additionally, the *telos* of any pilgrim is rooted in addressing basic life circumstances such as physical pain, spiritual or psychological suffering, boredom, loss of job and more, as well as with a desire to take part in a world set apart from the ordinary and initiate some form of transformation—personal, social, and/or physical.

The efficacy of self-transformation, insight, and increased faith for the pilgrim is bound up with their encounters with material and symbolic objects, other people, and far-away places, which could be called the *pilgrimage field*. Material cultural artifacts and sacred viewings of these objects are emotionally charged. However, for pilgrims these objects do not stand alone since they are embedded in rich, liminal environments. Although the final holy site might be the goal, pilgrims arrive after hardship, encountering other significant objects and places, ritual acts, and conversations with fellow travelers. The holistic organization of these settings and the semiotic guidance of pilgrims *crossing the boundary from ordinary to sacred* places are crucial conditions to fostering emotionally salient and transformative experiences.



**FIGURE 33.4** Jizo statues found on the roadside and at large temples and shrines. They are ubiquitous in Japan, especially Kyoto.

## Future Directions

1. Understanding pilgrimage as a process that extends beyond the path and pilgrimage center opens up possibilities for future study. What are the developmental implications of pilgrimages as people face futures that are always under construction? How do their pilgrimage experiences and signs derived from their pilgrimage encounters feed-forward and continue to reverberate and shape their value systems, identities, and self–other understandings? In other words, how do changes that take place during and in the field of pilgrimage generalize and texture the lifeworld of pilgrims long after their journey? How do their experiences act in their self and other dialogues, if at all?

This issue tackles the complex interrelationship of microgenesis and ontogenesis and brings us back into contact with Karl Buhler's notion of abstractive generalization (1990). How could this phenomenon be studied in research on pilgrimage?

2. As the case of Cedyra above suggests, we can examine travels to pilgrimage places at varying levels of organization. That is, we can look at the individual or the group (i.e., the immediate group that the person is journeying with or the more abstract community of fellow pilgrims). Eade and Sallnow (1991) and others have argued that the experience is multivocal in apparent contradiction to Turner's notion of *communitas*. One possible way of going beyond this false dichotomy would be to the collective or joint experience and meaning making and the trajectories of individual meaning making as they converge and diverge in real time. Studying this process suggests that group activities and individual meaning making would need to be captured and examined in relation to each other. How could Sato's Trajectory Equifinality Model (Sato et al., 2011) be utilized to accomplish this understanding?

3. Pilgrimages and similar visits to places of symbolic and social value are quite complex. Explanatory approaches that grapple with personal and social transformation must move beyond reductionistic frameworks that offer deterministic and linear accounts of change. The notion of catalysts broadly defined as the study of conditions under which something happens—offers a systematic causal framework that unites the richness of empirical phenomena with the generalizing value of science (Beckstead, Cabell, & Valsiner, 2009; Cabell, 2010; Beckstead, 2010). This could help flesh out the possible trajectories of visitors' experiences

to symbolically evocative places. What other theoretical approaches can be constructed to overcome the main paradigms of *communitas* and contestation, and the tension between universality and particularity reflected in this dichotomy (Coleman, 2002)?

4. What are the implications of increasing commercialization of pilgrimage places? How do sign complexes such as authentic < > unauthentic inhibit or block the spiritual qualities of pilgrimage? Are shopping malls a place of modern pilgrimage? Should travel for cosmetic surgery be considered a form of pilgrimage? How does the secular social world borrow from pilgrimage traditions?

## Note

1. This symbol indicates a boundary that relates at least two concepts that have often been conceptualized as opposites. In this sense, the symbol implies the notion of unified opposites.

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## Never “at-Home”?: Migrants between Societies

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### Abstract

This chapter explores the dialectic meaning of “home,” and movement away from home. Movement away from home—or migration—is characterized as a dynamic, dialectic, and developmental experience. We emphasize the *sense of being at-home* and the intertwined *sense of identity* as interlinked and mutually defining anchors of our existence that become inevitably shaken and ruptured in the experience of migration. But when looking at how this rupture is experienced and managed, we highlight the inherently complex and dialectic nature of migration, instead of seeing it as a unidirectional sequence from rupture to shock, to coping and finally to new stable being. We discuss the complexities of migration experiences as entailing dialectics of home and non-home, rupture and continuity, novelty and everydayness, changing and remaining. The *sense of being at-home* is simultaneously enabling and constraining, helping us to build self-continuity in a new environment, yet also holding us back and distancing us from novelty. Similarly, migration is a threat, yet also a promise; it is a painful, yet possibly exhilarating experience that makes us lose our center of security and familiarity, yet also opens up opportunities for transformation and reinvention.

**Keywords:** home, migration, identity, rupture, dialectics, development, ambivalence, repatriation

The phenomenon of *home* is one of the most fundamental aspects of being human. Its significance pervades our everyday language in the form of metaphors and proverbs we use to communicate feelings of comfort, security, belonging, ease, familiarity, and roots. For example, the proverb “there is no place like home” captures the essential value of home in our lives. Phrases like “I feel at-home” or “make yourself at-home” reflect feelings of familiarity, easiness, and comfort. Similarly, we refer to home as a place that offers security and protection (Charleston, 2009), as the well-known English proverb “an Englishman’s home is his castle” and its Estonian counterpart “minu kodu on minu kindlus” indicate. But what is home? Is it the house, neighborhood or country where we were born or raised? Is it the place where our loved ones live or have lived? Is it a single place or a multitude of localities?

Or is it “where the heart is”? And how does migration affect the value and meaning of home in our existence?

Indeed, the difficulty in answering such questions stems from the existential pervasiveness of the meaning and value of home in our everyday lives, society, culture, and history (Moore, 2000). Home cannot be defined; it can only be *experienced* and characterized. As such, our objective here is to address the above questions by investigating the characteristics of home and how migration affects the personal, identity-related, experiential meaning of home in our lives.

In this chapter, we adopt a dialectic view of home and migration. Migration is seen as a complex phenomenon that entails dialectics of home and non-home, rupture and continuity, novelty and everydayness, changing and remaining. We see the

*sense of being at-home* as simultaneously enabling and constraining, helping us to build self-continuity in a new environment, yet also holding us back and distancing us from novelty. Similarly, we look at migration as a painful, yet possibly exhilarating experience that makes us lose our center of security and familiarity, yet also opens up opportunities for transformation and reinvention. Although the new country of residence is a place full of novelty and foreignness, it is also filled with possibilities for re-establishing familiar patterns of everyday life. Therefore, the processes of being at home, being away from home, and being “never at home” are complex, dialectical and ever-changing. This reflects the dynamic, relational, mutually defining relationship between individuals and their environments, echoed in the majority of chapters in this volume (see for example Boesch, 2011; Marková, 2011; Rasmussen, 2011; Zittoun, 2011).

Throughout this chapter, we address issues of being at home, away from home, and never at home, in relation to migrants in general. Our aim is to unpack some of these complexities and show that both home and migration are not stable or unidirectional phenomena. The movement away from home is not necessarily characterized first by disruption, loss, pain, and later by coping, reconstruction, and new stability. Instead, we aim to explore it as being a fundamentally ambiguous experience of loss in relation to finding, change against the backdrop of everydayness, and disruption within continuity. This dialectic approach is followed throughout the chapter, where we start by characterizing the complex meaning of home in our lives, then move on to the rupturing experience of migration and what it does to our sense of identity and sense of being at-home. Next, we explore how migrants attempt to re-establish the sense of being at-home when away from home, and finally, we discuss the possibility and impossibility of feeling at-home again.

### **Meanings of Home**

From the vast research into the meaning and experience of home, several common categories emerge. Home is seen as a “nucleus of culture” (Boesch, 1991), a field that organizes and provides a reference point for our actions; it is a point of departure and return, a haven where one returns after a journey or at the end of one’s life (Moore, 2000). Through home we perceive and experience the world (Hayward, 1975; Case, 1996).

According to Sixsmith (1986), our modes of experience in relation to and within home yield a tripartite division. Firstly, home is a physical location, a dwelling surrounded by physical boundaries, divided into territories and supplied by different services. As a physical structure, home separates the private space of individuals and their families from the public space, functioning therefore as a means of regulating privacy (Altman, 1976; Märtsin & Niit, 2005).

Secondly, home has a social meaning. It is a milieu of a person’s everyday interactions with others (Hayward, 1975), a meaningful and emotionally based relationship between people and their environment that becomes embodied and anchored through ordered structures of space, time, and socio-cultural worlds (Dovey, 1985). As a “node in networks of social relations” (Easthope, 2004, p. 137), home is defined by relationships with others from this and previous generations (Parkin, 1999), functioning as a bridge between past, present and future, thus giving the person continuity in time and space (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Manzo, 2005).

Finally, home is a personally relevant and significant place. It is an extension of the self, which starts to represent the self through the person’s investment into the place. It functions as a nucleus through which one defines oneself (Hayward, 1975; Proshansky et al., 1983; Sarbin, 1983; Dovey, 1985; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Fried, 2000). In his description of his home office, Boesch (2007a), for example, illustrates how the objects that surround him are laden with personal meaning, evoke personally significant memories and reflect his identity. Home has thus something to do with our identity. To be “home” involves knowing where and who you are, being oriented in space and inhabiting a secure center (Dovey, 1985). This identity-giving quality of home, then, is our focus in this chapter.

From this perspective, home is a subjective, experiential, identity-related phenomenon. Along those lines, Manzo (2005) reminds us that places gain their meaning through our lived experiences. Home, then, may not refer to one physical location (a dwelling, neighborhood, city, or homeland), but rather to a bricolage of various experiences within and in relation to a variety of home-places involving several significant others. This experiential sense of being at home involves bodily, spatial, kinesthetic, sensual, emotional, rational, and interpersonal qualities that combine speakable and unspeakable,

explicit and tacit, reflective and prereflective ways of experiencing. It is this broad experiential *sense of being at-home* (Case, 1996) that concerns us in this chapter.

### *Antinomies of Home*

But what does this sense of being at-home entail? And how do we experience home? As Dovey (1985) correctly argues, the sense of being at-home is only experienced through dialectics that entail interdependent, mutually defining antinomies in tension (Billig, 1996; Marková, 2003). Home is animated by the tension between home and journeying, security in an insecure world, inside and outside, the feeling of being at-home as opposed to yearning for home, self in relation to other, and private in relation to public (Dovey, 1985; Manzo, 2005). It involves a powerful combination of the tangible with the intangible, concrete and ethereal, physical and imaginary, inflexible and flexible (Papadopoulos, 2002). Although home is often represented by comfort, it can also be a place full of obligations (Moore, 2000). It can be a private place free from the gaze of the other, while being also a place of isolation for those who cannot leave it (Fried, 2000; Rowles, 1983). Home is the primary locus where those dialectics are experienced, negotiated, and rendered meaningful (Papadopoulos, 2002). According to Dovey (1985), to experience the meaning of home is to experience such dialectics: “There is no sense of home unless there is also journeying. [...] Without a public realm there is no privacy. And in a sense, without homelessness, we would not be concerned with what home means” (p. 48).

The experiential, emotional, and dialectic qualities of home make it at once very flexible yet conservative (Dovey, 1985), enabling yet constraining (Boesch, 1991). It is flexible because it is embodied in the patterning of experience, behavior, and emotions. However, home is also conservative because the qualities of familiarity, comfort, identity, security in their all-pervasiveness become easily taken for granted (Dovey, 1985). As such, the meaning and value of home are awakened in their absence (Dovey, 1985; Case, 1996; Papadopoulos, 2002; Diriwächter, 2009). As a secure center through which we become oriented in time and space, absence of home makes us lose this sense of rootedness (Tuan, 1980; Easthope, 2004; Chow & Healey, 2009) and thus creates a basis for self-exploration. Here is where the simultaneous enabling and constraining nature of home becomes crucial for our

discussion. That is, we are interested in exploring the absence of home—migration—as simultaneously painful and exhilarating, as promising yet threatening, as a need and also a possibility for self-exploration, transformation, and reinvention.

### *Home and Identity*

The *sense of being at-home* is intertwined with a *sense of identity*. In conceptualizing identity, we draw on the work of Holland and her colleagues (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007), who suggest that:

Identities are social and cultural products through which a person identifies the self-in-activity and learns, through the mediation of cultural resources, to manage and organize himself or herself to act in the name of an identity. Identities are personally significant, actively internalized, self meanings, but first and foremost [...] they are formed in relation to collectively produced social identities.

(Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 114)

Identity is therefore a meaningful way of being in the world that has emerged through our continuous and repeated engagement with others in various activity contexts (Märtsin, 2010). Our identities are shaped by our interactions with others, while our sense of who we are shapes the way we act and interact in the world. Yet, identity is more than just a self-understanding constructed through internalization and accommodation of others' perceptions of us. Instead, as a way of being, it also goes beyond those internalized meta-perspectives to include bodily, sensual, reflective/rational and prereflective/affective ways of experiencing who one is. Thus, to signify this generalized sense of what it means to be me, we herein use the notion *sense of identity*. Importantly, self-continuity and sense of sameness are central to our conceptualization of identity. Falmagne's (2004) words capture this idea eloquently: “In some content-related sense I am constructed differently at [...] different moments. However, I remain myself, not you” (p. 835). Sense of identity, then, gives us a *meaningful* sense of who we are, where we come from and where we are heading; it bridges the past through the present to the unknown yet anticipated future. It refers to a sense of seeing oneself as continuous and more or less the same across various, even contradictory experiences in the world.

Our sense of identity is partly constructed through our engagement with others in places and

spaces that we consider to be our home. Through our engagement with home-places we feel rooted in a certain space and time context and we feel we belong to the groups we engage with in those contexts. Sense of identity and sense of being at-home are mutually defining; we derive our sense of identity, our sense of sameness, continuity, and rootedness from the experiences of being at-home, while home becomes a significant place precisely because of these meaningful experiences. Put differently, we are who we are because we come from a certain locale in space and time, and we call this locale our home because we derive our sense of identity from the experiences within and in relation to it.

As already indicated, this sense of identity is not necessarily a reflective and conscious self-definition, but rather a tacit sense of knowing how things are and what to expect. Familiarity and taken-for-grantedness are the primary features of this way of being (Heller, 1995), which involves sensual elements such as familiar smells, sounds, colors, shapes and language, as well as everyday routines, such as eating certain foods at certain times or sleeping in our own bed with our own pillow and duvet (Case, 1996). It also involves our embeddedness in social relations and our belonging to certain groups. As Shotter and Lannamann (2002) suggest: "Our being and belonging arise from the condition of being embedded in an ongoing flow of spontaneous, reciprocally responsive, living activity, occurring between us and the other in the group" (p. 597). Through our belonging to different groups and engagement with different activities we also internalize values, cultural practices, and roles related to these. All these elements come together to form an intertwined and not easily disentangled whole of being in space and time, rooted in a subjective conception of "home," and including idiosyncratic ethnic, national, religious, and other self-definitions. Therefore, our sense of identity in relation to home forms a part of the holistic, taken-for-granted existence, guiding our functioning in the world in a powerful, yet often unreflective manner.

### Migration as Rupture

Migration is a rupturing experience that introduces a break into a person's normal and taken-for-granted flow of being (Becker, 1997; Zittoun, 2007a, 2007b), and produces a diversity of ever-changing outcomes ranging from pain and trauma to feelings of exhilaration, excitement, relief and self-discovery. Migration could be a disquieting

experience "that hurts our *expectances*, prodding the subject cognitively as well as affectively to feel, think, and act" (Simão, 2003, p. 450). Because of the rupture, the patterns that sustained life before are no longer functional, and the taken-for-granted is questioned (Stein, 1986; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003; Zittoun, 2004, 2006). In the words of Josephs (2002): "The formerly taken-for-granted (and thus backgrounded) life-world suddenly becomes foregrounded and 'visible'" (p. 171). In discussing first experiences in a new context, we thus move away from the concept of *culture shock* that has been widely employed to describe the disorienting and disturbing nature of meeting a new context (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), and toward the dialectic and multifaceted experience of breaking up the taken-for-granted, living in between cultures, and renegotiating identities (Bhatia & Ram, 2001b).

By bringing to awareness the taken-for-granted, the rupture of migration concurrently provokes questions about one's sense of identity as it was intertwined with the sense of being at-home. Experiencing a rupture in one's sense of identity resulting from migration is an all-encompassing feeling that one's normal way of being no longer "flows" in the new context. That is, although migration introduces a disruption in physical environment, self-understandings, values, practices, social relations, etc., all these elements as an intertwined whole become broken as we encounter the strangeness of the new physical and social environment. Meintel (1973) correctly argues that feelings of alienation and isolation resulting from cultural strangeness, unfamiliarity, and unpredictability may well start to diminish once the migrant becomes familiar with the new environment. In this sense, such culture shock represents the less significant and less enduring aspects of being a stranger, while the more significant and serious shocks resulting from being a stranger are indeed those of self-discovery, where the migrant's previously established values and beliefs about the world and oneself are challenged, and by implication, the social world that endorsed them. Those sudden, unforeseen revelations about the world they had taken for granted are much more significant and of a longer lasting effect than the shocks of the new environment *per se* (Meintel, 1973). Zittoun (2007a) similarly states: "The first criteria to consider an event as a significant rupture, is that it is subjectively, consciously or unconsciously, perceived by a person as questioning



her sense of self and sense of continuity” (p. 190). Importantly however, a rupture in one’s sense of identity in relation to home may take various forms.

To begin with, rupture to one’s sense of identity in relation to home may have taken place even prior to migration. As Graham & Khosravi (1997) note, most of the research on home has been written by those who left it, but it should not be assumed that those who have not moved are in a secure state, feeling “at-home.” Research on political refugees, for example, shows that they leave their countries precisely because they do not “feel at-home.” Zarzosa (1998), a Chilean refugee describing her experiences of the 1973 coup, explains that: “One can become an exile while remaining on one’s soil [...] Chile was my country of origin, but ceased to be my home” (pp. 189–190). This experience of “internal exile” (Abu-Lughod, 1988) while remaining in one’s soil can be caused by different reasons, such as a radical political change, which ideologically divides people of the same country, or belonging to an ethnic population that is not officially recognized by the country, or feeling and acting differently from what is socially accepted. Lawrence, Benedikt, and Valsiner (1992), for example, discuss this latter kind of “homeless in the mind” in the case of a young woman living in and eventually breaking free from an ultra-orthodox Jewish community.

Similarly, people may feel uncomfortably restricted in their home community because of their inability to fulfill their life plans and aspirations. For example, Märtsin’s (2009a) semi-longitudinal multiple-case study, which explored how young Estonians studying in the United Kingdom made sense of themselves in relation to their experiences in a new environment, touched on this issue. Many of the participants indicated that they left Estonia because it was too small and offered too few opportunities for them and for their anticipated future ways of being. For these “internal exiles,” then, leaving home may be in agreement with their life projects (Giddens, 1994). In fact, and especially in the case of temporary migrants such as international students, leaving home may actually be perceived as an attempt at actualizing one’s life project by seeking educational, career, or financial opportunities believed to enrich one’s life. In this sense, there is a degree of choice in leaving home, which is based on feelings of discomfort or restriction, whether or not the person in question intends on returning home in the future. As Bühler and Massarik (1968)

and more recently Boesch (1991) suggest, humans are guided by their goals and imagined futures and therefore questions about anticipations and motivations largely shape the way in which migration as a rupture is experienced.

Boesch’s (1991, 2007b) work is important to the current discussion also in another way. He suggests that all human functioning and meaning making is characterized by the tension between *Heimweh* and *Fernweh*, between known home (or more generally “I”) and unknown faraway (more generally “non-I”). That is, while being within the familiarity of home, humans long for the strange, foreign, and unknown. They are attracted by the promise of the other that is undiscovered. Yet moving away from home makes them *Unheimlich*—unhomely or homesick; it makes them long for their intimate, hidden, secure, and safe haven in the world. Home is intimate and safe, but also known and unexciting. Faraway can be a promise, but also a threat. Understanding this double-bind, this tension between “home” and away and the dialectics within both realms is, in our view, crucial for understanding the experience of migration. These contradictory feelings are discussed next.

### *Encountering the New Physical Environment*

Encountering the foreign environment may not initially result in alienation or nostalgia but may indeed involve a great deal of exhilaration (Meintel, 1973). This is because humans are not only oriented toward what is familiar, but are also attracted to what escapes immediate understanding (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Boesch, 1991). The experience of Elina<sup>1</sup>, a young Estonian woman arriving to London, illustrates this excitement about the new and unknown (Märtsin, 2009a, pp. 140):

**Elina<sup>2</sup>:** For example, when the metro train pulled into the station, my stomach was turning. It was something new for me. Wow! Everything is so interesting! Yes. Like a child. Double-decker buses...

The initial excitement and fascination may be replaced or complemented by other feelings, such as nostalgia and homesickness, caused by the loss of subtle elements of one’s past life—familiar smells, sounds, tastes, and bodily experiences of being in certain spaces and places. In many cases, the migrant experiences both ends of the continuum, or can go through various stages throughout their time in the new environment. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that

cultural strangeness or contact with a new culture can give rise to “affective ambivalence”, i.e., coexistence of positive and negative feelings toward home and non-home. On the one hand, cultural strangeness can cause “existential unease” simply because it puts our taken-for-granted common sense into question. On the other hand, contact with a new culture may give rise to positive feelings of wonderment and fascination (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

The example of Elina above illustrates a positive rupture in encountering the new physical environment. But in contrast, the new physical environment may introduce an uneasy rupture. Consider the experience of Zein, a Sudanese refugee in Cairo, who was interviewed as part of a qualitative study investigating the culture, identity, and coping pathways of Sudanese refugees in Cairo (Mahmoud, 2010)<sup>3</sup>:

**Hala:** What do you miss from life [in Sudan]?

**Zein:** By God, a lot [...] the nature, the rain, the fields, the houses [...] I mean, we had big houses [in Sudan], all on the ground floor [...] here [in Cairo], sometimes the weather is very cold for us [...]. Sudanese meals are also different from what's available here [in Cairo].

Many other Sudanese refugees in Cairo mention that they miss the “earth” or “soil” of Sudan. This represents a subtle type of loss that nevertheless highlights the pervasive and general loss of the sense of being at-home and its associated sense of identity.

### *Encountering New and Old Social Others*

Moving away from home entails both coming into contact with new social others, as well as a qualitatively renewed kind of contact with old social others in the homeland. As the work of Mead (1934) and its recent development (Gillespie, 2007), as well as growing research into migrant identity suggests (*inter alia* Aveling & Gillespie, 2008; Bhatia & Ram, 2001a; Hermans, 2001; Kadianaki, 2009; O’Sullivan-Lago & de Abreu, 2010), our identities are constructed and constantly renegotiated through encounters with others. Thus, encountering new and old social others may introduce additional threats and ruptures to a migrant’s sense of identity. Coming into contact with new social others may shake our preestablished sense of identity because we no longer get the recognition and acknowledgement we used to get from others in the homeland (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Therefore,

rupture may arise from an experience of personal isolation, where the person feels that the environment is unfamiliar and instead of recognizing the person, it rejects and excludes them (Van Leeuwen, 2008). This seems to be the case with Såde, a young Estonian woman studying in England (Märtsin, 2009a, pp. 197):

**Såde:** It truly bothers me how they ignore these dots [in my name] [...] I can’t stand it. I’ve been polite and everything, calmly reminded them, but I constantly get smacked in the face, up to the point that I’m already worried that they will not use them on my diploma [...] They know how things should be. It’s like some sort of disturbing privilege that you are demanding your stupid dots [...] Perhaps I’m so touchy about this because my name has always been so central for me.

Såde’s feeling of “getting smacked in the face” emerges out of her perception of others’ perception of her. She thinks that her university considers her needs to be trivial, unimportant, sees them as “disturbing privilege.” This feeling of not getting recognition and acknowledgement about something that is important for her, and instead being considered as an alien because of her strange needs, thus heightens Såde’s sense of being disconnected with her old way of being. In contrast, there are many examples of migrants who were never recognized in their homelands, but become appreciated and acknowledged in the new environment. This is the case for poets and artists who realize their potential away from their homeland.

Encounters with new social others, identifying and being identified by them is central in the process of renegotiating one’s sense of identity, and re-establishing familiarity after migration. Migrants strive to understand who these new social others are (e.g., What are their values, their customs?) and they also get a sense of who they are through these encounters (e.g., How do these people see me? Who do they think I am?). At the same time, their sense of identity is still very much tied to the social environment of their homeland. Visits to the homeland or visitors from the homeland and even indirect ways of learning about their home communities (e.g., media, correspondence) can contribute to a changed way that migrants both perceive and are perceived by their home community. Consider for example the experience of Andres, a young man studying in England. When talking about his visits to Estonia, Andres says (Märtsin, 2009a, pp. 131):

**Andres:** Some sort of freedom that you have here in London. You are over 30, but you don't feel this total social pressure that we have in Estonia. In that age you have to have achieved something and if you are just [...] doing your research or something, you are just a nonsense bloke. You are just wasting your time, prolonging your childhood. This is precisely what I've been told in Estonia. That [pause] in Estonia, if you are away for a bit longer, you immediately feel [pause]. Others who have returned from abroad have said this too. Someone I know who lives in Paris, says that he comes to Estonia, is there for a week and already feels that he should get a mortgage and buy a flat. This is the way you do things.

Unlike Sæde's example above, Andres thinks that others *at home* do not acknowledge his chosen way of being. Instead, he is considered as a "nonsense bloke," who is "prolonging his childhood." Not being recognized by his old home community makes him turn his gaze toward other groups, toward other "in-betweeners" who seem more similar and therefore more attractive to Andres.

Thus, both home and resident communities, as well as other groups beyond these, are crucial in the redefinition of one's sense of identity in relation to home. Because of the rupture of migration, the migrant's position in relation to both home community and resident community becomes questioned and needs to be reconstructed from a position of being in between.

### *Liminal Space between Home and Non-Home*

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the multifaceted, complex repercussions of moving away from the homeland. A central thread of argument that appears both implicitly and explicitly is that the experience of moving away from home activates the dialectic of home and non-home, as these become simultaneously present and absent in our way of being in the new context. On the one hand, we are physically away from home, cut out from those routine and familiar callings from others that we respond to spontaneously (Shotter, 2003, 2008). Yet through that absence, by realizing what it meant to be at-home, the sense of home becomes very much present in the new context. Hence, it becomes a powerful reference point, a lens through which we evaluate the new encounters with others and otherness. On the other hand, in the new and physically present socio-cultural context we

are experiencing the flow of others' callings, which are unfamiliar and to which we do not yet have spontaneous responses (Shotter & Lannamann, 2002). That is, we are engaged with others in activity contexts that do not seem familiar and mundane and in which we do not necessarily know yet how to respond and interact. The otherness is thus very actively present, demanding a response from us. Nonetheless, it is not part of our being and as unknown and unfamiliar, remains absent. Thus the sense of being in between, in transition, not anymore there, but also not yet here emerges (Bhatia & Ram, 2001b), and is characterized by feelings of liminality, ambiguity, and ambivalence (Turner, 1967; Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992; Becker, 1997; Coker, 2004).

Turner (1967), in his classic work on liminality, considers society to be a "structure of positions." *Interstructural* human beings are those "transitional beings" or "liminal *personae*" who are at once "no longer classified and not yet classified" (p. 96). They are neither one nor another; they are betwixt and between all the recognized positions in space and time. In other words, they are "at a threshold outside the boundaries of society" (Becker, 1997, p. 119). From this perspective, migrants can be considered transitional, interstructural, or liminal beings who are at once no longer at-home, neither in relation to their homelands nor in relation to their new habitat.

The inherent ambiguity in any liminal position is associated with feelings of ambivalence. As Valsiner (2006) contends, ambiguity of existence leads to ambivalence in human feeling, acting, and thinking. Although ambiguity and ambivalence are present in every human psychological act (*see* Abbey & Valsiner, 2005; Valsiner, 2006; Valsiner & Abbey, 2006), they become exaggerated in the case of migrants. Therefore, besides the intrinsic ambiguity in any liminal position, there is also a marked degree of ambivalence—i.e., stressful uncertainty, being simultaneously drawn in opposite directions, and having mixed feelings toward people, objects, values, meanings, and so forth. Being a stranger in a foreign culture, where common sense no longer serves its function (Leeuwen, 2008) increases ambiguity and ambivalence. Not having a clear social position can make different possibilities equally desirable, repulsive, or confusing for the person (Mahmoud, 2010).

This state of being in between is vivid in the case of Ruth, a young Estonian woman studying in England (Märtsin, 2009a, 2009b). Talking about

the possibilities of living in England after having stayed several months in Estonia, she says (Märtsin, 2009b, pp. 207):

**Ruth:** I don't know, my mood changes all the time. [...] I started to think with horror that what if I'll come to the point when I actually don't need to return to England anymore [...] To be honest I don't want to think about it now. At the same time I really liked it in Estonia in the summer. I don't know, probably I'll have to stay being amphibious.

Importantly, the ambivalence between home and non-home can extend beyond comparisons of the new environment with the old one. Instead, ambivalence can well exist within one's relation to home itself, where home becomes the source of extreme ambivalence. For example, for many Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Sudan at once symbolizes both their home *and* the unwanted (Mahmoud, 2005). Sudan represents their home, their sense of identity, their loved ones, their productive roles, their memories. On the other hand, it represents war, rejection, genocide, torture, abuse, fear, and death. As a result, those refugees tend to have a sharply ambivalent relationship toward their homeland. *Heimweh/Fernweh* tension (Boesch, 1991) thus becomes awakened and renegotiated, as both home and the faraway appear simultaneously strange and hostile, while also being known and safe.

Yet the refugees' experience thus described surfaces another aspect of liminality. The space of in-betweenness, opened up by migration is, metaphorically speaking, a space where everything is possible and where one can experiment with different ways of being. However, although the transformation and development is intrinsic in the rupture → repair cycle, the possibility of perceiving liminality as promise and not as threat is linked to the safety net around the liminal space. In other words, migrants who have others' advice or their own aspirations and life goals that allow them to transition to the other side through the ambiguity are more likely to see it as possibility for change and growth, while it remains a threatening and hostile territory for those who do not have such social or symbolic support at their hand.

It is also clear that safety nets are not always offered to migrants. Instead they need to be discovered and created. The (re)establishment of a sense of home away from home—that is, creation of support systems that allow coping with liminality—is the topic we turn to now.

## Home away from Home

Thus far we have been concerned with migration as change. Our focus has been on the novelty of the physical and social environment that disrupts the taken-for-granted flow of everydayness. However, everyday life continues also beyond the rupture of migration. That is, migrants' lives are not lived only in the registers of catastrophe, drama, and change, but also in mundane and ordinary registers. Furthermore, novelty changes too; with time and through repeated encounters, the unordinary becomes ordinary. Thus migration is not only about changing, but also about remaining and maintaining. In other words, because our sense of being at-home and its associated sense of identity are dependent upon the qualities of familiarity, comfort, and continuity, one way of dealing with the rupture of migration is by re-establishing those qualities. Yet underlying our discussion about establishing continuity is the idea that maintenance, just as alteration, is an active and transformative process (Valsiner, 2007). In what follows we thus talk about “progressive, new adaptations between the person and her environment” (Zittoun, 2011) that are characteristic to transition periods triggered by the rupture of migration.

### *Pathways of Re-Establishing Continuity*

Rupture of migration exists in relation to continuity, and change happens only against the backdrop of sameness. In the words of Hall, Coffey, and Lashua (2009), “change is experienced and accommodated through mundane, everyday registers” (p. 551). Migrants attempt to keep certain everyday activities untouched in the new context, even if the ways of conducting these activities become altered. The Sudanese refugees may miss the smells and tastes of their traditional cooking in their new life in Cairo, but the pattern of eating at certain times of the day together with certain social others may remain, and is brought forward to the new context, where it continues to build up migrants' personal history. The everyday practices that we need to attend to thus function as kind of safety nets in the space of in-betweenness. This dialectic of change and continuity, novelty and sameness in understanding oneself and the world, is thus central to our understanding of migration.

In order to move beyond the break in one's way of being and re-establish sense of continuity and sameness, in order to turn threat into promise, and respond to new challenges, individuals' experience

and knowledge stores that build upon available cultural resources can be mobilized (Zittoun, 2006, 2007a). Sense of sameness and continuity can entail different things for different people (Becker, 1997). For some, it involves linking with loved ones, for others it involves sustaining daily routines or activities that were part of the familiar and taken-for-granted flow of being. For others still, it means using resources (Zittoun, 2007b; Zittoun et al., 2003; Zittoun, 2011), such as institutions, music, literature, or dance to make sense of their current situation and do the psychological work that is needed for reaching new stabilities. These and other elements of the sense of being at-home constitute familiar spaces in which the migrants' past ways of being were appreciated and rendered meaningful. Retaining those activities, bringing them to the present as an old basis for new creations, therefore means retaining one's sense of continuity, and in a way, creating an experiential "home" in the new environment (Mahmoud, 2010). In what follows we elaborate some common pathways for re-establishing continuity through strengthening the ties with the past home.

Maintaining *routines of everyday life* can be a powerful pathway for re-establishing continuity and recreating home in the new environment (Becker, 1997; Desjarlais et al., 1995). Many migrants care to cook their own food, burn incense, and perform their ordinary activities, habits, and hobbies from home. When possible, traditional dress is worn (Mahmoud, 2010):

**Hala:** So when you feel that you miss your family in Sudan, or anything else from Sudan, what do you do?

**Zein:** I try to [pause] for example, if it's family, I bring out the photos, if it's food, I try to cook it, if it's something social, I try to gather with the Sudanese here [...] everything I miss from Sudan, I try to do here.

Sense of continuity also involves *complying with traditional familiar cultural values* that ensured self worth at home. For example, the Sudanese refugees in Cairo consider the domain of *fertility and procreation* an important protector of their previously established sense of identity. In many parts of Sudan, one of the primary roles for a man or woman is to have children. In Cairo, married Sudanese refugees continue to embrace the value of childbearing very highly. This is a value that reinforces their manhood and womanhood, as they were defined in their past. It is also their only opportunity to continue their lost life projects,

since many of them project their own unfulfilled ambitions and dreams onto their children. Although procreation is an important protector of their identities, it imposes increased difficulties for them and their entire family. How to protect and safeguard their children? How to give them the needed education? How to maintain their connection with the (parents') homeland? Despite these dilemmas, some refugees continue to want to have more children, because procreation is a core value that sustains their personhood in the midst of inevitable change (Mahmoud, 2008, 2010). Consider the case of Michael, an unemployed Sudanese refugee in Cairo who has seven children and struggles to provide the food of the day for them (Mahmoud, 2010):

**Hala:** Tell me more about your life here. You said that you came here temporarily in order to travel?

**Michael:** One always seeks improvement. And I was thinking that from Sudan to Egypt, there will be improvement, and then we could move somewhere better from Egypt so that my children could get educated. This was my ambition. I want my children to have a good education. If they do not have an education, they will be lost. They could become criminals. I wish my children could get a good education. I want my children to say, 'Baba, you worked hard for us.' This is all I want from this world.

Michael, like many other refugees and migrants, is confronted with a catch-22 situation. By having many children he is challenged in his identity as a father providing for them and securing their future. At the same time, having many children is essential for preserving his identity as a man and husband and for carrying his legacy.

*Linking with family and friends back home* is another way of recreating continuity and coming closer to home, since "home" involves connectedness through meaningful relationships with friends and family (Dovey, 1995). For example, many young Estonians studying in England reported that their relations with their parents had improved significantly after their departure to England (Märtsin, 2009a). They claimed to have long and deep discussions about their experiences in the new environment and about their families' lives back home over phone and internet—an experience they hardly had when living at home. Again we can see the Boeschian *Heimweh/Fernweh* dialectic at work here—that which is out of reach and absent is dear and longed for.

Lastly, *cultural retention* is a powerful means for ensuring continuity and activating the sense of being at-home. Some refugees or migrants, especially those who belong to a social network of people from their own tribe or background, will try to recreate their social gatherings and celebrate national holidays or special occasions in the new environment, in order to revive their culture (Mahmoud, 2010):

**Hala:** Are there people from your tribe here?

**Taheyya:** Yes, there are many. Many of my relatives are here. Also, we go every fortnight [to] the Nuba Mountains nursery to revive our culture. We speak *Rotana* [tribal language] all day, and we perform our dances. [This is] something that brings us together, because life and work increase the gap between us.

Although fostering bonds with home may help to sustain and recreate everydayness, it also serves in intensifying feelings of nostalgia and homelessness (Mahmoud, 2010), as well as increasing the gap between the migrant and the local communities. Likewise, linking with family can remind the person of what they are missing. This makes the migrants' attempts of re-establishing continuity through the strengthening of home ties an inherently ambivalent endeavour, since it reinforces the mode of liminality. For example, Sadek, a 27-year-old Sudanese refugee man in Cairo mentions that he is comforted when talking about his family, yet at the same time the thoughts are painful and add to his suffering (Mahmoud, 2010):

**Hala:** Is there anything that you like to talk about and which makes you feel better?

**Sadek:** Well, when I talk about my family, it gives me *ra'ha nafseyya* [psychological peace] but at the same time suffering. You feel that you have not done anything for them. You feel that you haven't fulfilled your duties. All of this is poured on you. It is both happiness and sadness. You are happy that you are remembering them, but at the same time [sad].

Boesch (1991) too emphasizes this ambivalence. He recognizes that the absence of home can deprive a person of its supportive elements, putting at stake a sense of familiarity and stability. At the same time, these supportive elements can also be constraining, exactly because of their taken-for-grantedness and stability. Using Robinson Crusoe's cave explosion as an example, he argues that the explosion functioned as a trigger and basis for Crusoe's self-transformation, which was regulated by his memories of his self prior to the explosion. For migrants

then, the absence of familiar and homely, while depriving them of support, can enable transformation and innovation, while the relatedness of this novelty to what is absent also allows preserving a sense of continuity.

### *Migration as Process of Becoming (An)Other*

As already indicated, migration is ultimately a transformative and developmental experience. It is a process of becoming (an)other. The rupture may become repaired through the maintenance of old ways of being. Yet through this repair the maintained old way of being becomes transformed. The old everyday practices become recreated and renewed. Although they may look the same on the surface, the process of rendering them the same has brought along change and transformation.

Thus, it is not only the re-establishment of the familiarity of the old home that can function as a bridge to the new way of being in a new environment. The event of migration itself can be seen as a necessary link in one's life project that meaningfully connects the past with the present and anticipated future. Continuation of one's life project, a meaningful way of changing and developing as a person that emerges from the experience of migration, can thus also provide the needed sense of sameness and continuity. Moreover, the redefinition of the self through actualizing new empowering identities in the new context may also foster feelings of comfort, recognition, and self-worth which are necessary for establishing the sense of being at-home, and its associated sense of identity (Mahmoud, 2010).

For example, some Sudanese refugees in Cairo have coped with their ruptured preestablished ways of being by gaining empowerment through acting as representatives of the refugee community; they have proudly redefined themselves as activists and helpers of fellow refugees (Mahmoud, 2010). Likewise, consider the case of Andres, who reinvents himself as a European person in order to make sense of the liminality of being between Britain and Estonia (Märtsin, 2009a, pp. 130):

**Andres:** I have probably developed, I don't know if it is European identity. [...] Being European means differentiating oneself from the rest of the world. It is not in the sense of differentiating, but in the sense of thinking and acting freely. I feel natural in this environment [in Britain/Europe]; it doesn't feel like going abroad. Or like, I go abroad from Estonia,

I go to Europe. It's not that, it's my environment. And I definitely want it to stay this way. And I am afraid that if I go there [to Estonia], perhaps I'll get stuck there, and all this will somehow remain closed.

For Andres then, seeing himself as European allows going beyond the distinction between Estonia and Britain. This higher-level self-definition brings the two environments together in a meaningful manner and allows Andres to rebuild his sense of continuity while simultaneously responding to his new experiences.

Migration is thus an inherently ambiguous experience, ripe with discontinuity in the midst of incredible sameness, filled with excitement and pain of finding and losing. The experience of migration not only makes us reconstruct our patterns of everyday life, but it also changes our perceptions of our original home, and our self-understandings, acting sometimes as a powerful trigger for redefining ourselves and becoming (an)other. Through contact with unfamiliar worlds, we gain knowledge and experience, and we change. This change takes place as we make the initially unfamiliar world our own, and push the foregrounded experiences of strangeness to the background as ordinary and known. Although this re-established normal flow of being becomes functional in a new context, it may become dysfunctional for other contexts, including the previously known and familiar home. This raises the question: how do migrants fit in when they go back home?

### Never At-Home?

And when they return to the place they were born, they will be, more than likely, in a different space and therefore remain, in a sense, in exile.

(Constable, 1999, p. 225)

Perhaps the best-known repatriation story in the Western world is that of *Odyssey*, who upon returning home, not only fails to recognize his land, but nobody recognizes him either (Papadopoulos, 2002). As we have indicated, migration inevitably brings with it change and reinvention, even if it entails recreating the familiar patterns of everyday life and retaining continuity and sameness beyond disruption. Furthermore, people and places change with or without migration. As Fried (2000) has argued: "If we grow and age in place, the environments in which we are born and reach adolescence are no longer the same as the places in which we

become adults." There is a deep and pervasive meaning to Thomas Wolff's title: "You Can't Go Home Again. Home is, indeed, never again!" (p. 198).

The difficulties related to repatriation thus stem from the inevitable change in the home environment as well as in the migrant's own way of being and sense of identity that have changed through the migration experience. This process of self-discovery and knowledge accumulation, including the renegotiated sense of being at-home and the reconstruction of the taken-for-granted everydayness may not be fully realized until an actual return home (Meintel, 1973). Homecoming is not only about the arrival in the physical environment, but more importantly about the re-establishment of all the meaningful connections with the environment, people, and with one's own way of being (Constable, 1999; Papadopoulos, 2002). Although the (maybe idealized) image of home sustains migrants during exile, it can collapse abruptly upon return (Maletta et al., 1989; Zarzosa, 1998; Habib, 1996; Ghanem, 2003). Repatriation is thus another migration, another uprooting entailing a separation from the physical location of the country of residence and its social networks.

The experience of Helena, a young woman from Estonia, who returned home after having lived half a year in England as an exchange student, illustrates the difficulties that homecomers may experience (Märtsin, 2009a, pp. 153):

**Helena:** During the last month I've been trying to [...] cope with being in Estonia. Somehow I still feel that this isn't my life or that I'm not able to live it anymore the way I used to (before leaving). I still feel that I moved on with my life while living in England. And coming back and staying here is like a step back in my life. A very difficult step. [...] I feel that I've changed so much and I don't want to go back where I started. [...] Sometimes I even feel as if I have returned to hell. I don't feel as if I'm at home. I miss the people and the things we used to do, and the life we used to live. [...] I've understood that there is nothing keeping me here. And after graduation I'd like to go and live somewhere else. [...] When you go to live in a new place, then you are kind of a blank page [...] You can create a picture of yourself and you like that new picture. And then you go back and you have to be who you were before. And it's so difficult to stay who you have become, because all the people are different and they see you the way you used to be. [...] It's difficult to explain, but this is

the way I felt. I moved on and then I had to move back to be able to be here [in Estonia].

Helena's description indicates how one's sense of identity is intertwined and emerges out of her joint activities with others in specific time and space contexts. When this background of taken-for-granted connections is not there anymore to support her way of being, she feels lost. The reinvented way of being seems thus not to be functional in the old/new environment and she needs to go through another cycle of reinvention to re-establish the meaningful sense of identity and sense of being at-home.

The connections with old and new social others and the views we think they hold about us—the meta-perspectives—can be simultaneously upsetting and pleasant, because of the feelings of nonbelonging that they evoke, as well as the admiration they may carry. The work of Graham and Khosravi (1997) for example indicates that political refugees, who return to their homeland after the end of a period of political turbulence or war, feel or are made to feel by their home communities that they abandoned the country at times of difficulty and therefore have no place in it upon their return, as in the case of Iranian political refugees in Sweden. And although the home communities see them as reminders of a painful past, returnees are hurt by the collective silence that they think characterizes the home communities regarding the events that made them flee (Maletta et al., 1989; Habib, 1996; Zarzosa, 1998). The situation for refugees can be even more devastating. Besides the fact that millions of refugees in the world never return home, the ones who repatriate find themselves in a war-devastated homeland that may not resemble the home they had in mind. This can certainly cause them tremendous confusion, ambiguity, and ambivalence. On the other hand, the refugees who spend years seeking asylum start painting a pleasant image of their future homes in the resettlement countries (Mahmoud, 2010). Many refugees come to the new host country with high expectations (Stein, 1981), only to arrive (if ever) in countries so foreign to them that they start experiencing the difficulties of being away from home all over again (see Holtzman, 2000).

Furthermore, some returnees come home having achieved a somewhat higher position in the social and economical ladder, of which they are proud. Bhatia (2007), for example, discusses how Indians living in the United States, are admired by their

home communities, for they “have made it.” Yet, while evoking pride, the changed socio-economic status may also evoke feelings of being an outsider in the general atmosphere of poverty and deprivation. Similarly, those migrants who have become acquainted with different gender roles in the new environment, for instance, return home to face the traditional gender roles that have now become alien to them (Striffler, 2007; Zarzosa, 1998). Migrants who have received years of education abroad may return to their home villages feeling disenchanting with the traditional worldviews they may find there (Salih, 1969/2002).

Constable's (1999) interesting study of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong shows how returning home has become an increasingly ambivalent thought for the women. On the one hand, home is where their families and personal histories are. On the other hand, the experience of working and living in Hong Kong, despite their low social status, has brought them a sense of independence, empowerment, and liberation. When they go home briefly, they often experience a honeymoon period after which their homecoming goes downhill. They start the confrontation with problems at home, with traditional gender roles and constraints. This makes their feelings about possibly returning for good largely ambivalent.

Repatriation then is another cycle of migration, accompanied by mixed feelings of alienation, disillusionment, estrangement, unfamiliarity, and sometimes guilt. As Hall (1987) put it, “Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to” (p. 44). However, like migration, homecoming is an ambivalent experience full of feelings of pride and guilt, joy and shame, of wanting to belong, but also wanting to remain distinct. And again, there is the everydayness that unfolds under and beyond that ambivalence, which shakes one's security and comfort, functioning as an anchor in the process of recreating one's ordinary ways of being and turning change into the mundane.

### **Conclusion: Migration as a Dynamic, Dialectic, and Developmental Experience**

In this chapter, we attempted to explore the meanings of home and how these are affected by the experience of migration. Home has been characterized as a complex, dynamic, dialectic, and *experiential* phenomenon. We emphasized the *sense of being at-home* and the intertwined *sense of identity* as interlinked and mutually defining anchors of our existence



that become inevitably shaken and ruptured in the experience of migration. But when looking at how this rupture is experienced and managed, we have emphasized the inherently *dynamic, dialectic, and developmental* nature of migration, instead of seeing it as a unidirectional sequence from rupture to shock to coping and achieving a new stable being. Migration is accompanied by complex, contradictory, ambivalent feelings and attempts to cope with novelty against the backdrop of sameness, change in relation to continuity, and reinvention against the backdrop of the mundane. Similarly, we have tried to move away from the representation of home and resident societies as “hermetically sealed or mutually exclusive spaces” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001b, p. 3), but rather have seen them emerging as mutually defining aspects of our being through our lived experiences in and between them.

Another implication of the discussion in this chapter is the irreversible effect of movement on one’s sense of identity, giving rise to a mix of feelings in relation to one’s homeland and one’s sense of identity. The return home turns out to be significantly complex and dynamic, to the extent that it sometimes is experienced as yet another cycle of migration. Emphasizing this intertwined and mutually defining character of societies and dialectics of moving between them has thus taken us away from either/or, entity-like definitions, lists, and terminologies. And this is an important contribution that socio-culturally informed studies, including these reported in this chapter, have made to migration research.

Before closing, we should, once more, stress the idiosyncratic and highly personal nature of home, moving away from home, and returning home. Such experiences are not shaped by the *circumstances* of migration per se, but more so by the individual person in question. The diversity of circumstances surrounding the experience of home and movement, and all the complexities and tensions involved, may seem threatening to our comfortable way of seeing the world. Nevertheless, it is also liberating to know that migration can be an exhilarating experience, opening up new horizons for the person, and animating communications between and within cultures.

### Future Directions

But where does this conceptualization of migration as inherently dynamic, dialectic, and developmental experience leave us with our research efforts?

The research into cultural change and migration has in recent years moved away from seeing cultures as mutually exclusive entities and toward a more process-oriented approach, which seeks to understand how multiple cultural ways of being are held simultaneously in a constant dialogue by individuals who move between cultures. Thus our conceptualization of migration as a dynamic and dialectic process that entails simultaneous renegotiation of bonds with and meanings of home and new environment is becoming increasingly present in contemporary migration research. However, the third aspect we have emphasized in this chapter—the inherently developmental nature of migration—has been less central in this area of research. Therefore, we would welcome studies that take a fundamentally developmental approach to migration, seeing it as leading to change and growth alongside the maintenance of homeliness, and explicitly explore the double-binding experience of promise and threat of migration.

In our discussion we have already hinted at another possible alley of research—that of exploring the experiences of internal exiles. Migration research has traditionally been concerned with those groups of individuals who move between cultures or whose family has in the past moved between cultures. Yet in our multicultural, achievement-oriented class societies, the experience of social exclusion is not common only for migrants, but for many locals too. Exploring how people come to be foreigners in their own country, how they carve out spaces for themselves on the margins of the popular subcultures in their home society, and how they come to consider migration as a way of dealing with this feeling of being an internal outsider, are thus questions which are worth exploring further. Our conceptualization of migration as a dynamic, dialectic, and developmental experience that may begin far before the actual event of migration may be especially suitable for these kinds of studies.

Finally, in this chapter we have been concerned with the individuals’ experiences of migration. Yet the individuals carve out spaces for themselves in the context of societal and institutional structures, such as education, employment or health care, which is simultaneously enabling and constraining. Although this intertwining of migrants and institutions has not been our focus here, we would welcome studies that turn away from looking at migrants as humans whose being is rendered problematic by their belonging to a liminal space between cultures and societies, and toward exploring

institutional structures that constrain migrants in their efforts to cope with liminality. We would thus hope to see future studies that examine how societal structures and institutions enable and constrain migrants in imagining themselves forward in the new context. This type of analysis seems to be especially important in the case of refugees, yet can be equally useful for understanding the experiences of other migrants too.

## Acknowledgments

We are sincerely grateful to Irimi Kadianaki for her valuable feedback on the ideas presented in this chapter, many of which, we believe, have become clearer and more grounded thanks to her contribution.

## Notes

1. All personal names have been changed to preserve the confidentiality of participants.
2. The interviews in Märtsin's (2009a) study were conducted in Estonian, transcribed verbatim and later translated to English by her.
3. All the interviews in Mahmoud's (2010) study were conducted in Arabic, then translated and transcribed verbatim in English.

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Culture of Higher  
Social Regulators:  
Values, Magic, and  
Duties

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# Values and Socio-Cultural Practices: Pathways to Moral Development

Angela Uchoa Branco

## Abstract

The major claim I make in this chapter is that psychology must overcome the traditional tendency of considering the topic of moral development as an almost exclusive domain of cognitive-oriented constructivists. When we consult the literature about subjects concerning moral development, we easily find a vast amount of references that draw on constructivist assumptions, where Piaget's and Kohlberg's ideas still prevail. However, some authors are already pursuing explanations for moral development elsewhere, namely, taking a different, less reductionist, epistemological scientific approach. This alternative approach relies on a cultural and systemic paradigm that makes it possible to take into account the complexities of human development. As I analyze the issue from a cultural psychological perspective, I first refer to the conceptual origins of the constructs pertaining to the area, their roots spreading from philosophy and sociology. Then I highlight some of the main contributions of a few key philosophers, social scientists, and psychologists to the theme, however far from presenting an actual review of their interesting ideas. Last, but not least, I present to the reader my own contemporary elaborations on the topic, drawing on the resourceful contributions of theorists such as Shweder, Rogoff, Tappan, and Valsiner to come up with a perspective that I like to designate as a socio-cultural constructivist approach to moral development. From such perspective, culture, affect, cognition, and motivation (values) all come to the forefront of the analytic picture in order to investigate the ontogenesis and the cultural co-construction of moral development. The cognitive bias is therefore overcome, and the intertwined quality of affect plus cognition now plays a fundamental role in the emergence of specific moral motivations found in social practices and individuals' actions.

**Keywords:** moral development, values, moral motivation, cultural psychology, morality, ethics

*One of the most important consequences of separating the individual from the social world, and cognitive processes from affect, in moral psychology theories, has been a deep impoverishment in the treatment of morality as a fundamental, pervasive aspect of human functioning. Morality refers not to the abstract world of reasoning but to the world of actions and choices, having, at least potentially, deep social and interpersonal implications and involving both intrapsychic cognitive and affective mechanisms.*

—P. Paolichi, 2007



*L'egoisme est la racine de tous les vices; l'orgueil en est une  
branche. Lorsque l'orgueil grandit, il arrive un moment où  
l'individu deviant stupide.*  
—A. N. Philippe, 1902

Why did it take so long for psychology to actually address morality development issues at both motivational and interaction domains? Except for cognitive psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Blasi, and similarly oriented theorists, very few scientists in developmental psychology carried out scientific studies to make sense of how moral and ethical values develop along human ontogenesis. This has always surprised me as a researcher of human social interactions and relationships, since I started to investigate the roots of aggression and the promotion of prosocial development (Branco, 1989, 2003, 2009; Branco & Mettel, 1995). After all, ethics and morality are a major concern to human life and experience. Together and embraced with economy and politics, ethics and morality provide the rules and principles for social organization and human interactions that may, or may not, create possibilities for mutual respect and therefore the construction of democratic societies.

Consisting of omnipresent concepts applied to both personal, subjective, and collective social realms, morality and ethics are the two sides of a same coin, which consists of human daily life interactions and relationships, constructed and reconstructed at multiple different levels, from family to international domains. From a systemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Thelen & Smith, 1998), moral concepts, beliefs, and socio-cultural practices mutually and continuously construct each other at all levels (from micro to macro to global), and they have fundamental effects on our everyday lives. The way moral values (or their absence) guide our actions and judgments in powerful ways can never be overestimated. This chapter is a contribution to the topic, and refers to some of the main thinkers that can help psychology to take a more proactive role in the investigation—and better understanding—of the development of ethics, moral values, and social practices that lie at the core of a just and democratic society.

### **Psychology and the Development of Moral Values and Interactions**

Although *morality* and *ethics* have always been of central relevance to philosophers and sociologists,

psychology tried to maintain the issue outside its boundaries, at a distance, for a long time. In general, psychologists' incursions on the topic were timid and outstandingly primitive or simplistic. When we think about Freud's limited ideas about guilt and identification processes during Oedipus unconscious experiences, and behaviorist reductionism sweeping away any idea of human intentionality and reflexivity—as it claimed for simplistic, mechanistic behavior conditionings—we wonder why the topic remained for so long as a matter seriously taken into account almost exclusively by philosophy and sociology.

Piaget's reaction to this unforgivable lack of interest, which prevailed in the twentieth century, offered a significant contribution to the study of moral judgment development in children. When he published his 1932 book on children's moral development, the prevalent idea held by most psychologists and by some important sociologists was that human beings *were not* responsible for the moral consequences of their actions. For psychoanalysts, irrationality triumphed over intentional reflexivity, and for behaviorists, as well as for Marx-aligned sociologists, one should mostly blame, respectively, the mother (Freud), the family (person's conditioning history), and poverty (Marx), which resulted from capitalist oppression. Miserable life conditions and experiences of criminals, and other moral offenders, left no room for intentional thought, reflexivity, or any sort of personal choice or decision whatsoever. This, however, sounded overwhelmingly absurd even for laypeople, and later on, new approaches to the issue—from constructivism to cultural psychology—proved that even though what happens to us has strong impact over our development, we are as well responsible, although in different degrees, for our own actions.

Although sociology, behaviorism, and psychoanalysis downplayed individual responsibility, Piaget and Kohlberg, inspired by Kant's philosophy, put a special emphasis on individual activity, autonomy, and responsibility. That opened a new era for approaching the issue of moral responsibility, but, as we will see, their contributions were constrained to a person's discourse and judgment regarding moral

dilemmas about what is right or wrong in complex social situations. Hence, this chapter aims at bringing the topic of moral development to discussion from a critical approach of mainstream psychology while assuming a socio-cultural constructivist psychological perspective that highlights the role of culture and constructive individuals. Some selected interdisciplinary contributions to the topic are discussed, aiming at a better understanding of human beliefs, values, and interaction patterns development along ontogenesis. I will particularly emphasize how values and interactions develop within complex situations where dilemmas concerning right or wrong become of particular relevance within contexts of everyday life experiences with peers, family, strangers, all the way to national and international affairs.

### **Ethics and Morality: Conceptual Issues**

Despite the confusion resulting from the etymology of the words derived from their Latin and Greek origins—both *ethos* (Greek) and *moris* (Latin) refer to “customs”—according to Hegel (1999) *morality* refers to the *personal* principles that guide an individual’s conduct, while *ethics* refers to the *collective* norms within society domains. In fact, this differentiation was also acknowledged by ancient Greek philosophers and thinkers, and Sofocles’ play *Antigona* reveals the major dilemma faced by the protagonist when she has to decide between abiding by personal, family cultural principles versus by collective (*urbes*), public, social norms. As she disobeys the last, she suffers a death sentence that was no easy task to the king, Cleonte, to pronounce. Ghosts whispering the faults of both choices haunted the characters all along the play. The masterpiece illustrates how people often need to make a choice between terribly conflicting moral rules concerning right versus wrong, and makes us wonder how such incompatible moral principles develop. Moreover, we need to understand how individuals abide by one or other principle, and actually choose among them depending on multiple and complex conditions and subjective interpretations. In fact, both personal and collective cultures (Valsiner, 1987, 2007) are too plural, contradictory and complex, and we should not be surprised to realize how complicated it is to be able to predict people’s choices and to determine underlying motives and moral principles.

What makes a value or an action moral or ethical (its social counterpart)? The answer lies in evaluations and actual behaviors regarding rightness, fairness, and justice in opposition to wrongness,

unfairness, and injustice, the antinomy relating to one’s own and others’ behavior concerning matters of justice, loyalty, and human welfare. Morality (going forward I will use the term “morality” to encompass its sociological complement, “ethics”) is directed linked to the historically constructed notion of human dignity and the value of human existence. The value and dignity assigned to human existence have their Western roots in Greek philosophy, flourished during Enlightenment and more recently became the core of humanistic philosophy. The major accomplishment of such values was the internationally approved Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations. At an abstract level, few nations and people disapprove the Declaration’s terms. However, as cultural psychologists would insist, problems arise when those general assertions need to be translated into real life judgments, decisions, and actual behaviors. In everyday life, state laws may conflict with cultural norms that may also conflict with subjective moral principles, giving rise to endless battles and controversies that very often are extremely difficult to negotiate or solve. This is the foremost reason why the topic demands a trans- and multidisciplinary approach. For example, social norms and rules mostly pertain to sociology; axiology and transcendence, universalism versus contextualism are matters of philosophical reasoning; and subjectivity, the development of social motivation and personal actions are certainly topics that demand efforts by psychology in order to shed some light onto the complexity of moral phenomena.

### ***Philosophical Roots and Contributions***

Evil or good, right or wrong? Humanity has long struggled with these issues. Plato and Aristotle, among Greek philosophers, while dedicating their insightful thoughts searching for the truth, also suggested, respectively, that truthful reason and happiness were the major goals in life. Virtues consisted of, particularly to Aristotle, a very important characteristic to be cultivated and promoted by humans.

The French philosopher Rousseau considered kindness as a human *natural propensity*, only corrupted by society with its norms, unfair relations, and the distortion of natural values of goodness and virtue. Rousseau emphasized the importance of a pedagogy oriented to promote good and prevent society’s negative influence over the developing child. *Émile*, his most famous book, does an eulogy to human inbuilt kindness, and promotes his ideas

about how the morality of goodness should impregnate everyday life, and bring about justice and fair politics. In his own words, “deep in our souls, there is an innate principle of justice and virtue with which, despite our own beliefs, we judge our and other’s actions as good or evil, and it is this principle that I name as conscience” (Rousseau, 1966).

Although Rousseau underlined innate, biological predispositions toward goodness, Kant relied almost exclusively on *reason* to establish the parameters for moral judgment and actions. His most well-known contribution to the discussion of morality was a maxim that he designated as the “categorical imperative.” Along his numerous philosophical writings this principle was stated in different ways, but could be shortly summarized as “you should act as though the principle governing your will and action may simultaneously serve as a principle orienting a general law” (Kant, 1994). Kant emphatically claimed for the supremacy of reason over any other argument. For the German philosopher, no ends justify immoral means, and human dignity prevails over any utilitarian goal. The utmost finality of human values and actions is the promotion of human worth and goodness, no matter how social utilitarianism defends the notion that social benefits overrule human individuals’ rights and transcendent condition.

Hegel (1999), however, did not agree with such ideas on what he considered to be a too abstract conceptualization of reason as the only guide for morality. Hegel considered that a dialectical balance was needed to contemplate both individuals and society. His proposal of a dialectical materialism creates a tension between the individual and society, and this overcomes the excessive idealism of his mentor. Morality—in his word *moralitat*—is now related to the subject, while the concept of ethics—*sittlichkeit*—refers to collectivities such as institutions, society, and the state itself. The dialectical tension created by the individual-society polarity, though, needs to be comprehended assuming that individual morality is always socially mediated, and social ethics is permanently enriched by people who live within the social group or community. There is no person without society and no society without persons. His dialectical ideas, hence, will further contribute to the dialogical and inclusive approach of contemporary cultural psychology, which cannot conceive morality and ethics as different, exclusive categories but, *au contraire*, they are conceptualized as distinct but subject to “inclusive separation”

(Valsiner & Cairns, 1992). In lay words, the two sides of a same coin, except for these sides are profoundly interconnected although distinct from each other. Taking into account that Hegel’s tendency was toward the social side, for him morality issues are sort of absorbed by *sittlichkeit*, or ethics.

Marx does not particularly address the subject of morality or ethics. His powerful emphasis on historical materialism highlights history and economy to make sense of politics and sociology. In sharp contrast to Kant, Marx justifies the means when the goals are considered as good, just, or socially desirable. Weber criticizes this positioning, and reconsiders the importance of also taking into account the means, for human dignity must be preserved, even when radical changes are socially necessary to provide for justice within society. On the other hand, Durkheim (1973) takes an extremely positive and, I would say, even naïve perspective. As he sees society like the only legitimate parameter for morality, he reduces this fundamental dimension of subjective and social experience to a simple function of the social system. Everyone should then submit to the system and learn the desirable moral behaviors that society expects them to learn. Later on, they have to act toward each other according to the mechanisms of what he designated as “organic solidarity” (Durkheim, 1973).

Last but not least, I would like to refer to Habermas’ bright ideas concerning discursive ethics (Habermas, 1990, 1991). The concept of a *discursive ethics* is significantly meaningful, particularly from contemporary scientific and philosophical perspectives. This concept, intrinsically linked to his Theory of Communicative Action, allows Habermas to substitute Kant’s epistemic and moral subject by a heuristically productive category of discursive *intersubjectivity*. Now, the intellectual effort to make sense of what truth is—or may be—is not taken by a singular rational individual but, instead, it is taken by the participants of a fairly negotiated discourse, constructed through intensive and democratic communication. He argues for the restoration of spontaneity, sociability, solidarity, and cooperation as the necessary ground for communicative action, which he thinks is more important than instrumental action (Freitag, 1997). Although Habermas’ arguments sound much more in tune with the new, semiotics- and complexity-oriented paradigm, they suffer from a significant weakness resulting from the naiveté of their own assumptions. Society, and consequently social practices, are characterized by

cultural historical power games that are a fundamental, central aspect of negotiations. The actual possibilities for anything like spontaneity or fair negotiations are not substantial. In other words, discursive ethics resulting from intersubjective communication must always take into account those power games, and the co-construction of morality needs to be considered as a permanent process of negotiation and change that weighs up the role of unequal communication conditions.

### **The Appropriation of Moral Development by Cognitive Reductionism**

Piaget's and Kohlberg's interest on the psychological study of moral development allowed for knowledge construction on a specific dimension of moral development, namely, moral judgment or moral reasoning. Even though their ideas and work advanced our knowledge when they used the categories of heteronomy and autonomy to describe the general mindset of developing children—with heteronomy preceding autonomy in ontogenesis—the notion of universal stages, so well-appropriated by Kohlberg, is hard to sustain, even if we constrain our analysis just to cognition. The role of language, so brilliantly emphasized by Vygotsky (1978), is however excessive in the establishment of Kohlberg's six stages of moral development— progressively arranged along ontogeny in two levels categorized as preconventional, two as conventional, and two as postconventional levels of moral development. Kohlberg, though, was not bothered about how language games could determine some of the nuances between stages, and he did not take that into account. It turned out that more advanced stages à la Kohlberg are usually inferred from mostly linguistic, discursive degrees of sophistication. In fact, we can say that Kohlberg reassured the Platonic faith in the power of the rational good later assumed by Kant (Kohlberg, 1970, 1984), namely, when a person knows what is right, s/he will necessarily struggle to act accordingly, for reason prevails over any other human characteristics. Kohlberg goes even further in his strong beliefs linking rationality and morality. For him, only actions resulting from rational choice—cognition plus intention—could deserve the label of a moral action. Bergman (2004) reminds us that “in Kohlberg's view only a judgment that an action is right or obligatory makes that action moral” (p. 25). In short, Kohlberg's extreme rationalism led him to conclude that moral actions are almost an inevitable expression of high moral

judgments. The amount of counter-evidence against positive correlations between superior cognition and/or language skills, and moral actions, though, is definitely undeniable (Kurtines & Gewirtz, 1991). Nuremberg court reports very well show the independence between cognition and morality in astounding ways (Arendt, 2000).

Ratner (2002), a ferocious critic of idealism and cognitivism, argues that:

Kohlberg's abstract stages disregard and obscure concrete moral values and reasoning. They collapse vastly different values in common categories that promote the false appearance of similarity. They are impoverished, incomplete descriptions of people's real moral values and reasoning [ . . . ]. Subsuming [ . . . ] responses in any of Kohlberg's stages or categories [ . . . ] expunges them of interesting, important, concrete views of life and fosters the erroneous impression that they are 'basically' similar. In fact, the specific values and views that constitute the subjects' moral reasoning are far more interesting, important, and real than notions such as postconventional reasoning.  
(pp. 191–192)

Notwithstanding, the amount of influence and research generated by Piaget and Kohlberg cannot be overestimated. Even today the great majority of research and theoretical literature in psychology about moral development is based on or directly related to their work. Books and research reports related to their cognitive-constructivist perspective continue to proliferate and do represent the vast majority of literature in psychology concerning the theme (Daniel, Lapsey, & Narvaez, 2004; Kurtines & Gewirtz, 1991). As this chapter does not intend to do a review on the subject (easily found elsewhere, see Damon & Lerner, 2006; Killen & Hart, 1995), I will particularly speak to a couple of recent theorists that still address the complex issue of moral development from a cognitive-constructivist theoretical framework.

### ***The Persistence of Cognitive Reductionism: Contemporary Psychologists on the “Moral Self”***

One of the most well-known theorists related to a constructive, cognitivist framework is Augusto Blasi (1983, 1990, 1999), although he does advance the study of moral development beyond the usually narrowed investigations of narrative judgments typical of Kohlberg's tradition. However, Blasi is still

too faithful to Kant's legacy. The innovation introduced by him and other similarly oriented psychologists (as we will see below) is the role of personality and self in relation to morality. They also refer to the notion of identity, not with a social psychology connotation, but as a concept that sounds closer to the clinical psychology vocabulary.

For Blasi (1999, 2004), we agentially structure our motives and desires, namely, we structure our will, and then begin to establish our identity. The action is therefore *chosen* by the subject according to his/her freedom of will. Hence, each person has a free choice that determines, in significant ways, the shaping of his/her own identity. The bet on rational choices, however, are too unrealistic, as contemporary psychology progressively demonstrates, for instance, by acknowledging the role of affect, emotions, nonverbal and unintentional motives as legitimate and important factors contributing to the constitution of the individual's motivational system. But Blasi does not go that far. He states that morality results from a successful integration of personality, and it is granted by the need for self-consistency underlying moral choices. According to him, if I am a moral person, a rational logic syllogism will oblige me to act morally in order to reduce dissonances. Therefore, even if there are different motives at work on a certain situation, the moral self, consisting of a deep motivational structure, will prevail and lead the person toward moral actions. After all, betraying oneself is something unthinkable, according to the author.

For Blasi, moral understanding needs to precede moral identity, and the logic sequence requires that moral understanding leads to moral identity that leads to moral action, because of the necessity of identity integration of one's personality (1990). In addition, "self-consistency [is] as a central tendency in personality organization" (Blasi, 1983, p. 201).

Nucci (2004) criticizes Blasi, arguing that his model pretty much suggests the existence of a kind of "homunculus" who freely decides to be consistent. Affect, Nucci says, is as important for morality as reason and identity are, but this issue is not quite elaborated by the author. Even though he attacks Blasi's reductionism, evoking the complexity of human personality, he still believes and overemphasizes self-consistency and the idea that a moral self needs to be nurtured since childhood. Without disagreeing that a moral self cultivated from early childhood has a substantial chance to deeply internalize moral values, I insist, from a developmental

perspective, that a moral self may emerge later through meaningful experiences (Branco, Branco, & Madureira, 2008).

Damon (1984; Damon & Lerner, 2006) asserts that morality and self are separate conceptual systems, which are only later integrated in ontogeny. He argues that stages of moral development, as proposed and studied by Kohlberg and followers, are not related to moral action. Damon suggests that true personological dynamics need to be taken into account, and again refers to morality as being a central aspect in a person's identity that can provide for consistent moral actions.

Colby and Damon (1993) studied 84 individuals—called as exemplars—whose self was deeply impregnated with morality principles. The authors were able to demonstrate that self and morality can lead to "spontaneous actions," and therefore they concluded for their unity, namely, moral selves will behave morally. It seems to me that claiming for "unity" is perhaps too much, because we all know that such a perfect consistency—moral selves will always behave morally—cannot be true. In case they mean moral selves *tend* to behave morally, then it is too simplistic and obvious. Subsequently, the authors leave out of the equation the major role of contexts (with their numerous variables and conditions) and competence (i.e., the ability to act in effective ways). Bergman (2004), for instance, refers to the complexity of human motivation, affirming that even activists who work hard for common good are also motivated by ambition, pride, anger, need to please others, or even fear. Moreover, Colby and Damon (1993) do not examine their exemplars' specific motivations, and by attributing their actions just to blind obedience to abstract moral principles, the authors provide us with a perfect example of reductionism. Another shortcoming of their position resides in the fact that their model only describes the existence of significant integrations between self and morality, but it does not shed any light on how such integration does develop along ontogeny.

Although researchers as Wren (1991) propose simplistic linear schemes such as moral thinking generating moral motive, which in turn generates moral action, Lapsley and Narvaez (2004) present a much more sophisticated model. Although cognitively biased, their model suggests the inclusion of the *aretaic* dimension, that is, the dimension where virtues and values are taken into account. They affirm, among other ideas, that more recently we can

observe a growing interest in the relations between moral rationality and selfhood, moral cognition and personological processes. They criticize Piaget's biological and structuralist bias (as in morphological maturation plus the concept of stages), and underline the fact that both Piaget and Kohlberg showed no interest in the self, moral motivation, or identity. As Piaget and Kohlberg said nothing about virtues, they put aside a whole important dimension of moral development. Lapsley and Narvaez (2004) then go a step ahead, but still have difficulties to explain the evidence against consistency in moral behavior presented by the so-called moral individuals. Data allow us to confirm the existence of some coherence when self characteristics are kept in mind; nevertheless, cross-situational variability concerning moral actions is certainly undeniable.

Lapsley and Narvaez (2004) refer to the two major variances of morality: justice and care. But again the voice of justice prevails, since they, too, claim for a social-cognitive theory that demands the examination of the "moral personality in order to understand moral functioning". Most of the constructs they use in their arguments are cognitive constructs like scripts, schemes, strategies, competencies and so on. They agree with their colleagues that personality is "organized into coherent, integrated systems that impose constraints on the range of possible configurations" (p. 196). They go on stressing self-coherence while claiming that goal systems "structure the organization of the cognitive-affective system and influence the perception, selection, and interpretation of various contextual settings" (p. 196). However, contradictions can be found when they say that "schemes filters perception" and that "there is now mounting evidence that much of our lives is governed by cognitive processes that are tacit, implicit, and automatic ..." (p. 197). Now I ask: Where did the previously mentioned construct of "affect" by the authors go? Again, we observe that the affective dimension disappears when they assert that a "social-cognitive approach emphasizes the central importance of self-processes, personal goals, and life tasks that give meaning to one's motivated behavior and purposive striving" (p. 197).

Unlike cognitivists, contemporary psychology is increasingly pointing out at the blending of affect and cognition (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2007). If affect guides selective memory retrieval, filters perceptions and sensations, as well as channels the person's attention for reflective

appraisal and response, it does play a major role in human psychological functioning, not just regarding the development of morality. Affect and cognition are in fact interwoven into a single process of unification, and their distinction for analytical purposes contemplates the principle of inclusive separation earlier mentioned in this chapter. In general, though, to most theorists studying moral development the reference to affect comes easily, but it is better spoken out than actually meant.

To conclude, cognitive-constructivist perspectives end up bringing forth a network of ill-defined constructs such as moral motives, moral understanding, moral identity, moral self, moral action, self-reflection, etc., as though all were different things, but quite often one translating into others, all claiming for intentionality, reflexivity, integration, and unity. *Such unity and integration, though, is impossible* from a systemic perspective, for it demands a *dialogical* framework from which development and change can actually occur, and innovations can substantially emerge as a result of multi-causality, plurality, and interdependence.

Turiel (2002) has also elaborated on the topic of morality, including dimensions such as care and welfare in addition to justice and human rights. Hoffman (2000), on his turn, has emphasized the role of empathy together with cognition, but his stages for empathy development typically follow a cognitivist tendency. But neither takes into account the existence of culture as a powerful canalizing force driving moral thinking and actions in specific contexts.

In short, why does the study of moral development need to free itself from cognitivism? First, there is no universal developmental pathway for moral development as cognitivists want (Cole, 1998). And second, Staub (1992, 1993, 2003), with his bright work on the roots of anti- and prosocial behavior, provides us with plenty of evidence that demonstrates that *extreme violence is often perpetrated by individuals with very sophisticated cognition* (I recommend his book on the origins of genocide, Staub, 1989).

### **The Turning Point: Integrating Historical-Cultural and Constructivist Assumptions from a Systemic Framework**

*... to develop is not to become more rational. Instead, [the individual] enters a new frame of mind about self-other relationships.*

(Paolichi, 2007, p. 570)

As many theorists dedicated to the scientific study of human psychological phenomena have pointed out, human development cannot be addressed by linear, reductionist, or simplistic approaches anymore. *Au contraire*, the adoption of a systemic perspective is a *must* to make sense of the complex, dynamic, and processual nature of human development. Psychological phenomena can only be understood from an inclusive framework that considers multi-causality and interdependence as the epistemological ground for theoretical elaborations, the phenomena being characterized by permanent dialectical tensions between process-and-structure and individual-and-culture tensions, among other “inclusive” dualities (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Morin & Prigogine, 2000; Schnitman, 1996; Thelen & Smith, 1998; Valsiner, 2007). Contemporary all-encompassing systemic approaches have definitely overcome functionalist interpretations of reality, and cleverly take a process perspective to study human phenomena according to its multifaceted, complex nature. Systemic perspectives also emphasize the interwoven flow of time dimensions along change and stability processes, which consist of the main characteristics of open, multiple, interactive, developing living systems. Living systems are dynamic but also hierarchically organized in web-like networks, which overlap and intermingle with each other along irreversible time. Hence, systems exist at different though interrelated levels, and one level—the person—cannot be fully understood without the analysis of other levels as well—organized contexts for human and societal development constructed over a history of interdependent cultural contexts.

When psychology finally realized that its object of study was complex, but still analyzable in terms of general laws and regularities, it started to investigate human *experiences* in order to identify and analyze meaning-construction processes (Bruner, 1997), for those lie at the core of psychological phenomena occurring along social interactions within culturally oriented contexts (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). The same applies to moral experiences concerning right and wrong regarding our relations with others, ourselves, and the world. From such a viewpoint, it is not difficult to understand why morality and ethics are phenomena simultaneously characterized by both convergences—related to our singular ecological status in the animal kingdom—and divergences, resulting from our unique cultural

and sociopolitical histories within particular environments.

Meaning-making processes are absolutely central in determining the quality of our interactions and relationships, and in studying the moral dimension of our collective and individual experiences. However, meaning-making processes are not just constrained to language and cognition as most semiotics experts end up suggesting in one way or another (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; Pearce, 1967; Saussure, 1966). The roles of emotions, body, and affect are increasingly acknowledged and taken into account by contemporary theorists (Lewis, & Haviland-Jones, 2004; Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2007). Hence, the scientific investigation of moral experiences and development requires multi-causality approaches that certainly challenge those who find it easier to emphasize this or that aspect, such as cognition, intention or behavior, in order to explain the moral dimension of human beings.

Processes involved in meaning construction, viewed from a socio-cultural *and* a constructivist perspective, are numerous and relate to each other in extremely complex ways. Such processes take place within and throughout different levels of open-ended systems—i.e., individual *and* social organizations (e.g., Branco, 2001, 2003; Valsiner, 2005, 2007). Aspects such as cultural-historical frameworks, specific culturally structured contexts and social interactions, situational characteristics, communication and metacommunication dynamics, individuals’ subjectivities and goal orientations, all play a fundamental role in the co-construction of *meanings emerging within particular social activities*; consequently, all play a central role in the emergence of particular *experiences*.

The encompassing view of semiotics (Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2007) brings together language, affect, and body as essential parts of meaning-making processes. Consequently, this perspective prevents the naïveté of one-dimensional, biased approaches to issues of morality, ethics, and their development, for now the subject can be addressed from a broader and system-like perspective compatible to its complex nature.

One important controversy on moral issues is the pseudo-dichotomy: universalism versus contextualism (Lourenço, 1998). Why is it a false dichotomy? To start with, our status among biological species constrains our options *and* demands a couple of general principles to grant our own survival as a social species. Even though general principles

are still object of endless negotiations, some wide-ranging laws—such as reciprocity, mutual respect, and certain degrees of tolerance toward diversity—are a definitive “must” for global survival; otherwise we may end up blowing ourselves up in the near future. On the other hand, because of *diverse* reality conditions, we developed within very distinctive geographical and cultural-historical contexts, characterized by different sets of norms and rules that emerged and developed to grant each group’s survival. The result is diversity, namely, multiple ethnic, social, and individual singularities.

Globalization has acted upon cultural histories and human diversity according to an agenda toward hegemony. But such agenda is a dangerous one, because it presupposes the existence of an actual balance between democratic nations, and this is a huge pitfall from a capitalist perspective. It is very difficult to envision societies and people sharing the same degree of power and quality of life—a tricky culture-dependent category! Even though desirable, people need to be alert concerning the possibilities for just and fair international sociopolitical contracts. New trends are always possible but great efforts will be needed to promote changes toward a progressively better planetary balance among different cultures and societies.

The important aspect we have to consider from a scientific viewpoint (Wilson, 2007) is that *diversity is an essential source of innovation and development*, and therefore needs to be preserved. Thus we conclude that contextualism indeed makes sense. This is certainly true, but human survival with dignity also demands the existence of some basic general principles of mutual respect, and respect for the intensively negotiated conditions for preserving human rights and worthiness. The universal declaration of human rights here plays a vital role. The acceptance of a broad ethic/moral spectrum can allow individuals and societies to abide by negotiated laws of justice and efforts for mutual understanding. Therefore, it is possible, although not easy, to rely on constant negotiations over the dialectical tensions resulting from universalism *and* contextualism, in order to establish ethical principles and norms for social regulations among humans. In other words, biology and culture do *not* necessarily oppose each other, and may jointly operate toward continuous negotiations allowing for both convergence and divergence—i.e., both shared basic moral values *and* multiple expressions of moral diversity.

## Cultural Approaches to the Study of Moral Development

Building on Vygotsky’s legacy concerning the cultural-historical roots of human development and the role of language and contexts to explain complex psychological phenomena, many theorists have elaborated models to understand human development in relation to meaning-construction process. As Bruner (1997) brilliantly puts the subject, meaning-construction processes are indeed the major topic to be investigated by psychology. Among those who have studied the moral dimension of development, I should mention some authors whose contributions are of particular interest. Shweder deserves a special place for his insightful ideas concerning the cultural construction of morality along everyday life experiences (Shweder, 2001; Shweder & Much, 1987). His most interesting work (Shweder & Much, 1987) nicely demonstrates the inaccuracy of Kohlberg’s research on moral development based on his six stages theory.

### *A Case against Ethnocentrism*

Analyzing their interview with a Hindu man called Babaji, Shweder and Much (1987) show the impossibility to follow Kohlberg’s orientation regarding the interviewee’s classification. Where a cognitive-constructivist approach would suggest classifying Babaji into a lower moral judgment category—conventional stage—Shweder and Much disagree, and denounce Kohlberg’s ethnocentric classificatory system as consisting of a pitfall. Why? The answer is that in Hindu culture, acts such as robbery are condemned not only from a social-contractual perspective (conventional reasoning), but from a much broader, universal, spiritual, and existential framework related to the meaning of life (postconventional reasoning). Their analyses bring forth the major role played by *culture* on topics like morality and ethics, and such deconstruction of the cognitivist teleology expands our knowledge beyond the ethnocentric boundaries that previously claimed for universal patterns and standards for moral development and evaluation.

Shweder and Much (1987) consider everyday life interactions as the relevant site to study moral development. They also claim for the “objective” possibility to assess and analyze meanings when the researcher can conjecture and distinguish between valid and invalid inferences based on prior knowledge of culture, context, relationships, and practices. The acknowledgment of divinity dimensions led Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997)



to identify three different types of ethics, which are not mutually exclusive but have different priorities depending on culture and history: autonomy, community, and divinity. The distinction of different types of morality is also stressed by Gilligan (1982; Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991). She criticizes most authors, particularly Kant's affiliates, for the exclusive consideration of reason and justice in detriment of care and loyalty. Even though her first evidence that women and men were different—caused by general dispositions to prioritize justice over care (men) or care over justice (women)—was later questioned (Lourenço, 1998), her work reveals the complexity of morality, and the existence of principles other than justice, which participate in the dilemmas over right and wrong regarding human experience.

### **Radical Culturalism**

A typical representative of a radical cultural positioning is Carl Ratner. Ratner's cultural perspective (2002) is strongly based on Activity Theory, therefore being consistent with the views of Leontiev's ideas, also shared by some contemporary fundamentalists. Ratner compares the American and Chinese senses of love and value, and finds that the way each culture promote one's responsibility for each other is always based on the quality of cultural activities mostly observed in specific cultures. He invites researchers on the topic of morality to investigate the cultural activities and concepts that mediate and organize morality in specific contexts. Ratner (2002) provides and analyzes various examples such as abortion (i.e., whether the embryo has a status of person), premarital sex, gender roles, etc. According to him, "cultural concepts stipulate which social relationships between individuals deserve to receive help as well as the kind of help that is morally appropriate" (p. 187). He argues that prostitution can be considered as moral in some cultures because it is a voluntary contract between individuals, with mutual agreement, and does not involve dishonesty. Therefore, it is a commodity exchange from a capitalist perspective, based on the buy-and-sell logic of free markets. This may sound preposterous or weird for some people, but the same dilemma emerges when students buy the authorship of manuscripts or dissertations from someone willing to sell them. Would consensual contracts and free-market rules still apply?

Other problematic or dilemmatic issues arise: some people think pornography is innocuous for

children. Also the case of slavery is worth analyzing: today it is condemned, but for centuries it was seen as perfectly moral and acceptable by most civilized nations! Ratner thus has a very good point when he convincingly shows how history and culture in fact determine what is, or is not, classified as moral or immoral along sociohistorical time.

In addition to denounce the biased, too abstract, and noncontextualized cognitive-constructivist theories of moral development, Ratner also criticizes Gilligan (1982) for not analyzing actual cultural aspects of morality, even though she investigates gender, situations, and feelings. Other narrativists, as Tappan (1992), also do not escape from Ratner's sharp critiques. According to Ratner (2002), just referring to and investigating people's narratives for "recurrent words," "shifts in narrative," and "emotional resonances, inconsistencies in styles, the use of first, second or third person voice, turn taking etc [all end up to] obfuscate the cultural content of moral belief" (p. 192). He goes on criticizing the "reiteration compulsion" of discursive psychologists like Edwards (1999), and also Gee (1999), when he states that "most work in discourse analysis, for example, focuses on linguistic (semiotic) properties of statements and ignores cultural concepts and activities that are embodied in the statement's content" (Ratner, 2002, p. 128). He alleges that most discursive psychologists do not add anything to the mere words pronounced by research participants, consequently their studies well illustrate an individualistic approach, instead of an actual cultural approach to complex psychological phenomena. To further emphasize this aspect, Ratner quotes Sobel's appraisal of society's excessive individualism when he states that:

... at the outset of the 18<sup>th</sup> century most people seemed to regard themselves as having porous boundaries and as part of wider or 'we-self.' [ ... ] By the close of this period, the ideal white male was individuated, self-concerned, and determined to succeed in a rapacious market economy."  
(2000, p. 4, in Ratner, 2002)

In a few words, Ratner is a very convincing advocate for a cultural approach for the study of morality. The major problem with Ratner, as I see it, is that based on such extreme denial of individualism he also denies individuality as well as the stance of self and personal agency, showing an explicit contempt toward individuals.

Even targeted by Ratner, Tappan (1992, 1997, 1998) can be pointed out as an author who

represents, under the umbrella of cultural psychology, a narrative approach to the study of moral development. In his investigations, he stresses the significance of language for meaning-creation and attribution processes that pave the ground for moral judgment and action. No wonder he also presents and actually finds a broad range of variability and diversity while studying persons belonging to different cultures, particularly members of different social classes.

According to Ratner (2002), many qualitative researches are too abstract and do not objectively (concretely) refer to specific values or beliefs, namely, they just count frequencies of certain words, therefore the results are too general to add any innovation to scientific knowledge about psychological phenomena. In defense for a cultural approach that makes qualitative studies of psychological phenomena meaningful, Ratner (2002) states:

A cultural psychological analysis transcends the subject's knowledge. The subject is aware of details of her psychological functions: however, she is not aware of how these details reflect cultural activities and concepts. [ . . . ] We may say that a cultural psychological analysis goes beyond describing manifest psychological themes that individuals are aware of and delves into latent cultural themes that pervade individuals' psychological phenomena but remains outside the individuals' awareness. (pp. 178–179)

Therefore, the task of cultural psychology is “to remain faithful to what the subjects say, yet transcend the literal words to apprehend the cultural meanings embedded in the words [ . . . ]” (Ratner, 2002, p. 179). Shweder, very likely, would not disagree, since that is also his approach to moral investigations. However, Ratner's good ideas do not necessarily imply that he utilizes a flawless research design. The project he proposes to investigate children's moral beliefs (Ratner, 2002) presents many methodological problems because of excessively inductive instruments for obtaining children's narratives, for example.

### ***Social Practices and Meaning Constructions***

Another theorist who provides an insightful contribution to the topic, although she does not use the concept of morality, is Barbara Rogoff (2003). She analyzes phenomena related to the diversity of social norms, practices and beliefs in different

cultures, and her definition of human development emphasizes progressive degrees of individuals' participation in cultural practices. She draws on results of many anthropological studies and she herself develops interesting investigations on socialization, among other issues. Rogoff presents and thoroughly discusses the concept of social participation (Rogoff, 1990, 2003) to explain human development in specific cultural contexts. In her examples, she informs how some cultures, for instance, morally value discreetness and humbleness while others value bragging and arrogance; also, how some treasure autonomy while others stress interdependence. In a similar vein with the work of Margaret Mead (1937), Rogoff draws attention to huge contrasts existing between cultures that morally value sharing and cooperation, in opposition to others that proudly promote individualism and competition. In short, she provides substantial evidence for culturalism and contextualism regarding the construction of dependence versus autonomy, individualism and collectivism, and many other apparently antagonist practices and values, some of them qualifying to participate of the domains of morality and ethics.

Paolichi's (2007) socio-cultural viewpoint calls our attention to the other side of the dialogical relation between culture and individual. He underlines the *agenciality* of the self (i.e., human beings need to be seen as reflexive agents). He stresses the action of intentional selves in intentional worlds. Narratives should, then, be analyzed to find meaningful, plausible, and convincing evidences (as Bruner suggests, 1997) for moral motivation. Paolichi (2007) concludes for the inexistence of hierarchically fixed system of principles, and argues for the possibilities of different interpretive frameworks. He elaborates on affect and motivation but he neither expands his analysis on these topics, nor highlights the role of power relations and the existence of different values systems within a same society (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

### **Moral Development from a Cultural Constructivist Perspective**

From a cultural constructivist framework, the foundation stone for the ontogenesis of moral values, practices, and actions consists of a true amalgam of culture, motivation, and affect. This means that the actual ground for the development of ethics and morality lies in the historically contextualized blend of culture, affect, cognition, and motivation, which gives rise to a permanent and *mutual co-construction*

*of values and human actions within social practices.* This perspective does not privilege either the domain of semiotics—or meaning-construction processes, or the domain of social activities and practices. It conceives culture as the result of a historical mutual constitution between human social practices and values, and also overcomes the dichotomy between culture and individual. Social practices canalize values that promote social practices and so on and on. Culture canalizes individuals' trajectories; and active, constructive individuals promote cultural changes. This happens even though not according to a deterministic approach, for indeterminacy also plays a fundamental role in the development of open systems, hence, personal and social developments (Lyra, Fogel, & Valsiner, 1997).

Because of the centrality of meaning co-constructive processes, and the conceptualization of hierarchically organized—though dynamic—networks of meanings, the study of everyday communication and metacommunication processes is necessary to make sense of how ethics and morality evolve in determined contexts. Values, beliefs, and goals consist of the core of human motivational system, which develop according to experiences along microgenesis and ontogenesis. Values are conceptualized as those particularly affect-laden beliefs (Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas, 1997), which offer more resistance to change because of their major function in providing a sense of continuity to human self-development (Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco, Branco, & Madureira, 2008; Branco & Valsiner, in press). However difficult, though, even values can eventually change, since the whole system is open and therefore deeply meaningful experiences may radically transform developmental trajectories (Soares da Silva, 2003).

Scientific knowledge construction has mostly relied on *episteme* (related to Plato's notion of truth), but a growing number of theorists claim that *phronesis* (related to Aristotle's ideas on wisdom) should occupy an equal status concerning knowledge construction. Human experience transcends and goes beyond cognitive theories. For too long, developmental psychology constrained itself, as mentioned before, to the study of language and cognition. When contemporary studies show how affect and motivation are central for meaning-construction processes then a new venue is open for actual consideration of all of human dimensions as parts of a wholesome development (Branco, 2009). Paolichi (2007) argues for the centrality of an interpretation

framework populated with semiotic processes to understand morality, and alerts about the existence of conflicting, ambiguous messages and values that call for a detailed and profound analysis.

According to Barth (1993), contemporary authors have little to offer about values, in contrast with those of the 1950s and 1960s, and this is why we need to bring a constructive and dynamic conceptualization of values to the forefront of theoretical psychology (Branco, 2006; Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas, 1997). The inference of values and their role in moral development, though, can only occur after complex analysis and interpretations of observable actions, cues, and strategies mostly found in communication and metacommunication phenomena (Branco, Pessina, Flores, & Salomão, 2004; Fatigante, Fasulo, & Pontecorvo, 2004; Fogel & Branco, 1997; Lavelli, Pantoja, Hsu, Messinger, & Fogel, 2005).

Last but not least, it is worthwhile to discuss the issue of moral intentionality as a “must-be” characteristic of moral action. The stress put on moral intentionality may be fallacious, and it derives from the excessive emphasis on morality as cognition. No doubt intentionality is a fundamental ingredient for moral action; however, such intentionality does not need to be explained in terms of morality. The point here is that many people can behave in “moral” ways without being capable of presenting a nice discourse on the “moral” quality of their own behavior. As moral values and actions are differently internalized by different people, such awareness is definitely not necessary to qualify the person's action as moral. To keep this in mind helps us to free morality for good from cognitive and linguistic abilities found in discourses about sophisticated reasons for one's own actions. In short, less-educated people can indeed be exceptionally moral.

### ***Virtues as Values***

In relation to moral values, there is a topic rarely mentioned by psychology but very promising to be investigated: virtues as values, namely, the arataic dimension of moral development (Camps, 2005; Galán, Águila, Blanco, Camps, et al., 2005; Lourenço, 1998).

Virtue is a psychological category that refers to the notion of excellence in respect to moral standards (Rosa, 2007). According to Camps (2005), it is not right to affirm that in order to bring virtue to the forefront we need to go back to small communities where a belonging feeling is easier to develop,

and where easier identification among individuals makes possible their mutual recognition. The author criticizes the myths related to the notion of virtue, and proclaims that it is not necessary that people share a same language, religion, nor ethnic background to be able to understand that solidarity, mutual respect, tolerance, and responsibility are virtues that all individuals, no matter their social position, must strive to accomplish and develop. She goes on, saying that:

... the ethics of principles or pure duty is not enough, [...] the procedural ethics is insufficient: it is necessary to complement it with an ethics of virtues. Otherwise, we forget or ignore that democracy literally means 'people's government,' *demos*' government. The construction of *demos* must be one of the objectives of the ethics of our time. (Camps, 2005, p. 28)

Camps wonders what sort of virtues our democratic societies actually need, and concludes that human dignity, independently of time or place, will always require individuals and society to pay allegiance to virtues (or values) related to universal duties and rights. Without acknowledging the existence of basic human duties and rights, directly linked to corresponding virtues, no freedom, justice, mutual tolerance, and diversity acceptance will prevail over oppression, prejudice, and injustice. Moreover, as citizens, we shall actively engage in the promotion of such virtues or values with the aim of constructing democracy.

Vargas-Machuca (2005) asserts that the virtue of solidarity must be the imperative for democratic justice. He claims that:

... moral solidarity is not conditioned to mutual identification, nor to a sense of belonging, nor even to reciprocity, for its foundation resides in the recognition, respect and consideration due to other people, and this constitutes the primordial moral argument, which demands the person to imagine him/herself in a similar situation as that of other people. (p. 319)

The author highlights the role of motivation, therefore goals, beliefs and values, when he further elaborates:

In fact, in order to grant the blooming of virtues within political domains, motivation and powerful incentives for individuals' actions are necessary,

and both need to be congruent with the reasons that determine the precious quality of community's norms, which will allow for the achievement of a level of excellence in the community's practices.

(Vargas-Machuca, 2005, p. 322)

Consequently, solidary motivation and action are fundamental to provide for moral development at all levels, from institutional to personal interactions. As Vargas-Machuca (2005) well puts it, "... as a general hypothesis, I sustain that structures of solidarity and solidary motivation/attitudes are engaged in feedforward processes: the first stimulates the appearance of the second, and the second [improves] the quality of the first" (p. 328).

### ***Research Perspectives: The Mutual Constitution of Moral Discourse and Moral Practices***

Many are the possibilities to investigate moral development from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective. The work of most cultural psychologists (some already mentioned in the previous section) do correspond to a theoretical-methodological approach in tune with the premises presented here. Our research team has also investigated the issue using adapted ethnographic approaches, interviews, as well as microgenetic analysis of both naturalistic observations and filmed interactions during structured sessions (e.g., Barrios & Branco, 2010; Freitas, 1999; Martins, 2000; Palmieri, 2003). As a brief illustration, Barrios and Branco (2009) made use of all of the above mentioned methods. Our aim was to investigate, within the context of an early child educational institution, the kind of everyday activities and the dynamics of teacher-students interactions in relation to a possible incentive—or inhibition—of moral development among children. After direct observations of some groups, and two filmed sessions of an activity selected by the teacher herself to "promote" moral development, we proceeded to interview the teachers, the coordinator, and the principal in order to investigate how they conceptualized moral development and its promotion among children.

The groups of children studied included kids between 5 and 6 years old. Results showed a general absence of conceptual knowledge about moral development, which was defined by all interviewees as behavioral control, discipline, and obedience; social skills and good manners were also occasionally mentioned (Barrios, 2009). The activity selected

by the teacher to encourage moral development was particularly expressive concerning such conceptualizations. First, she selected a book meant to be used with 3- to 4-year-old children. Second, the content of the book consisted of a few assertions, illustrated with pictures, about what a young child could or could not do, especially concerning its abilities and difficulties (“I can draw,” “I can play with my friends,” etc. versus “I cannot take medicines by myself,” “I cannot hurt the cat,” etc.). During the activity, the teacher read the sentences and showed the pictures to the kids, asked nonsense questions—like “What does ‘to draw’ mean?”—to one child at the time, and did not allow them to talk whatsoever. Next, she asked them to draw and do some mimics about the “story.” In sum, no talking, no discussion, only obedience was required. The microgenetic analysis of everyday social interactions plus the interactions that happened during the session clearly revealed a pattern where discipline, inhibition and elimination of child-child interactions prevailed.

Data found in other studies with similar goals carried out by our team within school contexts have consistently shown teachers’ ignorance concerning not only moral development, but related concepts such as cooperation and prosocial behavior (e.g., Branco, 1989, 2003, 2009; Palmieri & Branco, 2008; Oliveira, 1999; Salomão, 2001). The conclusions we draw from such results are quite worrisome and suggest that little—if any—attention is paid to the social objectives of school education. Even worse, with the exception of Kohlberg’s traditional projects, most schools allow hidden curricula to take care of the development of ethics and morality, often stating explicitly that such issues are solely a matter of families’ responsibility (Branco, 2009).

### ***Practical Perspectives: The Promotion of Ethics and Moral Development***

The socio-cultural constructive theoretical approach—constantly elaborated within a systemic framework—opens a vast field of practical perspectives concerning the promotion of ethics and moral development. From genetics, we learn about the existence of predispositions for both aggression and competition, on one hand, and for prosocial behaviors and cooperation, on the other. The obvious conclusion is that *culture therefore makes the difference*, and the encouragement of ethics and morality does not go against any innate predisposition for sheer selfishness. In addition, studies about empathy show that its emergence is indeed innate, and its

development can be highly influenced by the quality of relationships and educative techniques employed by caregivers—i.e., empathy development depends on cultural values, rules and practices. Another important branch of biological sciences, ecology, today poses a dramatic challenge to human societies, meaning the need to share a planetary environment characterized by an interconnected world. So biology as well joins human and social sciences in demanding for a world with basic ethical and moral negotiated principles, to allow for the successful survival of diverse cultures and societies.

The major challenge for psychologists, in particular, comprises knowledge construction about how internalization of values occurs. Realizing that certain cultural practices canalize certain values is not enough, so the key for moral development will demand investigative actions at all levels of individual and social lives. Besides the necessary construction of a more just society, characterized by ever-improving economic and political institutions, everyday life interactions need to be impregnated with a sense of justice, care, and empathy that transpires in most human interactions. Microsystems such as family, school, and other relevant community sites have to be continuously co-constructed in order to entail positive social interactions among participating individuals.

Imitation and affectivity, together with inductive techniques, which facilitate the development of empathy, and the utilization of consistent rules constructed on the grounds of genuine dialogues even when people hold divergent positions, have shown to be substantially effective (Damon & Lerner, 2006; Fleer, Hedegaard & Tudge, 2009; Valsiner & Connolly, 2003;). Cultural psychology, though, will particularly remind us to provide for the actual engagement of individuals in cooperative social practices, where moral values are concretely translated into autonomous, respectful, and caring interactions among participants. The power of cultural canalization, then, cannot ever be overestimated (Branco, 2009; Rogoff, 2003; Valsiner, 1989, 2007).

### **Conclusions and Future Directions**

*The question of morality [then] would not be the problem of one person, one party or one society, and nor would it be an exclusive matter of philosophy or a particular science. The question of morality concerns all of us, everyone. It is the central issue of social life, and cannot be dissociated from a democratic, just and*

*rational project for humanity along its historical time,  
both at present as well as in future times.*

(Freitag, 1997)

Psychology needs to approach social sciences in general, particularly anthropology, sociology, history, and political sciences as already suggested. Here I claim for the need that science further dare to examine and carry out the difficult task of unraveling the complexities of human experience. Of similar importance is to highlight the need for the encouragement of reflexivity, autonomy, and responsibility at the levels of social institutions and individuals. I also stress the relevance of the topic of moral development in contemporary globalized world, for moral neutrality simply does not exist. What may exist is an attempt to divert our attention from the topic or to comply, intentionally or not, with the prevalent unawareness regarding the issue.

Along phylogeny and historical time, human groups have found different ways to live together, intermingling competition, cooperation, and individualism in many distinct versions. Periods of war and peace characterized our history ever since. Political and religious leaders as well as intellectual personalities contributed in multiple ways to guide people and civilizations along history. Although many paved the road for the construction of prosocial values and practices, some stood out claiming for intolerance, inequality, and prejudice (e.g., Hitler), and many created a kind of moral void—among them Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx—as they overemphasized the supremacy of either individuals or collectivities. This sort of trap—radical individualism or collectivism—we can no longer endorse. As Lash (1987) puts it, we cannot give our support to societies that actively encourage extreme individualism, narcissism, and the nurturance of a minimal self. Competition and individualism, which facilitate aggressivity, are counter-productive for teamwork, and teamwork requires cooperative efforts that have proved much more effective than tough rivalry among individuals. Competition and individualism, or the annihilation of individuality, all create a lot of ambiguity and personal frustration, for even within the context of global capitalism, collaborative efforts are exceptionally needed at most levels, including socio-affective support and friendly actions. As a result of this lack of moral reflexivity and action, most people complain today about the excesses of violence, hostility, social indifference, very low levels of empathy, as well as

the absence of respect, justice, and solidarity. In other words, today's world is plagued by competition and individualism that leave little to no room for moral and prosocial actions among people. Therefore, we have to face the necessity to investigate the complex development of subjective and collective goals, values, actions, and interactions to actively construct a better future for mankind, rooted in mutual respect, diversity acceptance, and the commitment to promote equality, freedom and solidarity in everyday life.

Globalization certainly turned all societies, nations, and cultures, no matter their specificities, into members of a planetary interdependent network. Like a huge visible and invisible system, technology, economy, and cultural practices lead people from all over the world to surrender to the power of the irresistible hegemony created by the media, the Internet, and capitalism. As globalization culturally canalizes whole generations of people everywhere, human beings need to confront a historical turning point, namely, how to collaboratively develop shared ethics and moral guidelines to make social relations viable, from everyday interactions to international negotiations. Thus, there is an unavoidable need to engage in meaningful interpersonal and international dialogues. As ethics and moral issues are a fundamental aspect of our coexistence, the topic will necessarily become a must-investigate-discuss-and-negotiate agenda, which will permanently develop—hopefully—into promising peaceful and productive social relations at all possible levels.

Within the realms of psychology, a lot can be done in order to contribute to the achievement of an increasingly peaceful and better world. Developmental contexts such as family, school, entertaining, and leisure sites should be carefully studied to unveil the actual everyday processes that continuously create and promote practices and values too often incompatible with ethics and morality. Awareness of activities' structures and communication and metacommunication mechanisms and strategies—which create subtle beliefs related to prejudice and injustice—will certainly consist of a first step. The role of the media, the internet, videogames—i.e., the industry of cultural standards and individualistic values demands serious investigation. Scientific psychological knowledge will then help parents, teachers, and policy makers to find more efficient ways to foster moral development. New institutional proposals, the implementation of novel practices, and eventual interventions

will also be necessary to encourage moral development according to the principles of democracy and freedom with responsibility. Kohlberg's welcome contributions concerning dialogue and group communication should be extended, and new perspectives for educational and cultural change can emerge and be put into practice.

Evidently, scientific transdisciplinary investigation will be needed, as well as permanent discussions about alternative approaches to make sense of, and to promote ethics, morality, and moral development within society. Consequently psychology, together with other social sciences, will face the challenge to develop theoretical perspectives that take into account the systemic, complex, and dynamic nature of the topic. These efforts will help explain the mutual constitution of cultural practices (activities) and cultural meanings (semiotic domain), as well as the development of moral individuals (subjectivities) and societies (collectivities). This challenge, though, has to be taken not just by psychological and social sciences, but also by all diverse fields of knowledge and human activities so we can jointly find out and encourage developmental changes toward justice and happiness.

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# The Intergenerational Continuity of Values

A. Bame Nsamenang

## Abstract

Intergenerational values generate from cultural scripts and family exchange systems, which induce family solidarity that sustains intergenerational transmission and continuity of values. Intergenerational values vary by culture, family form, and individuation into individualistic or interdependent norms, among other values. Across history, family values have changed and are changing in response to micro-familial and macro-societal factors, technological transformations, and globalizing forces. In consequence, family profiles are changing, exemplified by an accentuating visibility of multiple generations of grandchildren and grandparents in households in variable degrees across Minority- and Majority-World countries. Regrettably, intergenerational research hitherto has privileged the Euro-American nuclear family form in a world of diverse family forms. Equity and objectivity in science oblige attention to the intergenerativity of family forms in its global diversity. A learning research position could lead to the discovery of the changing intergenerational phenomena of the Majority World's extended families in context to enrich and extend theory and the knowledge base of intergenerativity. This disposition can prime theoretic innovation and methodological creativity to respect the diversity that exists to be discovered. Since intergenerational phenomena traverse several disciplinary boundaries, it seems plausible to adopt a multidisciplinary research framework.

**Keywords:** family forms, multigenerational families, social-exchange norms, family solidarity, intergenerational values transmission, intergenerational continuity of values, intergenerational discontinuity of values, multidisciplinary research approach

Whether human origins are viewed as creationism or evolutionism, the human being cannot be disjoined from nature. Biologists position evolution as the process by which populations of species, including humans, acquire and transmit their traits across generations (Baig, 2002). Evolutionary theory explains the survival and transmission of human genes and other traits by way of natural selection (Wood, 2011; All About Science.org, 2011). Biological evolution entails the changes in the genetic material of a population of species over time. The modern theory of evolution posits that individuals best suited to their environment of adaptability perpetuate the

species by transmitting their genes and traits to their offspring.

This chapter is a discursive triangulation of my work, selective archival research, and my ongoing participant observation since 1993 as an instructor in a yearly hands-on, faith-based course on HIV/AIDS lay-counselor training (Nsamenang & Loomis, 2003) in which trainees have been multigenerational, mixed-sex cohorts. The discourse sidelines the obscure debate over evolution as “fact and theory,” “fact not theory,” and “only a theory, not a fact” (Moran, 1993; Muller, 1959; Religious Tolerance.org., 2011) to refer tacitly to evolution simply as changes in any trait or gene frequency in

a population of organisms from one generation to the next. In this sense, *evolution* (e.g., Smocovitis, 1996) includes: (1) differences in trait composition between isolated populations over many generations that may result in the origin of new species in both biological and social senses, and (2) all living organisms alive today are theorized to have descended from a common ancestor (or ancestral gene pool), therein precluding the idea of creationism.

Ambitiously, the chapter is framed to incite a shift of discourse and research focus on intergenerational transmission of values from privileging Euro-American nuclear family orientations to researching family values in the context of the world's cultures. My primary mission is to point to how different enculturation regimes and social exchange systems shape intergenerational learning and how different family forms endeavor to sustain continuity of attitudes and values through varied cultural tools and processes. I believe different family forms and interdependent versus individualistic exchange norms are responsible, at least in part, for the global diversity of intergenerational values. Although Western cultures privilege adults with child care, African cultures separate child-care skills from the life period of parenthood and situate child-care training as a familial commitment for children to learn (Nsamenang, 2008) as part of their shared management, caregiving, and socially distributed support of the family (Weisner, 1997). Accordingly, African family values socialize children into social exchange norms that commit them to sibling and elder care (Nsamenang, 2010a).

During development, boys and girls build up a "parental identity" (Goodnow, 1988, p. 289) within the cultural contexts in which they are parented; sibling caregiving primes them gradually into the parental role. The "... *process and the experience of childhood does not end with childhood itself. It remains within all of us as a live and informative experience that influences our current and future relationships and activities*" (Neven, 1996, p. 13). In some cultures, children are cared for by their parents or grandparents with the understanding that children will take care of parents and grandparents in their old age. In the Caribbean, child care may not be provided only by the extended family, but may also involve dependable adults in the community (Dudley-Grant, 2001). Understanding the structure and function of different family forms can therefore enrich and extend intergenerativity discourse and research.

Social evolution speaks to "a past that is culturally present as tradition" and that has been "encoded in customs rather than in genes and transmitted socially rather than biologically" (LeVine, 1974, p. 227). Culture, as social heritage and cultural tools, nudges human values in the direction of a given community's cultural meaning systems. As Maquet (1972) asserts, the universal humanity in the human genome shapes into diverse specific individualities in different contexts, hence the variety of intergenerational continuity of values across the globe.

Visualization of human nature and social evolution occur within the meaning systems of the diverse cultural communities worldwide, albeit not with the same lenses and epistemology of scientists. Thus, cultural worldviews or frames of reference to the universe exude mindsets, human motives, and intergenerational values as well as mediate their transmission channels. Soyinka (1990, p. 37) posited "an ethnocultural reality, a humane quality which uniquely informs human artifacts, music, poetry, and philosophy", and obviously family solidarity and support networks, as a "crucial factor of human existence." Intergenerational continuity of values connotes evolution in the sense of both biological and social transmission across generations. This fact highlights the evolutionary basis of grandparents to family security (Silverstein, 2009). Worldwide, parents and grandparents seek to pass on their values and the exchange norms of their families to their next generations, hoping to ensure not merely the survival of their offspring, but that of their culture as well (Reagan, 1996). In fact, long-lived and supportive grandparents who served as surrogate parents (in cases of parental death, environmental threats, or parental absence resulting from migration, imprisonment, or other causes) enhanced the survival chances of their grandchildren (e.g., Dudley-Grant, 2001).

The impetus for this essay is the fact that the continuity of intergenerational interconnectedness in family systems is increasingly being threatened and shattered by a flux of unrestrained social schisms and innovations in information and communication technologies. Of course, there are obvious policy implications for intergenerativity research to understand how to sustain cultural identity as enshrined in the United Nations' (UN) *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (1989).

Indeed, intergenerational research ought to figure out how to promote cultural identity and

simultaneously equip the next generations, particularly in Africa, with the right techno-cognitive values and contextually suitable skills to cope with and make progress in a competitive, knowledge-driven global community. This is important in the face of the aversive attitudes to immigrants reported around the globe. So, how would research contribute to “cultivating” mindsets and value systems inclusive of and tolerant of the growing presence of immigrants and refugees in both Minority and Majority World countries? If ethnocultural reality is a universal but varying feature of cultures, then, we must problematize scientific narratives and programmatic research that have regarded or interpreted the expression or assertion of some ethnocultural realities as positive and useful but considered others as negative and detrimental from instinctual inclinations and not from research evidence.

The intergenerational stake hypothesis (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971) holds that children and parents diverge on family solidarity measures because they manifest different expectations and understandings of filial relationship status. Intergenerational differences in value perceptions result from changes in the timing of life-course events for parents and children (Hareven, 1994). Instead of timing events in concert with the family’s collective needs and solidarity, children display a more individualized timing wedged on peer norms, for example. Although parents are concerned with the continuity and intergenerational transmission of values they have found useful and important in life, children focus mainly on the differences in the two generations’ value systems in an attempt to establish independence from their parents. When children notice confusions and ambiguities in their interactions with adults, they endeavor to transform them into familiar routines of their peer culture (Carsaro, 1990). But children are not mere accommodators of adult norms and values; they are also creative social producers of their own worlds (Nsamenang & Lamb, 1995).

The next section presents forms of family around the globe but without a judgmental eye.

### **Family Forms around the World**

A variety of family forms rather than a universal, single family form is found around the world. In a nutshell, the principal family structures and household patterns are nuclear, extended, and blended, albeit with several other variants. The *nuclear household* contains two generations, parents and children. *Extended families* are multigenerational and

include a wide circle of kin and servants. In Senegal and much of Africa, the concept of family is fluid (Vandewiele, 1981); it sometimes includes a polygamous man and his wives and children, spousal kin, and friends. In *blended families*—the result of divorce or the death of a spouse followed by remarriage and a new generation of children—mothers and fathers can be both biological parents and step-parents simultaneously, along with stepsiblings.

*Communal families* also exist in many parts of the world. These families are usually extended families living in one household, including father, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, elders or grandparents. Sometimes such societies are *matriarchal*, with everyone living under roof being related through a grandmother, mother, or aunt; some societies are *patriarchal*, with everyone being related through a grandfather, father, or uncle. Everyone within this community has his or her own share of responsibilities and often every home within the community helps with child care, elder care, and the destitute.

The growing number of immigrant families in different countries and their acculturative values increases and complicates family values. It is critical to remark that throughout the world, family patterns vary greatly between urban and rural settings and reflect such differences as ethnicity, class structure, and religion, among others. Differences in family forms and demographic behaviors are more striking for migrants to Europe and North America from developing countries. The immigrants bring into their recipient communities the demographic profiles and more traditional exchange values of their natal cultures and agrarian economies. However, intergenerational values research continues to be draped in conventional theories and methods of the dominant culture, therein losing sight of the rich diversity of intergenerational values that coexist. In this sense, North American counseling perspectives tend to gloss over the intergenerational values of most African refugee and immigrant families.

Across times, family structure took a variety of forms throughout the world and increasingly adjusted to continuously changing family circumstances. Such diverse data sources as history, ethnography, sociology, demography, and law, among others, reveal the human family as an institution and not a biological fact founded on the natural bond of consanguinity. That is, intergenerational exchange values need not be family-based or biological.

Early scholars of family history applied Darwin's biological theory of evolution in their theory of family systems, therein reinforcing the idea of social and cultural evolution. This theory was quite popular until it was challenged in the 1980s by sociological theories, most notably structural functionalism. Research was framed by and reported mainly within the kinship terminologies of the Western family. The family types of pre-industrial Europe belonged into two basic groups, the *simple household system*, i.e., the nuclear family, and the *joint family household*, i.e., the extended family (Kertzer & Barbagli, 2002). In the joint family household system, early marriages allowed for multigenerational families to form. The organization of the pre-industrial family is now believed to be similar to modern types of family (Geller, 1994). Many sociologists used to believe that the nuclear family was the product of industrialization, but Colón and Colón (2001) cite evidence proposed by Peter Laslett suggesting that the causality is reversed, and that industrialization was so effective in Northwestern Europe specifically because the preexistence of the nuclear family fostered its development. The extended kinship is very strong in non-Western cultures and any event in the individual's life is, in principle, a group concern. Family relations and dynamics were characterized by patriarchal relations and gendered roles, early marriage, low divorce rate, and low age at first birth (Cliquet, 2003). In Nigeria, for instance, the eldest male is the patriarch and is the head of not just the immediate, but the entire extended family. In that role, he is the adjudicator of family disputes—from the personal to those about division of the family's wealth. He's also the spiritual leader of the family (Nossier, 2003). There was also childbearing into higher ages, as well as high fertility and larger household size.

### **Cultural Blinders: The Oedipal Model of Family**

Although some families stress the importance and authority of the father (patriarchy), others give primacy to that of the mother (matriarchy). Other families are *endogamous* in character, which permits marriage within a specific group or they may have an extreme *exogamous* emphasis, which taboos marriage within closely related kin. Most Western societies employ kinship terminology based on conjugal or nuclear families, which they regard as having a degree of relative mobility. They seem to hold the idea that there is only one type of family, a

consanguineous triangle of husband-wife-children, relatively isolated from other social connections. This has been called the *oedipal model of the family*, and it is a form of patriarchal family.

Such systems generally assume that the mother's husband also serves as the biological father but in many societies around the world, *social fathers* take care of children without regard to whose paternity is involved. For example, "African grandfathers, uncles, stepfathers, foster-fathers, older brothers, cousins, family friends, and other men who take responsibility to care for non-biological children do play and have played" the paternal role (Nsamenang, 2010b, p. 388). Emphasis on the nuclear family has lured some researchers and interveners into thinking about and working on the nuclear family as the "right" kind of family. This belief is an incredibly misinformed one as across the globe at any point in human social history there have been all sorts of views on what families are and how they are composed.

In some families, a woman may have children with more than one man or a man may have children with more than one woman. For collateral relatives, more classificatory terms come into play, terms that do not reflect nor build on the terms used within the nuclear family. The nuclear family, at least in the research literature, appears to be the most researched family form and the one form that international advocacy and the donor community, including UN agencies, promote as best-suited for family welfare policies and child-rights programs. This policy positioning is deeply regrettable, as it pays attention mainly to a minority of family realities and the English-language literature, largely bypassing other family forms and literature in non-English languages. This bias may be attributed to the capturing impact of Western-Christian civilizing crusades and the Euro-American hegemonic control of the world. In large measure the paragraphs that follow draw content from the website: Theophanes(2010).AroundtheWorldinSearchofDifferentFormsof"Family". Retrieved on October 9, 2010.

### **Other Family Forms**

*Polyamory* translates quite literally as "multiple loves" (Weitzman, 1999). It is the practice that consenting adults decide to create marriage-like bonds with more than one individual at a time (Barker, 2005). It is distinct from polygamy and polyandry in the fact that it is usually composed of multiple persons of either sex and if it ends up in a harem-type

system this is generally coincidental, not intentional. Everyone within the group does not necessarily have to share sexual bonds but in these networks emotional bonds are always of overriding importance. Pockets of polyamorous groupings around the world are not open about their choice because of the strong prejudice cultures have regarding it (see Allan & Harrison, 2002). *Polyandry* is probably the rarest form of family ever practiced by humanity at any point in history. It is speculated that with the combined statistics of modern and ancient cultures, polyandry only makes up less than 2% of the world population (Levine, 1988). It is a practice in which one wife will marry several husbands who are usually brothers. This is matriarchal society at its extreme. The wife will bear children and the husbands will share duties within and outside the home. This practice is sometimes used when one husband is rarely home (e.g., a sailor, hunter, migrant worker, merchant, etc.) so another may stay to care for the wife and children. It can be used as a form of population control, as one woman can only have so many children in her lifetime but men can potentially sire dozens, if not more.

*Polygyny* or polygamy is a relationship in which one husband has at least two wives. Unlike polyandry the wives are usually unrelated (Ridley, 1995). Polygyny is practiced in some Middle Eastern regions as well as in various places in Africa and Latin America, but it is not a universal practice. *Sororal polygyny* is a type of marriage in which two or more sisters share a husband, but this is specifically prohibited in Islam (see al-Lahaydan, 2011). Polygyny is illegal in the United States and Canada, but it is an aspect of fundamental Mormonism that is practiced in parts of the United States. The principle most often associated with Mormon fundamentalism is plural marriage, a form of polygyny (Bradley, 2002). In Christian Filipinas the family is *monogamous but* multiple wives are allowed in Muslim Filipino families (Herrington, 2010). Nsamenang (1992) recorded polygyny among the Nso Muslim of Cameroon as 17.5% but it is not universal among Nso Muslim. In the Kisumu, Siaya, and South Nyanza districts of Kenya, women in polygynous unions represented 38%, 47%, and 41%, respectively (Kenya, 1986).

### **Intergenerational Values Transmission: What Do We Know?**

Literature on intergenerational values transmission is vast but lopsided in geographical reference

in favor of Western societies. Programmatic research in non-Western societies such as Africa is noticeable by its scarcity and what little research has been done has largely been in comparison with European and American datasets. As such, it has been reported within the conceptual and family systems of Eurocentric epistemes and normative systems. Compared to Western societies, non-Western communities have been little-researched in their own terms; hence we know little about the contextual situativity of their intergenerational solidarity and values transmission, except for few studies captured in socio-cultural surveys (e.g., Colón & Colón, 2001). Scientific discourse and research reports tend to place fateful values on the so-called “researched” societies, implying non-Caucasian peoples, with concepts whose meanings are variable and inconsistent in the literature. For example, the African-Caribbean family has been presented as exhibiting unique mating and childrearing patterns and the emotional availability and social ties of their men to children are unclear (Sharpe 1996). With this state of the field, it seems plausible, in this section, to present only a synopsis and broad overview of the sparse intergenerativity literature available to the author and to devote more space to examining what the pluralism of intergenerational values that exist in the world’s varied family forms portend. It also endeavors to prompt inclusive discourse about and research into intergenerational solidarity and conflict of values in their global diversity. The desire is to extend the field by priming innovative research methodologies into hitherto unexplored intergenerational phenomena with the objective of rousing the discovery of the intergenerational transmission-of-values stories that exist in all cultures.

Intergenerational continuity of solidarity values, as documented in a number of studies, suggests that the family plays a key role in the socialization and transmission of values. The family has a universal and basic role (Hareven, 1991). For the majority of people the most influential aspect of the immediate social context is the family, which is increasingly becoming a multigenerational unit across the world. Indian-Caribbean families, like those in Africa, tend to share their limited resources and have mutual obligations to each other. It is not unusual to see several generations of African and Caribbean family members living in the same house or in houses built close to each other, even after marriage (Seegobin, 1999). African “kinship is the nucleus from which social networks ramify, moral behavior

is initiated and prosocial values, productive skills and the mother tongue are learned" (Nsamenang et al., 2008, pp. 55–56).

The notion of continuity is central to intergenerational values transmission research. How family members perceive continuity is directly related to their particular cultural ethos and family exchange norms. Family members interact in two ways, outward and inward. The outward interaction reflects how members respond and openly interact with one another. The inner interaction has more to do with each member's perception of or inner feelings about interacting. Perceptions can carry more influence than the reality of the act or interaction. Both sides of family interaction affect the dynamics of the family and the self-image of individual members. The two sides to family interaction make family dynamics and values transmission much more complex and account for family members harboring different feelings, perceptions, and action tendencies related to the same event. Furthermore, family forms provide the primary setting through which culture is defined and interpreted (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1987). As a conduit of culture, the family represents continuity. The family is key to most phenomena that represent cultural continuity, such as family solidarity, social organization, religion, and ritual; it is the repository of specific cultural beliefs and practices and a primary site for cultural meaning for grandchildren and grandparents (Hareven, 1978). In fact, the notion of continuity of solidarity should be central to gerontological theories of aging and elder care. Throughout much of gerontology's history, theories of continuity have been grounded in a model of life-course development that emphasizes "normative" behavior in individuals rather than in the family unit. Jingxiong (2009) recently studied the single-child policy in three-generation families in urban China and pleaded for genuine knowledge on factors that influence children's lifestyles in multigenerational families. Family dislocations regardless of cause exert dire consequences on intergenerativity.

Continuity theory (Atchley, 1989) has largely focused on the individual rather than the family and has been informed by a normative perspective. Increasingly, families in many parts of the world share a household with both their parents and grandparents, especially in three-generation families. There has been a shift away from constructs that model normativity to concepts that problematize phenomena and examine them in their fragmented and

contingent nature (Becker, 1997). This explains why some views of continuity have deconstructed the notion of continuity; in doing so, they have emphasized disruption (Becker, 1993, 1997) and life reorganization (Becker & Kaufman, 1995). The family is shaped by continuities and discontinuities in cultural history, and by disruptions to the ongoing fabric of everyday life, such as those caused by slavery, colonialism, war, civil unrest, chronic poverty, and migration (Becker, 1997; Becker & Beyene, 1999; Elder, Rudkin, & Conger, 1995). These and other events have directly threatened family cohesion and generational continuity in the present and future.

The "United States is far from unique in representing a confluence of voluntary immigrants, involuntary immigrants, and conquered indigenous peoples" (Greenfield, 1994, p. x). In Africa (e.g., Nsamenang, 2002), the continuities and discontinuities in family structures and functions partly reflect the extent to which multigenerational family members are coping with the coexistence of traditionalism, the "modernism" of Islamic-Arabic heritage, Western-Christian colonialism, and globalizing acculturation in the face of Africanity (indigenous African realities). The contemporary African family is thus best seen "as an intergenerational, multilocal, psychosocial community linked to local, national and global economies and polities" (Bradley & Weisner, 1997, p. xxvi). For most communities and families these forces are useful but at several points they crash, causing a deepening loss of personal and collective identity and an intensifying sense of alienation.

Early intergenerational values transmission research on acculturation reported significant intergenerational differences in three generations of Japanese Canadians in their retention of traditional values of familism (Maykovich, 1980). Maykovich's conclusions supported the theoretical proposition that acculturation is a multiphase process, whether it is measured by the retention of traditional familism or the adoption of "New World" (i.e., American) values (Akiyama, Antonucci, & Campbell, 1997). Similarly, Sugiman and Nishio's (1983) study of socialization and cultural duality among aging Japanese Canadians concluded that, in contrast to the traditional age-related norms of the first generation, middle-aged second-generation parents demonstrated a decreased dependence on their children for support in later life. Ujimoto (1987) attributed this change in support expectations to generational differences in the retention

of traditional first-generation values. Among the Nso of Cameroon, Nsamenang and Lamb (1995) reported substantial similarity in generations of parents living in quite diverse circumstances as well as significant variation of parenting values by sex, parental generation, rural-urban residence, religion, and level of education. This study, along with Africa's historical traumas and social schisms, inform us that African family adaptation, like those of African Americans, has been an ongoing struggle to create a meaningful, sustainable, and coherent pattern of everyday life. Regrettably, African and African American generational transmission patterns have been studied primarily in comparison to norms derived from data obtained from urban Caucasian families (Cantor, 1979; Shimkin, Shimkin, & Frate, 1978).

Intergenerational transmission research has focused largely on family generations but with little evidence of attention on such value spaces as the so-called demographic transitions and the transmission of values, skills, and proficiencies in family formation, the workplace, and peer generation, particularly in cultures in which age grading is normative. This author (Nsamenang, 1992) has explained the bonds and deference in African peer groups and the caring responsibilities of older siblings as a product of family socialization and parental education with emphasis on the notions of locus of authority, seniority, and filial service; core elements of African social solidarity systems. In this regard, we can extend continuity theory by exploring disruptions (Becker, 1993, 1997) in the life courses of peer generations in societies where age grading is common. Exploring the ways in which people seek to ameliorate disruptions to cohesion and solidarity in their families and life journeys, striving to regain a sense of continuity and personal integrity have direct relevance for the study of aging. Even when continuity appears to be present in daily life and people take their sense of continuity for granted, they strive to maintain it, especially in old age (Becker, 1997). Older parents may enhance family solidarity and continuity for all generations (Bengtson et al., 1996). As custodians of family history and autobiographical memories, elders have the greatest stakes in their group's roots and repairing historic disruptions, as well as with the maintenance of tradition and the continuity of the generations (Keesing, 1992). As such, elders would be expected to resist social change, combating change through traditional roles and statuses and working overtime to

maintain intergenerational connectivity. Although some research has reported that African American men have fewer supports than African American women and are less integrated into social networks (Barker, Morrow, & Mitteness, 1998), other studies found that although African American men's networks were sometimes less extensive; they were nevertheless complex.

An apparently ignored area of intergenerational research is the impact on autobiographical memory when shifting the elderly into elderly homes. That is, how is an elderly person's intergenerativity affected by placement in an old-people's home? This invokes the sense of *place attachment*. In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, belongingness is about human bonding; most accounts of identity formation discuss self-definition vis-à-vis others, not in vacuums but in physical and social settings with some significant others. Place attachment, then, is as central to adult attachment and identity as it is to intergenerational connectedness and values transmission. Most adults, having consolidated their identity formation that involved systematic differentiation of the self from the nonself, break down these processes and barriers in adult life, particularly in old age, such that places and their social networks become invested with personal memories and connotations. Places and neighborhoods become extensions of the self, so to speak, culminating in *autobiographical insideness* that is held with sensitive reminiscences, as when almost everyone resists hospitalization and some elderly resist abandoning their residences to enter elderly homes. Another neglected area of intergenerational research is the accentuating wave of interethnic and interracial marriages and the multicultural intergenerativity such families engender.

In addition, research on intergenerational transmission is only beginning to study grandparent-grandchild relationships, which may have a greater potential for the transfer of intergeneration-distinct information. The role of grandparents and grandchildren in caregiving in both developed and developing societies has received increased albeit lopsided research attention over the last decades. In part, this trend reflects the aging of societies, the greater availability of grandparents in families across the globe, the emergence of alternative family forms, and differing government policies on Social welfare services (Silverstein, 2009). Family caregiving demographics presuppose that providing care to one's aging parents, even in elderly people's homes, is a normative Euro-Western task and family responsibility. However,



providing care to a grandparent by children, adolescents, and young adults tends to be considered a non-normative life task; even cursory observation would reveal this as a normative task in the Majority World, particularly in Africa. Whereas the reigning Western developmental theories position the care of children as a specialized task of adulthood, African life-span theories separate the learning of childhood skills from the life stage of parenthood (Nsamenang, 2008) and situate sibling caregiving into children's "shared management, caretaking, and socially distributed support" of the family (Weisner, 1997). Thus, different cultural orientations fan out differing generational transmission values and profiles.

The *International Society for Behavioural Development (ISSBD) Bulletin* has reported a set of research on grandparenting from a range of cultural backgrounds and theoretical and methodological traditions (Weichold, 2009). Nishiyama and Yamada (2009) focused on female three-generational relationships over time in Japan and highlighted the issue of mutual support and role reversal between generations. Oburu (2009) explored support and caregiving, sometimes to a burdensome degree, provided by grandparents of sub-Saharan African orphaned children. The "burden" is perhaps being imputed from the interpretative visions of scholars but may not be an experienced reality of Africa's grandparents, given their cultural exchange values. Bullock (2009) departs from the tradition of focusing grandparenting research on grandmothers to understand parenting among grandfathers who raised children along with grandmothers. This approach is necessary in the sense that "to consider the status of either sex without reference to the other is to distort the reality we are trying to understand" (Fortes, 1950, p. 363). Two more papers within the special issue dealt, first, with grandchildren as caregivers who provide support and help to their grandparents (Fruhauf & Orel, 2009), and second, the behaviors of grandparents in three-generation Chinese families that may induce a more negative developmental pathway for grandchildren (Jingxiong, 2009). The special section also includes field reports of sociological research on grandparenting by research teams in Brazil (Kosminsky, 2009), the UK (Smith, 2009), and the Philippines (Antonio, 2009). Taken together, these studies reveal consistency of support and help to generations in the different contexts and family traditions in which the research was done.

### *Changing Dynamics in Intergenerational Values*

Micro- and macro-social, political, and economic factors provide the parameters for understanding changes in family structure and values. The African family, for instance, persists as a unit of production, consumption, reproduction, and accumulation that has been intensely battered by the economic downturns that have transformed the settings in which families make their decisions and socialize children. Worldwide, opportunities have arisen from considerable socio-economic changes that continue to alter the structure of the family away from traditional patterns toward new ones generated by the expansion of education, health care, technologies, employment, and migration. For example, in the Oriental Gulf states, contemporary means of communication have increased the knowledge of young people and given them specific alternatives that put them in touch with peers all over the world, and especially in the West. That contact influences the values, traditions and practices of Gulf youth and complicates socialization by their families (El-Haddad, 2003). Similar forces open new opportunities as well as produce multiple constraints. A telling case is that of African families affected by intrafamilial schisms and engrossed in longstanding fragile economies, chronic poverty, poor governance, and civil conflicts (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003).

African parents are always exasperated about their children's unwed parenthood, which is now alarming in many countries. Traditionally, there usually is little aversion toward such children, even the so-called illegitimate ones. Illegitimacy does not exist in the Western sense in that every child is always the "child" of someone, of an individual or of the family of origin (Nsamenang, 1992). This is because in most African communities, children of unwed mothers belong to their families of origin. In Western societies single-parent families are often seen as nuclear families that for one reason or another have been divided. This can be the case, but is not always. It is true that single parents can result from divorce or widowhood but it is also becoming more common for individuals to purposefully opt to be a single parent, although in some cases hedonistic attitudes and career or economic considerations underpin options for childlessness. With artificial insemination, tolerant attitudes to single parenthood, and the option of adoption, these families are growing in number.

Single-parent homes are not really accepted in African family traditions. They do have some benefits, however, but are not without dire consequences on next generations. A single parent has the sole responsibility and rights to care for the child or children, meaning they will not have to struggle with differences in maternal and paternal values and parenting methods (Richter & Morrell, 2006). However, in Western societies the single-parent family has been growing more accepted and has begun to truly make an impact on political culture and the social welfare system. The majority of single-parent families are more commonly single-mother families than single-father. These families face many difficult issues besides the fact that they have to raise their children on their own, but also have to deal with issues related to low income, “hostile” social welfare systems in some countries, and generational issues if procreative partners are not revealed to the children. Many single parents struggle with low incomes and find it hard to cope with other issues that they face, including connectedness to extended-kin networks, especially if there are societal snares to the single-parent status.

### ***Forces Supporting Intergenerational Continuity of Values***

Continuity is a human need and a universal expectation (Harris, 1989) although in family values, the concept has a culture-specific character (Becker, 1997). One way to interpret the variety of the continuity of values is to shift away from ongoing universalization of Western family forms to design and interpret research on the shape that the different socio-cultural tools and artifacts that mediate family values take in different cultural contexts. A second framework is the cultural structuring of family forms and the organization of life courses within family systems, given familism as a primary value in most cultures (Cuellar, 1990). In Cambodia, for example, families are the social platform from which cultural moralities generate to individuals, reinforcing family connectedness to reveal evidence of good-face/bad-face in behavioral intentions (Smith-Hefner, 1999). Similarly, in Cameroon, the conjugal unit is the hub of family formation from which social networks ramify, moral behavior is initiated, and prosocial values, productive skills, and other cultural learnings occur (Nsamenang et al, 2008). Universally, the parent-child generational relationship is an important and complex one, but

more of its unidirectional nature has been studied than its reciprocal complexity.

Social and emotional interdependence are the norm through which family members view each other and the family unit. Social norms of the Filipino family, for instance, dictate close family relationships, emotional ties, loyalties, and economic exchanges (Williams & Domingo, 1993). Therefore, family continuity is best studied in the nature and direction of responsibilities and obligations within families as well as solidarity and mutual support across the life spans of several generations. In Africa, such mutuality exists in child care and elder care. The unexpected projection that 22 to 28% of unpaid caregivers to family and friends in the United States are young people age 18 to 40 years (Center on Elderly People Living Alone, 1995) points to the direction in which uncritical intergenerativity research may lead the field.

Social exchange can be viewed not only as a means by which those who are old maintain power but as a major vehicle for perpetuating continuity across the generations. When family exchange breaks down, elders suffer from loss of power as expressed through role loss. To retain power, elders must have a negotiable commodity to exchange as well as the flexibility to adjust to changes in the extended family. For many elderly persons around the world, caregiving and guiding grandchildren is their “negotiable commodity.” But in African intergenerational relations, the parent, especially the father, is increasingly becoming the net loser, as his once undisputed authority is declining as children and their mothers are becoming economically viable and finding their way in the world without necessarily relying on men’s protection and guidance (Nsamenang, 2000). Mutual reciprocity or intergenerational transfer research over the life course, especially in Majority-World families, should not only focus on ongoing exchanges but should explore anticipation of elder care in the growing generation of the elderly. In Cameroon, where publicly organized social security schemes are remarkable for their dearth or inefficiency, both the young and old rely on intrafamilial schemes that comprise parental lifelong investment in childrearing in anticipation of filial service as an old-age social security net (Nsamenang, 2002). In this light, Kenyans perceive old age as “a reaping for the elderly whose rewards for successful childrearing were expected to be unconditional support from adult children” (Oburu, 2009, p. 7).

Having a big extended family is highly valued in Africa and other Majority-World societies as a source of emotional sustenance and mutual support. Accordingly, mutual assistance is one reflection of a broader cultural ethos about family relationships to which people in a given group subscribe and learn values and skills. Portraits of social interdependence and preparation of future generations should map out how family continuity is perpetuated in culturally specific ways as well as what nuclear and extended families are doing to fit children and grandchildren into a changing world. Mutual assistance and concerns about the goodness-of-fit of children in future years are deeply embedded in the cultural context of family life of most societies. This is, and related issues, a critical element in intergenerational continuity in terms of familism and its change from various causes that should be tracked in their contextual situation and variation.

The cross-transfer of currencies is evidence of continuity and discontinuity of mutual support and ongoing involvement with families, even when dislodged from family units. Of course, differences between families and groups in overall approaches to social connectedness and induction of skills, the factors to which families assign the greatest salience, and the degree of “loss-of-face” or disaffection expressed over family relations are expected to differ across families and cultures. We suspect that the varied approaches to mutual assistance and competency preparations have been shaped by cultural traditions, family norms, and role expectations, as well as by threats of their disruption. Competing demands on everyone’s time, energy, and resources are important, but are changing the shape of intergenerational expectations and actual values that are expressed.

### ***Sources of Changing Family Patterns and the Toll of Family Discontinuities***

Intergenerational research has been shaped by the “spirit” of the early European settlers and pioneers in the New World who claimed mobility as their birthright. The original colonies were not long-established before expansion began on the East Coast for more farming land inland. The frontier was the next piece of unexplored land to the west, and successive generations of Caucasian Americans worked their way from the Atlantic coast across the continent to the Pacific coast. After the American Civil War, many freed slaves migrated to spread African American family patterns across the

United States. Despite lower birth rates and women delaying childbirth, increased longevity has resulted in people from four or five generations being alive at the same time and at times in the same household (see Jingxiong, 2009). We need to more keenly address issues that result from multiple generations and multiracial families coexisting not only in society but also in the workplace, and the same household in all societies.

As social mobility and migration has become more racially and ethnically diverse, dating, cohabiting, and marrying a person of another race or ethnic origin has become more tolerable, at least among liberal men and women and their sometimes frustrated but helpless kin. Worldwide, the number of interracial or interethnic families is increasing, but we know little yet about the intergenerational phenomena they engender and create. In recent times, same-sex couples have also cracked the family door to gain recognition, but this is an acutely contested family form in most countries.

It is now obvious that the family is both a custodian of tradition and an agent of change. However, a widespread assumption hints that family continuity through the generations will override individual discontinuities (Becker, 2000), yet the contemporary family is beset by internal and external disruptions that threaten family continuity. Among persons who have migrated from other societies, threats to continuity lie in food items and feeding habits, cultural and language differences between generations, long-standing separations from loved ones, and changes in younger generations’ views of the family. Furthermore, job loss, divorce, illness, and death are among the many disruptions that force families to regroup or detach. The late twentieth century also ushered in new household structures, particularly with Euro-Americans, with unwed parents, gay parents, and remarried parents who brought with them a series of step-kin. Divorce, premarital childbearing, and single parenthood are losing some social stigma almost everywhere, albeit at different rates. Children in divorced families generally experience independence at an earlier age; some develop close relationships with more than one adult, and they develop new relationships with each parent. However, children’s sense of stability cannot help but be disrupted by the breakup of their family units, as parents date other people, and in some cases new families come into existence as a result of these new relationships. These not-so-blended families require tremendous emotional, if not, social and

financial adjustment and are expected to be confused about which values to perpetuate. Children with same-sex parents also face complex social and emotional issues, including building perspective on gender roles as well as dealing with social aversion of this nontraditional family structure.

### Policy Considerations

Although the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) has been critiqued as an overly Euro-Western document (Reid, 2006), it nevertheless supports everyone's right to a cultural identity. In order to uphold cultural identity, an intergenerational research agenda should take the Convention into explicit consideration. Research is largely matricentric, reflecting lack of focus on parenting as a shared duty between father and mother. Researchers and policy planners need to do more to understand and take into account what states and families should do to give every child that right. The tendency in research to observe and measure people in lieu of listening to and working with them somehow breaches this right. The image of African family systems and intergenerational values in print used to guide policy development and programming by otherwise well-intentioned donors and international advocates has been offered mainly by itinerant foreign researchers and does not only "embody the different perspectives which such expatriates bring to Africa" (Wober, 1975 p. ix) but also largely excludes what the recipients know and the apprehension they have about the services.

In the light of Wober's (1975, pp. ix–x) wisdom, intergenerational research might "turn a corner" if it increasingly comes into the hands of Africans "with their own outlooks, needs, and directions of enquiry." Smith (2004, p. 222) made a related point by noting how Nigerians who were bearing children did "not conceptualize what they are doing in the language or formulas of demography." Although development cooperation agents experience difficulty understanding African ways of thinking and acting, many African-born policy makers and scholars often make many of the same mistakes as expatriates (Creekmore, 1986). Whose interest and perspective should be the focus of research?

A related concern is whether rights considerations come to the fore when research reports create or conjure stigmatizing allusions of research participants. What does it mean if researchers, even African scholars, must figure what to see or hear and how to report it not for their own people—Africans

(Tangwa, 1996)—but for the Western audience, as most editors of most of my manuscripts have sought clarifications for the American audience? That is, African scholars tend to research and report in a manner to satisfy Western markets rather than to promote understanding of their intergenerational values or other realities. As such, intergenerational research in Africa has largely lost sight of the soil out of which the contemporary family structures have grown and the exchange values they have produced (Kishani, 2001).

An important issue is the extent to which various forces that should be tracked have modified "traditional" family forms and values to create generation gaps and what state parties have in place to sustain family solidarity and tackle intergenerational crises. The mixture of cultures within nation-states is a fact that is gaining increasing recognition and importance in both national and international affairs (Greenfield, 1994). What does it portend for theory, research methods, and policy, for example, if "new immigrants from Asia and Latin America have added a large measure of cultural and phenotypic diversity to the American population in recent decades" (Perez, 2009)? Intergenerativity in the Majority World is driven more by socially distributed norms and less by economic fortunes, per se. In the majority of families, worldwide economic considerations are not as salient or central to exchange values for child care and elder care as are emotional investment and the spirituality of child-bearing (Sam, 2007).

### Recapulative Reflections

The family is a universal institution, the hub of intergenerational values. It has varied and will continue to differ in form, function, and generation of continuity values across time and lived family circumstances. Social exchange is central to the continuity of family values; reciprocity and equity are core values in all social exchange systems. However, intergenerational inequitable thinking is perceptible in political motives when individuals and interest groups that would have been expected to support early-childhood services and elder care oppose Social Security benefits to these cohorts of citizens.

We live in a world that deserves intergenerational research inclusive of family values in the context and diversity of the world's cultures. Regrettably, the extant corpus of intergenerativity knowledge is Euro-American in main thrust and value content. It has mainly been strewn from middle-class

European and American families and largely reflects the conceptual lenses and practical issues that shape their visions of the world and individualistic social exchange norms. As such, intergenerational transmission research has been cast in the epistemes and kinship realities of the Euro-American nuclear family for projection onto the intergenerativity and policy prescriptions for the rest of humanity. Any intergenerational research that obtained data from non-Western samples was designed within comparative paradigms with little, if any, explicit goal of understanding the intergenerativity within societies in their own right. Furthermore, the methodologies and norms developed from research on Western nuclear families have been and continue to be used as referential grids for research worldwide.

So, intergenerational research has largely undermined or bypassed the family values inherent in the family systems and socially distributive norms of the vast majority of the world's families, particularly those in Africa. If the knowledge base from research on intergenerational values or any other behavioral phenomenon is overwhelmed by one culture, and it does not matter which culture (Ardila, 1982), it plainly ignores or excludes the situativity of the researched phenomenon in other cultures. Such research transgresses global era values and only at best depicts a partial and obviously misguided picture of the reality or the full spectrum of the phenomenon it objectively claims to understand.

Scientific objectivity thus obliges and justifies any and all efforts to shift the paradigm to broaden the scope and subject content of intergenerational research. In the next and final section of this chapter, I endeavor to articulate my preliminary views on how to move forward with intergenerational research within African cultural settings.

### **Future Directions**

In a globalized world of plural cultures, the future of intergenerational research that speaks to intergenerativity in its entire diversity will depend on steadfast commitment to the belief that "all cultures can contribute scientific knowledge of universal value" (UNESCO, 1999). The production and sharing of knowledge and perspectives from intergenerational research will occur under changing conditions incidental to the micro-familial, macro-societal, and globalizing forces that will continue to profoundly impact family values and their transmission channels. Various key factors have indeed transformed, and will continue to alter the relationships between

scientific disciplines and interactions among scientists, intergenerational phenomena, and the scope and cultural inclusivity of intergenerational research agendas.

In Africa's agrarian societies, production is family-based, mostly unspecialized, and accredits children as significant contributors. Until the recent past, successive generations of Africa's children were socialized into similar livelihoods, typically farming and local crafts. With rapid globalizing shifts of production and career prospects to workplace processes and the knowledge economy, career fortunes are more dependent on an inherent division of labor and competitive specialization than on intergenerational transmission of family work ethic and vocational aptitudes. Increasingly, individualism in global labor markets is diffusing into other spheres of life, including individual identity, solidarity values, mutual exchange systems, and the legal system, among several others. Intergenerativity research will happen within changing social and economic opportunities accentuated by the necessity for youth to move away from home in search of employment and better life prospects. This trend has already resulted in declines in the availability of multigenerational family members in African households and neighborhoods. With growing urbanization, rural African parents and communities are losing children and youth increasingly to sprawling city slums and, through illegal migration, into precarious conditions abroad (Nsamenang, 2011). These phenomena are disrupting African family structure and complicating values transmission. When social exchange breaks down, elders suffer from loss of power and the disaffection of being forgotten by their families; they are disappointed in their children who failed, in the light of psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1968) to ensure their old-age welfare.

In spite of the Euro-American parochialism of research databases, we cannot afford to dismiss the extant knowledge base on intergenerational values. We must be keen and ready, nevertheless, not to acquiesce to a state of a scientific field that lopsidedly reports research on Anglo-American intergenerativity as if it represented largely uncharted African intergenerational profiles. We must plan and design research from a resourceful apprehension that the "most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is also strongly cultural" (Gould, 1981, p. 22). In accepting science as part of culture, we must acknowledge that by its nature science "influences what scientists

see and how they see it and, more critically, what scientists report, ignore, or fail to notice, as when serendipitous research findings are not reported (Nsamenang, 2010b, p. 389). Therefore, we must go beyond questioning the current state of the science in order to ingeniously correct an inadvertent bias in intergenerational research.

Accordingly, the central mission of Africa-centric research should be to discover the situativity of intergenerational phenomena and their changing trends in Africa. In so doing, we must work from an understanding of Africa's triple heritage (Mazrui, 1986) of historically earlier Islamic-Arabic family patterns and later Western-Christian nuclear family ethos superimposing a toll on deep-seated African family values. African family values are said to be deep-seated in the sense that, thus far, scientific evidence reveals Africa as the origin of modern humans (Johanson, 2008). As such, Africa should be researched as home of the earliest and longest-standing versions of family forms and intergenerational transmission of values. Research within this hybrid context will require plausible theoretical as well as methodological innovations because no existing theory suitably explains Africa's triple-strand braid of family values.

Faith in science and the work of intergenerativity researchers permits proposal of alternative theories and methods. I invoke Bertold-Brecht's wisdom as a guide: "The aim of science is not to open the door to infinite wisdom, but to put a limit to infinite error" (Cited in Laccarino, 2003). The handiest strategy is the scientific method, an established set of rules that should be applied to all phenomena regardless of context. In the search, we must recognize that Africa possesses its own conceptual grids and knowledge bases, which may explain, at least in part, why scholars who have applied Western models and epistemes to African phenomena discovered that they did not exactly fit (MacGaffey, 1981; Ojiaku, 1974).

Scientific understanding is one knowledge system among many others (Nakashima, 2000). Cultures from all regions of the world have developed complex views of nature, rooted in their philosophy, which has led to their understanding and explanation of the natural world. The indigenous knowledge of non-European cultures is the expression of specific ways of living in the world, of a specific relationship between society and culture, and of a specific approach to the acquisition and construction of knowledge (Laccarino, 2003). These insights

and knowledge systems build up from local culture and the people's worldviews. Mazrui and Ajayi (1998) claimed that science and technology in Africa were once quite advanced, comparable to European levels of the time, in the fields of human and veterinary medicine, agriculture, food conservation, fermentation, metallurgy, and the preparation of soap and cosmetics. Slowly, the importance and influence of indigenous knowledge diminished because of the success of Western science and technology and the economic and political power that accompanies that success, but also because of deliberate denigration and treatment of Africa's knowledge and techniques as antiprogressive.

For these and other reasons, the knowledge systems of other cultures are reported and understood in reference to Western systems, a disrespect of diversity and great harm to humanity. By its design, Western science is reductionistic, mechanistic, and attached to quantitative measurement. On the other hand, traditional science relies on naturalistic observation from an inclusive point of view. Scientists limit or "reduce" their explanations of phenomena to unique observations; this reductionistic approach tends to ignore some facts that may be key factors in some situations (Laccarino, 2003). The traditional knowledge of non-Western cultures puts empirical observations into a larger context. Thus, in all cultures, we can notice efforts to harmonize empirical observations in order to represent phenomena and to be able to interpret and predict them. Such holistic knowledge provides much of Africa with frames of reference to individuate a sense of belonging to networks of social others that support satisfaction of basic needs.

Laccarino (2003) refers to Szent-Gyorgyi as having identified the problems of modern science as the inability to integrate results and concepts that come from different approaches and levels of analysis. African scholars tend to experience difficulty connecting or translating their academic or professional knowledge and research skills to the appalling state of their continent and ethnic communities. The extent to which African scholars are knowledgeable of the social capital of their communities is at best tenuous. The tacit juxtaposition of primitive versus civilized values in scientific literature exacerbates their difficulty.

Africa's exchange values open up opportunities to learn about elder care within the family and to approach analysis of phenomena with holistic, integrative lenses. Such opportunities prime an

innovative disposition to theory and method in order to address a phenomenon not as a defined concept but as it is implanted in context. Ingenious application of integrative thinking can thus instigate contextually sensitive research into the complex intersubjectivity inherent in the transmission of family values across diverse family forms and cultural contexts. The scientific community should be ready to re-evaluate what the out-of-Africa-origins of modern-humans theory (Johanson, 2008) portends and Africa's potential contributions to intergenerational values research, as the Renaissance scientists did with the ancient knowledge of the Greek and Arab scholars (Laccarino, 2003).

Intergenerational relationships and exchanges are sites of reaction to wider social change or key sources of change (Jamieson, 2006). That is, intergenerational exchange values need not be traditional or biological. Older adults and younger peers can validate and help each other. Intergenerational mentoring, for instance, can make a significant difference in a child's or elder's life. Some of the modes in which intergenerational values are generated and spread are culture-specific; but they have been changing in all cultures and will continue to adjust to prevailing conditions. If research reveals that the benefits of intergenerational interactions accrue to both the younger and the older generations, are they universal and inert or do they vary by family forms and social exchange systems? What policy insights could be lost if research continues to privilege economic exchange if some culture-specific factors are more salient in Africa? Population profiles are changing, as the number of elderly and multigenerational families of all countries is increasing, more rapidly in some countries than others, posing an unprecedented challenge to current and future generations. Most of these factors, and the fact that intergenerativity values cross disciplinary boundaries, necessitate interdisciplinarity and triangulation.

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# The Making of Magic: Cultural Constructions of the Mundane Supernatural

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## Abstract

Construction of magical thinking has been central for human cognitive adaptation to uncertainty of living. In this chapter, we present a rare comparison of how such thinking is culturally constructed across two different countries (Germany and the United States) and historical periods (1920s and 2000s). We demonstrate how reanalysis of empirical data from other historical periods can be a productive epistemological step in comparison with current historical phenomena. Heinz Werner's and Martha Muchow's work on magical thought in the 1920s continues to be of importance in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** cultural tools, magical beliefs, Heinz Werner, Martha Muchow

Kultur entsteht aus dem Bestreben des Menschen,  
Chaos zu vermeiden und Glück zu gestalten.

*[Cultures emerges from the human ambition  
to avoid chaos and to create luck.]*

—Boesch, 2000, p. 12

Magical thinking is all around us. In Germany, a black cat—coming from the right disappearing to the left—crosses the path of a man on his way to work. The man is startled for a moment and then cites the following lines internally:

Schwarze Katze von links nach rechts,  
*[Black cat from left to right],*  
bringt Schlecht's,  
*[brings bad things,]*  
schwarze Katze von rechts nach links,  
*[black cat from right to left,]*  
Glück bringt's.  
*[brings luck.].*

Relieved, he continues to walk his way. In South Korea, a white butterfly flutters past a boy in the park. It is the first one he sees that year. He is devastated, because the butterfly is a bad omen: A family member will die soon. He calls a friend to tell her about it. In Mexico, an older woman almost set her purse on the ground next to her while sitting in a café ready to order tea. In the last second, she stops herself and puts the purse on the chair next to her. She decides not to challenge luck and be safe since putting down the purse on the ground would have meant to lose all the money that is in it. The *Dieri*, an indigenous Australian group from the South Australian desert, would call upon the spirits of

their ancestors to grant them power to make a heavy rainfall during dry seasons (Leuba, 1912).

The themes of the incidents described above are luck, bad luck, unforeseen personal tragedies, and natural forces (e.g., rain, wind). What do these themes have in common? All of them cannot willingly be controlled or unerringly predicted by the involved or affected individuals. Of course, here it is assumed that one believes in (bad) luck. Of course, there are individuals who do not, who base their interpretations of the world on different belief systems and, thus, would use other concepts to predict/anticipate what will happen in the future.

Interesting here is the differentiation between *Spiel* (game) and *Glücksspiel* (gamble/game of luck or chance). In the case of the game (e.g., chess), the players learn or agree on certain rules. The question of why a game took a certain turn or led to a certain outcome can be explained by the players (B was a result of A, which allows for conclusions like: next time, I do A to arrive at B). In the case of the gamble, the players have less control. Of course, gambling also follows certain rules, but the outcome is uncertain/unpredictable. Luck is assumed to determine whether, for example, the roulette ball falls into a black or red slot. For the notion that all games are “games of chance,” see Neveux (1966).

The examples above show that—no matter which cultural setting (*culture* as condition for action; see Boesch, 2011; Eckensberger, 2011)—an individual may still try to predict or influence the unpredictable/uncontrollable by interpreting objects (signs) in a specific manner or by engaging in specific actions (*culture* as a result of action). While doing so, differences in culture are reflected by differences in the meaning-making processes involved.

### Trying to Control the Uncontrollable World

Uncontrollability and unpredictability imply that the causes for a certain and favored outcome are unknown. Depending on the perspective, this leaves the individual with none (*I do not know what to do, so I do nothing*) or endless ways (*I do not know what to do, so anything might help*) to act so that the probability of an outcome, which the individual regards as positive, increases. These two conclusions can be interpreted as the opposite ends of the possibility spectrum—both can leave the individual either helpless or overwhelmed, but not in control. The feeling of helplessness only emerges if the individual actually has an interest in predicting future events

(see Boesch, 2000, for his definition of *valence*). If the individual is indifferent to this matter, being unable to predict it will not have an impact.

Ways to (re)gain control over the situation are thus necessary (see for example, Lefcourt, 1973)—yet not possible—since the situation constantly changes ahead of the control efforts. It is that uncertainty that makes the need for the emergence of culture—*semiotic mediation*—both possible and necessary (Boesch, 2011; Valsiner, 2007). Of course the lay-person needs to survive, and there are some options for that. One option is to still admit that one cannot do anything, but to believe in a (higher) power that can (e.g., a deity), or to invent an action that will, by definition, have a positive impact on the outcome (see Belzen, 2011). The emerging routines (e.g., luck making, fate determining) that are based on magical beliefs can either be created by individuals, groups, or even societies. The invention of deities takes the form of *circularity of control*—a person invents a supernatural figure for the purposes of controlling him- or herself (Valsiner, 1999). In case of human willful efforts to control the situation, the agent of such control becomes indeterminate.

### The Foundational Role of Magic

Leuba describes one characteristic feature of *magic* as follows:

The term magic I would restrict to those practices intended to secure some definite gain by coercive action in essential disregard [ . . . ] of the quantitative relations implied in the ordinary and in the scientific dealings with the physical world [ . . . ].  
(1912, p. 350)

Leuba bases this definition on observations made in “primitive” cultures and children—a comparison not uncommon at the time (cp. Frazer, 1920; Tylor, 1871; see Lévy-Bruhl, 1921, for critique). Also, Werner (1927) assumed that only the people close to nature in traditional societies—at that time labeled “primitive man”—and children/adolescents (are able to) believe in magic. For Werner, the counterpart of the *magical adolescent* was a nonmagical, adult, civilized man. The former would be convinced that objects are ultimately not moved by natural causes, but that individuals and the surrounding objects are secretly interrelated, that they influence each other in a magical and nonnatural way. Piaget—following the lead of Lévy-Bruhl—explained this causality of the child’s thinking with the “Law of Participation.” He considered participation to be “the result of simple

transduction, of the syncretistic fusion of particular observations” (Piaget, 2001, p. 33). Participation is, thus, the

... relation which primitive thought believes to exist between two beings or two phenomena which it regards either as partially identical or as having a direct influence on one another, although there is no spatial contact or intelligible causal connection between them.

(Piaget, 1969, p. 132)

Piaget explained this way of thinking by an egocentric logic (“constant assimilation of external processes to schemas arising from internal experience,” 1969, p. 132) that is overcome when the child discovers that others do not think like it does, when it is disillusioned, so that it has to “bow to the exigencies of control and verification which are implied by discussion and argument” (Piaget, 2001, p. 302). Eventually, according to Piaget, the child will thus replace the egocentric logic with “true” logic (see Piaget, 2001).

Where does magic play a role in this? Piaget assumes that the egocentric logic corresponds with a primitive psychological causality, “probably in a form that implies magic proper” (2001, p. 303), since children believe that their desires can influence objects. They believe in the obedience of external things. It is important to note that “magic,” as described here, is summarizing cognitive processes based on the *Law of Participation*. Other authors have used it in the same, but others also in different ways. Sully (1897), for example, uses the term “magic” to describe imaginativeness of children, thus, referring to fantasy. Following these observations, Piaget uses the term *magic* “for the use the individual believes he can make of the [above defined] participation to modify reality” (1969, p.132). In correspondence

to Leuba, Piaget stresses that magic has something to do with wanting to influence the external world in favor of one’s own wishes/desires (in different ways, see Box 37.1 for classifications). In other words: For the child, it is one way of *controlling* or, at least, *wishing to control* the outside world because convincing alternative explanations (arguments) are not available. This becomes possible because the boundaries between the self (thought) and the external world (things) are less rigid than they are in adults (Piaget, 1969).

### ***Who Believes in Magic?***

The question is, whether it is true that *only* children, adolescents, and the “primitive” believe in magic and perform magical practices. The examples given at the beginning of this chapter would suggest otherwise.

If magical practices/rituals like the ones described above are observed in adults, some sort of “disturbance” is often assumed. Piaget (1969) points out that Freud would take *narcissism* as an explanation for the magical practices some of his adult patients performed. The assumption here is that adults, who are in love with themselves, consider their desires and wishes of special value and thus believe in their efficacy—which Piaget distinguishes strictly from the child’s developmental phase of narcissism (*absolute egocentricity*). Piaget himself assumes that magical practices and beliefs in adults can be explained by a temporary weakening of the boundaries between the self and the external world. The examples he gives are *involuntary imitation* (e.g., someone has a stuffed nose, the observer feels like blowing his nose to improve the situation of the other), *anxiety*, and *monoïdeic desire*. Piaget says that when adults experience *anxiety*, processes that usually only occur in children (feelings of participation) can be observed. The

#### **Box 37.1 Classifying Magical Practices by Structure (Piaget, 1969)**

- *Magic by participation between actions and things*: The child performs an action (including mental operations like, e.g., counting) to influence an event that he or she either desires or fears.
- *Magic by participation between thought (only internally or articulated aloud) and things*: The child thinks of something to modify reality (e.g., wishing for somebody to visit in order to increase the likelihood of this event).
- *Magic by participation between objects*: The child uses (or particularly does not use) an object to influence another object (e.g., wearing a certain pair of socks when competing in sports because they make you a better athlete).
- *Magic by participation of purpose*: The child regards objects as living and purposive (*animism*). The object thus has a will, which can be influenced by the child’s will, displaying participation between the object’s and the child’s will (e.g., telling the clouds to go away).

example he gives is the desire to “observe even the most insignificant details of the ordinary routine so that the balance of things shall not be upset” (Piaget, 1969, p.164). Rituals thus help adults to maintain a feeling of control, which can only be explained by the above-mentioned feeling of participation (=magic). In the case of the *desire*, participation goes hand in hand with animist ideas.

The study of these shows that it is generally sufficient ardently to desire something outside of our control [...] in order to have the impression of a sort of hostile power seeking to mock us. The desire thus becomes hypostatized in the things and by projection personifies fate and events. This realist tendency is sufficient to cause any number of magical tendencies. (Piaget, 1969, p.164)

Piaget illustrated this description with the story of a man who is reluctant to take off his raincoat after it stopped raining to prevent rain from starting again—an example for which Risen and Gilovich (2008) later show that many adult individuals actually believe that the likelihood of the event “no rain” actually decreased because of “them not taking off the raincoat” even though they recognize rationally that the events are not correlated. This can be observed in different cultures—“primitive” or not:

People in different cultures, regardless of their explicit beliefs, do not much differ in the tendency for negative outcomes to jump to mind and in the use of accessibility as a cue for judging likelihood. Instead, cultures are more likely to differ in their access to and reliance on abstract rules that override such automatic associations and assessments [...]. Thus, members of some cultures fully believe that it is bad luck to tempt fate. Members of other cultures intuitively believe it (and often behave accordingly) but simultaneously know that the belief is not rational. (Risen & Gilovich, 2008, p. 305)

The difference between adults and children seems to be that, for the child, magic (=participation) is a way of thinking to which there is, for at least some time, no alternative. Phelps and Woolley state that children rely on magic when “they encounter events that both violate their expectations and elude adequate physical explanation” (1994, p. 385). Adults, however, know—if the environment has provided them with this knowledge—about the scientific, fact-based background of different phenomena. They know, for example, that rain cannot be influenced by not taking off a raincoat since the rain is influenced by other

factors (e.g., temperature, evaporation). This observation leads Meehl to define magic as a

... belief, quasi-belief, or semi-serious entertainment of the possibility that events which, according to the causal concepts of this [or other] culture[s], cannot have a causal relation with each other, might somehow nevertheless do so.

(1964, as cited in Berenbaum, Boden, & Baker, 2009, p.54)

Meehl’s definition of magic, as presented here, is a rather broad one. Others prefer a narrower approach to, for example, be able to differentiate between magical thinking and peculiar beliefs. Here, both are considered to be one and the same (see Berenbaum, Boden, & Baker, 2009, for further readings on this topic). Even though being taken from the *Manual for Use with Checklist of Schizotypic Signs*, the definition seems to describe a possible behavior among adults that are not in need of any treatment (see Belzen, 2011). Berenbaum et al. (2009) actually draw a picture of a continuum: On one end would be those individuals who do not believe in magic or apply magical practices, on the other end, patients with psychopathological symptoms—suffering from delusions (=extreme versions of magical thinking)—would be found. In the middle, nonpathological cases that (partially) believe in magic and maybe even apply magical practices would complete the continuum.

This assumption is supported by studies that focus on ritualized behavior in clinical obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and nonclinical cases. Here, rituals are believed to be necessary to ensure a positive outcome of some, often apparently unrelated event. Consistent with Piaget (1969), Franzblau (1997) showed—for the nonclinical cases—that engaging in rituals is perceived as reducing feelings of *anxiety*, fear, and discomfort, while at the same time increasing feelings of *control* and security. Reuven-Magril, Dar, and Liberman (2008) show similar mechanisms in OCD patients: They describe rituals as means for achieving an illusory sense of control to cope with stressful life events—just with a different intensity. By drawing a picture of a continuum between the pathological and the nonpathological, we address a topic that others have already discussed in the past. Kretschmer (1921), for example, thought that thin individuals tended to be introverted and timid, which was seen as a milder form of the negative symptoms exhibited by withdrawn schizophrenics. Even though Kretschmer’s constitutional approach, linking body

shape to personality, does not influence today's personality theory anymore, the description of a continuum between the normal and pathological is still up to date.

### **What is Real Logic?**

Berenbaum et al. connect magical thinking with "errors" in thinking. According to them, these errors lead to "judgments, decisions, and beliefs that are not entirely rational and logical" (2009, p.198). "Real" logic or nonmagical thinking would thus be based on rationality and would be "error-free." Nevertheless, not only children, but also adults often are irrational—one reason being emotional processes that interfere with rationality (cp. Pham, 2007). Many examples for this irrationality can be found in Dan Ariely's book (2008) *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*.

Josephs and Valsiner (1999) prefer the term *inconsistencies* over errors in thinking, and map the associated meaning-making processes with which humans try to make sense of themselves and the world. Using microgenetic developmental analysis, they show that, in fact, the belief in miracles (magical thinking) utilizes the same meaning-making processes that are used in everyday life, which leads them to the argument that these processes are essential and mature rather than primitive—in contrast to what Leuba, Werner, Piaget, and others have suggested. Josephs' and Valsiner's interviewees most of the time argued not in the extremes of "miracles happen or do not happen," but rather allowed for the possibility that they "might or might not" happen. This reminds us of Meehl's definition of magic in which—despite knowing better—individuals would still consider causal relations between apparently unrelated events as possible explanations; even though they might start off with a preference for either "might" or "might not." Using Josephs' and Valsiner's (1999) terminology, this apparent contradiction can be solved by applying circumvention strategies. *Circumvention* is a meaning-making process that temporarily neutralizes generalized semiotic macro-organizers that represent convictions, worldviews, rules, etc. An example for *circumvention of meaning by focusing on harmonious coexistence of meaning complexes* is the following (Josephs & Valsiner, 1999, p. 111):

- Rationally, the biblical miracles cannot happen. (1)
- I am a rational man. (2)

- I believe in them anyway. I know this sounds crazy, but it is as it is. (3)

The person in this example is rational *and* believes in miracles at the same time. This contradiction does neither confuse him, nor does it mean he is crazy. Circumvention allows him to balance incompatible domains of belief: Everyday knowledge and religious reasoning, showing that it sometimes is not an either/or question when it comes to being rational or not.

What is missing from Josephs' and Valsiner's example is the reason for *why* the man decides to—despite his accentuated rationality—believe in miracles. Is it because he would question his parents' upbringing and their beliefs if he questioned biblical miracles, which he does not dare doing? Or is the argumentation closer to the one used in Pascal's Wager (cp. Hacking, 1972) that makes the man believe in miracles? Or is the reasoning a completely different one? Cathcart and Klein (2008) describe Pascal's Wager very informally, but to the point as follows:

[Pascal] argued that deciding whether or not to believe in God is essentially engaging in a wager. If we choose to behave as if there is a God and we get to the end and it turns out there isn't, it's not such a big deal. Well, maybe we've lost the ability to thoroughly enjoy the Seven Deadly Sins, but that's small potatoes compared to the alternative. If we bet there isn't a God, and get to the end only to find out there is a God, we've lost the Big Enchilada, eternal bliss. Therefore, according to Pascal, it is a better strategy to live as if there is a God.  
(p. 100)

A deeper microgenetic analysis would be necessary to answer this question—if answering it is possible at all, since some of the underlying reasons might not be directly accessible for the individual. If they are, for example, part of the sub- or unconscious, they might only lead to a vague feeling of *anxiety* (see for example, Mayer & Merckelbach, 1999).

### **Voices from the Past**

A step toward answering the questions above is the analysis of already existing data. In 1928, Heinz Werner and Martha Muchow—working at Hamburg University in close collaboration with William Stern and Ernst Cassirer—developed a questionnaire to examine (magical) personal customs, which was

published in the *Journal for Educational Psychology* in Germany (Muchow, 1928). Precedent interviews with adolescents and adults at Hamburg's Psychological Laboratory had shown the relevance of these magical customs with which adolescents as well as adults tried, for example, to secure the positive outcome of future actions or to influence decisions that depended on chance in favor of their wishes. It is assumed that about 600 completed questionnaires must have existed at the time, but that most of them were lost at the beginning of World War II (Faulstich-Wieland, 2007). Fortunately, a few of these questionnaires still made their way to Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, together with other academic belongings of Heinz Werner, which allowed us to reexamine the then-collected data. In addition, we translated Muchow's questionnaire and had it filled out by current undergraduate students of the Psychology Department at Clark University, so that we can compare the answers given 80 years ago with the answers provided today. A brief description of both samples can be found in Table 37.1.

### Comparing the Use of Magic Then and Now

Although Werner (1927) argued that only children and the primitive believe in magic, his and Muchow's data provides evidence that also adults believe in magic and engage in magical rituals—as already discussed above. In the following sections, we will introduce an excerpt of the questions asked in both studies and the results for both samples. This will allow us to see if magical rituals have changed in content and use, or whether the underlying functions of rituals have stayed the same over time.

**Question 1:** Did you [as an adolescent] sometimes need so-called oracles or interrogations of your

destiny when you had to make important decisions or perform in a certain way or when you thought that the outcome was mainly a question of chance?

This question also included an explanation of what *oracles*—as one example of magical practices—are, which was taken from Muchow's (1928) questionnaire. The explanation was the following:

By oracle we mean the following:

a. Oracles for which you had to do something that had (almost) nothing to do with the expected or feared (e.g.; balancing on a low balustrade, foot racing a car or bus to a certain point, gathering a certain number of hats, coins, etc.).

b. Oracles for which you remain rather passive (e.g.; two bus lines drive past your house, seeing one of the two on your way home brings "good luck," seeing the other brings "bad luck;" counting the trees that grow alongside a certain street, if the final number is even, it is considered "good," if it is uneven "bad," etc.).

Of Werner's and Muchow's interviewees, 18.6% (N=8, with 2 missing) said that they did *not* use oracles at all when they were younger, and 25% (N=10) of ours said they did not. All others had consulted oracles of some sort with varying frequency, showing that it was and is a quite common phenomenon among adolescents.

**Question 2:** Do you still use the oracles described above [or other magical practices]?

Of the ones that consulted oracles as adolescents, 84.9% (N=28) of Werner's and Muchow's interviewees and 83.3% (N=25) of ours still use(d) oracles (occasionally) today. In both cases, it is striking that many claim to know that oracles or other magical practices are irrational (e.g., with statements like "They are interesting but of course not reliable"

**Table 37.1** Sample description

Brief description of the two samples	
Muchow & Werner, 1928 (MW)	Watzlawik & Valsiner, 2009 (WV)
Study conducted in Hamburg, Germany	Study conducted in Worcester, MA, USA
N = 43	N = 40
9 females, 24 males, for 10 sex is unknown	26 females, 14 males
Average age: 23.4 ( <i>SD</i> = 5.3) (14 missing)	Average age: 20.4 ( <i>SD</i> = 4.8)

[WV-ID 9]), but that they would still perform them, if:

(a) a very important decision has to be made (e.g., “Yes, rarely, only for important decisions” [WV-ID 24]);

(b) the decision to make is very insignificant (e.g., “I still perform them often today, but never before big decisions, it appears to be playful and wrong” [“Ich übe sie heute noch des öfteren, aber nie vor großen Entscheidungen, es erscheint mir spielerisch und unrecht”] [MW-ID 3]); or

(c) the situation is extremely stressful (e.g., “In times of strong mental efforts, when overstimulation of the nerves occurs, rituals of this kind re-emerge” [“In Zeiten von starker geistiger Anstrengung, bei Überreizung der Nerven treten solche Bräuche wieder auf”] [MW-ID 456], or “unless I have absolutely no idea about what to do” [WV-ID 12]).

The argumentations found in both samples are very similar and can be phrased in terms of Josephs’ and Valsiner’s (1999) concept of circumvention of meaning. As in the example introduced above, we would start off with the statement:

- Believing in magical rituals is irrational. (1)

Then the self-evaluation follows:

- I am a rational person. (2)

To still be able to apply magical rituals, circumvention is necessary, which can be achieved by different paths of meaning making:

- But in this situation, it still might help me find the right solution. (3a)
- But I do not use them for important things anyway. (3b)
- But it makes me feel better at the moment. (3c)

In each case, the contradiction between being a rational person and applying or believing in magical practices is solved and allows for a balanced evaluation of the situation. Of course, this is only necessary if a contradiction exists. In both samples, few interviewees seemed to simply accept their beliefs in magical practices and did not evaluate this as “irrational.” Some even stated the following: “It [consulting oracles] seems logical” [WV-ID 18]. Circumvention is then not necessary.

The answers to Question 2 showed, that no matter if we look at the data collected in 1928 or in 2009, many *adults* still apply magical rituals (oracles) in different situations. Of course, it can be argued that the 2009 sample does not consist of

adults, but *emerging* adults (Arnett, 2004) that are still in an exploratory state and are, thus, prone to using practices that allow them to feel in control of their lives. Nevertheless are they aware of the magical practices’ irrationality, so that applying magic does (a) not equal participation beliefs as found in children, and (b) is also not pathological since it helps the individual to cope with current insecurities. At this developmental stage, magical rituals can therefore be a possible coping strategy (cp. Keinan, 1994). It is thus questionable, if it is only a developmental stage or even disturbance. It seems more likely that these practices fulfill certain functions: facilitating decisions, providing a feeling of control, or regulating emotions. The answers to the following questions will provide further insight in this matter.

**Question 3:** Can you remember how you came up with these rituals; specifically, can you tell us something about the inner and outer causes that would help us understand how these rituals developed?

Of Werner’s and Muchow’s interviewees, 28 provided an explanation for why they came up with these magical rituals, as did 29 of our interviewees. We categorized the answers to give an overview of the different explanations. In Table 37.2 the different categories, sample answers, and frequencies can be found.

The most frequent answer in both samples is that magical rituals were or are used, because they were introduced by others or were observed in others. The answer that magical rituals are a cultural thing goes in the same direction. These rituals are thus suggested or shown by different sources that, for example, Bronfenbrenner (1979) divided into different, but cross-linked systems. Attitudes and ideologies that characterize cultural groups would be subsumed under the *macrosystems*, whereas the family, peers, and others form different *microsystems*. From both, as well as in-between systems, magical rituals can be suggested (see Figure 37.1).

Whether an individual adopts the rituals depends, on the one hand, on the intensity with which they are reinforced, on the other, individual characteristics—such as anxiety, emotional salience/awareness, etc.—also play an important role (cp. Berenbaum et al., 2009). Another *individual mechanism* is described by the participants from 1928. They mention the parallel occurrence of events as one possible cause for the emergence of magical rituals. In fact, Pronin,

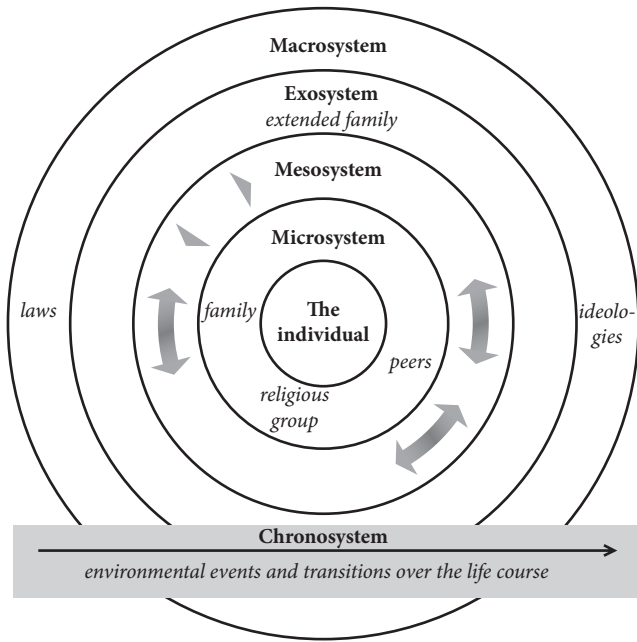


**Table 37.2 Categories, sample answers, and frequencies of the different explanations for why magical practices emerged (multiple answers possible)**

Category	Sample answers	1928	2009
Learned rituals through or from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly through the influences of friends. I saw them doing it and would try for myself.</li> <li>• My mother came from Lusatia, which is full of superstitions. The whole upbringing was interspersed with it.</li> </ul>	13	15
Rituals are considered to be part of the culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I guess using a coin was something that was part of the culture I was growing up with.</li> </ul>	–	2
Rituals were just “made up” (on the spot), emerged from sudden ideas/impulses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made them up, they dealt with chance. For example, ‘If I make this shot in basketball I’ll get an A on my test.’</li> <li>• Quickly, I said to myself: ‘If you reach the door at the same time as the man (to make me go faster), you will find something nice, a letter, a lunch.’ I promised myself a reward, but I knew that it might become true even without the promise to me; I did not want to promise anything completely absurd. But I knew that it could also not occur, but I admitted that to myself only after I performed what I had promised something for. I used those rituals thus to incite myself.</li> </ul>	6	4
Rituals were triggered by unpleasant/traumatic experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They started when I started driving and I often would count cars passing, and one day after the eighth car, there was an accident. I do not know why it affected me.</li> <li>• In my opinion, they emerged after unpleasant experiences that needed an explanation. One is rarely inclined to see oneself as the determining causal factor of the unfavorable events.</li> </ul>	5	2
Rituals emerged by the coincidental parallel occurrence of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cause of this ritual is, in my opinion, that I walked that way maybe coincidentally and then, especially that day, the lessons would—contrary to expectations—be good.</li> </ul>	6	–
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A certain anxiousness [ . . . ] was over-compensated by a strong religiosity, that caused a fast faith in wonders. The rituals might have been an outlet of this faith; they were their field of activity. When the thought of causality slowly interfered, religiosity served to outcompete it (God can do anything, even act against laws).</li> </ul>	5	4

Wegner, McCarthy, and Rodriguez (2006) showed in several studies—with which they examined whether having thoughts related to an event before it occurs leads people to infer that they caused the event (*magical causation*)—that this quite often is the case, even when the thought-about outcome was unwanted by the research participants (also cp. Rothbart & Snyder, 1970). In 2009, this parallel occurrence is only referred to by the interviewees with the examples given for the traumatic events that preceded magical

rituals. The *chronosystem* (see Figure 37.1) stresses the importance of the situation when we examine the emergence of magical rituals. An individual might be more receivable for the adoption of magical rituals in stressful than nonstressful situations (e.g., after traumatic or stressful events, Keinan, 1994; also De Rios, 1997, presented how cultural superheroes [*magical realism*] can be used as an intervention for traumatized children). Another important factor of “time” or the *chronosystem* is the *Zeitgeist* being reflected



**Figure 37.1** Different environments with potential influence on magical rituals (cp. Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

in the content of different rituals. Even though the function of rituals seems to be fairly stable over time (based on the observations presented above), the content is not. Werner's and Muchow's participants state, for example, that they would count a specific type of horse ("Schimmel"=gray horse) which was, at their time, still an important matter of transportation. With horses being replaced by cars, they are not mentioned anymore by today's participants. Overall, we can say that magical rituals are not caused by a single factor, but emerge out of the interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors (cp. Risen & Gilovich, 2008). Closely related to the question about what causes magical rituals is the question of what they are good for: Why do individuals engage in magical practices? Some answers to this question are already implied in the categories described in Table 37.2. The rituals that were made up on the spot, for example, serve the function of *self-motivation*. This is explicitly mentioned by the interviewees: "Because I tend to procrastinate often these help me stay on task" (WV-ID 11), or "to make me go faster" (MW-ID 472). They are applied to serve a specific purpose at a certain moment (only). They are very much controlled by the individual to challenge oneself, escape boredom, or—as one of Muchow's and Werner's interviewees phrased it—"to counterbalance the too much reinforced intellectualism in school" (MW-ID 485). Rituals of this kind seem to be not as

"powerful"—meaning the effect *on* the person, not the effect they had *for* the person—as other rituals that almost seem to dictate the actions of an individual and are perceived as not willingly controllable ("I suffered from such mental compulsion and they bothered me" MW-ID 480). The latter would lead us to rituals described in connection with OCD and would therefore serve a different function: *reducing feelings of anxiety, fear, and discomfort*, and *increasing feelings of control and security*. For the first, additional evidence is provided by the answers to Question 4 (see below).

Again, we observe a continuum of ritual controllability: from willingly and purposely inventing and applying rituals that are based on the *Law of Participation* to being dictated by such rituals that cannot be willingly controlled. The cases in which individuals state that rituals help, but that they do not have to perform them necessarily, would lie in between the above-described extremes. It is very likely that the relief (emotional component) an individual feels after applying a certain ritual determines the frequency with which it is used, but we cannot prove this assumption with the data collected. Further research is needed in this case.

We stated above that children rely on magic when they encounter events that both violate their expectations and elude adequate physical explanation. Is this also true for adults? Two of our participants

actually describe events that would fall into this category, one being: “I thought if I was skating particularly good one day—and not the others, and I was doing everything the same, there must be some mysterious force that was improving my ability or that I was just getting lucky that day” (MW-ID 5). Experimental studies with adults also confirm that adults also tend to assume relations between events, where—rationally speaking—there cannot be any (cp. Risen & Gilovich, 2008; Pronin et al., 2006). Thus, magic is indeed considered when we are *lacking alternative, rational explanations*—but not only then.

**Question 4:** Do you think that these rituals that you performed during adolescence developed because you were afraid of important decisions or maybe even afraid of life in general?

Of our interviewees, 29 answered this question, as did 30 of Muchow’s and Werner’s interviewees. The interviewees in both groups differentiated between the different things they were afraid of—if they were afraid—so that we decided to do the same when summarizing their answers (see Table 37.3).

Overall, the samples do not differ much in their answers confirming that anxiety was and is an important trigger for magical rituals.

**Question 5:** What happened if you were meant to do something to influence an outcome and then you didn’t succeed? [American sample only]

For the American interviewees, we added the above question to find out how fragile/stable the belief in these rituals was. The answers were again categorized and are displayed in Table 37.4.

The different reactions to the failure of a ritual may be influenced by the importance the particular ritual has for that person. Some of our interviewees were just able to “shrug it off” (low importance), other simply denied the failure and looked for alternative explanations (high importance)—the most popular one being blaming oneself instead of the ritual.

Although Werner and Muchow did not ask specifically what we asked, some participants still described situations in which rituals lost their importance or were abandoned altogether. The following case shows that the importance of what one wishes for also is an important factor:

**Table 37.3 Summary of the answers to Question 4 (multiple answers possible)**

Category	Sample answers	1928	2009
No		11	9
Yes (without further explanations)		5	6
Maybe (without further explanations)		–	5
Afraid of life in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probably more because of being afraid of life in general.</li> </ul>	5	–
Afraid of important decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They did not that much emerge because of being afraid of life, but because of being afraid of important decisions.</li> </ul>	5	–
Afraid that something bad will happen (failure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probably, I’ve always been afraid of losing a family member.</li> <li>Maybe because I was scared that if I didn’t have these rituals it would be hard for me to get motivated any other way.</li> <li>I think I was afraid of not being perfect.</li> </ul>	5	7
Afraid of solely being responsible for one’s actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because I don’t want to be solely in charge/responsible for my actions.</li> </ul>	2	2
Afraid of authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being afraid of the mother and school.</li> </ul>	2	–

**Table 37.4 Categories, sample answers, and frequencies for the answers to what would happen if a ritual was not successful (American sample only) (N = 23)**

Category	Sample answers	2009
Blame myself, instead of ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would blame myself most likely (for poor preparation, etc.) rather than blame the rituals, although I may consider what the outcome would have been if I had followed them.</li> </ul>	6
Shrug it off/ignore it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd just ignore the oracle and do what I wanted anyway.</li> <li>• Shrug it off.</li> </ul>	4
Feel bad/awful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would feel awful.</li> </ul>	3
Try again (later)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would make sure to do it next time; it was almost like a superstition.</li> <li>• Then I would try again and hope it worked better.</li> </ul>	3
Re-interpreted situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk myself into believing that it actually worked, just in a modified version.</li> </ul>	2
Change ritual (was flawed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perhaps the ritual was flawed; I would need to modify it.</li> </ul>	1
Deny it, but keep believing in it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I start denying it, but still believing in it next time it occurs.</li> </ul>	1
Would be disappointed, but kept believing in them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disappointed but didn't diminish my belief in them.</li> </ul>	1
Lost some faith in them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I lost some faith in the rituals.</li> </ul>	1
Think about it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would walk away and think about what happened.</li> </ul>	1

When my parents were in hospital, badly injured because of a car accident, I desperately tried different things to influence their fate. Being very religious from early on, I prayed to God. I also jumped over a fence in the yard that was 1.3 m high and believed that things would turn out well because of my success. When my mother died shortly after, things changed: I now hated religion and with that all rituals that I once cherished and that now seemed useless to me. I swore to myself never to believe in any rituals like that again, or to suppress them should they occur nevertheless, (MW-ID 476)

**Question 6:** Did you keep those rituals a secret or did you talk to others about them? Who did you tell? If you didn't tell anyone, what were the reasons? [German sample only]

A question that only the German sample answered was the one above asking whether rituals were kept secret or not. The vast majority says that they did not speak to anyone about their magical practices

(N=26; 78.8%). Only one person said that he *did* speak to others about these things. Unfortunately, he did not comment any further on this statement. Six people (18.2%) replied that they selected the people they talked to very carefully: They did talk to some and did not talk to others. What were the reasons for not talking to anyone or to carefully select the appropriate confidants? Most of the participants that gave reasons said that they were afraid others would laugh at them, they were embarrassed or feared embarrassment (N=18). Other reasons were that discussing a ritual might have affected its success (N=1), the ritual was not a conscious thing (N=1), one did not want to bother others with subjects they were not interested in (N=1), the ritual was too important (N=1), or too insignificant (N=1), or—last but not least—the ritual was not the business of anyone else (N=1).

These answers show that magical rituals usually are a very private matter. Applying magic often means to act against one's better knowledge ("I know this is not rational, but ..."), which cannot

easily be justified when being confronted with it. The functions discussed above show, nevertheless, that magical rituals make “personal” sense and can fulfill different, important purposes (*see* Question 3)—even though knowledge would suggest otherwise. Furthermore, the magical rituals created by the person oneself are parts of personal culture—hence not necessarily shareable with others.

### **Conclusion: The Unbearable Pleasures of Magic**

If we think that a society has left magical thinking behind, because of the technological and economic orientations, think twice. The phenomena of fascination with Harry Potter and the lures of getting rich by luck on a stock market bring us to new magics of the video screens and consumer cults. Contemporary societies abound in ever-new magical rituals in public life and on TV screens. Hence, magical rituals:

... are not merely the product of people who have failed to reach formal operational thought; rather, they reflect the felt limits of science and technology for answering questions about meaning, value, and being. These issues are significant, not only in their own right, but also for the insight they provide into the wider importance of existential concerns in human development.

(Vandenberg, 1991, p.1284)

Instead, magical thinking is part of any forward-oriented productive thinking. Human minds weave their semiotic webs of organization of the meaning so as to face the future. This is mostly accomplished by thinking in complexes—rather than in concepts. Lev Vygotsky emphasized that:

... the complex, like the concept, is a generalization and unifier of concrete varied objects. However, the tie with which this generalization is built, can be of most different type. Any kind of link can lead to the inclusion of a given object in a complex, if it only practically exists—and the characteristic feature of the complex is exactly that. When linkages of unified type—logically equivalent to one another—are at the foundation of the concept, very varied factual linkages that often have nothing in common with one another, are the bases of a complex. In the concept, objects are generalized by one characteristic, in a complex—by most varied practical bases. That is why in the concept the relevant, unifying link and relationship between objects finds its reflection, while in a

complex—practical, occasional, concrete [relations are reflected].

(Vygotsky, 1931, p. 250)

The process of differentiation and hierarchical integration in the process of moving from complexes to concepts was viewed by Vygotsky to entail an important transitional form—that of *pseudo-concept*. This is a form of reasoning that at the outside looks like *concept* (i.e., seems organized by an abstract, unitary relation between objects), but in reality remains a *complex* (i.e., entails multitude of relations between objects). Among those relationships, the beliefs in rationality of the necessarily irrational world are widespread.

The invention of the supernatural is particularly rampant in critical life situations. In the civil war in Uganda in the late 1980s, it was the war activities that were cast in the power of supernatural forces (Behrend, 1999). Such inventions are possible thanks to the capacity of the mind to create semiotic hierarchies that can include high-level field-like signs (Valsiner, 2007). The crucial nature of the supernatural forces a person could believe in is their nebulosity—they are considered to be responsible for very concrete acts, yet they are not in any place. They are believed to be everywhere.

### **Future Directions**

Contemporary cultural psychology needs to take a fresh look at newly emerging examples of magical thinking. Looking at these phenomena at the intersection of society and individuals can reveal the connections of intrinsic motivational forces and social guidance of human minds. More specifically, it would be important to study:

- What kinds of social representations (“luck,” “devil,” “success,” etc.) support the emergence and use of new personal magical rituals;
- How a person creates one’s new “lucky charm” in one’s personal life? How would magical moments enter into any mundane area of living? The invention of a ritual of luck in competitive settings, or of a new belief in the power of a new electronic gadget in bringing happiness into private lives;
- How social institutions promote the use of magic thinking in social situations—in peace and war settings.

### **Acknowledgments**

The work on this chapter was supported by the Feodor Lynen Scholarship to the first author, awarded by Alexander von

Humboldt-Stiftung. The careful maintenance of Heinz Werner papers in Heinz Werner Library at Clark University by Seymour Wapner is to be specially acknowledged.

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### Abstract

Evidence for relativistic theories of rights and duties is overturned by an analysis of supererogatory acts in Afghan, Asian, and Spanish-speaking cultures. The authors present a cultural evolutionary account of the development of rights and duties to explain the appearance of certain universals in the domain of justice. An order of evolution is proposed: from functional origin in primitive social relations, to informal labeling as “rights” and “duties,” to formalization in black-letter law. The authors recommend two future directions of research: an investigation of the cycle of rights and duties as understood in different political and cultural contexts, and a closer analysis of universal duties, beyond human rights alone.

**Keywords:** rights and duties, supererogation, cultural evolution, primitive social relations, universals, family rights and duties, religious systems, normative justice, cycle of rights and duties, Afghan culture, Latino and Spanish cultures, Asian cultures

Do you refuse me, Antigônê? I want to die with you:  
I too have a duty that I must discharge

These words are spoken by Ismene, sister to Antigônê, in a play by the same name, written by Sophocles (442 B.C./1977, p. 207) at a time when Athenian democracy was at its height. The democracy of Athens was centered on *duties*, demands placed by others on the persons who owe them. Every Athenian male citizen not only served in the military, but also had judicial, legislative, and executive duties:

Even many of the highest offices in the land were filled by allotment and so could fall on any citizen; almost all offices could be held only for a single year. In this way maximum participation was achieved, and every man was a public servant.  
(Lang, 2004, p. 7)

This sense of duty was shared by women: Antigônê buries her brother Polyneicês, a rebel

against the king, even though she knows she will be killed for this act. Her sister Ismene also requests to die with Antigônê, in order to discharge her duty. This duty, says Antigônê, is for laws that:

... are not merely now: they were, and shall be,  
Operative for ever, beyond man utterly  
(Sophocles, 442 B.C./1977, p. 203)

The centrality of duties in ancient Athens seems far removed from the culture of twenty-first-century Western societies. Indeed, the march of technological, scientific, economic, and political progress in Western societies has been accompanied by a trumpeting of *rights*, what we are owed by others, from the struggles of the suffragettes to win voting rights for women, to desegregation and the civil rights movement that eventually allowed an African-American to be elected as America’s president in 2008, to gay rights, disabled person’s rights, senior rights, children’s rights, patients’ rights, animal rights, and

so on. But this has not been a universal trend; the “progress of rights” has not moved forward much in practice, if at all, in some countries. For example, though rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are taken for granted in Western societies, these remain severely restricted in many parts of the world, such as China, Iran, and Russia. Indeed, despite the 30 articles set out in the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and “agreed to” by nearly all nations as signatories, there are obvious violations of rights in many countries. These sometimes include Western countries as well; critics point to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib prison by U.S. military personnel, and other such “incidents” to support the claim that Western societies also violate human rights.

It seems, indeed, that there is “. . . no universally honored conception of rights and duties” (Louis & Taylor, 2005, p. 105), and that rights and duties are normative and can be socially constructed and justified in many different ways, particularly by those who enjoy greater power. For example, in some societies powerful groups serve their own interests by highlighting duties (e.g., in Iran the duty to obey the “Supreme Leader” is highlighted), whereas in other societies, power groups prioritize certain rights (e.g., the right of the super-rich to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to influence election results in the United States, justified under the “right to freedom of expression”). This *relativistic* viewpoint runs against the idea, as suggested by Antigoné, that there are duties (and rights) that are “not merely now,” but “forever” and “beyond man” in the sense that they are found in all human cultures.

The question of whether there are universal rights and duties is one of a number that psychological science has explored, as reflected in the volume *The Psychology of Rights and Duties* that brought together an international group of leading scholars in this field (Finkel & Moghaddam, 2004). We begin this discussion by describing a hierarchy of rights and duties and clarifying our position on five questions that are central and must be addressed in any psychological account of duties and rights, including the question of possible universals. Next, we describe a cultural evolutionary account of the development of duties and rights. This evolutionary perspective suggests that certain functional behaviors evolved early in our history, and at a later stage in human evolution these were labeled “duties and rights” as part of informal everyday life. Still

later, selected duties and rights became transformed and formalized in *black-letter law*. A psychological understanding of duties and rights thus considers the development of these informal rights and duties, which evolved prior to formal, black-letter law.

This overall process will be explored using examples of *supererogatory duties*, behaviors that a person is not obligated to perform, but is applauded for carrying out, and *supererogatory rights*, or what a person is owed by others, but is willing to forgo for the sake of the greater good (Moghaddam, 2008, p. 56). We use cross-cultural examples from case studies in Afghani, East Asian, and Spanish-origin cultures to showcase the power of social norms in shaping formal and informal rights and duties. Evidence for relativistic theories of rights and duties, we argue, is overturned by a cultural evolutionary account of social behavior in the domain of justice. We propose that although there are large variations in duties and rights across cultures and across time, this variation has masked certain universals, small in number but of great importance.

Our argument in support of universals is “top-down” and is rooted in our “cultural evolutionary” conceptual framework. On the other hand, we work “bottom-up” to show variations across cultures in rights and duties. Given the foundational influence of religious systems on conceptions of rights and duties in the contemporary world, we begin by exploring rights and duties in religious systems.

## Religious Systems and the Hierarchy of Contemporary Rights and Duties

The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”

(Luke 10:35 (NRSV))

Today the concept of supererogatory action is generally used in a secular context, though its origins lie in religious ethics. The term appears in the Christian ethical debates in the late Middle Ages in reference to voluntary works that are besides, over and above God’s commandments. In the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, a man from the southern region of Samaria in Israel finds a stranger on the roadside who had been beaten by robbers. The Samaritan takes the stranger to an inn, bandages his wounds, pays for his lodging, then promises to go above and beyond: “I will repay you whatever more you spend.”



In Latin, “super-erogare” means to over-expend, or pay in addition. In the Roman Catholic tradition, supererogatory acts constitute not simply the performance of good works, but good works beyond sacramental requirement. Roman Catholic officials held that such acts, often performed by saints, could create a “store of merit which the Church can dispense to others to make up for deficiencies” (OED, 1989). This framework has been applied to other acts such as sexual abstinence in place of marriage and procreation (Mellema, 1991). In the early sixteenth century, controversy erupted around the Catholic Church’s interpretation of supererogatory acts in exchange for indulgences paid to the church. These were cited perhaps most famously in the Ninety-Five Theses against the church by Martin Luther. Today, the Church of England still requires all clergy to declare allegiance to thirty-five articles of faith including one (Article 14) stating that “the performance of supererogatory acts cannot be taught without arrogance and impiety” (“Opera quae Supererogationis appellat non pussunt sine arrogantia et impietate preaedificari”) (Book of Common Prayer, 1662/1999).

Importantly, the concept of supererogation is not unique to Christianity. In Jewish law the Talmudic concept of “beyond the letter of the law” (*lifnim mishurat ha din*) applies to self-sacrificial acts of fairness and charity that go above the bare minimum prescribed by law (Shilo, 1978). In Islam, the concept of *Isaal-e-Sawaab* refers to performing a good deed and granting the heavenly reward for that act to another person, a practice not entirely unlike the Roman Catholic conception of stored merit, as well as the Church of Latter Day Saints’ doctrine surrounding the afterlife and “saving ordinances” for deceased relatives. To perform *nafl* prayers in Islam, prayers beyond the general minimum of five times each day, is supererogatory. So too are extra fasting, the giving of voluntary charity (*sadaqa*) beyond obligatory alms (*zakat*).

In secular ethics, divine command is substituted for formalized laws and rights. British philosopher J. O. Urmson (1958) argued that saintly and heroic acts should constitute a fourth category in secular ethics, beyond categories of mandatory, permitted, and forbidden. A soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save the life of his comrades, according to Urmson, is committing a supererogatory act. It is neither required, nor morally neutral, nor forbidden by law. The standard view, generally held by philosophers Urmson (1958), Sheldon Peterfreund

(1978), and Robin Attfield (1979), is that an act becomes supererogatory when it meets three criteria: (1) it is beyond the call of duty, (2) it is meritorious or praiseworthy, and (3) omission of the act is not blameworthy. Secular acts of supererogation have been argued to include legal pardon and clemency by kings and presidents, volunteering and community service, acts of qualified self-sacrifice such as election to be an organ or blood donor, and acts of forgiveness, conscientious tolerance, and forbearance (Heyd, 1982; Benbaji & Heyd, 2001; Portmore, 2003).

To be clear, little has been written about supererogatory rights and duties, but some debate around the criteria for supererogatory acts continues in the disciplines of philosophy and ethics. One group argues that supererogatory actions must be self-sacrificial and other-regarding: the act should be “completely gratuitous” (e.g., Heyd, 1982), it should bring “much good for the other person,” and should be performed “at considerable cost or risk to the agent” (Rawls, 1971, p. 11), and should be “more onerous for ourselves” than for others (Hale, 1991). Others disagree, arguing that supererogatory acts can be self-regarding (Kawall, 2009) and without benefit or even intended benefit for others (Mellema, 1991). Susan Hale (1991) argues that there are no truly supererogatory actions, only apparently supererogatory actions motivated by duty or principle. This is reminiscent of debates in social psychology about whether or not there really is *altruism*, behavior intended to help another, without regard for benefit to oneself. Among the major theories of altruism, the empathy-altruism model of Batson (1995) is closest to assuming there is true altruism—all of the others dismiss this assumption (Moghaddam, 1998, Chapter 9). In this discussion we are not interested in the question of whether or not either supererogatory acts or altruism actually exist according to some objective criteria, but in the question of how, by labeling a behavior as “supererogatory,” society influences behavior. In the next section, we further clarify our conceptual orientation.

## Five Basic Questions

At the outset it is useful to clarify our position on five foundational questions concerning duties and rights: source, function, relationship to supererogatory rights, free will, and replaceability. First, what is the source of duties and rights, particularly as set out in formal or black-letter law? Second, what is the functional nature of black-letter law? Third,

what is the relationship between black-letter law and supererogatory duties and rights? Fourth, should we assume that humans have some measure of free will (in the domain of rights and duties, at least)? Fifth, are rights and duties replaceable?

With respect to the source, there are two major positions: *natural law*, whereby duties and rights are assumed to have derived from natural and divine sources, and to have been discovered by humans; and *positive law*, where duties and rights are human constructions and can vary over time and across societies. The account we develop strongly supports a positive law interpretation, based on cultural evidence. We argue that duties and rights arise out of cultural evolution that is to some degree shared between humans and other animals, but we do not see it as necessary to assume an inherent universal “moral grammar” (Hauser, 2006). Rather, we adopt a functional interpretation whereby certain behaviors, later interpreted as duties and rights, prove to be adaptive and continue to manifest themselves in the behavior of animals and humans.

Second, we adopt a minimalist interpretation with respect to the functional nature of black-letter law. That is, black-letter law answers the question: what is the minimal or lowest standard of acceptable behavior? This “minimal” takes shape, we believe, with respect to the functional needs of society. Black-letter law reflects the baseline conditions for the survival of a particular form of society, given its various characteristics, and especially its group-based inequalities and power relationships. From this perspective, then, law is a set of rules, enforced by institutions, that sets the minimal acceptable standard of behavior, to sustain a particular type of sociopolitical order.

Third, black-letter law and supererogatory duties and rights together define the boundaries of obligations, since we argue that supererogatory duties and rights establish the “upper level” for standards of behavior in a given society, just as black-letter law establishes a minimal or “lower level” standard of behavior. For example, imagine if Sam is standing on a bridge, looking down at the boats passing in the river below. A father and child are standing near Sam. Black-letter law sets the minimal “lowest” standard for Sam’s behavior: Sam must not push the

child into the river, since doing so would be a criminal offense. On the other hand, if the child accidentally falls into the river, black-letter law does not stipulate that Sam must dive into the river to save the child. If the child falls into the river and drowns, Sam will not be sent to jail for failing to be courageous enough to dive into the river to save the child. However, if Sam does dive into the river and saves the child, she will be enthusiastically applauded and she might even receive a medal: a supererogatory duty fulfilled (see Figure 38.1)

Although informal social and cultural norms influence parenting practices, and in turn, the formation of rights and duties, formal black-letter law also influences family contexts and informal norms. The relationship is reflexive. For example, black-letter law formally defines certain parental duties according to definitions of abuse and neglect. However, numerous instances illustrate the mismatch that can occur between parenting practices and the law, particularly among immigrant groups; parenting practices that are common in one culture may be legally construed as neglect and a failure to fulfill parenting duties in another. The practice of *cupping*, a traditional medical technique performed in some cultures, is interpreted as child abuse in some contexts. In regions of Africa, a mother who fails to circumcise her female child is chastised by other women in the community, whereas female circumcision in the United States is punishable by prison and the child may even be removed to government child custody. Similarly, Hmong parents who view epilepsy as a form of spiritual rapture have often been charged with neglect for not seeking treatment for their children (Coleman, 2007).

Also, black-letter law reifies the informal rights and duties in the family. Imagine a woman named Helen, a retired English banker living in Paris, who decides to make a will that leaves almost all of her considerable fortune to charity. This is accepted by her first husband and their two children, who are English and live in England. Indeed, after the initial shock of learning about the contents of the will, most of Helen’s English family applauds her action as an example of a supererogatory duty. However, the situation is very different with Helen’s second husband, a Frenchman, and their three French



**Figure 38.1** The continuum of “minimal standard” (black-letter law) to exemplary (supererogatory rights and duties) behavior.

children, who all live in Paris and adhere to French law. From the perspective of Helen's French family, her will is not only illegal, but immoral. Indeed, in 26 out of 27 member countries of the European Union (EU), Helen's will would be regarded as illegal, because in most of these countries about half of the estate is automatically inherited by surviving children (unless they have committed parent killing or the like). In most of the European Union, Helen would not be legally allowed to leave her estate to charity.

The situation in England and Wales is very different because the individual enjoys almost complete freedom to decide who will inherit the estate, and thus there is room for Helen to carry out a supererogatory duty by allocating her estate to charity. This Anglo-Saxon tradition of individual choice is also present in the United States. Now consider the influence of black-letter inheritance law for a recent immigrant family to the United States. If the family immigrated from one of those 26 EU nations in which Helen's action was illegal, informal family perceptions of inheritance rights and duties will likely give way to formal law, over successive generations. In essence, black-letter law sets the boundaries of supererogatory duties and rights.

Fourth, in religious systems as well as in secular ethics, a supererogatory act assumes at least a minimal level of free will and conscious choice, so that merit can be rewarded on the basis of the assumption that the meritorious person freely chose to do good rather than evil. It is assumed, for example, that saints and heroes are not forced to do good works; they act as individual agents. But in traditional experimental psychology, it is assumed that independent variables (such as environmental factors external to the person, or cognitive mechanisms within the person) serve as causes, and bring about changes in dependent variables. In this cause-effect relationship, there is no room for free will. An argument has been made that while some behaviors are causally determined, other behaviors, including behavior in the realm of duties and rights, are better explained through a normative account, which does allow for free will (Moghaddam, 2002).

A *normative account* of behavior assumes that much of human thought and action is regulated by norms, rules, and other features of the normative system. Most of the time, most people behave according to the rules for correct behavior in a given context. However, people can choose to behave in non-normative ways; second, certain behaviors are

causally determined rather than normatively regulated. For example, when her optician asks Susan, "Can you read the last line?" This has to do with Susan's visual performance being causally determined by factors such as aging (what Moghaddam, 2002, has termed *performance capacity*). Susan could read the last line when she was 20 years old, but can no longer read it now that she is 50 years old. But if Susan's optician asks, "What do you think that symbol means?" This question has to do with the meaning we ascribe to things, or what Moghaddam (2002) has termed *performance style* (for example, "Oh yes, that symbol represents a mysterious love potion on this tropical island!" versus, "That symbol is just a gimmick used by the local tourist board to attract more visitors to this island!").

The fifth question concerns the replaceability and interchangeability of duties and rights: can a duty always be reinterpreted as a right, and a right as a duty? We can identify two main conceptual positions on this issue (*see* Dembour, 2006 *for an example of a more detailed classification*). First is the natural law position, which holds that at least some duties and rights are fixed. For example, the duty to abide by certain moral imperatives, such as "thou shalt not steal," "thou shalt not kill," and so on are purely duties; a duty to abide by the command "not to steal," "not to kill," and so on, cannot be changed to a "right not to steal," a "right not to kill," and so on. Similarly, a "right to freely choose a God" cannot be replaced by a "duty to freely choose a God."

The other view, which we find more compelling, takes positive law as a point of departure, where duties and rights can be interpreted as replaceable in almost all cases. This is suggested by various examples across societies in areas such as inheritance of estates and voting in elections.

### ***The Power of Context and Replaceability of Rights and Duties***

Our final two suppositions—the power of social context to influence choices and free will, and the replaceability of rights and duties—merit special attention as keystones in our argument. For the first, consider Gregory Mellema's (1991) prisoner example. A man is held prisoner by political terrorists, and he is commanded to swear allegiance to the leader of the terrorists—and to renounce allegiance to his own government. The prisoner knows that a refusal to cooperate will result only in bad consequences. He will be beaten, and the angered terrorists will only stiffen their resolve to

eradicate all opposition to their cause. Moreover, no one but the terrorists will ever know if he refuses. Nevertheless, the man is willing to endure these bad consequences. As a man of high principle, he is simply unwilling to renounce allegiance to his own government. Mellema considers the prisoner's decision supererogatory because he acts out of a concern for morality or principle. It would appear that the prisoner chooses this freely, without force or coercion—indeed, against coercion.

Now suppose the prisoner had been a member of the Taliban government in 2001, and his capturer had been an American military officer. Would it make a difference on whether the act can be called supererogatory? Then, would it make a difference if the prisoner were John Walker Lindh, an American citizen who fought on the side of the Taliban? In the first case, we must ask: whose morality and whose consequences make the act supererogatory? In the second example, group affiliation and expectations of citizenship matter: John Walker Lindh is an American citizen, but affiliated with the Taliban. For Lindh, a decision not to renounce allegiance to the Taliban would be supererogatory within the norms of Taliban group identity, and forbidden within the norms of American group identity. In fact, Lindh did not report his American citizenship to his captors, despite the fact that it might have provided him better treatment. What becomes apparent is that assumptions of praise are relative to perspective: Who blames? Who praises? In both cases, the moral logic is rooted in group identity.

Free will, for an individual, therefore presumes certain group constraints. However, a social psychological perspective also considers collective and communal acts, beyond individual choices. Duties and rights are fundamentally normative expressions, and norms are shaped by groups and cultures more than individuals. Consider a collective agreement by a military group not to pillage an enemy village captured in war, or to show clemency when it is neither required nor forbidden. If supererogatory acts may be collective expressions, it follows that supererogatory rights and duties can be expressed through groups and networks: family networks, tribal networks, nation-states, and networks of nation-states such as the United Nations. Indeed, international declarations of human rights and duties may be argued as supererogatory acts themselves, as meritorious expressions by diverse communities responding to global forces.

Importantly, as we will observe through animal and cross-cultural human examples in the next section, the fact that supererogatory duties and rights are manufactured by culture does not make them arbitrary. In practice, duties and rights embody internal logic and serve adaptive purposes for survival. Our argument assumes a social intuitionist model, where morality, like language, is an evolutionary adaptation for intensely social life; moral intuitions are both innate and enculturated and can best be understood in an evolutionary context (Bekoff, 2005; Haidt, 2001).

To some extent, attention to cultural context makes it obvious that rights and duties are replaceable. Replaceability can simply be a matter of group perspective. Suppose there is an English woman of some wealth named Lady Slattery, and Lady Slattery writes a will leaving the bulk of her estate to her gardener. One group of villagers claim that Lady Slattery “Did not have a right to do this!” while another group claims, “She did her duty, because the gardener was completely devoted to her.” Because Lady Slattery lives in England, black-letter law allows her to fulfill this right/duty. But as seen in an earlier example, had she lived in France she would be obligated (by French law as it stands in 2010) to leave at least half of her estate to her children—and her choice would have been limited at the outset.

Similarly, in the domain of elections, the act of voting can be interpreted as a right or a duty, depending on context. According to black-letter law, voting is treated as a right in some countries (such as the United States) but a duty in some others (such as Australia, Belgium, and Switzerland). Even in countries where voting is treated as a right, the attitude of (at least some) citizens is that citizens have a duty to vote. For example, among some groups of “patriots” it would be unpatriotic for a citizen not to vote in national elections. On the other hand, among other groups, who might also see themselves as patriotic, it is a duty not to vote, because voting in national elections would strengthen the central government and thus work against their libertarian vision of what the nation should be in the ideal (i.e., a country of free individuals unencumbered by a strong central government).

A clearer variation across countries concerns the participation of prison inmates in elections. In the United States, inmates are banned from voting in most states, and even former inmates are banned in some states. In the European Union, seven of the 27 European Union member states (including the

United Kingdom) do not permit inmates to vote in elections. In these countries, inmates do not have the opportunity to carry out voting as a supererogatory duty, because they do not have it as a legal right. In other countries where inmates have the right to vote in elections, voting can become a supererogatory duty.

The proposition that duties and rights are replaceable is also supported by a number of empirical studies (Moghaddam & Riley, 2005), particularly in the family context. For example, in studies of families with young children, researchers found that parents tried solving sibling conflicts through “care” orientations emphasizing duties (“You should share your toys with your sister because she loves you”) while young children prioritized “justice” orientations emphasizing rights (“It’s not fair—these are my toys!”) (Lollis, Ross, & Leroux, 1996; Lollis, Van Engen, Burns, Nowak, & Ross, 1999). The same transaction, sharing a toy with a sibling, led different actors to invoke either rights or duties in accordance with their perspective. As the authority figures in the family system, parents appealed to duties; in contrast, children challenged parental authority by invoking their rights (Moghaddam & Riley, 2005).

### **Primitive Social Relations and the Evolution of Duties and Rights**

Having explored a few ways that duties and rights are bound by group context and social positioning, we now turn to illustrations that help describe duties and rights as functional adaptations that evolve over time. A *cultural evolution* explanation assumes two major stages in the development of duties and rights: first, the emergence of certain styles of behavior, termed *primitive social relations* (Moghaddam, 2002, p. 40), that are adaptive and enable some people to compete better for scarce resources and to improve survival chances; second, at a later stage the labeling of such adaptive behaviors as a duty or a right, depending on cultural conditions. The timing and sequence of the second stage, labeling and interpreting primitive social relations in terms of duties and rights, is unclear. It might evolve tens of thousands of years after the emergence of a particular primitive social relation, or shortly after. In this theory, primitive social relations arise out of the common challenges confronted by humans. These challenges are partly based on human physical characteristics and the physical environment. Commonalities here—bodily and environmental

constraints—result in certain universal styles of behavior adopted by humans, the roots of which lie in our evolutionary past.

### ***Primitive Social Behaviors among Animals***

The evolutionary account we provide suggests that the roots of “fairness” should be found in animal behavior and, indeed, there is some evidence to support this idea. Rudimentary behaviors that later developed to be labeled as duties and rights are reflected in cooperation and empathy among animals (Bekoff, 2005). Elephants help injured or ill members of their group, as do whales and dolphins. During play, high-ranking wolves are known to “handicap” themselves by engaging in role reversal with lower-ranking wolves, even allowing the low-ranking wolves to bite. If the low-ranking wolves bite too hard, it will initiate a “play bow” of submission before the play resumes. Coyotes who bite too hard during play can be ostracized by the rest of the group (Bekoff & Allen, 1997). Ant colonies are highly cooperative; often individual ants will sacrifice themselves to increase survival chances of the group (Wilson, 1975). Monkeys react negatively when they witness other monkeys receiving more favorable rewards for the same effort, or for less effort (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003). Mice reacted in ways that could be interpreted as empathic when they observed cagemates, but not strangers, suffering pain (Langford et al., 2006). Although insects and animals do not make sacrifices, act empathic, or feel unfairly treated out of political ideology or principle, their behavior has been interpreted as reflecting “wild justice” (Bekoff, 2005) and demonstrating a level of behavioral continuity between animals and humans. Humans were able to move to increasingly complex interpretations of justice through the evolution of their sophisticated social lives.

### ***Human Settlements, Duties, and Rights***

The evolution of duties and rights in human societies took a dramatic turn after the transition, around 12,000 years ago, from hunter-gatherer to settlement societies. Development of agriculture and the domestication of animals allowed for the growth of a reliable surplus, which was used by power elites to develop institutions for governance and control. Through the monopoly and control of the surplus, power elites supported security and military forces, as well as administrations for collecting taxes and redistributing wealth to benefit their supporters.

These developments led to the growth of larger and more complex urban centers, with an established elite enjoying “high culture.” For example, the Minoan civilization that flourished on the island of Crete lasted about 1,500 years, from 2,600 to 1,100 B.C., and centered around luxurious palaces with over 1,000 rooms each. The Minoans were one of a number of civilizations that flourished in the Mediterranean region from around 5,000 years ago and laid the foundation for the Greek city-states, culminating in the golden age of Athenian democracy. The foundation for these developments was trade between stable and secure urban centers.

The development of large urban centers and the flourishing of interstate and intrastate trade and commerce had foundational implications for social relations, because now a normative system was needed to regulate frequent and necessary interactions between strangers, rather than just kin. Until this time, and for almost all of our evolutionary history, we lived in small, nomadic groups. Evidence suggests that during the many thousands of years of our existence as hunter-gatherers, we lived in groups numbering a few hundred in size (*e.g.*, Dunbar, 1993). This long evolutionary past has led some researchers to argue that the optimal size for human groups continues to be 150 to 200 members (*see* Moghaddam, 2008, p. 34). Certainly, this “optimal group size” seems to exert influence on the way even high-income twenty-first-century societies are organized, particularly in terms of the organization of local or “everyday-level” small groups. For example, although many people now work in organizations with hundreds of thousands of employees and live in cities with millions of inhabitants, they actually function in small work units (*e.g.*, the office or university department) and neighborhoods that allow some level of intimacy and face-to-face interaction with other group members (Moghaddam, 2008, pp. 77–79). However, whereas during our hunter-gatherer era our small groups consisted mainly of others who were our kin, in twenty-first-century Western societies our work, neighborhood, and even social groups tend to consist of nonkin.

Out of interactions between nonkin individuals and groups has evolved practices such as turn-taking, which appears across multiple cultures (Moghaddam, 2000), as well as other practices that help mitigate competition over resources and encourage collective fairness. These normative practices continue to influence behavior in modern societies, so that for the most part order is maintained

without “calling in the law” (Ellickson, 1991). Here duties and rights appear as functional adaptations, with cultural variations reflecting local conditions, a topic we turn to next.

## **Culture and Supererogatory Acts**

Whereas our argument for universals in rights and duties was top-down and began with discussions of primitive social relations and evolutionary processes at a high level of abstraction, we now turn to a bottom-up analysis to highlight variations in rights and duties across cultures. Our specific focus is on supererogatory rights and duties in Afghan, Asian (especially Korean), and Latino- and Spanish-culture family contexts. Family units are primary sites for the development and transmission of supererogatory rights and duties. Certainly, the family is only one of many social systems into which a developing child is socialized, but all societies have developed one or another form of family structure (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). In family contexts we can observe how culture defines certain behaviors as either duties or rights, obligatory or supererogatory. However, in highlighting variations across cultures, we do not lose sight of possible universals and in the concluding discussion we argue that the highlighting of cultural variations ultimately serves the purpose of pointing to a small number of commonalities across cultures.

## ***Socialization of Rights and Duties in Families***

Human beings do not develop in isolation, but rather in a unique physical and social context influenced by culture. Culture and child-rearing is therefore intimately linked: children must learn to survive and grow in their given context, and parents must prepare the next generation for integration into the existing culture (Bornstein, 2010). Cultural values therefore influence not only the form of families, but schools, neighborhoods, and other social structures. The shape that these social structures take has great implications for rights and duties, as we will see later.

Within families, duties can be delegated to parents, children, or members of the extended family. In most cultures, however, actors with the greatest face-to-face interactions with children—for example, parents, teachers, and babysitters in Western contexts—are most directly responsible for providing the bare necessities of development. In many contexts now, failure to fulfill these duties can be

formally prosecuted as child abuse or neglect. Nevertheless, it is important to remember the origins of these behaviors as informal duties establishing a minimum requirement for behavior.

In countries such as the United States, for example, parents are almost solely responsible for feeding, protecting, and nurturing their child. In other more collectivistic cultural environments, the child's regular face-to-face interactions include members of the extended family, neighbors, and family friends. By extension, the minimal duties assigned to parents in the United States are now assigned to aunts, uncles, grandparents, and the like. Among the Nso in Cameroon, for example, a child "belongs" to the community as a whole. Educating the child according to social norms and enforcing discipline is an obligation shared by all adults, not merely parents (see Nsamenang in this volume for a discussion of social exchanges in non-Western family contexts.) The exercise of such duties is not seen as encroaching on a parent's responsibilities because the parents are not solely accountable for the child—and perhaps not even principally responsible for the child's development (Rabain, 1979).

Beyond these minimalist obligations, characterizing behaviors as supererogatory duties becomes difficult because what is laudable (though not required) in one context may be expected in another. There are informal pressures at play, which complicate assumptions about what is "required." For example, payment by an uncle for his nephew's school tuition may be supererogatory in Western contexts though required in others. In the United States, an uncle would not be the boy's legal guardian, so he has no minimum legal responsibility. In the absence of social norms that pressure him into supporting a child that is not his, the uncle's contribution is supererogatory by virtue of meeting all conditions established by theorists: the act is beyond the call of duty, meritorious, and its omission is not blameworthy (Peterfreund, 1978). However, if the uncle lives in a context where there are informal social pressures to support his nephew—e.g., an assumption that males must be caretakers of extended kin, as often the case in tribal societies—paying for the nephew's education fails the first condition of a supererogatory act and becomes an ordinary duty.

Then there may be substantive varieties, a division of labor in supererogatory duties, as it were. For example, kin support among African-American families usually takes the form of practical support (child care, help with transportation, household

work, and so on), whereas European-American kin support is characterized by the extended family providing economic resources or emotional support to parents (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). In both cases, members of the extended family are not expected to provide resources to the same degree as parents. Nevertheless, they are commended for their actions on behalf of children for which they are not directly responsible.

#### RIGHTS AND DUTIES IN ASIAN FAMILIES

Culture dictates more than who is responsible for what within the family; the family is also "nested" in a context of larger social and religious values. For example, among the Javanese, Indonesia's largest ethnic group, a patriarchal social structure and the heavy influence of Hinduism means that individuals' opportunities, duties and rights are determined by their gender as well as their caste. Boys—particularly eldest sons—have greater responsibilities than their siblings, but they also enjoy more attention from their families and have greater rights than their sisters. Similarly, individuals from the *Brahmana* (spiritual leaders) caste enjoy greater rights than those in the *Ksatrya* (warriors), *Waisya* (traders), and *Syudra* (low class society) (Shwalb et al., 2010).

Perhaps one of the best-known examples can be found in East Asians' parenting practices; a review of this literature shows that socialization goals of Asian and Asian-American mothers emphasize children's duties to bring honor to the family in a way that is consistent with the interdependent and collectivistic Asian culture (Kim & Wong, 2002). Many attribute this phenomenon to East Asia's cultural roots in Chinese *Confucianism*, a comprehensive philosophical system encompassing ethics, interpersonal relations, and governance. This philosophy is the basis for *filial piety* (*Xiao*), one of the most important and distinctive concepts of Asian families. In Korea, for example, the devotion of children to parents involves a number of duties that can be classified into five broad categories: obeying (e.g., *Myong-Shin-Bo-Kam*, children must immediately answer when called), attending (e.g., *Kuk-mong-yo-keul*, when parents are ill, children must give priority to attending to their illness), supporting (e.g., *Don-Mon-Seun-Sup*, children must ensure parents are comfortably housed and fed), comforting (e.g., *Yi-ki*, children must be careful not to expose themselves to danger and cause their parents distress), and honoring (e.g., *So-hak*, children must restrain themselves from dietary and sexual

pleasure for 3 years after their parents' death) (Kim & Choi, 1994). Filial piety rooted in Confucian ideals is widespread throughout other countries as well, including Vietnam and Japan. Surveys reveal that the importance of children's duties in Vietnam is on par with Korea: more than 90% of adolescents agreed with the statement that no matter what the circumstances, they would support their parents in their old age (Le, 2000). However, some research suggests that filial piety has weakened in postmodern societies (Shwalb et al., 2010).

In addition to these filial duties, parents in Asian families also have duties to their children. In order for children to reach maturity and exercise these obligations, parents must first raise, care for, and educate their children. Indeed, in Korea, Vietnam and other Asian societies, the concept of "womb education" (*thai giao* in Vietnamese) stipulates particular duties for a woman to her unborn child (Shwalb et al., 2010; Kim & Choi, 1994). Although basic parental duties of raising children may be fairly uniform—feeding, protecting, socializing to cultural norms—the nuances and meanings of these duties vary by cultural context. For example, one ethnographic study revealed cultural differences in attitude toward motherhood among Korean and Canadian women (Kim & Choi, 1994). Whereas Canadian mothers emphasize personal (career) development and maternal caregiving equally, Korean mothers place greater weight on their role as caregivers, and see little conflict in sacrificing their careers for their children. This reflects the Korean culture's deep-rooted consciousness of parent and child unified in "body and soul" (*ilshim dongche*; Choi, 2000; Shwalb et al., 2010). Parents' continual support for their children is also seen in their greater willingness to support their adult children financially. In a cross-national survey of European, North American, and Asian countries, Korean parents were most willing to pay off their children's debt, contribute to college education, and pay for wedding celebrations (Gallup, 1983 as cited in Kim & Choi, 1994). This intense child-centeredness reflects many parents' beliefs about their role in the lives of their children: it is the parents' duty—and a critical part of their existence—to continually sacrifice for their children (Shwalb et al., 2010).

#### **RIGHTS AND DUTIES IN SPANISH-ORIGIN FAMILIES**

Respect for parents and hierarchical family structures, however, are not unique to East Asian

contexts. Much like Koreans, Latino- or Spanish-origin families are also characterized by an interdependent orientation (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeir, 2002). A review of literature indicates that three cultural values rooted in this orientation—familism (*familismo*), respect (*respeto*), and moral education (*educación*)—are held by Latinos of all national origins and underlie many parenting decisions, including the assignment of rights and duties (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). Of these, *respeto* and *educación* are most relevant for our discussion of rights and duties, since they bear on the duties of children and parents, respectively.

In an ethnographic study of Mexican-American immigrant families, researchers described that by the age of 4 years, children are taught verbal and nonverbal rules of demonstrating respect, such as politely greeting elders, not challenging elders' views, and not interrupting adults' conversations (Valdes, 1996). Thus, behaviors parallel some of the filial duties apparent in East Asian cultures. However, the meaning of *respeto* is more comprehensive in that it includes respecting the role of each member of the family, not just parents. For example, sisters did not act affectionately toward their husbands or boyfriends in front of their brothers because to do so would be interpreted as a *falta de respeto*, an affront to the brothers' sense of dignity and their roles as brothers (Valdes, 1996).

*Respeto* is also an important motivator in the grief responses of children and other survivors when a loved one dies. In an account of the funeral ceremonies of Mexican-Americans in Texas during the 1930s through 1950s, Williams recounts family obligations surrounding the funeral rites. Wakes were held in the home over the course of an entire night, and talking and laughing were strictly prohibited during the viewing. At no point was the body left unattended, since doing so would be a sign of disrespect. At that time, widows were also expected to wear black for the remainder of their lives, a concrete symbol of their enduring duty and loyalty to the deceased (Williams, 1990).

If *respeto* is the value most central to children's duties in this culture, *educación* is the most important value for understanding adults' duties to their children. *Educación* extends beyond the English word "education" in that it also refers to the training in responsibility, morality, and interpersonal relations. A close comparison is the concept of *bildung* (education) active in German taxonomy since the sixteenth century: broadly, *bildung* refers to not



only a transfer of literacy or a body of knowledge, but also to a process of personal and cultural maturation (Schmidt, 1996). Ethnographic accounts of Mexican immigrant mothers indicate that mothers often mention *la educación de los niños* (the moral education of their children) as an important parental responsibility. Further studies also indicate the importance of this duty: in a study on child-rearing practices of U.S.-born and foreign-born parents of European, Mexican, Cambodian, and Vietnamese descent, Mexican parents reported that social skills and motivation were as or more important for children's school readiness than cognitive skills (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993). Similarly, a second study found that Latinos gave higher importance ratings to children's socio-emotional characteristics than Euro-American or Asian-American parents (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998).

Just as respeto motivates the duties surrounding funeral ceremonies, educación plays an important role in the birth and baptism ceremony, another important traditional life-cycle ritual. Most important here is the *compadrazgo* (literally co-parent-hood), the practice of expectant parents selecting a married couple from among their friends to be the child's sponsors at a baptismal ceremony. On the day of the ceremony, the *compadres*, which the child will eventually refer to as *madrina* and *padrino*, are responsible for purchasing the white christening outfit. This functions as a symbol of the *padrinos'* duty: to take care of the child's physical and spiritual needs in the event of the parents' absence (Williams, 1990)

#### RIGHTS AND DUTIES IN FLUX

Although the previous case studies have focused primarily on duties—whether of parents, children, friends, or extended family—it is nevertheless important to address the issue of rights as well. Earlier we argued that rights and duties are in the vast majority of cases replaceable, and that children will give preference to autonomy while adults will emphasize obligations. We also illustrated the influence of culture and group context on the formation of rights and duties. But what happens when families move from one cultural context to another? How are diverse perspectives and identities negotiated, and what does this mean for rights and duties?

In immigrant families, conflict over diverse perspectives and identities is marked by generational differences. For successive generations of Mexican and Central American families in the United States,

adolescents in one study were increasingly likely to believe that disagreeing with parents was acceptable and that autonomy was desirable (Fuligni, 1998). This seemed to indicate a shift from duties (obedience to parents) to rights (freedom to make personal decisions). Another example concerns changing expectations around the marriage decisions of sons and daughters. Spanish-heritage families often experience conflict in these areas, since parents emphasize children's duty to accept a "good match" while sons and daughters stress their right to choose a mate (Baptiste, 1987).

#### *Between Laws and Norms: The Case of Afghan Rights and Duties*

We have seen how black-letter law and informal perspectives influence each other, but what if enforcement of black-letter law appears weak or absent? Such is the case in Afghanistan. In Western literature, Afghanistan is often depicted as a "lawless" and tribal society where drug lords gather private armies and build mansions with illegally acquired gains. Despite a new constitution and strengthened national police force for enforcement, Afghan laws regarding safety, prohibition of alcohol and gambling, or compliance with intellectual property rights are rarely enforced. The Afghan-Pakistan border has remained highly porous; credentials of Pashtun tribal identity are often a more important "passport" than actual citizenship for travel across the Durand Line envisioned by the British (Barfield, 2010). At the same time, Afghanistan is remarkably rule-bound. Daily life is regulated by a mix of "renegade" freedoms and strict cultural, moral, and religious codes—most orally, informally, and locally transmitted through family and village networks. During Taliban rule and still today, an Afghan man could own and operate a gun, drive a motorcycle, and set up his own dentist's office without a government-issued license. However, during Taliban rule the same man would be expected to grow a beard to a fist's length, and perform *namaz* (Arabic, *salah*) prayers five times a day—or face imprisonment and beating. Even today, Afghans still accept harsh legal interpretations that most Western cultures would not tolerate. Under conservative interpretations of *Sharia* (Islamic) law, specifically for the *hudud*, adultery is punishable by death from public stoning. Religious conversion from Islam to any other faith tradition explicitly warrants the death sentence, though can be appealed under conditions of "insanity." In January 2008, an Afghan

court sentenced a 23-year-old journalism student to death for asking questions about women's rights under Islam (Sengupta, 2008).

Where these apparent paradoxes of lawlessness and strict rules intersect, a picture of cultural rights and duties emerges. Like any complex society, Afghans divide and order themselves along a multitude of different social categories, each with formal and informal rule structures. These categories may contradict each other, or apply simultaneously, depending upon the circumstances. Certain rights afforded by local interpretations of Sharia law may be encouraged or discouraged by local custom, and further negotiated at kinship levels. For example, an urban man who takes a second wife by choice, as allowed formally by law, will be ostracized and scorned by the first wife's family network, if conducted without their permission. Although the letter of the law, for moderate Islamic interpretations, requires women's hair to be covered in public, most late-teenage and adult Afghan women still dress in full-body *burqas*.

Not only is law bound, adapted, and sometimes extended by cultural customs, but also the enforcement of law and customs are negotiated at the level of kinship networks. Consider that in 2004, the Afghan *Loyal Jirga*, or Grand Assembly, agreed upon a constitution that provides that both genders "have equal rights and duties before the law" (Constitution of Afghanistan, Article 22:2). Culturally, women are generally not allowed to pedal bikes, drive cars, travel alone, or serve as primary household head in the presence of a male alternate. Women who run for political office, attend co-educational schools, or travel alone often face serious threats; many women have been killed or mutilated for taking these actions, even after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Yet many Afghan families still urge their daughters to attend local schools, and restrictions on women's mobility and dress varies considerably across kinship networks and nuclear families. This heterogeneity is not arbitrary. In many cases, conditions of poverty at the village level trump conservative religious customs; women will work in fields without burqas and assume otherwise traditional patrilineal roles for survival. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the world witnessed Afghan women running for parliamentary office, often campaigning through extended family networks of support. In 2005, Afghanistan nominated its first and only female governor, Habiba Sarobi, to assume control of the more liberal and

predominantly Shi'a region of the central highlands, Bamian province.

As these examples illustrate, what constitutes a duty or right—and therefore also what goes beyond the "minimum" behavior required—is negotiated on multiple levels. In tribal societies, lineage members generally have mutual obligations to assist each other—as well as mutual liabilities, in terms of honor and often finances. Anthropologist Bernt Glatzer (1996) observed that among Durrani Pashtun nomads in the western part of the country, patrilineally related kin provide social security and political support. But relations between them can become strained when competing for authority in the kin group and for inheritance. Property is passed patrilineally, as are feuds about previous inheritance. Within maternal kin, however, which lack this resource competition, relations tend to be marked by "cordiality and helpfulness" (Dupree & Gouttierre, 1997, p. 116).

A people, an ethnic group, and a tribe are called *qawm* in Pashto and Dari, and most other languages of Afghanistan. The term reveals that ethnic groups and tribes are structured by genealogical ties. Subtribe or clan is *khel* in Pashto often extending to the level of a neighborhood or village. Kin groups are normally expansive, stretching from the nuclear family unit and the *khel*, to the tribe, to the larger ethnic group. Last in line is the nation-state, which can be fluid where nation-state boundaries and *khel* or *qawm* boundaries contradict—such as along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Local segmentations between tribes are sometimes described by the Arab proverb, "I against my brother. My brother and I against my cousin. My cousin, my brother, and I against the world." The potential for tension with kin is expressed in a common Afghan saying, "Do you have an enemy? I have a cousin." Beneath and between the formal law and vernacular practices governing social behavior are unwritten supererogatory rights and duties. An individual can be applauded for giving up an "unwritten" right, or expected to give up a particular right to preserve social harmony. When facing a shared enemy or threat, the importance of preserving harmony within these kinship bonds increases. An heir to an inheritance may volunteer to share portions of the inheritance with other kin, or demonstrate forbearance or tolerance over a past grievance, where that preserves kinship collaboration.

Another example of supererogatory duties and rights appears in the Pashtunwali code of

hospitality toward guests and travelers. A guest in someone's home has the supererogatory right to ask the host for tea and food. These are customarily offered by the host, with varying degrees of expectation that the guest should accept the offer. The guest has the unwritten right to accept these offers, but sometimes preserves social harmony by not doing so. Taken to an extreme, a guest may demand from the host extraordinary items beyond what is offered, including bedding, clothes, and even money. If the guest demands to be served meat, a luxury food for most Afghan families, the host family would be expected by custom to do so. A failure to serve the guest would be considered shameful. However, exercising these rights may provoke resentment from the host. Similarly, in the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan offers the innkeeper money for the guest, and then promises to pay for anything more that the guest might need. Offering the option to the guest is supererogatory; it is granting a right, perhaps gratuitously, that simultaneously goes beyond the law and preserves honor within a kinship and cultural context.

Supererogatory duties and rights for guests apply even during wartime. Jason Eliot (1999) recalls a story of Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, who, while inspecting the front lines against the Taliban in the late 1990s, accidentally took a wrong turn, lost the route, and drove unarmed into the heart of a Taliban stronghold. Massoud, who was instantly recognized and facing almost certain death, demanded confidently to see their leader. So baffled were his hosts at the sudden appearance of their arch-enemy, they obliged, and a cordial exchange was reported between the rival leaders. Their meeting was just long enough not to offend custom, but short enough to prevent the Taliban from realizing that Massoud's appearance in their midst was nothing more than a one-in-a-million mistake (p. 76).

Whether this legend is exactly true or not, it conveys the reality of the Afghan duty of hospitality toward guests. In this case, it saved Massoud's life, but his protection was only afforded when he presented himself as a guest, rather than a fighter. The shift in positioning meant a shift in social codes for what constitutes fair behavior. Certainly, the very same shift in positioning would not work in a Western culture: a member of the Taliban wandering into an American military camp would be served something quite different than tea!

## Common Goals, Different Expressions

As part of cultural evolution, rights and duties across cultures can best be understood as evolved ways of resolving dilemmas; solutions instead of black-letter law (Ellickson, 1991). As we have seen, these are best understood using an evolutionary-ecological approach. Dilemmas may arise from specific physical, environmental, cultural, and historical facts and are resolved by structured tribal and group affiliations where adaptive duties and rights can be enforced (Ferguson & Whitehead, 1992). For example, in Sherry Ortner's (1989) study of the Sherpan Buddhist community of Darjeeling, Nepal, supererogatory acts were found to resolve contradictions in the social hegemony and strengthen low-class social identity. In particular, voluntary construction of Buddhist temples by low-class Sherpan workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served an adaptive function: on the one hand, these were acts of charity or religious devotion, but on the other, they were an expression of working-class empowerment. Constructing a temple was a "denial that having fewer material resources defined them as 'small,' and of no social consequence" (p. 151). The act carried indirect benefits, such as self-expression and expression of group identity, and resistance of culturally defined hegemony. Ortner explains that "many small [low-status] people who participated in the monastery foundings were like the returning heroes of the schema, newly empowered and expressing or claiming 'bigness'" (p. 153). Supererogatory acts maintained group harmony and collaboration. An informal system of meritorious acts made the working class powerful, and in turn, kept the powerful class in check: priests and power figures were praised for "making statements of smallness, of (political) concern for the people and of (religious) egolessness." Arguably, this expression is no different from the submissive "play-bow" among wolves or other cooperative, evolved animal behaviors.

Within family units, child-parent dilemmas of status, inheritance, and identity were resolved by sending the children to a monastery. Low-income parents unable to provide inheritance for children through property and arranged marriages, could otherwise elevate their family's status through religious participation. Many children pressured their parents to send them to be monks or nuns, where monasticism conveyed high status and exit from low-class obligation (p. 180). Sending a child to join was considered a super-meritorious act, and both parents and children were praised.

Not entirely dissimilar is the American tradition among teenagers from primarily low- and middle-income families to join the military, gaining access to higher status and income. The act of voluntarily joining the military is generally considered meritorious, an opportunity to sacrifice for the benefit of one's country. When the risk of bodily self-sacrifice increases, such as during active combat, the degree of merit increases. In theory, veterans of war are given special respect and valor by their government and countrymen. Super-meritorious and supererogatory acts in combat are rewarded with purple hearts, silver stars, and other medallions. Failure to exemplify special bravery in combat is not punished or blameworthy, but in the case of mandatory military service, failure to serve in combat can be punished.

### ***The Soldier's Sacrifice***

Can there be a "universal ethic" of service in a soldier's sacrifice? Possibly so, but from a functional perspective, supererogatory acts are informal methods of resolving dilemmas. They promote social harmony and survival, rather than a set of universal values per se. Supererogatory acts are best understood therefore not in categories but rather in functional shades and degrees. These degrees vary based on the pressures exerted by the social conditions and relevant spheres of cultural influence. Age, gender, and status, for example, may change the expectations beyond formal duty, as well as calculations of the sacrifice and intentions involved in a supererogatory act. Consider, for example, the case of the American Pat Tillman. Among the thousands of American soldiers who sacrificed their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq, the American press and the United States government gave special attention and praise to Tillman, stating the significance of his sacrifice. Tillman was an American football player who, after the events of September 11, 2001, turned down a multi-million dollar professional sports contract in May 2002, to enlist in the United States Rangers (Krakauer, 2009). Tillman's decision to join the military was considered supererogatory in large part because of the apparent sacrifice involved. A soldier from a low-status background with less access to resources than Tillman would not normally be given the same public praise for the deontological considerations of his supererogatory choice. Given so many financial and personal reasons not to join the military, Tillman is assumed to have acted out of principle rather than social or cultural pressures. It is our position, however, that supererogatory acts

are best understood with reference to principles that function within cultural and functional contexts, rather than separate from them.

### **Minority-Majority Cycle of Rights and Duties: An Example of Universals?**

The identification of cultural variation in rights and duties can be useful, in part to demonstrate the enormous plasticity and range of possibilities in human social life. But we must also return to the question of universals: are there universals in rights and duties in the family context? If so, do they have wider implications outside the family context? Based on the functional analysis we have been using, one possible universal in this context is the *minority-majority cycle of rights and duties* (Moghaddam, 2004), elaborated below.

In all human societies, infants come into this world completely helpless and dependent on others. This means that the young have less power than their caretakers; it is the caretakers who (initially at least) set the rules for behavior and assign rights and duties to the young. Irrespective of whether the child is in a Spanish, Korean, Afghan, or any other culture, it is adults who assign duties in particular. In the caretaker-child relationship, caretakers tend to focus on the duties of children, whereas children assert their rights. This tendency is most extreme in Western societies, where youth rebellion has become a "tradition." Our contention is that the same tendency for caretakers to emphasize duties ("You have to do your homework," "You must tend to the sheep.") and for the growing child to emphasize rights ("I want to go play with my friends.") is found across cultures (Moghaddam & Riley, 2004).

Although the child, a power minority, emphasizes rights, and the caretaker, a power majority, emphasizes duties, the child shifts position when she or he becomes an adult. The child who 20 years ago was rebelling against her parents ("I don't want to do that!") shifts position and emphasizes duties when she has her own child ("I am telling you, you have to do that!"). This "cycle" of rights and duties has wider implications outside the family context.

The study of minority-group behavior reveals that in their relationships with majority groups, minorities tend to give priority to rights—this is reflected in minority-rights movements around the world, along with movements for indigenous peoples' rights, Black rights, women's rights, gay rights, and so on. On the other hand, majority groups emphasize duties, broadly the duty to obey laws that

support the status quo. However, when a minority gains power and manages to become the majority, then there tends to be a shift of emphasis by that newly empowered group from rights to duties. This in part explains the so-called *paradox of revolution* (Middlebrook, 1995): prior to revolutions, minority groups emphasize rights (e.g., “The people must be free to speak and say what they want;” “The people have a right to a higher standard of living.”), but if a revolution succeeds and a former minority group takes over the government, then the “new majority” shifts focus to duties (e.g., “That is not free speech, that is anarchy—we must have limits;” “The people have a duty to work hard.”). The first author witnessed this firsthand during the 1978–1979 revolution in Iran: when in opposition to the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini and his group demanded all kinds of freedoms and rights for the people, but when they became the government themselves, they clamped down on rights and used an iron fist to demand that people “do their Islamic duties.”

Although the minority-majority cycle of rights and duties seems to be pervasive in actual political processes, there have also been attempts, on paper at least, to reinterpret and use duties to serve the interests of all humankind, including minorities, and to argue that duties are a precondition for rights. Two examples of this are the *Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities*, proposed by the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government (preamble, *Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities*, 1996), and the *American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man*, proposed by the International Council of American States in Bogotá, Colombia in 1948.

## Summary and Future Directions: In Search of Universals

We see the exploration of duties and rights to be part of a response to the urgent need for cultural psychology to address “The question of relationship between societies ...” (Valsiner, 2009, p. xi). Rights and duties are foundational to worldviews, and shared understandings of rights and duties can serve as a basis for organizing relationships between and within societies.

The functional argument we have proposed begins with certain behaviors, termed *primitive social relations* (Moghaddam & Riley, 2004), that prove to be advantageous for the survival of groups and become pervasive across groups in the course of evolution. An example is turn-taking, a behavior

that is manifested very soon after birth (Collis, 1985) and is essential for key aspects of social life, such as communications (Duncan, 1972). Without turn-taking, communication quickly breaks down. After the emergence of primitive social relations, there evolve cultural practices for labeling the behavior. For example, depending on cultural conditions, “having a turn to speak” can be interpreted as a right or a duty. In democratic societies, “the right to free speech” is given considerable importance, whereas in dictatorships this right is limited to certain power groups and leaders.

Irrespective of the political and family systems of societies, certain rights and duties are necessarily assigned and adopted as a requirement for using certain modern technologies. In these cases, the requirements of technology override local cultural variations. For example, Iran is a dictatorship in which women are treated as second-class citizens, whereas women enjoy equal rights in Western democracies. However, a woman driving a car in Iran participates in turn-taking in traffic with equal rights to other drivers, just as is the case in Western societies. This is because modern roads and cars require standardized rights and duties for all drivers. Of course, it is possible to deprive a group of the right to drive in the first place (for example, it is illegal for women to drive automobiles in Saudi Arabia).

Working bottom-up, we can identify almost countless cross-cultural variations in duties and rights, including supererogatory acts, reflecting the enormous plasticity of human behavior. However, our conceptual orientation allows us to also work top-down and to identify a small but important number of possible universals in the domain of duties and rights, an example being the minority-majority cycle of rights and duties. Of course, even in the case of this possible “universal,” there are cultural variations in how it is manifested. For example, although parents in both the United States and Afghanistan emphasize the duties rather than the rights of their children in the home as they attempt to socialize them to behave “correctly,” there will be differences in the nature of the duties emphasized, the communications used, rewards and punishments practiced, and so on. Consequently, we need to tread carefully in how we interpret “universals” in rights and duties. This is an area for further research: to test the universality of the rights-duties cycle, and to explore the different duties and rights emphasized in this cycle in different cultures.

Similarly, care is necessary when searching for and interpreting other universals in duties and rights. Although some attention has been given to the psychology of rights and possible universals there, little has been done by way of exploring universal human duties. For a right to be justified, theorists contend that it has to represent a justified *claim-to* (a person's justified claim to, say, clean drinking water) and a justified *claim-against* (a justified claim against some addressee to make water unavailable by polluting a water source) (Feinberg, 1973). Thus, any justified right—such as universal human rights—must be accompanied by a duty (claim-against), as the InterAction Council and others have argued. However, little empirical work has been done to investigate these underlying duties, and whether there is cross-cultural agreement on them. For example, we can imagine different societies agreeing that something is a justified claim-to, but disagreeing about the justification of claim-against. Or perhaps arrive at the same conclusion about a justified right, but disagree on what claim-against was necessary to get there.

Duties underpin and complement rights, as has been previously suggested, and as our examples affirm. Thus, duties are a part of even the most individualistic cultures. It is important to note also that these prevailing cultural norms can be suspended temporarily, as is often the case during emergencies such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks. During this time, *triage*, the prioritization of patients based on severity of injuries and chances of survival, becomes the principle motivation for most medical actors and public managers. By necessity then, everyday notions of individual rights are often temporarily put on hold. Future research should focus on how these rights and duties are understood, maintaining an eye out for whether government recommendations to citizens should be couched as either rights or duties.

Future research should also attend to the implications of the different evolutionary paths through which duties and rights have come to take their contemporary shapes. For most of human history, societies have been organized as dictatorships, with people being trained to give highest priority to their duties to obey authority figures, such as emperors and popes. Rights, particularly individual rights, evolved out of revolutionary struggles of the relatively powerless against the powerful, as reflected in various conflicts, from the French Revolution to clashes involving Black Power, women's liberation, and various other

more recent minority movements. Whereas individual rights are a relatively recent focus, individual and collective duties have been a historical focus. Research is needed to explore the implications of these different paths of development for the behavior of citizens responding to government programs.

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PART 10

Cultural Interfaces:  
Persons and Institutions

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# The Interface between the Sociology of Practice and the Analysis of Talk in the Study of Change in Educational Settings

Harry Daniels

## Abstract

The point of departure for this chapter is the long-running methodological debate concerning the separability or inseparability of person and context in the analysis of human functioning. The intention is to discuss one means of bringing together the psychology that has developed in the wake of Vygotsky's early twentieth-century writing with the sociology of pedagogy developed by Basil Bernstein. The chapter also draws on methodological developments emanating from a 4-year study of professional learning in multi-agency services. The analysis provides a way of examining the sequential and contingent emergence of new forms of understanding in specific institutional settings. This provides one approach to research engagement with the processes of mutual shaping that occur between persons acting and the institutional settings in which they act.

**Keywords:** methodology, separability, Bernstein, Vygotsky, institutional modality

There is a long-running tension, within the so-called macro-micro debate (*e.g.*, Huber, 1991), between those, such as Giddens, who hold that individual and group cannot be analytically separated because “the notions of action and structure *presuppose one another*” (Giddens, 1979, p. 53) and those, such as Archer (1995, p. 88), who propose various forms of analytical dualism as a counter to the notion of inseparability. This same tension is witnessed in recent developments of post-Vygotskian theory where writers such as Rogoff (1998, pp. 2, 7) espouse a thesis of inseparability and others such as Valsiner (1998, p. 1) advance the case for analytic dualisms (Sawyer, 2002). As I have noted elsewhere, much of the sociocultural or Activity Theory research that claims a Vygotskian root fails to fully articulate an appropriate theory of social structure and an account of how it directs and deflects the attention of the individuals it constrains

and enables (Daniels, 2008, p. 1). Sawyer (2002) argues that even the socioculturalists who do make a theoretical claim for inseparability witness certain forms of dualism in their empirical work. His resolution of the central tension is to reject the “strong” forms of both inseparability and dualism and calls for an approach to analytic dualism that:

... must include postulates about the two-way causal relationship between individual and social properties, including the internalization processes associated with development and the externalization processes whereby individuals affect social structure.

(Sawyer, 2002, p. 300)

In this way he rejects the individualism that is the hallmark of much cognitive psychology and the deterministic internalization that Bernstein suggests is to be found in some approaches to macro-sociology.

A crucial problem of theoretical Marxism is the inability of the theory to provide descriptions of micro level processes, except by projecting macro level concepts on to the micro level unmediated by intervening concepts through which the micro can be both uniquely described and related to the macro level. (Bernstein, 1993, p. xv)

In this chapter, I will develop an account of institutional structures as cultural/historical products (artifacts) that play a part in implicit (Wertsch, 2007) or invisible (Bernstein, 2000) mediation of human functioning and that are in turn transformed through human action. In so doing, I will draw on recent developments in post-Vygotskian theory and Bernstein's sociology of education. That is, I will seek to avoid the trap of projecting unmediated macro-level concepts onto the micro-level. The aim is to provide a means by which the mutual shaping of the macro and micro can be seen through and explorations in the development of understanding.

### Approaches to the Macro-Micro Problem

Mäkitalo and Säljö (2002) outline the recent history of the engagement of social science in the development of understandings of the ways in which institutions exert a formative effect on the production and maintenance of social order. Their particular interest is on the relationship between the structural and enduring features of institutions and interactional dynamics (p. 58). The attempt to unravel what is institutional about talk, and the ways in which talk shapes institutions, brings together macro-micro debates with concerns about the relations of the present to the past. Makitalo and Säljö contrast aspects of *structuralist*, *ethnomethodological*, and *sociocultural* approaches. That is, between the determination of individual social action by social structures, as in structuralist accounts, the generation of social structures and institutions through communicative action, as in some ethnomethodological positions (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967), and sociocultural accounts in which the primary culturally and historically generated mediational means, speech itself shapes and is shaped by the situation in which it takes place. In this chapter, I wish to pursue the notion that the construction of social and organizational reality involves the production of oral, written, and even gestural texts, which participate in the *constitution* of organizations (Searle, 1969). In other words, the texts we produce and exchange not only represent a world, but also have the property of constituting it (Putnam & Cooren,

2004). However texts and/or utterances need not be accorded primacy, as Archer (2000) argues that it is our practice in the world that gives rise to our self-consciousness,

This is not simply a matter of [practice] coming before anything else, though temporally it does just that; it is also a question of viewing language itself as a practical activity, which means taking seriously that our words are quite literally deeds, and ones which do not enjoy hegemony over our other doings in the emergence of our sense of self.

(p. 121)

Practices and the institutions in which they arise are also transformed over time. Zandee and Bilimoria (2007) focus on the historical making and unmaking of institutions. That is, they move from a focus on the "process by which institutions are produced and reproduced" (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 638) to the processes through which existing institutions "weaken and disappear" (Scott, 2001, p. 182).

### Mediation: From Vygotsky to Bernstein

The mediational process is one that neither denies individual or collective agency nor social, cultural, or historical influence. At the very heart of Vygotsky's (1987) thesis is the argument that the introduction of new tools into human activity does more than improve a specific form of functioning, it transforms it. Tools, such as language, are cultural, historical products that mediate thinking and feeling and are in turn shaped and transformed through their use in human activity. It is through tool use that individual/psychological and cultural/historical processes become interwoven and co-create each other. Vygotsky links the development of consciousness to semiosis, and specifically to linguistic semiosis, and thus links the specifically human aspects of our practical and mental life to socio-historical contexts (Hasan, 2005, pp. 135, 136).

It is important to note that Vygotsky's thoughts on the nature of mediation changed during the course of his writing. Wertsch (2007) distinguishes between the accounts of, what he terms *explicit and implicit mediation*. The former is explicit in that an individual or another person who is directing this individual overtly and intentionally introduces a "stimulus means" into an ongoing stream of activity and the materiality of the stimulus means, or signs, involved tends to be obvious and nontransitory (p. 180). He contrasts this with implicit mediation, which he sees as a feature of the later cultural/historical phase of Vygotsky's work.

... implicit mediation typically does not need to be artificially and intentionally introduced into ongoing action (*as in explicit mediation*). Instead, it is part of an already ongoing communicative stream that is brought into contact with other forms of action. Indeed, one of the properties that characterizes implicit mediation is that it involves signs, especially natural language, whose primary function is communication. In contrast to the case for explicit mediation, these signs are not purposefully introduced into human action and they do not initially emerge for the purpose of organizing it. Instead, they are part of a pre-existing, independent stream of communicative action that becomes integrated with other forms of goal-directed behavior. (Wertsch, 2007, p. 183)

Similarly for Hasan (2002) and Bernstein (2000), visible semiotic mediation mediates a specific category of reasoning, a certain range of technical concepts, and a particular relation to the physical phenomena of the world whereby the world is classified and categorized in a certain way (Hasan, 2002, p. 152). Whereas invisible semiotic mediation is concerned with the ways in which unself-conscious everyday discourse mediates mental dispositions, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways and how it puts in place beliefs about the world one lives in, including both about phenomena that are supposedly in nature and those that are said to be in our culture (Hasan, 2002).

### ***Invisible Mediation***

Invisible semiotic mediation occurs in discourse embedded in everyday ordinary activities of a social subject's life. Bernstein (1990) argues that while the context for mediation is always the social practices of discourse, an important qualification is that in such practices individuals take up specific social positions and are positioned. The same context offers different possibilities for socially positioned actors.

Participation in social practices, including participation in discourse, is the biggest bootstrapping enterprise that human beings engage in: speaking is necessary for learning to speak; engaging with contexts is necessary for recognising and dealing with contexts. This means, of course, that the contexts that one learns about are the contexts that one lives, which in turn means that the contexts one lives are those which are specialised to one's social position. (Hasan, 2005, p. 153)

I will bring the analysis of the sequential and contingent development of innovation into a Bernsteinian

framework in order to open up the possibility of studying the ways in which such action transforms institutional structures while also being shaped by them. In this way, I will seek to outline an approach to the mutual shaping and transformation of individuals and institutions.

### **MEDIATED ACTION IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS**

Wertsch (1998) has advanced the case for the use of mediated action as a unit of analysis in social-cultural research because, in his view, it provides a kind of natural link between action, including mental action, and the cultural, institutional, and historical context in which such action occurs. This is so because the *mediational means*, or cultural tools, are inherently situated culturally, institutionally, and historically. However, as he had recognized earlier, the relationship between cultural tools and power and authority is still under-theorized and in need of empirical study (Wertsch & Rupert, 1993). This recognition is an important step forward from the original Vygotskian thesis, which as Ratner (1997) notes, did not consider the ways in which concrete social systems bear on psychological functions. He discussed the general importance of language and schooling for psychological functioning; however he failed to examine the real social systems in which these activities occur. The social analysis is thus reduced to a semiotic analysis that overlooks the real world of social praxis (Ratner, 1997).

Wertsch's statement that cultural tools are in themselves powerless and only have impact when agents use them (Wertsch 1998, p. 30), when presented starkly in this way could appear platitudinous. Nevertheless, the statement carries an important reminder about the focus and methods for research on learning resources. With his concern for the materiality of means (including speech), he underlines the way in which the material properties of tools can illuminate "how internal processes can come into existence and operate" (Wertsch, 1998, p. 31). He suggests that goals arise as part of the "background framework" or context within which action is carried out and that there may be conflict between the goals of the agent and the embedded goals of the tools. He is interested also in how new forms of mediated action result from emergence of new means and "unanticipated spin-offs." Here he notes that tools can emerge in unpredictable ways through misuse or borrowing from different contexts or through use for different purposes than designers intended.

Wertsch also considers issues of power and authority with respect to cultural tools and their use. He describes mediational means as “differentially imbued with power and authority,” “privileging” and citing Goodnow, imbued with “cognitive values” (Wertsch, 1998). The notion of cognitive values includes “why it is that certain knowledge is publicly available and openly taught while other forms or knowledge are not” and why certain types of solutions are more highly regarded than others (Wertsch, 1998, p. 66). He suggests that the “emergence of new cultural tools transforms power and authority” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 65) and that “forces that go into the production of a cultural tool often play a major role in determining how it will be used” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 142). He raises questions about how tools are manipulated by users and what tactics are used for employing others’ tools. This is an important departure from approaches to socio-cultural studies of the formation of mind, which neglect the wider situation in which people act. The analysis of relations of power and control as they impact on the production of cultural tools and their use is a vital feature of research that seeks to understand an enriched, embedded view of human functioning in the situation in which it develops.

#### **BERNSTEIN AND THE NEED FOR A LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION**

Bernstein (1993) argued that the enrichment of Vygotskian theory calls for the development of languages of description, which will facilitate a *multi-level* understanding of discourse, the varieties of its practice, and the contexts of its realization and production. There is a need to connect the theory of social formation of mind with the descriptions that constitute part of the methodological apparatus of empirical research. This should provide a means of relating the social/cultural/historical context to the form of the artifact. If processes of social formation are posited, then research requires a theoretical description of the possibilities for social products in terms of the principles that regulate the social relations in which they are produced. We need to understand the principles of communication in terms derived from a study of principles of social regulation.

Different social structures give rise to different modalities of language, which have specialized mediational properties. They have arisen, have been shaped by, the social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which interpersonal exchanges arise and

they in turn shape the thoughts and feelings, the identities and aspirations for action of those engaged in interpersonal exchange in those contexts. Hence the relations of power and control, which regulate social interchange, give rise to specialized principles of communication. These mediate social relations.

In order to understand social mediation it is necessary to take into account ways in which the practices of a community, such as school and the family, are structured by their institutional context (Abreu & Elbers, 2005). There is a need to connect the theory of social formation of mind with the descriptions that are used in research. This should provide a means of relating the social/cultural/historical context to the form of the artifact—in the present case the patterns of talk understood and analyzed as communicative action. We need to understand the principles of communication in terms derived from a study of principles of social regulation at the institutional or organizational level.

#### **The Regulation of Action in Institutions**

It is not just a matter of the structuring of interactions between the participants and other cultural tools, rather it is that the institutional structures themselves are cultural products that serve as mediators. When we talk, as Makitalo and Säljö (2002) argue, we enter the flow of communication in a stream of both history and the future (p. 63). When we talk in institutions, history enters the flow of communication through the invisible or implicit mediation of the institutional structures.

My suggestion is that there is need to analyze and codify the mediational structures, as they deflect and direct attention of participants. In this sense I am advocating the development of cultural/historical analysis of the invisible or implicit mediational properties of institutional structures, which themselves are transformed through the actions of those whose interactions are influenced by them. This move would serve to both expand the gaze of Vygotskian theory and at the same time bring sociologies of cultural transmission, such as that developed by Bernstein (2000), into a framework in which institutional structures are analyzed as historical products, which themselves are subject to dynamic transformation and change.

Bernstein’s (2000) model is one that is designed to relate macro-institutional forms to micro-interactional levels and the underlying rules of communicative competence. He focuses upon two levels: a structural level and an interactional level. The

structural level is analyzed in terms of the social division of labor it creates (e.g., the degree of specialization, and thus strength of boundary between professional groupings). The interactional level is analyzed in terms of the form of social relation it creates (e.g., the degree of control that a manager may exert over a team member's work plan). Thus the key concept at the structural level is the concept of boundary, and structures are distinguished in terms of their relations between categories. The interactional level emerges as the regulation of the transmission/acquisition relation between teacher and taught (or the manager and the managed), that is, the interactional level comes to refer to the pedagogic context and the social relations of the workplace, classroom, or its equivalent.

Power is spoken of in terms of classification, which is manifested in category relations which themselves generate recognition rules. Possession of these category relations allows the acquirer to be recognized by a difference that is marked by a category as would be the case of the rules that allow a professional to be recognized as belonging to particular professional group. This is not simply a matter of finding out which service someone belongs to, it also refers to the ways forms of talk and other actions may be seen as belonging to a particular professional category or grouping. When there is strong insulation between categories (i.e., subject, teachers), each category is sharply distinguished, explicitly bounded, and has its own distinctive specialization; then classification is said to be strong. When there is weak insulation, then the categories are less specialized and their distinctiveness is reduced; then classification is said to be weak.

Different institutional modalities may be described in terms of the relationship between power and control, which gives rise to distinctive discursive artifacts. For example with respect to schooling, where the theory of instruction gives rise to a strong classification and strong framing of the pedagogic practice, it is expected that there will be a separation of discourses (school subjects), an emphasis upon acquisition of specialized skills, the teacher will be dominant in the formulation of intended learning and the pupils are constrained by the teacher's practice. The relatively strong control on the pupils' learning, itself, acts as a means of maintaining order in the context in which the learning takes place. This form of the instructional discourse contains regulative functions. With strong classification and framing, the social relations between teachers and

pupils will be more asymmetrical, that is, more clearly hierarchical. In this example the regulative discourse and its practice is more explicit and distinguishable from the instructional discourse. Where the theory of instruction gives rise to a weak classification and weak framing of the practice, then children will be encouraged to be active in the classroom, to undertake inquiries and perhaps to work in groups at their own pace. Here the relations between teacher and pupils will have the appearance of being more symmetrical. In these circumstances it is difficult to separate instructional discourse from regulative discourse, as these are mutually embedded. The formulation of pedagogic discourse as an embedded discourse comprised of instructional and regulative components allows for the analysis of the production of such embedded discourses in activities structured through specifiable relations of power and control within institutions.

The language that Bernstein has developed, uniquely, allows researchers to take measures of *institutional modality*. That is, to describe and position the discursive, organizational, and interactional practice of the institution. Bernstein's work has not placed particular emphasis on the study of change (see Bernstein, 2000) and thus, as it stands, has not been applied to the study of the cultural/historical formation of specific forms of activity. In the next section I will discuss some of the methods of data collection and analysis that were developed in a study of professional learning in rapidly changing contexts.

### ***The Learning in and for Interagency Work Project***

The Learning in and for Interagency Working project (LIW) was a UK research council (TLRP-ESRC) study that was co-directed by Harry Daniels and Anne Edwards. It was concerned with the learning of professionals in the creation of new forms of practice that require "joined-up" solutions to meet complex and diverse client needs. We studied professional learning in children's services that aim to promote social inclusion through interagency working. Working with other professionals involves engaging with many configurations of diverse social practices. It also requires the development of new forms of hybrid practice. This called for joined-up responses from professionals and stressed the need for new, qualitatively different forms of multi-agency practice, in which providers operate across traditional service and team boundaries.



Vygotsky was concerned to study human functioning as it developed rather than considering functions that had developed. The essence of his “dual stimulation” approach is that subjects are placed in a situation in which a problem is identified and they are also provided with tools with which to solve the problem or means by which they can construct tools to solve the problem. When applied to the study of professional learning, it directs attention to the ways in which professionals solve problems with the aid of tools that may be provided by researchers. We studied professional learning in workshops that were broadly derived from the “Change Laboratory” intervention sessions, developed by Yrjö Engeström and his colleagues in Helsinki (Engeström, 2007, *see* Chapter X this volume), which incorporates a dual stimulation method.

In laboratory sessions the participants were helped to envision and draft proposals for concrete changes to be embarked upon. They discussed and designed interventions, which were intended to bring about changes in day-to-day practices and, at times, in the social structures of the workplace. These actions were prompted by reflections on the tensions and dilemmas raised by data. Prior to the workshops, interview and observational data were used as a base from which to select data that mirror embodied tensions, dilemmas, and structural contradictions in the practices of each site. In this way, critical incidents and examples from the ethnographic material are brought into Change Laboratory sessions to stimulate analysis and negotiation between the participants. The crucial element in a Vygotskian dual stimulation event is the co-occurrence of both the problem and the tools with which to engage that problem.

Vygotsky’s cultural/historical psychology created demands for methods that could not be met by the existing resources that early twentieth-century psychology offered him. He instigated the development of methods that were commensurate to the challenges that his theoretical program required.

The search for [the] method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and result of study. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65)

Vygotsky (1978) consistently argued the case for a historically based psychology. By this he meant a psychology that is concerned with the process

of change. He announced that “behaviour can be understood only as the history of behaviour” (p. 65). He was pursuing a method that allowed for a developmental analysis of process that explained human functioning in terms of dynamic causal relations. The dual stimulation method is important in that “it creates the conditions under which a subject’s course of action toward an experimentally given goal makes explicit the psychological processes involved in that action” (Valsiner, 1990, p. 66). His central concern was to study human functioning as it developed rather than considering functions that had developed. The essence of this approach is that subjects are placed in a situation in which a problem is identified and they are also provided with tools with which to solve the problem or a means by which they can construct tools to solve the problem.

The task facing the child in the experimental context is, as a rule, beyond his present capabilities and cannot be solved by existing skills. In such cases a neutral object is placed near the child, and frequently we are able to observe how the neutral stimulus is drawn into the situation and takes on the function of a sign. Thus, the child actively incorporates these neutral objects into the task of problem solving. We might say that when difficulties arise, neutral stimuli take on the function of a sign and from that point on the operation’s structure assumes an essentially different character.

(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 74, italics added)

The essence of this approach, when it is applied to examining professional learning, is that it directs attention to the ways in which professionals solve problems with the aid of tools that are provided by researchers and become modified in the course of expansive learning. In the Learning in and for Interagency Work Project, the focus of our research was on the operational work of education, social-care and health professionals working within children’s services.

In each local authority our research methodology was organized around series of “developmental work research” workshops involving operational staff. Prior to (and in between) the workshops the research team collected interview and observational data that was then scrutinized in workshop settings by researchers and children’s services professionals from each local authority. We worked in three multi-agency settings:

(a) *Nortonville*, a school whose remit has been extended to act as base for other agencies,

(b) *Wildside*, a children-in-public-care team, and

(c) *Seaside*, a multi-professional team that originally was comprised of education professionals but expanded to incorporate social-care and health practitioners.

We organized six Developmental Work Research (DWR) workshops at each site. The aim was to build upon professionals' "everyday" understandings of multi-agency working, juxtaposing these with reflective, systemic analyses of the ways in which current working practices either enable or constrain the development of innovative multi-agency working. The stated aim of the workshops was to address the challenges of multi-agency professional learning by:

- encouraging the *recognition* of areas in which there is a need for change in working practices, and
- suggesting possibilities for change through *reconceptualizing* the "objects" that professionals are working on, the "tools" that professionals use in their multi-agency work and the "rules" in which professional practices are embedded.

#### ANALYZING AND DESCRIBING THE SITES

There was a need to refine a language of description, which would allow the research to "see" institutions as they did their tacit psychological work through the discursive practices that they shape. A way of describing what were essentially the pedagogic modalities of the settings in which we were intervening was required. That is, the most likely forms of institutional practice that would be sustained in those settings needed to be described. A crucial element in the description was to be an attempt to try to identify points at which communicative action will engage with the transformation of the institution. We recognised the importance of developing an approach to the analysis and description of our research sites that could be used to monitor changes that took place over the course of our intervention. All the more so because we were minded by the understanding that different social structures give rise to different modalities of language that have specialized mediational properties. This was part of the development of an account of institutional structures as cultural/historical products (artifacts) that play a part in implicit (Wertsch, 2007) or invisible (Bernstein, 2000) mediation.

From a Bernsteinian standpoint, the relations of power and control, which regulate social interchange, give rise to specialized principles of communication. These mediate social relations and shape both thinking and feeling: the "what" and "how" as well the "why" and "where to" of practice. We were concerned with the ways in which wider social structures impact on the interactions between the participants and their patterns of communicative action.

#### A MODEL OF DESCRIPTION

A model of the setting in which the development of such multi-agency functioning develops must refer to the group of professionals who were involved in the workshops, the wider local authority and the clients who were to be served by emergent multi-agency practices.

#### *Classification and Framing*

Bernstein's (2000) concepts of boundary strength (classification) and control (framing) can be applied to many aspects of such a model. Here we use the terms *instrumental* or *instructional practice* to refer to the pragmatic actions within practice. Within the workshop group, the strength of classification (horizontal division of labor) in the practices of professional agencies and control (framing) over the membership of these groups was examined. The strength of distinctions in the vertical division of labor, the strength of the marking of hierarchy, and the associated relations of control within this hierarchy were also seen to be central facets of the structuring of the workshop groups. The strength of control over the regulative practice (matters of order, identity, and relation) was also noted. In many respects this shows similarities with Engeström's (1992) discussion of the "why and where to" aspects of activity in that the reference is to the values and beliefs that underpin practice. The features of the practices within the DWR group were modeled as follows in Table 39.1.

**Table 39.1 The DWR group: Model features**

Instrumental or instructional practice	Classification	Framing
Horizontal	yes	yes
Vertical	yes	yes
Regulative Practice		yes

**Table 39.2 The local authority: Model features**

	Classification	Framing
Horizontal	yes	
Vertical	yes	yes
Boundary with DWR group	yes	

In the local authority the vertical division of labor between members of the workshop and their colleagues in the wider authority was also taken as a key feature of the research sites as was the extent to which boundaries were maintained between the professions in the local authority. The control over the boundary relations between the workshop groups and the local authority was analysed and described, somewhat awkwardly, as the framing of those relations where strong framing was taken as a boundary maintained by the authority, weak framing as a boundary relation in which the workshop group maintained control and an intermediary position in which a relatively fluid two-way flow of communication was maintained. The features of the practices within the local authority were modeled as follows in Table 39.2.

The extent to which clients were classified as belonging to a particular category of need (strong classification) or as the “whole child” (weak classification) was also noted. This was taken as the division of labor within the client community.

Each aspect of this model was described for each site through data gathered through extensive observations and interviews. A coding grid was developed for each aspect. The codings were independently validated by two researchers. An example is given in Figure 39.1.

The codings were agreed upon for the full model for each site, as shown in Figure 39.2.

We also noted the means by which attempts were made to coordinate services in the wider local authority, as well as the form of any recent disruption in the order of the local authority. These features are given in Figure 39.3.

A crude typification of these sites in terms of a general application of Bernstein’s model of the embedded features of pedagogic practice in which instructional Practice (I) and regulative practice (R) are mutually embedded, but in which one may predominate (see Fig. 39.4).

In this way we arrived at condensed codings of what may be seen as the historical legacy presented at the moment when we sought to engage with groups of professionals at each site.

*Analyzing Communicative Action at Each Site*

David Middleton proposed an approach to analysis that focused on the forms of social action that are accomplished in talk and text and the sorts of communicative devices that are used (Middleton et al., 2008)<sup>1</sup>. This was designed to focus the analytic attention of the research team on emergent distinctions that were argued by participants. This involved the examination of the shift from the “given” to the “to-be-established.” “What it is to do” or “to learn” was not to be assumed as an analytic a priori (Middleton, 2004). Rather, such issues are approached as participants’ concerns or “members categories” (Sacks, 1992; Edwards & Stokoe, 2004; Stokoe, 2006). This analytic shift aimed to move from framing communication as descriptions corresponding to states in and of the world, to the performative organization of communicative action. In other words, what we do with talk and text can be analyzed in terms of what it accomplishes (Potter &

**Model Feature** -- Division of Labour (Vertical)

**Exemplar interview question** - How hierarchical is the management in your work ?

**Coding**

- 1. C-- = All members of a ‘flat’ team
- 2. C++ = Strong hierarchy (director, dep director, principal, senior, junior)

-	1 C--	2 C-	3 C+/-	4 C+	5 C++
Seaside	X				
Wildside	X				
Nortonville				X	

**Figure 39.1** Example of coding grids applied to model of description.

	Wildside	Seaside	Nortonville
<b>DWR group</b>			
Horizontal	C- F-	C+/- F+/-	C++ F++
Vertical	C- -F-	C- - F+/-	C+ F++
Regulative Practice	F+/-	F++	F- -
<b>Local Authority</b>			
Horizontal	C + F+	C+ F+	C+ F+
Vertical	C- F -	C++ F+/-	C++F++
Control over DWR	F+/-	F++	F- -
group boundary	Free flow	Control with LA	Control with DWR
<b>Clients</b>			
Horizontal	C-	C- -	C+ +

**Figure 39.2** Agreed codings for the full model

Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1992). We emphasized that addressing such issues required a focus on the sequential and contingent organization of session-communicative action. That is, how people's contributions to the sessions are contingently related to each other in terms of the sequential organization of their talk (Middleton et al., 2008).

Its cyclical application enabled: reading, reviewing, interrogating, collating, and comparing all the audio-visual evidence from the intervention sessions in order to identify the emergent strands of learning and proposals for change. The approach was developed as a means of identifying strands of communicative action, which witnessed the sequential and contingent development of concepts over the course

of the year in which the six DWR workshops were organized at each site. In drawing analytical attention to the significance of claims to experience, we were also able to highlight the temporal organization of communicative action. We also used forms of discursive analysis to trace the emergence of what can be taken as the collective and distributed knowledge of people who are charged with the task of working together. We aimed to track the emergent practical epistemologies (*cf.* Wickman & Ostman, 2002; Wickman, 2004) that come and need to be taken as given in order to take account of hitherto unaddressed gaps in the realization of multi-agency practice. Such gaps were identified and worked on through participation in the DWR sessions at each research site.

	Seaside	Wildside	Nortonville
Coordination of agencies and agents	Perceived lack of response to operational staff views (at several levels)	Strong strategy	No strategy which impacted on case study site. Strategy developing within rest of LA
Disruptions	Several major re-organisations Radical localisation of services		Recent leadership changes and reconfigured systems

**Figure 39.3** Features of the local authority (LA)

- Seaside I/R The regulative aspect of predominant
- Nortonville I/R The instructional / instrumental aspect is predominant
- Wildside I/R An intermediary / balanced position

**Figure 39.4** Representation of the structure of pedagogic practices at each study site

Initially we approached the data with what could be termed a minimal operationalisation of “what it is to learn” from a participant’s perspective. We examined the data for ways participants signaled some forms of awareness that theirs’ or others’ knowledge state is at issue. Such “noticings” provide the resource that engages the participants in their definition/delineation and deliberation of the nature of the practices that make up their multi-disciplinary work. In the data we could identify many such strands of noting and noticing such distinctions that make the difference. Indeed this sort of analysis provided us with a basis for defining a protocol for guiding interrogation and analysis of the data in terms of the sequential organization of such strands. The analysis was therefore initially guided in terms of the following protocol:

**Deixis:** identify when there is some nomination or “pointing” to a particular issue in terms of drawing attention to a distinction that is then worked up to make a difference in subsequent turns.

**Definition and delineation:** look for how that issue is elaborated in the uptake of others in terms of how the following are warranted and made relevant through: (i) qualifications identifying further distinctions; (ii) orderabilities in the organization and delivery of past, present, and future practice; (iii) expansive elaborations of the problematics of practice.

**Deliberation:** identify how some working consensus on what is the case emerges in terms of evoking both particularities and generalities of marking distinctive features of past, present, or future practice.

The analysis then turned to examining in what ways such sequences mattered. If we identified strands of deixis, definition/delineation, and deliberation, what were their contingent consequences for participants? Did they make visible distinctions that made the difference in ways that participants could be identified as attending to what was necessary to

attend to in order to learn to do multi-agency working? In other words, did they lead to some form of departure or development in claims concerning the practice of the participants? This step enabled us to complete the definition of the protocol with:

**Departure:** identify shifts toward qualitatively different positions in practices in terms of the formulation of emergent distinctions.

**Development:** identify when participants specify new ways of working that provide the basis for becoming part of, or having become part of, what they take to be and warrant as a significant reformulation of their practices.

Sequences of communicative action were analyzed in the transcripts of the workshops. Some sequences progressed to departures, others remained at other stages within the model. Related sequences were identified and these were grouped into strands of talk that wove their way through the progress of the each series of workshops. These strands (comprised of different types of sequences) witnessed the progression of learning through and with talk in the workshops. The themes that these strands addressed and the contradictions that gave rise to their emergence were analyzed in activity theoretic terms. At the end of the project, participants were interviewed about what they gained from the experience and subsequent analysis revealed the traces of each site’s strands in the interviews at each site. In this way we developed an approach to the analysis of communicative action in the workshops themselves, along with a rudimentary approach to validation. The next move was to consider the relation between the communicative action that took place and the historically given structures that shaped the practices of participants.

The overall challenge of the project was to show how institutionally established categories and ways of arguing could be reformulated and transformed

into new strategies and activities as part of learning what it is to become engaged with and in multi-agency work. However, without the comprehensive analysis of the communicative action within the sessions across all the research sites we would not have been able to progress to the final analysis of those transformations (Daniels, 2006).

### ***Communicative Action and Structural Change***

The notion that guided the further development of the analysis was that the institutional arrangements at a particular site would direct and deflect the possibilities for action by participants. This suggestion was witnessed in the findings.

The data suggest that at a very general level there were stronger values of classification and framing of the instructional practice in Nortonville and progressively weaker values in Seaside and Wildside. In addition, a consideration of the nature of the regulative practice in each site suggests strong framing in Seaside, weak framing in Nortonville, with Wildside occupying an intermediary position. Thus, in Nortonville the instructional practice (which was strongly classified and highly framed) predominates over the weak regulative discourse. Whereas in Seaside the relatively weak boundaries witnessed in the weaker values of classification of the instructional practice were embedded in the regulative practice through which common values and meanings have been the object of much of the early work of the team. In Wildside an intermediary position was witnessed in the embedding of the instruction and regulation.

Over the period of interventions in the workshops, many structural transformations were witnessed. The Bernsteinian analysis revealed the boundaries where communicative action in each site was most engaged and how that action was regulated. Analysis revealed how a focus on institutional boundaries and relations of control provided important tools for understanding the shaping of transformative learning in specific settings.

For example, by the end of the intervention it was the weaker regulative practice of Nortonville that was the object of intervention from an external agent. The historical legacy of the strongly bounded extended school site within which professional practices were highly controlled. These remained distinct from each other provided a setting in which a move to multi-agency working and thus weaken-

ing of boundaries was most likely to be achieved through external influence on the values and beliefs within the DWR group (the regulative practice). This was confirmed through the analysis of communicative action within the workshops. An educational psychologist acted in this way.

In Seaside the focus of communicative action was on the rules and practices of communication within the instructional practice. Participants became frustrated by the contradiction between legacy rules (maintained by the local authority) and the new emergent objects of multi-agency work. They had already established a strong regulative practice before the DWR intervention was initiated. On the basis of this legacy they sought to examine the contradictions in the instrumental aspects of their practice and began to bend (or even break) the legacy rules. The strong boundary between the workshop group and the local authority was maintained through practices of communication in which instructions (rules) were formulated and transmitted by local authority strategists who were unresponsive to replies or ideas formulated by operational professionals within the workshop group. This approach which we termed 'd-analysis' confirmed that the boundary between the workshop group and the local authority was the focus of the communicative action in the workshops.

In Wildside the relation with clients became the predominant concern. There were no strong barriers between the group and the authority, and although the categories of professional agencies within the authority remained strong, the learning focused on ways in which multi-agency work could be coordinated through strategic tools. These tools were the focus of much of the communicative action in the Wildside workshops.

The strong boundaries around the professional categories and the strong control over professional behavior in Nortonville maintained the practices of individual specialists. In what was, in essence, a contract culture in which specialist labor was purchased in order to meet needs that were stipulated by one agency, there was no debate or development of the regulative discourse, the "why and where-to" features of the practice. Here the formation of a collection of specialists was mediated by explicit means. Whereas at Wildside there were weak boundaries around the professional categories in which professionals were situated in the workshop and they were more in control than their peers in Nortonville. However their operational professional practice witnessed strong

boundaries between services and their professional peers. In Seaside the weakened professional boundaries and relations of control that had been weakened through rule breaking and bending gave rise to a collection of workers who drew on the primary strengths of their colleagues when they recognized the need for their expertise. Values coordinated by strategy resulted in a coordinated collection of specialists in the field. The implicit meditational effect of the boundary between the operational and strategic aspects of the work resulted in transformations, in the form of rule bending, that were not open to articulation by practitioners. It was only when their changes in practice were represented to them that they realized the nature of the changes they had made in their work.

## Conclusion

This approach gives some insight into the shaping effect of institutions as well as the ways in which they are transformed through the agency of participants. We modeled the structural relations of power and control in institutional settings, theorized as cultural/historical artifacts, which invisibly or implicitly mediate the relations of participants in practices in which communicative action takes place. This communicative action was then analyzed in terms of the strands of evidence of learning in and for new ways of working. This provided empirical evidence of the mutual shaping of communicative action by organizational structures and relations and the formation of new professional identities.

This approach extends the application of Bernstein's work to the study of the transformation of institutional modalities over time. The analysis of communicative action provides an approach to the consideration of the sequential and contingent development of concepts over time in specific institutional settings.

This approach to modeling the structural relations of power and control in institutional settings were theorized as cultural/historical artifacts, which invisibly or implicitly mediate the relations of participants in practices. Their communicative action may be analyzed in terms of the strands of evidence of learning in and for new ways of working, giving some insight into the shaping effect of institutions, as well the ways in which they are transformed through the agency of participants. It opens up the possibility of developing increasingly delicate descriptions of the rules and division of labor that are obtained within and between settings.

At the same time it carries with it the possibility of rethinking notions of agency and reconceptualizing subject position in terms of the relations between possibilities afforded within the division of labor and the rules that constrain possibility and direct and deflect the attention of participants.

## Future Directions

There are many challenges ahead for the development of this approach. Given that the delicacy of the model of description may be adjusted to the demands of the research question:

1. How do we ensure that we are asking the right questions about the potential institutional contributing factors, which exert a formative effect on inter- and intrapersonal functioning, and
2. How do we ensure that we are observing the relevant forms of inter- and intrapersonal functioning when we come to consider the shaping of institutional change?

These are questions about what might be called *lens adjustment* in research.

There is a related question concerning the considerable challenge inherent in the search for methodologies that allow us to uncover the range and extent of invisible or implicit meditational means in different situations.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to David Middleton for permission to draw on project notes for this section.

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## The Work of Schooling

Giuseppina Marsico and Antonio Iannaccone<sup>1</sup>**Abstract**

The communication process between the school and home is a universal relation that is crucial for cultural organization of human development. Through the *balcony metaphor*, the chapter outlines how the school is a *place in between*, a border constantly interfaced with both internal aspects (practices, discourses and different actors) and the wider sociocultural climate. The school balcony, as a border zone, is an area of contact with other relevant educational settings. By standing on the balcony and by adopting a binocular-type vision focused inside and outside school, this contribution explores the many processes implied in the work of schooling, moving from the role played by the socio-economic and cultural dimensions, passing through the analysis of intersectional points with other educational contexts (such as family-school meetings), arriving at the definition of identity in the school (the suggested *Educational Self notion*). The choice to “be” on the school balcony, even if it’s an uncomfortable position, allows one to assume a perspective where one is able to grasp the inherent dynamism of the boundary phenomena.

**Keywords:** balcony, boundary process, inside and outside the school, school-family intersection, Educational Self notion

When you think about the school, the most common image that comes to your mind is likely a large, multi-storied building with a spacious entrance and several rooms, more or less of the same size.



This image, that you probably draw from biographic memory and experience as a student, comes in clearly and seems ordinary to your eyes. Besides negligible details, the school seems a place connoted by some features—including architectural features—concurring to build a prototypical and shareable image. When we think about the work of schooling, something similar happens. Suddenly the image comes to mind of a classroom furnished in a standard way, with students and teachers carrying out some activities. The visual and virtual tour of the school, slowly winding before your eyes, seems to follow a specific pathway: you enter the building through the nearly empty entrance hall,

All conversational sequences we present in the following pages were fully transcribed according to the Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 1985). See the appendix for symbol definitions that are used in the excerpts.



walk through the corridors,



enter a classroom where something is going on between teacher and students, following a format (front lesson, discussion, assessment).



But is that really all there is? Do not you think that something is missing? What's missing? Something does not actually appear in this journey—something that the schools do not have—a balcony.

Why a balcony? Why would a school need a balcony? Can you visualize a balcony? Obviously, a school does not need a balcony—but the school can be considered to be a metaphoric balcony of the society itself.

### The School as a Balcony

Schools all over the world hardly ever have balconies<sup>2</sup>. In this imaginary topology, we want to look at the work of schooling from the viewpoint of a metaphoric balcony. In our view, the school is just comparable to a balcony because it is exactly a *place in between*. It is part of the whole—an establishment of learning—but also a frontier, bordering on the outside. In fact, the balcony is a *place that is a non-place*. It is an extension of the house where various events of daily life and many relevant social interactions take place. But the balcony is also a space outstretched toward the outside, suspended in space. It brings the intimacies of the inside to the public visibility on the border with the outside—without abandoning the inside.

School as balcony must constantly face the internal and external world in terms of culture—sociopolitical climate, social change, systems of beliefs and values, conceptions of education or, in other words, the *Weltanschauung* and *Bildung* shared at given time. It also faces challenges in terms of social norms (for example, how the relations between adults and children in different social settings are regulated) and of relations with other institutions (such as families, religious organizations, local authorities, etc.).

The metaphor evoked—like every metaphor—is not a strategic and simple way to summarize concepts. It is an evocative modality to talk about the work of schooling because it contains the way to immediately grasp the multifaceted and concrete state of this specific topic (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Dooremalen & Borsboom, 2010). Looking at the work of school from the balcony is certainly an uncommon and maybe uncomfortable position. On the balcony you are actually exposed to unexpected events such as the change of weather conditions. However, from the balcony you can observe both inside and outside the building. From this position you can grasp both internal elements coming out—like the good smell of coffee or an Italian kitchen, people laughing or quarrelling—and external elements coming in—for example, fresh air, light, smog, and noise. Many other things happen

in the narrow and hanging space of a balcony. The balcony actually exposes you to world outside. It is a physical space distinct from the house's interior, which is instead made of well-known objects with their usual place. It is a distinct social space where some forms of interaction with neighbors take place. From the balcony, you can observe life going on and be observed in return, you can look at the changing landscape, the world in movement, the succession of the seasons. On the balcony, you can grow plants or keep the dustbin.

### ***Inside and Outside: The Balcony as a Border Zone***

Applying this metaphor to the work of schooling, we may say that choosing to be on the balcony transcends the idea of school as a closed territory, characterized by its own culture of education (Bruner, 1996), estranged and far away from the real world. This choice rather assumes a perspective able to grasp the dynamism and movement between different social settings, connections and implications between school and broader culture characterized by some ideas about education, some specific form of social organization, beliefs, and shared models of behavior, as well as sociopolitical and economic change. In the metaphor, the balcony is the point of contact between the school—with its own practices and discourses (laughing and quarrelling), its old and new cultural artifacts (coffee, Italian kitchen, material and symbolic objects that are available and familiar)—and the outside world, where different social changes take place (succession of the seasons and change of landscape), and in which different educational models and belief systems coexist, sometimes opposing and disorienting (fresh air, light, smog, and noise). Like every boundary zone (Lewin, 1936; Tüomi-Gröhn, 2007; Tüomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003; Konkola, 2001), the school balcony is a place of social interaction with other actors (neighbors) and of intersection with other educational contexts, relevant for a child's development. In order to manage the encounter with the "Other" (for example, families, other education agencies, community), a school has at its disposal more or less adequate tools (plants or dustbin) that can make it fruitful or difficult meeting the world outside.

In this contribution we will attempt to better direct the look, focusing not only on what happens inside and outside school, but especially what happens on the border. The construct of "border"

seems to be heuristically relevant, from the point of view of psycho-social processes, to explore some psychological dynamics and exchanges between life contexts where development events take place. The use of boundary notion is, obviously, not new in psychology. Sufficient is to refer to Kurt Lewin's perspective focused on boundaries (Lewin, 1936).

### **BOUNDARY PROCESSES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MEMBRANES**

It is the boundary conditions—structured and dynamic as a "membranes" in biological systems (Belousov, 1998)—that we need to explore. The inherent open-ended nature of sociocultural phenomena requires a new theoretical framework that enables us to grasp the fluidity of the relations between different parts of the dynamic system (Tavory, Jablonka, & Ginsburg, 2012). Recent advances in modern biology seem to provide a set of heuristic concepts useful to investigate the complexity and fluidity of the relationship between different contexts. One of these is the notion of plasticity derived from Waddington's epigenetic approach (1940, 1957). *Plasticity* is related to the different possible responses (more or less adaptive, active, predictable, or reversible) of one organism to the various environmental conditions. Such fluid and opened-ended plasticity is a relevant feature of the boundary conditions. The interest for the boundary process is strictly connected with the "crossing boundaries" phenomena. It calls for focusing on what happened on the border or, following our metaphor, what happens on the balcony. We will adopt binocular-typevision, enabling us to constantly focus on both aspects—what happens to actors inside and outside school in the broader cultural context—because we are aware that school walls, as argued, are much more permeable than previously theorized by psychological research.

Even though constantly paying attention to the whole of field forces (Lewin, 1951) inside and outside school, we will attempt to "zoom in," from the analysis of some elements of sociocultural context significantly affecting education, to the way school gets in contact with other education agencies, to explore how the history of one's educational experience affects the definition of Self.

### **A View through the Balcony**

Our privileged position on *the balcony* enables us to clearly observe the twofold function of school, referring to both individual and interpersonal

processes and contextual and cultural aspects with their interconnection. This position enables us to see the unity of differences operating within the same whole (Valsiner, 2009). School holds a prominent position in most societies—as well as in psychological research—because of its crucial role in both individual and social life. In the school context, the individual reaches a series of cognitive, social, and affective achievements that are fundamental in development to become able to appropriate of the culture he/she belongs to (Rogoff, 2003; Lopez, Najafi, Rogoff, & Arauz, 2012) and it happens through more and more active participation in shared social practices. Within the sociocultural context of a given society, school is also the catalyst element—sometimes propulsive, sometimes inhibitory—of specific social processes (Toomela & Valsiner, 2010; Cabell, 2010; Steininger, 2008). On the other hand, school plays more frequently a homeostatic function, devoted to preserving the *status-quo* of society.

### **Context as a Ground of a Figure**

The key element allowing the creation of the relationship inside and outside the school is the idea of a link between context and culture with the *figure* itself (Kindermann & Valsiner, 1995). In this sense, context is the *background* of a *figure*, and cannot exist separately, according to Herbs't's co-genetic logic (1995). When a phenomenon comes into being, context is necessarily there. This idea is in contrast with the cross-cultural and “traditional” psychological concept of context, understood as something into which a person is placed. Following this perspective, school should be a context into which a child is placed. Instead, we argue that when a child enters the school, this context becomes part of the child just because he is in the school. A relationship between the child and the school is thus established, rather than a unilateral effect of school, family, or society on the child. This could be an example of the view we would not follow—context, and its cultural features, as separated from individual processes taking place in school. In some sense, even Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) *de facto* accepts that view. He would probably oppose this claim, but the way he presents the context at multi-level essences of different systems actually separates the context from actors. Undoubtedly, the ecological theory of human development is one of the most interesting scientific perspectives to have emerged during the twentieth century to study the development processes. It

assumes that development can be understood only considering it as a process integrated with social and environmental conditions.

Since its first comparison in the 1970s, Bronfenbrenner's model has had a great impact on the psychological field. Unlike other models, although sophisticated, it offers conceptual tools essential to understand the relationship between certain specific elements of development and the role played by the characteristic of the environment. As stressed by the ecological systems perspective, family and school are the fundamental contexts in which social development takes place. This assumption, widely shared, is the basis of many researches that, at different levels, have examined how things work in these two micro-systems. Few studies, instead, have investigated their intersection. How and where do family and school contexts intersect? Which is the representations' systems produced by the actors in one context toward the other micro-system? Which are the regulatory dynamics taking place during the encounters of the two micro-systems? These questions require defining the nature of this intersection and the way in which the person becomes person-in-the-context. Valsiner's notion of context (1987) is closer to the concept of the functional relationship between person and environment, in which the organism creates the context and the context creates the organism in return, even if they are not melted into one entity. This differs from Rogoff's perspective (2003), in which the two aspects are considered similar and connected, rather than unified but separated. The idea of *inclusive separation* (Valsiner, 1987) is a more heuristic look at the relationships than the idea of *exclusive separation*, in which person and context are just separated—or *fusion*, in which they cannot be distinguished at all. A phenomenon cannot be theoretically analyzed “in relation” without having parts that relate. In order to understand the dynamic nature of the relationship between person, context, and culture, it is worthwhile to theoretically keep person and environment together, like separate entities always related as a whole.

### **THE MUTUAL FEED-FORWARD LOOP**

The theoretical perspective—sensitive to the connections and mutual definition between different elements within the same whole and to the *mutual feed-forward loop* between person and context—seems to support the methodological choice of “positioning on the balcony,” constantly directing the look inside and outside school. In this way, is thus

possible to examine how, during everyday activities inside school—on an intrapsychic and interpsychic level of analysis (Doise, 1982)—the extraordinary endeavour of the formation of higher mental processes (such as formal language, reasoning, problem solving, etc.) takes place. In addition, is it also possible to explore how the personality construction is consolidated through the relationship with others and significant adults. Within this dimension the construct of *Educational Self* is grafted. As we will argue more fully below, it is a specific part of Self emerging from the individual's experiences in the educational contexts. It takes place during the school age, but goes on throughout life, playing a role every time people are involved in educational activities or have to deal with educational contexts.

On a more general level of analysis, school is instead the institution “formally” charged with human development. It is a social organization that, in theory, takes care of—or should take care of (conditional mood is required especially in relation to depressed or developing areas)—an entire generation of children and youths in a given historic and cultural moment. The fundamental construction of human beings as members of society is thus at stake in school and, as a consequence, the construction of collective future directions, the opportunities for positive or negative change, is also at stake. Also in jeopardy is the fundamental play for present and future models of collective life, as well as social rights—for example, the opposition between democratization and privatization affecting the right to access school, a debate taking place in different rich and developing countries. These remarks impose to examine what surrounds the metaphorical balcony from which we are analyzing the work of schooling. Through the balcony, these elements reach school, becoming a fundamental element in constructing school's everyday life and its systems of activity (Engeström, 1987). The first element to be taken into account is the socio-economic dimension of cultural context in which school acts. In this perspective, a historical review of the processes, leading to specific concepts of school and to some outcomes of teaching and learning processes, can be very useful.

### **Homeostatic Functions of the School**

Since the 1960s, extensive scientific literature in development and education psychology stressed the dramatic effects of families' socio-economic conditions on children's school experience. This

scientific production is based on a series of studies in sociology and economics leading to the scathing and common conclusion that—despite an almost universal diffusion of alphabetization and basic education—it is quite impossible, as a matter of fact, to significantly “democratize” the effects of education. It is not possible to provide every student, independently from his own socio-economic origins, actual opportunities of redemption from the original status through education. This is an evidence-based conclusion stressing the critical state of democratic foundations with respect to school. As a matter of fact, despite evident differences in accessing educational resources and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), many people would claim that these differences are not actually relevant at school. Every student, provided with good will and enough perseverance, will be able to achieve every aspiration. Democratic systems are based on the reassuring claim that, at least in principle, it is actually possible to remove the obstacles causing “socio-economic diversity” in a large number of the population. Education is charged with the fundamental responsibility to put citizens in a position of equal rights and opportunities, by actually supporting those who move from disadvantaged social and economic positions. Unfortunately, although more people can access education, school seems still unable to narrow the socio-economic gap, even in rich countries. Employment statistics still show a clear and direct relationship between type of job and a family's socio-economic resources. In other words, social class of origin, choice of the course of study, and school achievements are so tightly linked that school seems to be an instrument to maintain social stratification (Dei, 2000).

Besides a student's actual starting condition, related to his or her family's social and cultural capital, there is a second level of influence playing a relevant part in enhancing or balancing the effects of social differences in the classroom. The forms of organization established in the classroom lead to different arrangements in teachers' formal power conduct and in students' group informal power relationships (Fele & Paoletti, 2003). These complex processes originate from socio-economic differences—as well as any other difference of age, gender, disability, etc.—anchoring to group dynamics. These dynamics can minimize or, more frequently, radicalize the perception of differences, affecting group inclusion and exclusion processes. Many studies in social psychology (*see* Speltini &

Palmonari, 2007 *for an overview*) stress how this dichotomy—being inside or outside the group—clearly affects the perception of specific individual characteristics. The group tends to “assimilate” members emphasizing common traits and underestimating differences. On the other hand, differences with nonmembers or conflicting out-group members are overestimated (Tajfel, 1981).

Through psycho-social studies, we can more systematically stress common sense extension and depth of socio-economic differences affecting people life, also in so-called welfare societies. Several sharp studies incontestably show the basic privileges provided by some socio-economic conditions, dramatically highlighting inequalities between students in choosing courses of study, achieving educational goals, and accessing jobs. Although for different reasons, teachers also often underestimate the effects of socio-economic conditions on students. For example, the belief that students’ success or failure is mainly related to endogenous and motivational factors is still commonly held (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007). It is not unusual to say: “He is a child with scarce motivation to learn,” or “He is not inclined for school,” as if learning processes would totally rely on a sort of magical energy someone has and someone else does not have. In this case, researchers argue that people use this *gift theory* (Mugny & Carugati, 1985) to account for the extraordinary variability of individuals in achieving educational goals. The impossibility to unequivocally attribute success—or failure—to clear and identifiable causes, would lead people to identify elements of individual conduct (e.g., will, specific flairs), or, at worst, of familiar behaviour (“with that family, he can’t get far!”). Teachers instead seem to turn to the gift theory for different reasons, as far as they have a specific experience of learning processes. They use this argument in defense of their own professional identity.

The teacher’s profession is actually directed toward mass alphabetization and education of future citizens, despite challenges related to socio-economic and cultural origin. In everyday life, he must instead cope with an obvious sequence of failures. It does not frequently happen, as it can be argued, that students with low socio-economic origins totally recover the initial gap. Thus, teachers must cope with the rigidity and immobility of social reality much more than they would expect with respect to their job. This dramatically questions professional principles (especially for novice teachers and those worn out by difficult experiences),

activating (according to some social psychologists of development) a sort of “defensive” representation, realized in the “individualistic” gift theory. The attribution of failure to a student’s specific characteristics becomes a teacher’s vindication.

Fortunately, a large part of modern education psychology provides alternative explanations to failure, by contextualizing it and restoring the complex of human experience as a whole (Carugati & Selleri, 2005). Some just point out the relationship between failure and socio-economic variables, while others stress how learning is an interpersonal process by nature. In the latter category of studies, failure is identified with specific social skills, especially argumentative ones (Muller Mirza, Perret-Clermont, Tartas, & Iannaccone, 2009). Thus, the problem shifts from the student’s cognitive and motivational fund to the ability of establishing relationships with others—in situations in which confronting ideas and points of view leads him or her to become aware of the necessary operations to solve problems—enhancing a cognitive progress (Iannaccone, 2010). In the same socio-constructivist direction, there are other interesting perspectives referring to the so-called “Brunerian culturalist.” view Bruner (1990, 1996) outlines an idea of cognitive and learning processes as a construction of meaning with respect to their social and cultural frameworks. Common sense, on one hand, and “contextualist” researchers, on the other hand, are a good example—even if not exhaustive—of the numerous ideas of school circulating within society. These ideas can significantly affect educational policy and practices, on a national and local level. These different visions lead to conflicting and incompatible conclusions also concerning the problem of the actual democratization of educational action. As already mentioned, among the more diffused representations, a naïve vision of school certainly exists, which overestimates positive effects making unclear the latent socio-economic variables. This perspective considers school a pathway to individual and social redemption without manifest rifts. A sort of relationship between students’ “will” and success in study is thus established. This idea has been fully shared in both the scientific community and everyday discourses. It is however undeniable that education has actually improved life conditions of large populations.

### *Maintaining Status-Quo of Society*

Sociology and psychology have shown the less simplistic and reassuring side of the functioning

of educational institutions. Even before psychology of education stressed the social and contextual dimension of learning and failure (Daniels, 2012; Perret-Clermont, 1979; Carugati & Selleri, 2005), sociology already described a school slightly differing from common sense's idealized and stereotyped image. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970) shook school's traditional image. School is not just a place in which knowledge is transmitted, but also a context in which social inequalities are reproduced. According to these French scholars, the fundamental element of social distinction concerns a sort of circularity of socio-economic characteristics. Inequalities in parents' economic and cultural resources and the different place they occupy in social division of labor originate nursing practices and interaction modalities that will provide children a sort of educational legacy with which they participate to the educational experiences. These instruments will vary according to the social and economic context of origin. Without generalizing, these differences will "tend" to foster students' behaviors and learning styles that do not always fit with the aims and activities of school. This will inevitably lead students to different forms of integration and assessment outcomes related to their "suitability" with respect to the educational context's features. The following step can be easily argued: a not very brilliant student will probably be directed toward vocational training and will have more limited access to job markets. It is understood that these forms of social distinction do not deal very much with the actual potentialities of students. The educational context, in this type of analysis, is considered as a filter definitely based upon psychosocial characteristics of students that are, more or less implicitly, directed to predetermined careers. Through these clear remarks, sociological analysis provides valuable elements to fully clarify the educational institutions' role—beyond proclamations and theoretical goals—in "validating" socio-economic differences. However, on this level of analysis, sociological perspective runs the risk of providing a fatalistic and unmodifiable picture, if not supplemented by further analysis of real social dynamics taking place in educational contexts.

Actually, there is a potential margin of action also on the level of classroom activities. Preliminarily, it is worthwhile to observe that every form of social distinction has correspondence in students' communicative interactions. As a matter of fact, the classroom actually is a social system supported by both formal

and informal relationships (Daniels, 1995, 2004; Fele & Paoletti, 2003). In this context, different types of communicative interactions are regulatory elements par excellence. They define and maintain order—not necessarily that expected by the institution—but also to foster potential change in social organization. Communicative interactions—as argued by contemporary communication theories—just marginally correspond to the typical metaphor of information transmission. Communicating is, first of all, to share meaning and to establish a common ground in order to cooperate or to conflict, to establish social borders between two or more individuals. From this point of view, language can be actually considered an activity that is not limited to information transmission. Power relationships, personal and professional identities, etc. are equally at stake. Language plays a crucial role in classroom life. Because of its malleability and sensitivity to the contexts of use—especially social and professional—it is often indicated as the key factor to account for disadvantage and socio-economic differences. From this starting point, pioneering sociolinguistics study the relationship between social belonging and linguistic competence. Basil Bernstein's approach (1971) to socio-linguistic disadvantage is one of the best-known and most-criticized ones. He attempts to analyze the mechanisms of reproduction, maintenance, and change of social order through language and symbolic systems used in families and schools. Bernstein's fundamental point is that language and symbolic systems in the family can dramatically diverge from those in the school. He believes that every social context establishes which meaning must be linguistically actualized, also determining which syntactic and lexical choice can be made. Individuals trained in specific contexts find themselves in a brand new situation at school—from the sociolinguistic point of view—probably facing difficulties of adaptation affecting performance. This can trigger a process of marginalization or even exclusion by the institution. Although Bernstein's ideas remarkably contributed to the debate about the role played by so-called socio-linguistic codes in integrating students into classroom social life and discourses, they present several critical aspects. The socio-linguistic code's idea itself has been widely criticized because it is difficult to be defined and operationalized. Actually, research demonstrated inadequacy of some aspects of Bernstein's theory. For instance, the relationship between socio-linguistic codes and abstract references has been widely

falsified. Dialects—widely used by lower classes—against Bernstein’s expectations, are very elaborate at the linguistic level and fully usable in describing and manipulating abstract meanings. After observation studies in the classroom (Edwards, 1990), findings demonstrate that the problem of communicative disadvantage—and probably other forms of marginalization—is not related to the availability of socio-linguistic codes, rather to the acceptance of a new system of rules—also linguistic ones—characterizing classroom context and diverging, sometimes dramatically, from everyday life.

Focus thus shifts from the idea of inadequate socio-linguistic competence to the idea—much more complex and probably able to account for many forms of disadvantage—of specificity in processes of meaning attribution to activity. As Iannaccone (2010) reports, if cognitive activity cannot be separated by the meaning that individuals attribute to situations in which they act, it is convincing that some students’ marginalization and exclusion processes are rather triggered by how they interpret learning situations and the social system below.

### ***Some “Practical” Implications***

Planning every educational activity in this specific area of interest starts from a preliminary remark: evaluating the impact of students’ socio-economic origin on class life and analyzing how it is perceived by the different actors of the learning community.

A first important element is the so-called teachers’ folk psychology (Bruner, 1996). Bruner’s statement makes clear, beyond any doubt, how much educational and professional activity is directed by adults’ representations, namely by teachers. If some of these systems of beliefs can hide the effects of socio-economic differences or tend to transfer the problem through individualistic and de-contextualized explanations, it is quite evident that educational acting will be ineffective, despite the best intentions. In order to actually cope with potentially negative effects of socio-economic differences in the classroom, it is required to start by fostering teachers to become aware of the real problem, causes, and consequences. Teachers’ systems of representations play a fundamental role in constructing and reinforcing teachers’ professional identities (Iannaccone, Tateo, Mollo, & Marsico, 2008). They are “constituent” elements of what can be defined as the teacher’s *Educational Self* (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007).

For this reason they can seem like “proof” against change. Rather, in presence of a threat to professional situations—like those challenging teachers on the level of social reputation and salary—these elements can get even more radical.

If teachers’ system of representations is the first element to be taken into account when planning effective educational strategies, the second element should necessarily concern teachers’ and students’ “perception” of classroom social life. It is quite clear, on this point, that the different socio-economic origins are easily perceivable in the classroom. Despite schools’ attempts to minimize the display of socio-economic differences, all the actors of the learning community are in some way aware of the distribution of economic and social resources among peers. Beyond external cues, linguistic marks and interaction styles in the classroom constantly recall students’ social and cultural origins. Besides, in the case of immigrant children, these indicators are further emphasized by the cultural framework they refer to in everyday rituals and relating to the educational system. Social psychology has clearly demonstrated that perceptive availability of such similarities and differences generates social categorization. Groups of students will then be formed with respect to these social indicators. Even the groups’ “entry rituals” will be based on the ability of the single student to show behaviors and lifestyles fulfilling a group’s expectations. Thus, it is useful for teachers to monitor spontaneous social groups’ architecture in the classroom. It can be useful to recall Sherif and Sherif’s experiment (1953, 1961)—veritable milestones of social psychology—clearly showing how it is possible to act upon group dynamics, establishing conditions for competitive and cooperative climates to emerge. Although this experiment is just one of numerous possibilities to tune group climate, at the same time it represents a clear example of group management in education. It also makes clear how negatively emphasizing class differences is always a problem that must not be underestimated. Conflict is a “natural” modality human beings use also to assert their identity. The “negative” radicalization of social fabric can make this process extremely dangerous and able to interfere with every educational initiative, if not bearing in mind its nature.

It is quite evident that an in-depth knowledge of the wider social phenomena such as in-group/out-group processes or socio-economic characteristics of individuals is absolutely essential. These dimensions regulate everyday life in different social contexts in



which the actors are involved. They are reflected in the work of schooling, showing a clear overlap between inside and outside the school.

### **What Happens on the Balcony: Looking at Crossing Boundaries**

As we have argued in the previous pages, a number of elements belonging to the wider social and cultural contexts are not alien to the way the school works in practice; on the contrary they act as catalyzers, providing contextual support, which leads to certain form of schooling rather than others. These sociocultural dimensions (socio-economic levels, ingenious or expert theories on education, the school's representations, etc.) pass metaphorically through the balcony and enter the territory of the school.

Studying what happens on the border between inside and outside the school means first paying attention to the intersections it has with other life contexts relevant to the development and education, first and foremost the family. The relevance of "crossing boundaries" and of intercontextual dynamics between family and school are presented in this section.

The crossing boundaries phenomenon (Marsico, Komatsu, & Iannaccone, in press) became evident when we consider the contact's points with school and family. In fact, it is possible to consider boundary encounters, such as meetings and conversations, and events that provide connections between systems. That was precisely the focus of a research project carried out by the present authors that tried to describe what happens when the family goes to the school to receive the evaluation of their child during the school-family meetings<sup>3</sup> (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007).

The aim of this research was to explore the social space emerging from the interaction between family and school. In the situations under examination, we try to understand how *school culture* comes into contact with *family culture* via a dynamic of delimitation of competences over the key issue of children's education. At this level of analysis, we were particularly interested in the interactional activities and in the conversational strategies that schools and families adopt during the "school report cards delivery" event. This kind of encounter, as in any social space, causes an adjustment between the participants, who will eventually converge or diverge in their evaluation of the child. Metaphorically speaking, meetings take place just on the balcony. School invites family into its own "territory," creating a

temporary shared space (functional, not structural, balcony) that is a prominent extension of the institutional wall. It can be assumed that school, in this way, intends to promote a satisfactory home-school interaction, that is, surely, an essential component of effective education (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 1994). The reason for this occurring in a specific space and time, decided by the school, is a different question. What would happen if the school communicated the child's evaluation by formal letter, e-mail, press release on local TV, or via the Internet (allowing, in such a way, the comparison of student's performances all over the world)?

If school intends to support parents' involvement in children's education and fruitful family-school relationships, why not organising meetings with parents at home? What would parent-teacher meetings be like at home? After all, this is not uncommon for other professionals like doctors or social workers. Why not for teachers? How would teachers be received at home? Which forms of social interaction would take place and with what effect on the relationship between the teacher, parents, and child? Would teachers keep the same institutional function even in a different social structure?

School instead decides to invite parents, emulating a certain kind of informality. This informality, however, is only partial (a formal informality). Encounters are placed into an official context, organized according to specific institutional rules. Even though it is a balcony, a border zone, it is still the school's balcony, that parents can enter tip-toeing, feeling uneasy, or on the contrary with confidence, arrogance, and self-assurance. What social rules, instead, would modulate the school-family encounters if they happened in an informal place such as the bar on the corner where parents and teacher, drinking a coffee and discussing the child's school performance (an informal formality)? The articulation between "formality/informality" and "openness/closedness" is also evident in another school event that occurs at the end of the school year, when students' assessments are put up on the wall of the school's entrance-hall. It is an open space, but institutionally characterized, yet another of the school's border zones. Why are some ways of communicating adopted, while others are avoided or judged not admissible? What are the effects on school-family communication and on social regulation of meetings? Although we are aware of the several possible alternatives to

communicate, in the study hereafter presented, we focus on a particular point of intersection between family and school.

### *The Family Goes to School*

The school and family cultures, in the meeting situation constituted by the presentation of the school report, will necessarily have to come into contact in a micro-systemic space. If in daily life family and school communicate almost exclusively via the child/pupil, in this case the meeting is face-to-face, and the respective representations of the child/pupil enter into direct contact in a conversational space. From an ecological and cultural viewpoint, we could say that the “report delivery” event represents an occasion in which the family micro-system and the school micro-system meet/clash, highlighting the meso-systemic connections (both the successful and fruitful ones and the unsuccessful or fruitless ones) between two life contexts of key importance in one’s upbringing (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). During this appointment, two cultural worlds come into contact, each one with its specific sets of beliefs and organization, specific social climates and viewpoints (which can sometimes differ greatly, such as on the educational processes, the child/pupil’s growth and the management of the adult-child relationship). The school-family meeting is thus a critical event, not only for the reasons mentioned above, but also for the meanings it acquires in the experience of the actors involved. Suffice it to consider how the school’s evaluation of their child may be perceived by the parents as an evaluation of their own educational skills, or how the process of the definition of a pupil’s identity is strictly connected with his/her school experience, and the value that school success or failure acquires in relation to a positive or negative definition of the Self (as discussed in the next pages).

In the school-family meeting, the main conversational topic should be, at least in theory, the student. Again in theory, teachers meet parents to present them the results of their child’s learning in school. The meeting may end (as it sometimes does) with a few laconic exchanges from which the parents are supposed to grasp all the necessary information to understand whether their children are “good” or “bad” students. The few laconic exchanges should also allow parents to “justify,” when required, their children’s inadequacies at school. What really happens, albeit within a relatively short time span, is much more complicated than it may seem (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007).

First of all, during the meeting two or more adults, both of whom are responsible in different ways for a child’s education, are compared, together with their different perspectives on education that somehow compete for the privilege of “having their say” about a human being at a critical stage of his/her life. In this one-to-one match, the school should represent a public institution and as such it is a sort of an “official voice.” The family, in the least problematic cases, will spontaneously agree with this representation; in the most difficult cases (for instance, when the child does not embody the good student prototype and his/her parents accuse the teachers of being the main reason for this), it will defend its own conflicting positions.

The idea of the school’s “official voice” is certainly an unsuitable generalization of concrete observed conversational dynamics. Indeed, teachers follow an enormous variety of educational models, which are only partially in line with syllabus indications and social, cultural, and scientific expectations. As studies on professional identities and sociocultural dimensions in working organizations have clearly highlighted, what the teacher does is the result of a process of adaptation with unforeseeable outcomes (Iannaccone et al., 2008). What makes this process difficult to foresee is the co-participation of elements of the teachers’ human and professional biographies with the sociocultural conditions of the working contexts. From a more strictly scientific viewpoint, this plurality of “voices” is identified as the expression of the various social representations co-existing in professional contexts as in any other social context. This obviously increases the complexity of defining the “success/failure at school” (Monteil, 1989) category when the issue at stake is the outcome of a school-family meeting.

In the school context, with its institutionally “ratified” rules, the definitions of “good pupil” and “bad pupil” will in any case be placed within specific traditions (in this school, children have always studied hard and obtained good results when they went on to high school), specific conducts, and adjustments. Although “modulated” by their belonging to the institutions, the categories of people involved in the issue of success at school represent the result of a complex social process, influenced by a number of key elements (Ligorio & Pontecorvo, 2010).

On a broader level of analysis, when looking at a school’s organizational features and cultural traditions, some elements contributing to the students’ success/failure can be identified. Every school, as a

social and cultural context, is a space where representations are elaborated. It could be considered as a social place in which different actors, with different roles and different life experiences, live together, albeit often unwillingly. As in any other community, also at school these actors produce shared narratives, use gossip to maintain the social order, give credit to various “legends” about what apparently happened at that school in the past, about its pupils’ (positively or negatively) sealed fate, about this or that teacher being good or bad. In other words, a school is also a set of narratives (Bruner, 1996) that in turn generate expectations and modulate the behavior of the actors who carry out their daily activities there. Teachers themselves have specific representations of their work in the different school contexts. Families also often choose the school for their child according to its potential to fulfill their expectations about what the child is capable of and what, in their opinion, he/she should do when he/she “grows up.” This crossfire of teachers’ professional identities and parents’ representations of success heavily contributes to creating very different expectations concerning schools. This will influence, and not negligibly, the students’ success/failure parameters and the nature of their education. In this way, school as a social, complex context will represent a significant framework for a punctual definition of the notion of academic success/failure. For instance, when a teacher defines his/her students as a “bad” or a “good” class, he/she is probably using a Lewinian-type category. Besides, how could he/she otherwise say that, on a given day or moment of the school year, his/her class seems particularly “bright” or extraordinarily “dull”? By adopting Lewin’s notion of group, every student in his/her daily class life, beyond his/her individual distinctive features (which no psychology would completely deny), is also an element of some more complex interdependence. To use a metaphor frequently employed by cultural psychologists, we could consider him/her “a thread in a complex web.” Being “interwoven” with the other actors in the educational context, he/she necessarily lives inside a sort of social polyphony, where the sense of his/her acting will depend on the interactions between his/her individuality and the social contexts in which he/she experiences his/her daily interactions. The research focuses on the articulation between the participants’ representations and interactional activities. This methodological choice allowed us to explain several consistencies between school/family meeting management (by parents),

the family’s perceptions of the school’s success/failure and the family’s socio-economic origins.

#### **TYPES OF INTERACTIONS, FAMILY’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, AND SCHOOL RESULTS**

Using an ethnographic approach, several meetings between family and school were observed and audio/video-recorded. More precisely, 22 families were involved (and 26 pupils, since some of the families observed had more than one child at the school). To conduct this study, the parents, with their child, went to school by appointment to meet the teacher who presented them with the child’s school report. The meeting was also attended (though at this time on a basically “nonparticipating” role) by a researcher, who audio-taped and took note of any potentially significant events occurring during the specific meeting. Besides the recording of meetings between family members and the teacher in charge of presenting the report card, the research comprised a second phase, featuring a semi-structured interview. The interview’s general aim is to analyze the voice of the family immediately after the report card delivery ritual. What is the parents’ evaluation of their child’s school report? Was it what they expected? And what do they hold responsible for success in school? And for failure? And, in turn, what explanations can the child/pupil provide for the marks received? The interview, which was entirely filmed, was conducted by a researcher who had a conversation with the family.

The analysis of the transcripts and the field notes show three main modalities of interactional activities. We will see that these activities are related to family’s socio-economic level and to the student’s school results. In fact, during the first analysis of the school-family meetings, in 42.3% of cases the management of the meeting involved parents and teachers converging toward consensual modalities (*alliances*). However, in 34.6% of cases, the family seems to comply with the image of the pupil proposed by the teacher (*acquiescences*). Finally, conflicts, in a more or less latent way, affected 23.1% of the meetings (*oppositions*). By comparing the frequency of these modalities with the socio-economic level of the family, we obtain an interesting result. Alliances, for instance, were never observed during meetings with families of low socio-economic level. They did, however appear in 50% of all meetings with medium-level families and in the 60% of families with a high socio-economic level. In a similar way,

opposition was more frequent for the higher socio-economic levels (from the 17% of low-level families to the 30% of high-level families). Conversely, the interaction modalities of acquiescence are very frequent on a low socio-economic level (83%) and are almost negligible at high levels. It would seem reasonable to explain these differences with at least two types of factors. The first factor could be related to a type of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). Considering that high socio-economic levels generally correspond to a thicker and better-constructed educational experience, it is possible that the medium- and high-level families feel more “akin” to the school discourse and are better able to cope with the teachers. These families are more familiar with the typical communication tools of the school context, and they have a greater proximity to the sociocultural origin of the teachers. The second factor that could explain the different modalities of meeting management is related to a sort of self-perception of the social asymmetry in that relationship. Acquiescence, a passive relationship modality, indicates a clear acceptance of the teachers’ comments by the families of a lower socio-economic level.

Predictably, the dynamics of school-family meetings is also related to the student’s success/failure. In particular, the alliance is more typical of the discussions about successful situations (75%). Acquiescence, on the other hand, is more frequent during the discussion of students’ failures (57%). Typically, a “good” student facilitates the agreement of the evaluation between the family and the school. Instead, a problematic student could be the “stake” of conflictual dynamics (29%), or alternatively (and this is the more frequent case) of forms of passive acceptance of the evaluation (57%) by the parents. In fact, opposition and acquiescence, taking into account the data mentioned above, seem to be the modalities used to cope with the student’s failure related to the socio-economic origin of the family. In this sense, since failure goes along with oppositional and acquiescent forms of interaction, it is probable that the different frequency of these modalities can be traced back to the social level of the families. In particular, we saw that opposition and acquiescence tend to be respectively associated with medium-high and low socio-economic levels. To better contextualize the discourse, it is appropriate to clarify the relationship, which is also reported in literature (Schizzerotto, 1988; Ballarino & Cecchi, 2006), between the academic performance of students and the socio-economic level of their families. Actually, the highest

percentage of the students with good results at school comes from medium and high socio-economic levels (60%). Conversely, the percentage of failures is higher among students of a low socio-economic level (about 83%). Taking into account the broader category of “troubled experiences at school” (that include every type of socio-relational and cognitive deficit), this relationship is even more pronounced. All the students from families with a low socio-economic level have some kind of trouble at school, compared with half of the students from medium-level families and the 60% of students from high-level families.

### ***Opposition, Alliance, and Acquiescence in the Family-School Interactions***

The following are some examples of meetings between families and the teacher, who was appointed by the class board to deliver the school report; the examples concern three kinds of interaction events: opposition, alliance, and acquiescence.

In particular, the meetings developed in the form of oppositions, alliances, and acquiescences depending on the goals’ orientation. In other words, this kind of encounter assumes different social configurations depending on the convergent or divergent participants’ evaluation of the student’s results. When school and family agreed on the child’s evaluation, they easily shared viewpoints. On the contrary, when the academic assessment represented, for instance, a threat to the educational choices that a specific family considered necessary, more dynamic and conflictual communications emerged. Therefore, the divergent goals’ orientation, mainly observed in the opposition in family-school interaction, stressed the communication breakdown between teachers and parents and allowed us to understand the details of such events and the arguments evoked by participants with respect to, for example, how the problem is presented, who is responsible for it, what has to be done in order to solve it and by whom.

#### **OPPOSITION**

##### *Meeting #1*

Participants: Teacher, Father, (boy) Pupil

The school-family meeting involved the teacher, the 13-year-old student (attending the third year of Italian middle school<sup>4</sup>) and his 46-year-old father, an employee in a private company.

The student’s family is made up of his father, mother, and an elder (18-year-old) sister.

The student's school performance, according to his teachers, is just around the pass mark, and he is weak in technical subjects. The teacher thinks that the student needs to concentrate better and that his parents should monitor him more closely. His father seems to take this statement as a criticism and answers back, stating that, in order to grow up well, a person needs to have the time "to do everything" (e.g., school, fun, sports, etc.) and that school must guarantee students the chance to express their potential in many different fields.

In the opening part of the conversation, the teacher highlights the boy's weakness in technical subjects, which he considers a "serious thing," with a generally positive attitude. At the same time, he underlines (confirming his implicit "opinion" of the student) how his physical education performance is "good," while his behavior

does not exactly fit "our orientation" (the teachers' ideas). The teacher's opening approach and his choice of points to highlight primarily result from his general opinion that the student is distracted by his after-school sports activities. In this opening part, the father seems to accept the teacher's explanations.

In a subsequent phase, which constitutes a turning point in the conversation, the teacher, while trying to identify the reasons for the student's bad performance in certain subjects, specifically addresses his family (I think there is also a problem with being regularly followed at home). The conversation's main topic then becomes that of time management: from the time management of class activities, the conversation, partly because of the parent's reply, will gradually move on to time management in the boy's overall education.

### Excerpt 1: Meeting #1

#### English translation:

**11. TEACHER:** so this is it, quite correct (.) in his interpersonal relationships (.) he is sociable and cooperates with his classmates, takes an active part in school life (.) but he is not very constructive (2.0) **I think here there is a problem=with=being=regularly followed also at home** and (1.0) I mean here we basically mean that he (.) when he organizes himself he must use his time better (.) and he must=learn=how=he must=do it because> [...]

**12. FATHER: to the end there are time limits:::**

**13. TEACHER:** that is not all (.) there are many other things (.) for example it is important to not merely count on one's memory but to try and understand and try and :::

**14. FATHER:** >activate a logical reasoning process<

**15. TEACHER:** always try to provide an explanation (.) dispel all doubts (.) and ask the teacher in order to (.) eliminate some (.) situations=to=be able=then=to avoid=continually=slowing down=the learning process (.) that here we can say is on track (1.5) the teaching objectives set have been partially reached (1.0) he attended the extra maths course (.) and passed it and=this=is certainly a=positive=fact=because (.) before this extra course he::: didn't have this current passion for studying maths too (.) now he seems to be:::

#### Italian original:

**11. DOCENTE:** per cui rimane questo abbastanza corretto (.) nei rapporti interpersonali (.) è socievole e collabora con i compagni partecipa alla vita scolastica in modo attivo (.) ma poco costruttivo (2.0) **credo che qui ci sia il problema=di=una =verifica continua anche a casa** e (1.0) cioè qui vogliamo dire praticamente che lui (.) quando organizza deve meglio spendere i tempi (.) e deve=vedere=come=deve=fare [...]

**12. PADRE: alla conclusione ci vogliono dei tempi:::**

**13. DOCENTE:** non solo questo (.) tantissime altre cose (.) per esempio non affidarsi alla memoria cercare di capire e cercare di:::

**14. PADRE:** >attivare un processo logico di ragionamento<

**15. DOCENTE:** cercare sempre di elargire la spiegazione (.) mettere da parte i dubbi (.) e chiedere all'insegnante affinché (.) vengano eliminate certe (.) situazioni=per=poter=poi=non=accumulare =ritardi=nel processo di apprendimento (.) che qua diciamo che è regolare (1.5) gli obiettivi didattici programmati sono stati raggiunti in modo parziale (1.0) ha partecipato al corso di recupero di matematica (.) con sufficiente risultato e=questo=qua sicuramente è un=fatto=positivo=perché (.) prima di questo corso di recupero lui::: non aveva ancora questa affezione a studiare pure la matematica (.) pare che adesso stia:::

Starting from turn #16, the father adopts a true defensive strategy, using a defensive argument first, and then a second, more generic one, showing a specific concept of education that differs from that of the school. This is the moment in which the clash between school and family culture first becomes evident. At turn #18, the father also refers to

intergenerational differences (“and this is let’s say a problem with I think 99% of young people today”). The father, by using specific and detailed arguments, *contrasts* his way of educating his son (based on trust and respect for his autonomy) with the aims of the school. This is a good example of what we intend as *opposition*.

## Excerpt 2: Meeting #1

### English translation:

16. FATHER: >I if I must< (.) express a global opinion=we=at=home=do follow him we have (1.0) the difficulties I think all parents have (.) these days (.) because this is nor[mal]

17. TEACHER: [yes]

18. FATHER: >the thing that< (3.0) as a parent I must say the truth not that I justify my son’s attitude on the contrary I am very critical when he doesn’t apply himself< **and this is let’s say a problem with I think 99% of young people today** (.) with whom we have contact (.) **I told him that in my opinion to be complete one must find the time to do everything (.) he must find the time to study (.) time to have fun (.) because if not if a boy were focused only on one thing (.) I mean studying (.) he would also have limits (.) I think he has also [some potential]**

19. TEACHER: [potential yes]

20. FATHER: speaking as a parent I’ll tell you this (.) in my opinion if I notice (1.0) well (.) >maybe sometimes today as school doesn’t exist anymore< (.) that is when we used to go to school school was something positive (.) back then either you did it or you did it and that was it (.) **today I think everybody has great potential (.) but >we must have the ability to let them express it<**

21. TEACHER: **this is another reason why there have to be time limits too (.) the time he has (.) that he spends at home (.) if he [only spends it playing football]**

22. FATHER: [I’ll tell you something]

23. TEACHER: there is a time for football (.) but it can’t be football all day so that the thing also continues::: into the next day the match they’ve played they talk about it again the following day and then it’s basically all about the match (.) that once it’s started it goes on and on:::

### Italian original:

16. PADRE: >io se devo< (.) esprimere un giudizio globale=noi=in=casa=lo seguiamo abbiamo (1.0) le difficoltà che secondo me hanno tutti i genitori (.) nel tempo moderno (.) perché è un fatto nor[male]

17. DOCENTE: [sì]

18. PADRE: >quello che< (3.0) io come genitore devo dire la verità non è che giustifico l’atteggiamento di mio figlio anzi sono estremamente critico nel momento in cui lui non si applica< **e questo diciamo che è un difetto penso del 99% dei ragazzi di oggi** (.) con i quali noi abbiamo contatti (.) **io a lui gli ho detto che secondo me una persona per essere completa deve trovare tempo per fare tutto (.) deve trovare tempo per studiare (.) tempo per il divertimento (.) perché altrimenti se un ragazzo fosse solo monotematico (.) cioè verso lo studio (.) avrebbe anche dei limiti (.) io credo che lui abbia anche [delle potenz]**

19. DOCENTE: [potenzialità sì]

20. PADRE: detto da genitore vi dico questo (.) secondo me se io noto (1.0) ecco (.) >forse delle volte oggi siccome non esiste più la scuola< (.) cioè quando noi andavamo a scuola c’era una scuola in positivo (.) allora tu o lo facevi o lo facevi basta (.) oggi secondo me **hanno tutti delle grosse potenzialità (.) però >noi dobbiamo avere la capacità di farglielo esprimere<**

21. DOCENTE: **per ciò ci vorranno anche dei tempi (.) lui il tempo che ha (.) che spende a casa (.) se lo [spende solamente per il calcio]**

22. PADRE: [io vi dico una cosa]

23. DOCENTE: si dà uno spazio per il calcio (.) ma non deve essere calcio tutta la giornata che poi la cosa continua anche::: il giorno dopo la partita che hanno fatto la raccontano anche il giorno dopo e praticamente diventa tutta una partita (.) che comincia e si va avanti così:::

At turn #29, the teacher once again tries to return to his theory that the boy is “too busy” with his after-school activities. Once again, the father opposes his specific view of the problem, referring to his condition as a worker in the private sector,

where “you must always be active and operative.” At turn #30, he identifies a possible solution in the democratization of the teacher-pupil relationship, on which the “pleasure of studying” should depend.

### Excerpt 3: Meeting #1

#### English translation:

29. TEACHER: also because they are busy with so many other activities in the afternoon

30. FATHER: no Sir=not on this (.) I can assure you that I also said something else to him (.) you were talking about time management (.) I'm 46 now and when I am out working (1.0) for my company (.) they teach time management I mean they tell me there is time to do everything because I work in the private sector =they=make us=work=twenty=hours=a day (1.0) and they want us to be always (1.0) active and operative (.) the basic problem here in my opinion is exchange (1.0) I mean you must have a more democratic exchange with the students meaning that basically the students must learn the pleasure of studying (.) this is the crucial thing

#### Italian original:

29. DOCENTE: anche perché sono presi da tante altre attività pomeridiane

30. PADRE: professore no=no su questo (.) vi posso assicurare che io a lui ho detto anche un'altra cosa (.) lei diceva la gestione del tempo (.) io oggi ho 46 anni e quando vado a fare lavori (1.0) per la mia azienda a me (.) insegnano la gestione del tempo cioè a me dicono c'è tempo per fare tutto perché io lavoro nel privato=ci=fanno=lavorare=venti=ore=al giorno (1.0) e vogliono che noi siamo sempre (1.0) attivi e operativi (.) il problema di base che c'è secondo me il confronto (1.0) cioè voi dovete avere un confronto un po' più democratico coi ragazzi nel senso che praticamente i ragazzi devono capire il piacere di studiare (.) questa è la cosa fondamentale

From turn #37, the teacher's words betray his personal view of the aims of the school. In his opinion, parents' requests for sports and music activities would represent a real problem (“and where is

the school in all this, I wonder”). This educational vision, reminiscing about a sort of “withdrawal into tradition,” highlights another element of variability in the school-family relationship.

### Excerpt 4: Meeting #1

#### English translation:

37. TEACHER: it may not be your case but some parents::: come to tell us that afterwards they have to go to the gym because they have scoliosis

38. FATHER: no=no, absolutely no way:::

39. TEACHER: they must study music because they like music and where is the school in all this I wonder and they leave it to the school to deal with the problem

#### Italian original:

37. DOCENTE: non sarà il caso vostro però alcuni genitori::: vengono a dire che poi deve andare in palestra perché ha la scoliosi

38. PADRE: no=no, assolutamente non esiste:::

39. DOCENTE: deve fare musica perché piace la musica e la scuola dico io quando viene e lasciano il problema esclusivamente alla scuola

### ALLIANCE Meeting #9

Participants: Teacher (female), student (female), Father, Mother.

The participants are the teacher, the 11-year-old female student attending the first year of middle

school, her father, a 40-year-old bus driver, and her mother, a 37-year-old hairdresser. The student's family is composed of the father, the mother, the student, a younger sister (age 9 years) and a younger brother (age 8 years). During the meeting, the teacher starts the discussion by presenting the new

report card, introduced by a recent school reform, to the parents. In a second phase, the teacher deals with the positive assessment of the student's performance and her participation in class. The core of the conversation (reported in the transcript

below) seems to focus on the "transition" from primary school to the first year of middle school and its effects on the pupil's school experience. The school-family alliance appears to be another core element of the conversation.

#### Excerpt 4: Meeting #9

##### English translation:

47. TEACHER: then:: let's say she attended (.) she applied herself (.) she understood that (.) the situations (were) (.) well she realized quite quickly that things were different (.) that:: the approach was different (.) that behavior was different (.) maybe because she has a family behind her (.) quite simply. (.) that is I assume that are kids aged ten=eleven years and (.) if they have a choice between (.) playing and working (.) they prefer to play so when>they don't have (.) some constraints< that is the family on one side and the school on the other side to guide them (.) it's clear that they can easily [lose::]

48. FATHER:[it's she had this passage]

49. TEACHER: if we could (.) but how (.) if we could (.) have a walk (.) there's the sense of responsibility ok

50. MOTHER: but at this [age]

51. TEACHER: [there is not]

52. MOTHER: [unfortunately there's not]

53. TEACHER:[there's not] that's why you need family and school (.) that is two entities leading them and guiding them

54. MOTHER: definitely

55. TEACHER: then they realize they can't move just within such [constraints]

56. MOTHER: [definitely]

57. TEACHER: so when there's a cooperation between school and family things (.) generally go

58. MOTHER: go better

59. TEACHER: go better (.) maybe let's say go better in the sense that to some extent: some problems are overcome: and it is also clear that when they improve they can improve even more ((laughs)) well I mean ((laughs)) and in this case she has done just that: demonstrated this situation (.) she applied herself (.) at the beginning she was quite uncertain (.) now she starts to chime in a bit too much raising her little finger (.) but anyway

##### Italian original:

47. DOCENTE: quindi:: diciamo che lei ha seguito (.) si è impegnata (.) ha capito che (.) le situazioni (erano) (.) ecco quello che ha capito abbastanza rapidamente che le situazioni erano diverse (.) che:: l'approccio era diverso (.) che il comportamento era diverso (.) forse perché ha la famiglia alle spalle (.) detto molto francamente. (.) cioè io parto dal presupposto che questi sono ragazzi comunque di dieci=undici anni (.) e che fra (.) il gioco e il lavoro (.) preferiscono il gioco per cui nel momento in cui >non hanno (.) dei paletti< cioè la famiglia da una parte e la scuola dall'altra che l'indirizzi (.) è chiaro che possono tranquillamente [perdere::]

48. PADRE: °[ci sta' che ha avuto questo passaggio]°

49. DOCENTE: se potessimo (.) ma come (.) se potessimo (.) andare a fare una passeggiata (.) là c'è il senso di responsabilità e va beh

50. MADRE: ma a questa [età]

51. DOCENTE: [là non esiste]

52. MADRE: [purtroppo non esiste]

53. DOCENTE:[non esiste] ecco perché ci vuole la famiglia e la scuola (.) cioè due entità che li guidano e li indirizzano

54. MADRE: sicuramente

55. DOCENTE: per cui loro si rendono conto che loro non possono muoversi se non all'interno di quei [paletti]

56. MADRE: [sicuramente]

57. DOCENTE: e quindi allora quando c'è questa sinergia tra scuola e famiglia le cose (.) in genere vanno

58. MADRE: vanno meglio

59. DOCENTE: vanno bene (.) forse diciamo che vanno meglio nel senso che a un certo punto: certi problemi si superano: e poi è chiaro che quando vanno meglio poi possono andare anche meglio ((ride)) cioè voglio dire ((ride)) e in questo caso lei ha dimostrato questa situazione (.) si è impegnata (.) i primi tempi era abbastanza incerta (.) adesso comincia a intervenire un poco po' troppo con quel ditino alzato (.) ma comunque tutto sommato



## ACQUIESCENCE

### Meeting #16

Participants: Teacher (female), Student (female), Mother

The participants are the teacher, the 12-year-old student attending the second year of middle school and her 40-year-old mother, who is unemployed.

The student's family also includes a 45-year-old father, a blue-collar worker, and an older brother (age 16 years). The teacher presents the assessment of the student whose marks are poor in a number of subjects. The mother never replies to the presentation of the report card and the meeting ends in just a few turns.

### Excerpt 5: Meeting #16

#### English translation:

1. **TEACHER:** well well >we already talked with you madam< so you already know the situation (.). eh::: (.). let's give the marks in detail::: (.). let's say::: in short (.). in Italian she got a pass (.). the same for history and geography however in the (.). other::: subjects foreign language that is English she has a °fail° (.). eh::: maths and science >science and maths< >chemistry=physics=natural sciences< fail (.). technology fail (.). art pass (.). music good (.). physical education good (.). religion pass >well these are the marks or rather< she started to improve a little bit well I::: let's say I gave her (.). a pass in humanities but she did the same as with the others <she didn't study enough> she did with me (.). that is **she must pay more attention (.). and she must study more (.).** so eh::: let's take a look at her behavior (.), she's behaves well but she chats °too much° eh=eh

2. **MOTHER :** [()]

3. **TEACHER :** [she's °too° distracted]

<with respect to interpersonal relationships she often collaborates (.). even though she's not very communicative> I mean she participates (.). although let's say she doesn't=doesn't= doesn't express herself (.). she chats but not (.). <but she's not a girl who talks about herself:> no::: she's a bit introverted (.). she takes an active part in school life (.). sometimes not very constructive (.). eh::: to organize the work **she needs >a lot of help<** (.). she::: (.). I often see she's °very distracted° (.). the time is now (.). **she must apply herself (.).** the learning process is not regular in all the subjects of course (.). >**because she has some fails<** and the learning objectives (.). have been only partially achieved yes::: because only partially (.). she achieved (.). the objectives and got a pass she attended the additional workshops (.). for maths (.). IT and pottery with good results >you got good marks in the workshops<! instead::: (.). who knows! (.). **that's the: situation of:::** >is yes=yes of course!< (.). now she must apply (.). please sign here(.). (.). yes:::now I've got to leave:::

4. **MOTHER: yes!**

5. **TEACHER :** so that:::

#### Italian original:

1. **DOCENTE:** va bene va ben >con la signora abbiamo già parlato< quindi già sa la situazione (.). eh::: (.). diamo nel dettaglio i voti::: (.). diciamo::: sintetici (.). in italiano ha avuto sufficiente (.). storia e geografia lo stesso mentre invece nelle (.). altre::: discipline lingua straniera cioè inglese non °sufficiente° (.). eh::: matematica e scienze >scienze e matematica< >scienze chimiche=fisiche=naturali< non sufficiente (.). educazione tecnica non sufficiente (.). educazione artistica sufficiente (.). educazione musicale buono (.). educazione fisica buono (.). religione sufficiente >va beh questi sono i risultati anzi< lei ha cominciato pure un poco a migliorare cioè io::: diciamo gli ho messo (.). la sufficienza nelle materie letterarie ma lei come ha fatto con gli altri <che **non ha studiato abbastanza**> lo ha fatto con me (.). **lei cioè deve stare più attenta (.). e deve stare deve studiare di più (.).** quindi eh::: vediamo il comportamento (.). è corretto però chiacchiera °molto° eh=eh

2. **MADRE:** [()]

3. **DOCENTE:[si distrae molto °si distrae molto°]** <nei rapporti interpersonali spesso collabora (.). anche se riservata> cioè partecipa (.). anche se diciamo non=non=non si esprime diciamo così (.). chiacchiera però non (.). <però non è una ragazza che dice le sue cose:> non::: è un po' chiusa (.). partecipa alla vita scolastica in modo attivo (.). a volte poco costruttivo (.). eh::: nell'organizzazione del lavoro **ha bisogno molto >molto bisogno di essere aiutata<** (.). lei::: (.). la vedo spesso °molto distratta° (.). adesso **è il momento (.). che si deve impegnare (.).** il processo di apprendimento non è regolare in tutte le aree logicamente (.). >**perché ha delle insufficienze<** e gli obiettivi didattici (.). sono stati raggiunti in modo parziale si::: giacché solo in parte (.). ha raggiunto (.). gli obiettivi sufficiente di sufficienza ha frequentato i laboratori di (.). recupero di matematica (.). di informatica e ceramica con buoni risultati >ai laboratori hai avuto buoni risultati!< invece::: (.). chi lo sa! (.). **questa è la::: situazione del:::** >è sì=sì certo!< (.). adesso lei si deve impegnare (.). la faccio firmare (.). (.). si:::io ora vi lascio:::

4. **MADRE: sì!**

5. **DOCENTE:**cosi:::

## What is Actually at Stake in School-Family Meetings?

At wider level of analysis, the delivery of the report cards represents a real “ritual,” as it has all the main features of this type of social interaction. The school-family meeting takes place, as we have seen, in an institutional place (the school) and at a specific time (for example every 4 months), and the participants are individuals having specific roles (the teacher, the parents, the pupil/child), each assigning, though within the same framework, a particular symbolic meaning to the event. In such encounters the actors stage all the complexity of interpersonal dynamics in an institutional context. These are also meetings of different voices that tell different points of view, modulated by specific sets of beliefs, stemming from the experiences lived by the actors. In many cases the child’s success or failure ends up representing the “stakes” in a confrontation between the family’s and the school’s differing educational views. Taking a particular perspective, inspired by economic dimensions, it is possible to depict an intriguing economically oriented picture of school-family meetings as a real space of negotiation between parents and teachers. At this point the main research question could be: What is actually at stake in school-family meetings? First, the stake is the different representation of “education” and “school” held by parents and teachers. This difference can lead to a two types of opposition. One is between school culture and family culture, even if not necessarily in the form of conflict (multi-dimensional *versus* mono-dimensional vision of the educational process). The second one is within the families’ educational

orientation (instrumental *versus* holistic-orienting vision of school).

With respect to the first opposition, the clash between school and family cultures becomes evident when the parents refer to a multi-dimensional educational vision in accordance with the idea that to be well-balanced, a person must do several experiences (see the Excerpt 1: Meeting #1, turn #18). This wide concept of education differs from the mono-dimensional educational vision presented in several teachers’ talks (as in the Excerpt 4: Meeting #1, turn #39) and circumscribed almost exclusively to the school engagements.

The second type of opposition is between *instrumental versus holistic-orienting vision of school* held by parents.

### THE FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION OF THE SCHOOL

One of the key points around which parents organize their representations of school is what could be called the functional dimension, relating to the different purposes that families think the educational experience should have. In this dimension, it is possible to identify a first basic type of argumentation among those (and these are primarily families with a lower socio-economic status) who consider school a relevant factor for social mobility (see Excerpt 6, below).

Participants: Father, Mother, Daughter, Researcher

The participants are the researcher, the 12 years old female student attending the II year of middle school, the father, 41 years old hydraulic, and the mother, 37 years old housewife.

#### Excerpt 6: Interview #16

##### English translation:

54. FATHER: well:: (.) but:: (.) I think:: (.) ((laughs)) school is definitely everything (.) nowadays: (.) to be educated in something (.) I think:: (.) it’s must (.) so:: better one (.) has more quality:: (.) on (.) a field (.) the more it goes:: (.) and the future (.) really:: (.) it’s absolutely positive really [...]

57. MOTHER: in fact without school (.) without anything (.) ((laughs)) we can’t do:: anything ((laughs))

##### Italian original:

54. PADRE: va bè:: (.) ma:: (.) io penso che:: (.) ((ride)) la scuola è tutto in effetti (.) oggi: (.) essere istruiti in qualche cosa (.) secondo me:: (.) è di obbligo (.) quindi::anzi uno (.) più ha qualità:: (.) su (.) un settore (.) più va avanti:: (.) e il futuro (.) in effetti:: (.) è del tutto positivo in effetti [...]

57. MADRE: in effetti senza scuola (.) senza niente (.) ((ride)) non possiamo fa:: niente proprio ((ride))

These parents adopt an instrumental vision of school; they believe that obtaining a degree will make it easier to find a suitable job. They also believe that education differentiates people and helps to position a person socially. The voice of those parents who see school as essential to supporting their children's growth is completely different. They seem to refer to a holistic-orienting representation of school (*see* Excerpt 7, below), where educating means accompanying pupils through a

comprehensive and progressive discovery of their Self and adapting to the sociocultural context, by means of an empathetic element that is distinctive of the teacher-student relationship.

Participants: Father, Mother, Daughter, Researcher

The participants are the researcher, the 11 years old female student attending the I year of middle school, the father, 52 years old doctor, and the mother, 49 years old housewife.

### Excerpt 7: Interview #2

#### English translation:

**43. MOTHER:** surely it's different from the school we went to (.) before they were (.) so strict (.) that we were afraid of teachers (.) of the head teacher (.) when we went to school (.) if we studied it was because (1.5) there was this (.) **now they're more::: open (.) available (.) towards the children (.) to understand them and also their problems if there are any** (1.5) different from the school of the past (.) I can't tell you if the old school (1.5) was better we should see it in time to see the results (.) now they seem to want to do MANY things (1.5) too many things forgetting (1.5) one's point of view (*(smiles)*)

#### Italian original:

**43. MADRE:** sicuramente è diversa dalle scuole che abbiamo frequentato noi (.) prima c'era (.) una rigidità (.) tale per cui c'era il timore del professore (.) del preside (.) quando si andava a scuola (.) se si studiava era perché (1.5) c'era questo (.) **adesso c'è una maggiore::: apertura (.) disponibilità (.) nei riguardi dei ragazzi (.) a comprenderli anche verso i loro problemi se ci sono** (1.5). diversa dalla scuola precedente (.) non le so dire se era migliore (1.5) quella precedente dovremmo vedere nel tempo ai fini dei risultati (.) adesso sembra che si vogliono fare tante TANTE cose (1.5) troppe cose perdendo (1.5) il punto di vista (*(sorride)*)

This holistic-orienting model of school may be easily related to the notion of the "parental function" as "taking charge" of one's child as a whole and following every aspect of his/her growth. This perception of school is similar in many ways to a family group, and its functions are comparable with the educational functions of a family.

Those opposite views of the school's function are part of the same perception shared by the common sense. According to this, the school is a relevant factor in promoting the development of each individual even when moving from a low socio-economic and sociocultural level.

But the stake in school-family meetings is also the adults' perception of the child. In this case it is possible to talk of an attributional bias (Ross, 1977; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross & Nisbett, 1991) (*see* Excerpt 8) and an opposition between the adult's culture and the youth's culture (as in Excerpt 9). During the report card delivery event, the adult's culture keeps its distance from the youth's culture,

by attributing school results to the child's dispositional aspects rather than contextual ones.

Participants: Teacher, Father, (boy) Pupil

In Excerpt 8 (turn #7), the adult shows a clear attributional bias. In fact, parents and teachers seem to overestimate the "internal" origin of school results (referring to personal characteristics and his effort in his studying), underestimating situational factors (like for example the school system's organization, the curricula, the teaching methodology adopted, the family's supporting role). Even in case of opposition between family and school, adults converge anyway, and form a strategic *peace treaty* by stressing the dispositional and internal dimensions of the pupil.

In Excerpt 9 (turns #48 and #49) and Excerpt 10 (turns #5 and #6), it is possible to see such convergence between teachers and parents.

Participants: Teacher, Father, (boy) Pupil

Participants: Teacher, Pupil (female), Father

The meetings between families and school are an adjustment of the social positions at stake. In the

## Excerpt 8: Meeting #1

### English translation:

5. FATHER: (*reading the report*) so (.) Italian pass (.) History and Civic Education pass (.) Geography pass (.) Foreign Language pass (.) Sciences and Mathematics pass (.) Chemistry, Physics and Natural Science pass (.) Design and Technology fail (.) so (.) >this is a really serious<thing::: (.) >Art pass< (.) Music pass (.) Physical education good (.) this I didn't::: doubt (.) English pass (.) Religion pass, even Religion just a [pass]

6. SON: [eh]!

7. TEACHER: >let's say it all defines < his character::: (.) (1.0) and these (these) (.) technical things for example fail (2.0) we must try and::: improve them because I also think it's due (.) to a::: behavioral thing I think

### Italian original:

5. PADRE: (*legge la scheda*) allora (.) Italiano sufficiente (.) Storia e Educazione Civica sufficiente (.) Geografia sufficiente (.) Lingua Straniera sufficiente (.) Scienze e Matematica sufficiente (.) Scienze Chimiche Fisiche Naturali sufficiente (.) Educazione Tecnica non sufficiente (.) quindi (.) >qua ci sta proprio un dato< grave::: (.) >Educazione Artistica sufficiente< (.) Educazione Musicale sufficiente (.) Educazione Fisica buono (.) questo non::: avevo dubbi (.) Inglese sufficiente (.) Religione sufficiente, pure Religione suffici[ente]

6. FIGLIO:[eh]!

7. DOCENTE: >diciamo che denota un po' tutto< il carattere di::: (.) (1.0) e queste (queste) (.) cose tecniche per esempio non sufficiente (2.0) dobbiamo cercare di::: migliorarci perché credo che sia anche dovuto (.) a un fatto di::: comportamento penso

## Excerpt 9: Meeting #1

### English translation:

47. FATHER: I also want to say that from the beginning of the course (.) to the end of the course some prejudices (.) basically developed (.) and when prejudices have developed teachers find it difficult to overcome them (.) these things these are things I'm telling you as a parent (as a parent) you know why? because I know (.) the guy I know that teachers (.) sometimes (.9) because my son if you tell him off (.) even if you don't touch him (.) he'll be mortified for some time he looks for affection:::

48. TEACHER: [he's sensitive]

49. FATHER: [he's sensitive] I've never seen him (.) that superficially the thing=didn't=effect=him when they criticized (.) him it's always been with with::: deeply struck

### Italian original:

47. PADRE:voglio poi dire che dall'inizio del corso (.) alla fine del corso si sono (.) creati fondamentalmente dei preconcetti (.) e quando si creano dei preconcetti gli insegnanti hanno difficoltà a scioglierli (.) queste cose sono cose che io vi dico da genitore (da genitore) sapete perché? perché conosco (.) il pollo allora io so che gli insegnanti (.) alcune volte (.9) perché mio figlio se lo sgridate (.) potete anche non toccarlo (.) lui rimane mortificato per un periodo di tempo e lui va alla ricerca dell'affetto:::

48. DOCENTE:[è sensibile]

49. PADRE: [è sensibile] io non lo mai visto (.) che con superficialità gli è passata=la=cosa=addosso lui quando gli hanno mosso (.) una critica è sempre stato con con::: sensibilmente colpito

opening part of each meeting there can be a more or less explicit conflict between the two “educational cultures” or, conversely, an alliance. If the family accepts the school's evaluation (which is very frequent, obviously, in the case of positive evaluations), this does not produce dynamic conversations: a conflict, of any form, contributes to clarifying the sophisticated

processes of attribution of meaning operated by the participants. The constant articulation between individual points of view (sets of beliefs expressed by single individuals) and representations emerging during the conversational interactions is particularly interesting. The need to defend one's position encourages the participants to seek “shared” arguments.

## Excerpt 10: Meeting #8

### English translation:

1. TEACHER: so then (.) ((reads the school report card)) in Italian (.) pass mark (.) in history and civics pass mark (.) in geography good (.) foreign language good (.) science maths pass mark (.) chemistry physics pass mark (.) technics pass mark (.) arts good (.) physical education good (.) music good (.) religion very good (.) >we talked about the girl at the beginning had a phase

2. FATHER: [she got some]

3. TEACHER: [now she's recovering instead] (.) we hope that (.) that's the evaluation global

4. FATHER: global

5. TEACHER: first the evaluation of behavior (.) she behaves correctly (.) collaborates with mates (.) even if she's a little bit **reserved**

6. FATHER: **yes=yes closed**

### Italian original:

1. DOCENTE: allora quindi (.) ((legge la scheda di valutazione)) in italiano (.) sufficiente (.) in storia e educazione civica sufficiente (.) in geografia buona (.) la lingua straniera buono (.) scienze matematiche è sufficiente (.) scienze chimiche fisiche e naturali sufficiente (.) educazione tecnica sufficiente (.) educazione artistica buono (.) educazione fisica buono (.) educazione musicale buono (.) religione distinto (.) >abbiamo già detto che la ragazza all'inizio ha avuto una fase

2. PADRE: [ha avuto un po']

3. DOCENTE: [adesso invece si sta riprendendo] (.) noi questo ci auguriamo (.) questo è il giudizio globale

4. PADRE: globale

5. DOCENTE: prima il giudizio sul comportamento (.) un comportamento corretto (.) collabora con i compagni (.) anche se **lei è riservata**

6. PADRE: **sì=sì chiusa**

### SCHOOL-FAMILY MEETINGS AS A NEGOTIATION SPACE

It's worth underlying that adults' culture (parents and teachers) opposes youths' culture fundamentally, with:

a) the denial of child's role as partner in the social interaction. In fact the meetings made the presence of the participating pupils insignificant. When "the family goes to school" to learn about its children's evaluation, the situation becomes, in almost all cases, an "adult affair." To the children, who should actually be at the center of what is happening, a minimum conversational space is given. During the meeting with families, the predominant need is the comparison between two educational cultures; and

b) the shirking of adults' responsibilities through the overvaluation of pupil's dispositional elements, and the undervaluation of the elements of the educational context, both within school and outside school (family).

It is quite evident that the stake in school-family meetings is the pupil's value. How much is it worth? In the case of the opposition between the multi-dimensional and the mono-dimensional vision of education, the child's value depends on his more

or less complying with the model proposed by the family or by the school.

But the object rising or decreasing in value is also the school itself. For some parents, the school rises in value if it trains the child for a job, and it decreases in value if it does not provide the child with technical competencies. Therefore, it is evidently an instrumental vision of the school. For some other parents, the school rises in value when it forms the human being. It instead decreases in value when it becomes instrumental, and provides superficial factual knowledge, without a general framework of meaning.

In the opposition between adults' and youths' cultures we noted that adults manipulate the dispositional element and de-value the context. They emphasize the attributional bias to defend their identity of adults interacting with children. Magnifying the attribution bias could be, from the psycho-social point of view, a sort of defense, probably to protect their self-representation and the image of the family's and school's good functioning as constructed by the parents and teachers. School evaluation ends up coinciding more with what child *is* rather than with what child *knows*.

The analysis of the school-family meetings shows that the individual psychological dimension is of

value in explaining school success and failure. The knowledge of folk-psychological aspects, that is the child's individual dimension, is manipulated, becoming a commodity, a stake. This causes a devaluation of contextual aspects, such as the school organization, the curricula, the teaching methodology, the family's supporting role, the students' socio-economic level and standard of living, the presence of risk factors within the context, or, in Lewin's (1951) words, the "force field" operating when a given behavior takes place. The dimensions taken into account outlined an intriguing economically oriented picture of "school-family" meetings as a real negotiation space, underlining that what really happens on the border of these two educational micro-systems, even if only on a relatively small balcony, is much more complicated than it seems.

Of the many encounters between parents and teachers that take place in a short space of time, the school report event, as we have seen, constitutes a true boundary zone (Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003) between the territory of the school and that of the family. In this contact situation, that could, in some ways be defined "cultural" (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007), a number of fundamental elements of the symbolic-representative dimension generated by the encounter between parents and teachers emerged. Along this boundary, a series of psycho-social processes take place that are the product of the encounter and discursive exchange between parents and teachers. These processes would seem to be unpredictable a priori as they are connected to the attribution of sense of the players involved in the encounter. They appear to be interwoven with contextual factors (the type of school, the condition of success/failure, the disciplinary areas on which "critical" evaluations insist, etc.). In our research, as in other works (Valsiner, 2007b), the boundaries, by acting as "membranes," modulate and determine the relationship between the parts of the system. They make certain elements dynamic, inhibiting others. From this standpoint, school-family meetings take on different configurations that led to the emergence of many of the psycho-social and contextual dimensions involved.

### **Behind the Balcony: What Happens in the School?**

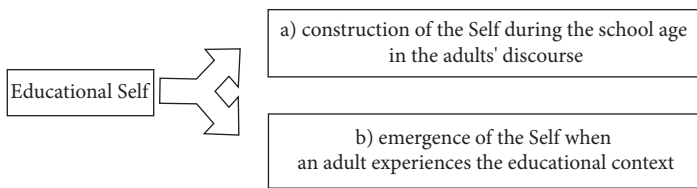
The next step in our attempt to look at inside and outside school from the special location chosen calls for a glance behind the balcony. Many things take place in the school with respect to the learning

of specific knowledge and skills, but we are more interested in how the work of schooling contributes to the definition of the Self. Adopting a binocular vision from the balcony on which we are, it is easy to observe that the Self is formed through a variety of experiences both inside and outside school. Suffice it to consider the interrelationships and the constant transitions among different social settings in which each person is engaged (for example, family, peers, school, etc.). At same time, it is thus not exaggeration to say that the history of educational experiences, as a part of life's wider trajectory, plays a crucial role in the construction of the Self (Bruner, 1996). Every educational institution is the expression of a given culture and will tend to transmit, reproduce, and cultivate knowledge, beliefs, norms of behavior, and even emotions on the basis of which students interpret the natural and social world. Even the idea of Self, with its limits and characteristics, is typical of a given culture. School therefore contributes to the formation of the student's Self in such a way as to fit with the cultural requirements: for example, the emphasis on the values of individuality rather than affiliation, the role of agency and individual effort rather than cooperation, etc. (Bruner, 1996). This is the starting point of the reflection that led to the idea of Educational Self considered as a specific dimension of the Self, a regulatory process emerging from the experiencing of the I-Other relationship (Bakhtin, 1979/1986) in the educational context (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2007).

### **Defining Educational Self: Two Sides of the Same Coin**

The idea of Educational Self involves two related aspects: the construction of the Self during the school age in the adults' discourse and the emergence of the Self when an adult interacts within an educational context (*see* Fig. 40.1).

The construction of the Educational Self (*see* Fig. 40.1a) is basically a dialogical process, taking place during the school age and involving multiple voices expressing different points of view, modulated by specific sets of beliefs and actors' experiences (Markova, 2006). Young people interact with adults, experiencing a dialogical and contractual space where the adults' and peers' voices provide different "as-if" possibilities, contributing to define what a person could be in present and in future time. The student's Self, somehow unclear, comes into contact with adult "voices" and is asked to negotiate, reject, or accept the different possible definition provided



**Figure 40.1** The two aspects of the Educational Self

(Simao & Valsiner, 2007). Through the processes of active internalization and symbolic mediation described above, the child will construct his own Educational Self and will activate it every time he subsequently acts in an educational context.

This is the second characteristic of the Educational Self, that is to become salient every time that the person is involved in an educational activity (*see* Fig. 40.1b), for example during significant turning points and life transitions such as higher education or professional training activities. The school experiences then emerge, providing values, models of behavior, norms, symbolic repertoires, emotional experiences, knowledge and practices that are internalized in the form of “voices” that will constitute a capital of symbolic resources on which the individual will draw (Zittoun, 2006).

This theoretical idea could help to understand how individuals learn to manage the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions with respect to the identity and the different Self positions when involved in educational activities (Hermans, 1996). Even an elderly person would experience an implication of the Educational Self when enrolling for a university of the third-age course (Leibing, 2005). In other words, the Educational Self can be conceived as a process of sense making on the move, referring to the past but, at the same time, shedding light on the future development of Self (Linell, 2009). The voices of the educational context define the individual’s identity: what he/she is, is not, should be and should not be, would be and would not be (Valsiner, 2007a).

A good example of the significant role played by the Educational Self is provided just by the school-family meeting. In this encounter, as we argued above, parents and teachers have to attribute meaning to their child’s success or failure at school, provide explanations, negotiate their viewpoint with the other, adjust their vision of the child with that provided by the school report card. This social sense-making process, that takes place in a conversational space, is based on the educational perspective (i.e., the representation of schooling

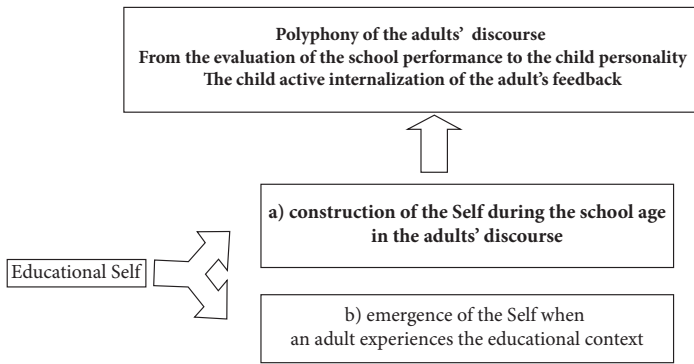
or of childhood) held by the actors (parents and teachers) and on the Educational Self as formed through one’s own educational history. Teachers, for instance, reinterpret the educational models, teaching styles, representations, and formal and informal norms, that they internalized in a continuous dialogue between the voices populating their educational and professional Self (Iannaccone et al., 2008; Ligorio & Tateo, 2008). In other words, past experiences as a student become a lens suitable for reading and interpreting all the present complexity of dynamics in the institutional context and also for modulating the discourse, identity positioning, and social behavior. Suffice it, for instance, to consider how parents feel during the school report card delivery event.

The first dimension of the Educational Self pertains to the adults’ discourse about the child’s Self (*see* Fig. 40.2a). In the excerpts presented below, it is possible to observe the role played by the definitions of the pupil’s Self provided by the parents and teachers, the discourses about the scholastic assessment and the explications of the academic success/failure stressed by adults and pupils and, finally, the process of “active internalization” of the adults’ feedback in the definition of the Educational Self.

Afterward, we’ll discuss the second aspect of the Educational Self, pertaining to the reactivation of this dimension of the Self when the adult enters the educational context. Some arguments evoked by participants during home-school encounters and interviews with parents realized after the report card’s delivery, explain how the Educational Self is reactivated and used to make sense of what happens to the pupil at school through the polyphony of the voices of the Self related to the educational experiences in the adults’ discourse.

### ***Polyphonic Configurations: From Opposition to Juxtaposition of Voices***

School-family meetings are highly meaningful events that involve perceptions, sense making and personal evaluations affecting the construction of Self (Berger, 1995; Dazzani & Faria, 2009;



**Figure 40.2** The construction of the child's Educational Self in the adult's discourse

Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). The meetings are the place where the teacher and parents' representations of the student are defined, made explicit, and modulated at a micro-genetic level (Marsico, Komatsu, & Iannaccone, in press). During the meetings, the student's Self—somewhat unclear and ill-defined—must come into contact with adults' voices negotiating, rejecting, or accepting the different positions. This results in a very dynamic situation stressing the fluid and dialogical nature of the Self-definition's process.

The following excerpts of the family-school meetings concern three types of dialogical events in which the voices of parents and teachers produce different polyphonic configurations: *Opposition of voices* (Excerpt 11), *Different intonation of the voice* (Excerpt 13), and *Juxtaposition of voices* (Excerpt 14). Moreover, Excerpt 12 (*The voice of youth*) is, on the other hand, an example of an interview with a family that shows some relevant dimensions affecting the definition of the Self.

#### OPPOSITION OF VOICES

In Excerpt 11 we can observe an “opposition of voices” emerging during a meeting between teacher, student (a 13-year-old) and his father (a 46-year-old).

The school and the family voice different perceptions of the child. For the school, the boy is shallow and not very constructive. He should be kept an eye on because he is not yet independent and responsible. He is still immature and needs the control and guidance of adults (turn #11). For the family, the boy is fairly independent. He can accomplish his assignments and can evaluate both himself and the teachers. He is certainly mature and able to establish relationships based on trust rather than control (turns #24 and #42).

#### THE VOICE OF YOUTH

The Excerpt 12 refers to the same family as Excerpt 11. The discursive interaction between father and son during the interview focuses on the dimension of evaluation embedded in the process of identity definition.

The boy positively evaluates his less-than-excellent school results, showing that his self-esteem is not attached to the academic assessment (turn #10). The father's statement (turn #15) produces a conversational shift that determines a discursive overlap between the assessment of his son's academic performance and that of the person (“you're worth so much?”).

In this case, the Self is directly involved with the value that the boy attaches to himself. The process of identity definition is ongoing, this clearly makes it difficult for the boy to answer (turn #16: “I don't know how much I'm worth”). During the meeting, he must face the institutional voice of the school that defines his competence and his psychosocial characteristics through the artifact, the school report card. He must also face two other voices as equally meaningful on a psychological level (parent and teacher). They straightway express in the presence of the child the opposite perceptions of his Self (*mature* versus *immature*) as shown in Excerpt 11. In this polyphony, the boy must mediate between what he thinks about himself and what the significant others think about him. In this case, it is possible to talk about a polyphony of voices that define a dynamic and dialogical system of the Self under construction.

#### DIFFERENT INTONATION OF THE VOICE

Excerpt 13 shows the “different intonation of the voice” by the school and the family, attaching different connotations to some behaviors and psychological characteristics of the child's Self. The meeting



## Excerpt 11: Meeting #1

### English translation:

11. TEACHER: in class=little constructive this is::: probably due to his (1.5) following lessons not always (.) correctly (1.5) in organizing his work he is still a little uncertain

[...]

24. FATHER: then I'll (1.5) repeat it to you since we basically (.) established (.) both with my daughter and with him (.) a trust-based relationship (1.5) in which I basically say I trust you (.) you've got to do your things (.) I don't even want to have to check on that every day (.) because I obviously check on it periodically

[...]

42. FATHER: ... what I notice (what I notice) and obviously I'm telling you this in a very (.) relaxed way is that they can judge themselves (.) they can judge their teachers (.) they have their own evaluation scale [inside]

43. TEACHER: [but] they could have a higher self-esteem than [that which]

44. FATHER:[nooo] this is a mistake that I don't make because I tell him be critical about yourself (.) because you can be critical about yourself everyday

### Italian original:

11. in classe=questo poco costruttivo è::: dovuto probabilmente a (1.5) un'attenzione in classe non sempre (.) corretta (1.5) nell'organizzazione del lavoro manifesta ancora qualche incertezza

[...]

24. PADRE: io allora (1.5) vi ripeto siccome praticamente noi abbiamo (.) impostato (.) sia con mia figlia che con lui (.) un rapporto di fiducia (1.5) in cui praticamente dico io mi fido di te (.) tu devi fare le cose (.) io non voglio neanche venire a verificarle tutti i giorni (.) perché io chiaramente le verifico a step

[...]

42. PADRE: ... io quello che noto (quello che noto) e chiaramente dico a voi in modo (.) molto rilassato che loro da soli si sanno giudicare (.) sanno giudicare i professori (.) hanno una scala di valutazione dei professori loro la hanno [internamente]

43. DOCENTE: [però] potrebbero avere un'autostima superiore rispetto a [quella che]

44. PADRE:[nooo] questo no su questo è un errore che io non commetto perché io gli dico tu criticati (.) tanto perché tutti i giorni ti potrai criticare

## Excerpt 12: Interview #1

### English translation:

9. RESEARCHER: and what do you think of these school results?

10. SON: they're ok ((smiles))

11. RESEARCHER: was it what [you expected]?

12. SON: [yes=yes]

13. FATHER: >that is you in your opinion you should have a pass in all subjects?<

14. SON: °yes° ((smiling))

15. FATHER: >you're worth so much?<

16. SON: °I don't know how much I'm worth° ((looks down))

17. FATHER: >you don't know how much you're worth?< ((smiling))

18. SON: °no°

### Italian original:

9. RICERCATRICE: tu invece che pensi di questi risultati scolastici?

10. FIGLIO: vanno bene ((sorride))

11. RICERCATRICE: era quello che [ti aspettavi]?

12. FIGLIO: [sì=sì]

13. PADRE: >cioè tu secondo te devi avere tutti sufficienti?<

14. FIGLIO: °sì° ((sorridendo))

15. PADRE: >tanto vali?<

16. FIGLIO: °non lo so quanto valgo° ((abbassa gli occhi))

17. PADRE: >non lo sai quanto vali?< ((sorridendo))

18. FIGLIO: °no°

### Excerpt 13: Meeting #11

#### English translation:

1. **TEACHER:** before re:ading (.) the evaluations reported for each:: discipline (.) I would say that the pupil is: a little taciturn (.) ((*laughs*)) **I would say (.) eh! (.) is a little taciturn (.) eh:: (.) he loves his own company:: (.) he's often stimulated to [be]**

2. **MOTHER:** [become part of]

3. **TEACHER:** become part of (.) >no become part of!< (.) because he can do it (.) **I mean being close to someone (.)** but if he must sit alone he do:esn't have difficulties (.) that's maybe

4. **MOTHER:** just to not be near

5. **TEACHER:** eh=eh he would prefer to be alone (.) rather than:: (.) but he's not aso[cial]

6. **MOTHER:** [no=no]

7. **TEACHER:** for heaven's sake (.) on the contrary he's a boy::

8. **MOTHER:** but: he's a little:: (.) a:n (.) not in bad sense (.) but:: **he's got his own:: [ideas]**

9. **TEACHER:** [ideas] (.) so: (.) as they say:: (.) better alone than in bad company (.) but (.) **I think:: (.) he should start to get used to spend time with ((*laughs*)) the types of (.) is not like ((*laughs*)) (.) in the sense (.) taciturn=silent (.) also to manage himself for**

10. **MOTHER:** no (.) I don't believe it's (.) being taciturn or not (.) because actually he gets on well with G. ((*mentions a school mate*)) who (.) when he buttonholes he never stops (.) they know each other very well

11. **TEACHER:** ()

12. **MOTHER:** but:: **he doesn't like:: (.) nosy people**

13. **TEACHER:** eh! (.) but we have some in class (.) eh:: and he has to learn to cope with them

#### Italian original:

1. **DOCENTE:** prima di leggere (.) le valutazioni riportate per le varie:: discipline (.) volevo dire che l'allievo è: un po' taciturno (.) ((*ride*)) **volevo dire (.) eh! (.) è un po' taciturno (.) eh:: (.) ama pure stare da solo:: (.) molte volte viene sollecitato a [essere]**

2. **MADRE:** [a inserirsi]

3. **DOCENTE:** a inserirsi (.) >no a inserirsi!< (.) perché si inserisce bene (.) cioè **a stare vicino a qualcuno (.)** però se deve stare seduto da solo no:n trova alcuna difficoltà (.) cosa che magari

4. **MADRE:** pur di non stare vicino a

5. **DOCENTE:** eh=eh preferirebbe stare da solo (.) più che:: (.) ma non è che è aso[ciale]

6. **MADRE:** [no=no]

7. **DOCENTE:** per carità (.) anzi è un ragazzino::

8. **MADRE:** però: e un po': (.) u:n (.) non in senso cattivo (.) però:: **diciamo che ha le sue:: [idee]**

9. **DOCENTE:** [idee] (.) per cui: (.) si dice:: (.) meglio solo che mal accompagnato (.) però (.) secondo me:: (.) **dovrebbe cominciare ad abituarsi a stare anche un po' con ((*ride*)) i vari tipi (.) chi non è come lui ((*ride*)) (.) magari nel senso (.) taciturno=silenzioso (.) anche per gestirsi per**

10. **MADRE:** no (.) io non credo sia (.) di essere taciturno o meno (.) perché in realtà lui si trova bene con G. ((*cita un compagno*)) che (.) °quando attacca a parlare non la finisce più° (.) si conoscono tantissimo

11. **DOCENTE:** ()

12. **MADRE:** però:: **gli danno fastidio:: (.) gli invadenti**

13. **DOCENTE:** eh! (.) purtroppo ci sono in classe (.) eh:: ed è anche giusto che lui li sappia affrontare

involved the teacher, the 11-year-old student, and his 42-year-old mother, a housewife.

According to the teacher, the boy is introverted and tends to avoid social relationships (turns #1 and #3). This closure could be a potential sign of an asocial personality. He should instead open up to social interaction in order to learn how to tune his behavior and how to manage social relationships (turn #9). In accordance with the school's voice, the boy has difficulties in social integration. From the family's point of view, the boy chooses to spend time alone because of specific preferences (turn #8: "he's got his own

[ideas]"). In the opinion of the family, the boy has clear ideas about the type of interactions and persons he looks for (turn #12). In short, the family reinterprets the boy's taciturn and loner aspects in positive terms, emphasizing his need for autonomy.

#### JUXTAPOSITION OF VOICES

Excerpt 14 presents a "juxtaposition of voices" between family and school during the meeting involving the teacher, 13-year-old student, his 50-year-old father, a doctor, and his 40-year-old mother, a teacher.

### Excerpt 14: Meeting #13

#### English translation:

11. **TEACHER:** although are only in the first 4-months term (.) let's say that the important thing is::: **that overall he seems a mature boy** (.) I must tell you the truth

[...]

23. **TEACHER:** for the deepness of thinking

24. **MOTHER:** yes

25. **TEACHER:** yes but at other times, on the other hand

26. **MOTHER:** yes that's true

27. **TEACHER:** he seems a child to me

28. **MOTHER:** yes that's true=that's true

[...]

36. **TEACHER:** ok he's always like that! ok well he's only 10!

37. **TEACHER:** let's say >he's in this phase of growth < so he shows alternate phases

38. **MOTHER:** [()]

39. **TEACHER:** [yes=yes yes=yes]

40. **FATHER:** he needs to leave childhood behind

41. **TEACHER:** eh! eh! he made a poster in classroom on adolescence and I asked him I said why have you drawn a shrimp?

[...]

50. **TEACHER:** that is what he said later on (.) actually

51. **MOTHER:** ()

52. **TEACHER:** let's say when he wants and::: he's one hundred percent mature and at other times

53. **FATHER:** he is like that at home too

54. **MOTHER:** at home he's like that

#### Italian original:

11. **DOCENTE:** siamo anche al primo quadrimestre (.) diciamo che l'importante che::: **il più delle volte appare come un ragazzo maturo** (.) vi devo dire la verità

[...]

23. **DOCENTE:** per la profondità proprio di pensiero

24. **MADRE:** si

25. **DOCENTE:** si poi in altri momenti invece

26. **MADRE:** si è vero

27. **DOCENTE:** mi sembra un bambino

28. **MADRE:** si è vero =è vero

[...]

36. **MADRE:** va beh è sempre così! va beh che c'ha dieci anni!

37. **DOCENTE:** si diciamo >che è in questa fase di crescita< per cui mostra queste fasi alterne

38. **MADRE:** [()]

39. **DOCENTE:** [si=si si=si]

40. **PADRE:** si dovrebbe lasciare alle spalle un poco di infanzia

41. **DOCENTE:** eh! eh! ha fatto un cartellone in classe sull'adolescenza e io gli ho chiesto dico ma perché rappresenta un gambero?

[...]

50. **DOCENTE:** poi me l'ha raccontato così (.) effettivamente

51. **MADRE:** ()

52. **DOCENTE:** diciamo quando vuole e::: è maturo al cento per cento altre volte poi

53. **PADRE:** lo fa anche a casa

54. **MADRE:** pure a casa è così

The voices of the family and the school seem to converge toward a common perception of the child's Self (turns #11, #25, #26, #27, #28). For both teacher and parents the boy shows a sort of inconsistency, switching from mature behaviors to childish ones (turns #52, #53, #54). The voice of the child is evoked by the teacher through a semiotic mediation device. In fact, the teacher reports (turn #41) that during a classroom activity, the pupil, when asked to create a poster, decided to portray adolescence as a "shrimp," showing the presence of a self-reflexive process with respect to the fluctuations in the definition of his own identity. The boy

himself therefore seems to be aware of the instability typical of the pre-adolescent phase. This uncertainty echoes the mother's discourse (turn #36) accounting for the son's apparent immaturity by attributing him a "lower" age ("ok well he's only 10!"), when he is actually 13 years old.

#### POLIPHONY, SYMBOLIC RESOURCES AND TEMPORALITY

The main purpose, formally established, of the school-family meeting is to communicate to the parents the results of the child's scholastic development. What actually emerges is more complex

and interesting from a dialogical viewpoint. First, the communication of the academic results is situated within a ritualistic and structured context of activity in which many other elements are at stake. The excerpts presented show that during the school-family meetings, the child is provided with a set of symbolic resources in the form of the voices that the adults use to talk about his Self. The pupil then draws on these resources and on the different definitions of the Self given by the significant adults (parents and teachers). A space of negotiation is thus opened in which the pupil can decide to accept, reject, or remodulate the possible definitions of the Self. The outcomes cannot be predicted, but what matters here is the interactive and dialogical nature of this process. It is a fluid and problematic process for the child because these voices can be either consonant, dissonant, or opposite to one another. At the same time, they can partially agree with the child's self-perception or else they can totally disagree with it. This process takes place within the constraints of power relationships and the framework of the specific culturally situated activity. The power relationships limit the range of possible Selves that the child can construct because the polyphony of voices is however a "selection" emerging within given cultural parameters (Bruner, 1996). They define the different identity "possibilities," for instance what a "good" or "bad" pupil is, or what a growing child should or should not become. Besides, the school-family meetings and their voices are contextualized within a time perspective (see Fig. 40.3).

Thus, there is a time "before" the meeting, concerning the whole experience of the pupil in the educational context. This experience contributes to defining his Self and can be partially documented through the academic assessment. There is a "present" time of the meeting and, finally, there is a time "after," concerning the development of the Self in the future. This development can be only imagined within the range of some culturally defined identity options. The adults' voices then contribute to

defining what the child is, what he is not, what he should and should not be, what he could and could not be.

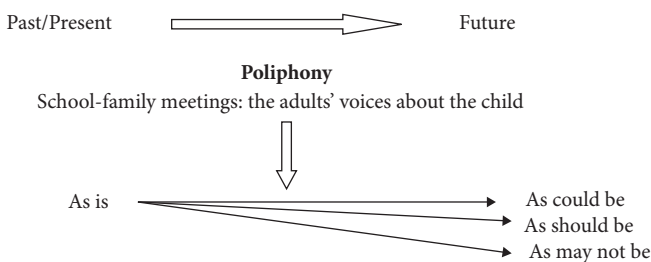
### An Easy Shift

In the previous pages we have underlined how the process of definition of a child's identity is closely connected with his/her scholastic experience. In this perspective, academic success or failure acquires value in relation to a positive or negative definition of the Self (as seen in the Excerpt 2). Besides, school assessments are also frequently used not only to define the features of a "good" or "bad" student, but also to connote the child/pupil's identity.

Scholastic assessment ends up coinciding with what the child *is* rather than with what the child *knows* (as in Excerpt 8, turn #7: the teachers says, "let's say it all defines his character").

Excerpt 15, on the other hand, concerns an interview with a family made up of an 11-year-old pupil, her 52-year-old father, a doctor, and her 49-year-old mother, a housewife. The pupil's academic performance, according to her teachers, is very good.

The excerpt shows that for both the teachers and parents the school results tell what kind of person the child is. In this excerpt, the adults account for school success or failure by attributing academic performance to the child's dispositional and internal aspects (Excerpt #15 turn #21: the father says, "she's responsible"). Thus, results define the pupil but they are the outcome of her personal characteristics in return, like a sort of identity definition feedback loop. It is evident how scholastic assessment can take on meanings that are more closely related to the definition of identity and "self-value," showing how assessing performance can easily become assessing the person. This has a particularly meaningful connotation on a psycho-social level, especially considering the very delicate transitional phase pre-adolescents and adolescent students are going through, in which they face the fundamental task of constructing their Selves.



**Figure 40.3** Polyphony and time perspective. Adapted from Valsiner (2007) with permission.

## Excerpt 15: Interview #2

### English translation:

**18. RESEARCHER:** why (.) do you think your daughter got these very good results? What do you put it down to?

**19. FATHER:** because she is certainly (1.5) in the humanities (.) we know she's more talented (.) she likes reading writing she writes quite well because indeed at home she's been encouraged to read

**20. MOTHER:** >part from the fact< that she's a very conscientious girl (.) she has a conscience (.) she does everything what has to be done

**21. FATHER:** [she's responsible]

**22. MOTHER:** [she's very responsible] she isn't a superficial girl (.) that leaves things she's responsible and conscientious

### Italian original:

**18. RICERCATRICE:** perché (.), secondo voi, vostra figlia ha ricevuto questi risultati che sono sicuramente ottimi? a cosa lo attribuite?

**19. PADRE:** perché sicuramente lei (1.5) nelle materie umanistiche (.) sappiamo è più portata (.) le piace leggere scrive abbastanza bene proprio perché a casa è stata abituata alla lettura

**20. MADRE:**>a parte il fatto< che è una bambina molto coscienziosa (.) lei ha una coscienza (.) fa tutto quello che deve essere fatto

**21. PADRE:** [è responsabile]

**22. MADRE:** [è molto responsabile] non è una bambina superficiale (.) che lascia le cose è responsabile e coscienziosa

In short, on a broader conceptual level, scholastic assessment seems to acquire symbolic meanings and to become: (1) a modulator of the identity-building process; (2) an element that can confirm or destabilize the emerging idea of Self; (3) a negotiational space with respect to the way pupil is perceived by both parents and teachers.

### *The Child's Active Internalization of the Adults' Voices*

The legacy of "evaluations about the person" is the object of the active internalization process that is, the raw material for the definition of the Self. The following excerpt shows how the child reformulates and elaborates the judgements on the Self, emerging during the dialogical interaction with the adults, and uses them to talk about himself. Actually, it is not a passive echoing of adult voices, but a personal and active redefinition of the identity options provided by the adults' discourse. These options dialogically define what the child is but at the same time imply the exclusion of what he is not. In other words, the child appropriates of the "adult voices" that talk about the Self, performing that process that goes from the externalization of the semiotic forms to their internalization as tools for defining and regulating the Self.

The dialogical definition of the child's Self is shown in Excerpt 16, also taken from Interview #1, in which the researcher, the father (a 46-year-old)

and the son (a 13-year-old student) are discussing the child's school results.

During the first phase of the interaction (turns #19 to #26), the father and the son start an exchange in which the parent asks the son to answer for his level of diligence in his studies (turn #19: the father says, "but you believe that you study the subjects thoroughly in the right way all the subjects?"), repositing at turns #21 and #23 his personal viewpoint on the method of study. In a first phase of the dialogue, the son seems to assume an acquiescent position (turns #20, #24 and #28). When the researcher asks him straight out to express his own opinion on why his academic performance is not brilliant, the child appears to be uncertain and confused (turn #28: "don't know!"). The uncertainty seems to disappear at turn #30 when the child chooses to account for his performance by evoking his "superficial" attitude to his studies. Actually, in this turn it would appear that the child chooses to talk about himself with the same connotations as his father's discourse. Nevertheless, he mediates—this could be understood as a son's active internalization—between the adult's voice—that defines him as "superficial"—and the self-perception he is constructing of a person that, despite the recognition of this lack of diligence, does not judge himself in totally negative terms (turn #30 "even in things I like a pass is okay"). This represents a clear example

## Excerpt 16: Interview #1

### English translation:

19. FATHER: >but you believe that you study the subjects thoroughly< (.) >in the right way all the subjects<?

20. SON: °no° ((*lowers his eyes*))

21. FATHER: >and what did your father always tell you< (.) >Italian language, history e geography you can't get pass mark<

22. SON: °not pass mark°

23. FATHER: no (.) I said pass mark >is scant because pass mark:::< means that you actually gave a quick look at the pages (.), am I wrong?

24. SON: °yes°

25. FATHER: >that's what I always say to you?<

26. SON: eh! ((*nod*))

27. RESEARCHER: why do you think you got these results?

28. SON: °don't know!°

29. RESEARCHER: according to dad it's clear, what about you?

30. SON: maybe because I am superficial (1.0) well I don't go into enough::: even in things I like a pass is okay ((*smiles and lower his eyes*))

### Italian original:

19. PADRE: >ma credi che tu approfondisci giusto nelle materie< (.), >in un modo corretto a tutte le materie<?

20. FIGLIO: °no° ((*abbassa gli occhi*))

21. PADRE: >e che ti ha detto sempre tuo padre< (.), >italiano, storia e geografia non si può prendere sufficiente<

22. FIGLIO: °non sufficiente°

23. PADRE: no (.) ho detto che sufficiente >è poco perché sufficiente::: vuol dire che praticamente hai fatto una girata dei fogli (.), o mi sbaglio?

24. FIGLIO: °sì°

25. PADRE: >te lo dico sempre?<

26. FIGLIO: eh! ((*fa cenno con la testa*))

27. RICERCATRICE: perché secondo te, hai avuto questi risultati?

28. FIGLIO: °bo!°

29. RICERCATRICE: secondo papà è abbastanza chiaro, secondo te?

30. FIGLIO: perché sono superficiale forse (1.0), cioè non approfondisco::: pure quello che mi piace lo stesso sulla sufficienza va bene ((*sorride e abbassa lo sguardo*))

of the modulation and negotiation between the adult's voice and the child's vision of his own Self.

In Excerpt 17 the researcher is interviewing a family composed of two sons, 12 and 13 years old, attending two different classes at the same school, the father, a 45-year-old nurse, and the mother, a 41-year-old housewife. Again in this case, the participants are discussing the school results.

In this excerpt, the parents introduce a wider time perspective in the evaluation of their sons' scholastic results (turns #39 to #41). The parents suggest that the results at school are related to life expectations and the commitment required to study is the same quality that should serve to face the forthcoming challenges of life. The topic at stake is commitment, which goes beyond the boundaries of the school results (turn #41). It is something "acquired" through education but necessary for life. In this case, the two sons had good marks, so their capability is not questioned and commitment is "already" part of the definition of Self provided by the adults (teacher and parents).

Son #1, when asked by the researcher, seems to accept this viewpoint (turn #43), but he immediately proposes a complementary explanation (I did what I had to do) in terms of compliance to the school's requirements. Son #2 seems to agree with his brother's explanation (turn #45). In this case, the children's definition of Self seems to agree with the adults', and it doesn't require a significant negotiation between different or opposite viewpoints as in Excerpt 16. The children seem to comply with the expectations of both the family—commitment to grow up—and the school—a "good" pupil fulfills his assignments. Nevertheless, the two pupils in Excerpt 17 do not disagree with the adult position but play a different type of active appropriation and negotiation between voices. In this case they "attune" their definition of the Self by appropriating and internalizing the categories of the adults' discourse. Then they use these categories as self-regulatory instances in order to orient their semiotic behavior, their self-presentation, and sense-making of school experiences.

### Excerpt 17: Interview #3

#### English translation:

39. MOTHER: because there's a question underlying all this there's a question of (.) preparing the future (.) the society (.) as we know (.) is (.) so it's important (.) the=crafts=doesn't=exist=anymore (.) the=manual=labor (.) so with three sons we try to make them understand the importance

40. FATHER: we talk with them above all about these problems

41. MOTHER: commit yourself for your future (.) now we've done our job ((gesticulates)) (.) do your best for your future (1.5) and that's the only way by nowadays (.) and so it's good to commit oneself (1.5) to have a better future

42. RESEARCHER: why do you think you got these marks? (names SON #1) why?

43. SON #1: ((smiles)) during the school year (.) I applied myself (.) I did what I had to do

44. RESEARCHER: so perseverance rewarded you (.) and what about you (names SON #2)?

45. SON #2: eh:: (2.0) let's say the same thing

46. RESEARCHER: you applied yourself?

47. SON #2: yes

#### Italian original:

39. MADRE: perché poi comunque dietro c'è tutto un discorso (.), per la preparazione del futuro (.) La società, sappiamo, è ormai (.), quindi è importante (.) non=esiste=più=il=mestiere, il lavoro=manuale=artigianale. Quindi con tre maschi cerchiamo di fargli capire l'importanza

40. PADRE: ci si parla con loro soprattutto di questi problemi

41. MADRE: impegnatevi per il vostro futuro (.), ormai il nostro lo abbiamo fatto ((gesticola)), per il vostro futuro impegnatevi (1.5) ed è l'unico modo al momento (.) e quindi è bene impegnarsi (1.5) per avere il futuro più facile

42. RICERCATRICE: secondo voi perché avuto questi voti? Corrado perché?

43. FIGLIO 1: ((sorride)) nel corso dell'anno scolastico (.) mi sono impegnato, ho fatto quello che dovevo fare

44. RICERCATRICE: quindi la costanza ti ha premiato (.) E tu Adriano, perché?

45. FIGLIO 2: eh:: (2.0) diciamo per la stessa cosa

46. RICERCATRICE: ti sei impegnato?

47. FIGLIO 2: sì

In more general terms, Excerpts 16 and 17 are examples of the symbolic process of active appropriation that leads to the construction of the Self. What happens is that the children are provided with images of the Self, norms, values, and explanations of their behavior. They elaborate the signs adults use to talk about them but at the same time they elaborate these signs to produce their own view, which is partially coinciding and partially not.

### The Other Side of the Coin: The Educational Self in the Adult's Life

The second characteristic of the Educational Self (see Fig. 40.4b) is the fact that it emerges and becomes salient every time the person participates in an activity within an educational context<sup>5</sup>. The legacy of symbolic resources (systems of activity, emotional experience, etc.) attached to the school experience, is used by the adults to regulate and

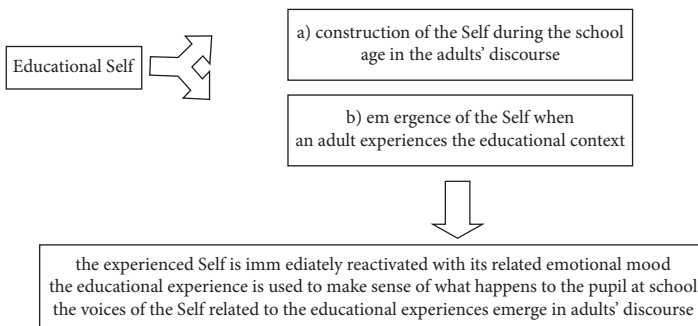


Figure 40.4 The emergence of the adult's Educational Self

modulate the interaction and to make sense of what happens in this type of situation. This process emerges in our data under three different forms:

- 1) the experienced Self is immediately reactivated with its related emotional mood;
- 2) the traces of the educational experience are used to make sense of what happens to the pupil at school; and
- 3) points 1 and 2 emerge in the adult's discourse through the voices of the Self related to the educational experiences.

The first form is presented in Excerpt 18, where we can see how the experienced Self of the parents is immediately reactivated by the school-family meeting. The researcher interviews a family just after the school-family meeting. The family is composed by the father, a 41-year-old craftsman, the mother, a 40-year-old waitress, and the son, age 12 years. First, the researcher asks the parents to evaluate their son's school. The mother starts to talk about the headmaster, who was incidentally her teacher when she left the school before finishing (turns #24,

#26). Then the researcher asks for the father's opinion (turns #27, #30).

Both the mother and the father left school after obtaining their middle school diploma and went out to work. In turn #24, the mother immediately refers to the important turning point in her life ("instead I decided to get a job"). She juxtaposes a present and a past situation linked by the person of her teacher. She was a good student, she loved the school, but she decided to leave despite her teacher's advice. When she comes back to school as a mother, she meets again the same person, who has become in the meantime the headmaster, and she reports his discourse in the third person ("when he saw me he told me 'don't do to your son what you did to yourself'") to argue in favor of her present belief as a parent of a school-age son ("going to school is better than going to work"). The narrative of the mother's biography (turns #24, #29 and #31) seems to be attached to an immediate activation of an emotional and "nostalgic" mood ("If I could go back yes"). On the other hand, when the father is asked to evaluate the school (turn #30) he immediately presents not only the same "nostalgic" mood ("we

### Excerpt 18: Interview #8

#### English translation:

24. MOTHER: yes he's a smart person (.) when he saw me I took my son to middle school for the first time (.) because I didn't finish the school (.) I just finished the middle school and didn't want to go on (.) even if I got good notes (.) when he saw me he told me don't do to your son what you did to yourself (.) he came home to tell me I must go on (.) instead I decided to get a job

25. RESEARCHER: in general (.) what is your idea about the school?

26. MOTHER: it's a good thing (.) beyond literacy (.) going to school is better than going to work

27. RESEARCHER: does daddy think so too?

28. FATHER: yes=yes

29. MOTHER: If we could go back yes

30. FATHER: that's what I said earlier to the teacher (.) I sat down at the little school desk (.) I would go back to school again

31. MOTHER: it's very nice (.) I loved going to school (.) a lot

#### Italian original:

24. MADRE: sì una persona in gamba (.) quando mi vide la prima volta che portai mio figlio in prima media (.) perché io non ho continuato (.) ho fatto la terza media e non ho voluto continuare (.) anche se andavo moto bene a scuola (.) come mi vide disse non far fare a tuo figlio quello che hai fatto tu venne fino a casa che io dovevo continuare mi misi in testa che dovevo andare a lavorare

25. RICERCATRICE: e in generale (.) rispetto alla scuola che idea avete?

26. MADRE: è una cosa buona (.) a parte una cultura generale (.) è meglio andare a scuola che lavorare!

27. RICERCATRICE: anche il papà pensa così?

28. PADRE: sì=sì

29. MADRE: se tornavamo indietro sì

30. PADRE: l'ho detto prima alla professoressa (.) mi sono seduto nel banchetto (.) io ritornerei un'altra volta a scuola

31. MADRE: è molto bello (.) a me piaceva andare a scuola (.) tanto



would go back to school again”), but he accounts for the activation of a specific “educational” behavior (I sat down at the little school desk). Excerpt 18 shows how the adults, while getting in contact with the educational context, immediately activate a repertoire of voices, norms, emotions, and behaviors that are part of the Educational Self, and use it to make sense of their life trajectory as individuals, students, and parents. The parents “know” how to behave and self-regulate at school, even if they are actually there as parents, because they immediately grasp their previous experience. At the same time, the internalized teacher’s voice, once addressed to them as *students*, is now used to account for their choices as *parents*.

The second characteristic of the adult’s Educational Self is that the educational experience is used to make sense of what’s happening at school. The parents provide some evaluations of the school with respect to their past experience and account for a change, which is not easy to elaborate.

As shown in Excerpt 7 (turn #43) the mother immediately compares the present situation of

her daughter’s school with her own experience as a student. It should be noted that she evokes the emotional condition (“we were afraid”) and the relationship with the adults (“the teacher, the principal”) rather than other dimensions such as learning. In the same way, the difference between “her” school and that of her daughter is described in terms of “open-mindedness” and attention to the student’s “problems” rather than subjects or methods.

Excerpt 19, on the other hand, is taken from Interview #3 involving two sons, (12 and 13 years old), the father, and the mother.

In this excerpt, the focus of both parents (turns #40, #41 and #48) is on the change that has taken place in terms of methods, subjects, and programs. As in Excerpt 7, the parents immediately refer to their own school experience to make comparisons. These are two examples of the different way adults refer to their school experience to make sense of their children’s situation. Although, the parents’ evaluations focus on different dimensions, the emotional experience and the relationship *versus* the learning and the method, both the excerpts show a

### Excerpt 19: Interview #3

#### English translation:

39. RESEARCHER: and in general (.) what do you parents think about the school?

40. MOTHER: it has made great strides from time to time (1.5) maybe too many [many:::]

41. FATHER: [many] (.) we remember our school once upon a time (.) a school with (.) a teacher (.) schematic (.) mechanical (.) school isn’t like that any more (.) the programs (.) the subjects (.) are different (.) they do (1.5) not have to study like (.) we used to but like::: (3.0) how can I say

42. RESEARCHER: maybe not the [content]

43. FATHER: [the content]

44. RESEARCHER: [a method?]

45. FATHER: [yes a method]

46. RESEARCHER: school in general has changed like:::

47. FATHER: hasty

48. MOTHER: we don’t have the time to (.) get to grips with one phase and (.) they’ve suddenly moved on to the next one (.) I don’t know (.) maybe that’s good (.) I can’t really say

#### Italian original:

39. RICERCATRICE: e in generale (.) voi genitori che pensate della scuola?

40. MADRE: si sono fatti passi da gigante da un momento all’altro (1.5) troppi forse [troppi:::]

41. PADRE: [troppi] (.) noi ci ricordiamo la scuola di un tempo (.) di una scuola con (.) un insegnante (.) schematica (.) meccanica (.) invece la scuola di adesso no (.) sui programmi (.) sulle materie (.) è diverso (.) devono (1.5) più studiare non in modo (.) come facevamo noi una volta ma come::: (3.0) come posso dire

42. RICERCATRICE: forse non tanto i[contenuti]

43. PADRE:[i contenuti]

44. RICERCATRICE: [un metodo?]

45. PADRE: [sì un metodo]

46. RICERCATRICE: la scuola in generale ha fatto tanti cambiamenti un po’:::

47. PADRE: affrettati

48. MADRE: non abbiamo avuto il tempo di (.) regolarci in una fase che subito (.) sono subito passati alla successiva (.) non so (.) può darsi che sia buono (.) non so analizzare la cosa

certain difficulty in making sense of the change with respect to their own school experience (Excerpt 7, turn #43; Excerpt 19, turns #47 and #48), which is attached to an emotional vividness. Once the school was rigid but reassuring, schematic but stable, it is not only the student's Self that must adapt to the "hasty" change but also the Selves of the parents as former students.

The last aspect of the adult Educational Self is the polyphony related to the educational experiences emerging from the adults' discourse. An example of such polyphony is presented in Excerpt 20, which is taken from an interview with a family composed of a 12-year-old son, the father and the mother, both 45-year-old teachers. The sense of the school experience is expressed in the dialogue between the different voices of the Self, in this case the I-teacher and the I-father (Ligorio & Tateo, 2008).

When the father is asked to evaluate his son's school, the answer is expressed through an alliance of the I-positions of "father" and "teacher" (turn #31). Nevertheless, this evaluation calls into the picture the father's self-evaluation as a good teacher ("doing it with passion") and the whole set of knowledge derived from the personal school experiences in different moments of his lifetime ("pupils are different than in the past").

In short, the function of the Educational Self emerging from the excerpts is that of regulating and making sense of the adult's encounter with the school, through the activation of the specific symbolic repertoires related to the experience of having-been or

willing-to-be a successful or unsuccessful student (Excerpts 7, 18, and 19), parent (Excerpts 7 and 18), teacher or worker (Excerpt 20) with the related emotional and relational implications. The Educational Self is also used to make sense and to regulate some types of power relationships (Bruner, 1996), providing a framework to account for the teacher-student relationship (Excerpts 7, 18, and 19) and for the social value of the education (Excerpt 18). The Educational Self is a legacy of symbolic resources made of the set of knowledge, beliefs, narratives, and affective states established during the personal educational life. We can draw on it when participating as adults in an educational activity, playing different roles and functions, such as in school-family meetings.

The adult would thus activate the Educational Self—that is what has been defined here as the self-regulatory instance of the Self formed during the dialogical interaction in educational contexts—to make sense of the school experience of the child as a pupil but also of their own experience as parents or teachers.

The idea of Educational Self results from a dynamic, situated and dialogical process as underlined by the excerpts discussed. The definition of Educational Self has to do with the formation of Self during a critical stage in life. More in general, this is not a static entity but follows the same complex and fluid process of elaboration of the identity throughout the personal trajectory, in which "*what is*" is connected with "*what was*," "*what is not yet, but is about to come*" (Valsiner, 2009, p. 18). The analysis of school-family meetings provided some initial hints about how the polyphony

### Excerpt 20: Interview #4

#### English translation:

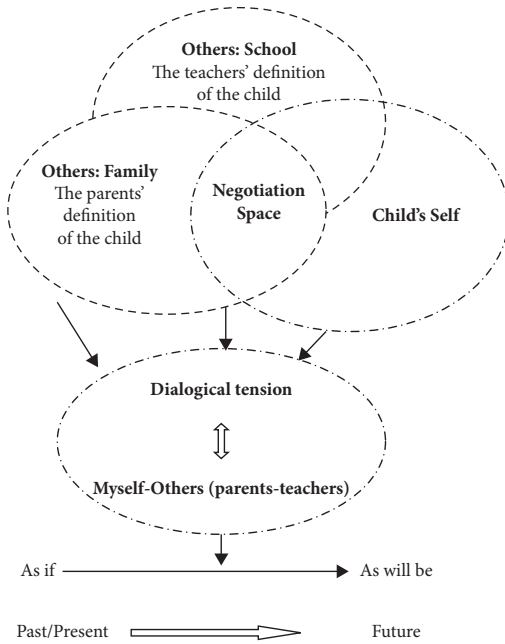
30. RESEARCHER: what do you think about your children's school?

31. FATHER: **the school (1.5) for me as a teacher** and I have seen many schools (.) this school really works (.) I don't know all the teaching staff because the school works (.) if the teachers (.) understand the pupils(.) >believing in their own job< (.) **doing it with passion** (.) which is not always the case (.) in the school=world=like (.) elsewhere in our life and so (.) it depends on the teacher (.) **today the relationships with the pupils are different than in the past**

#### Italian original:

30. RICERCATRICE: cosa pensate della scuola che stanno frequentando i vostri figli?

31. PADRE: **la scuola (1.5) per me che sono un insegnante** e che ho visto parecchie scuole (.) questa è una scuola che realmente funziona (.) non conosco tutti gli insegnanti perché la scuola funziona (.) se ci sono gli insegnanti (.) che capiscono i ragazzi (.) >che credono nel loro lavoro< (.) **che lo fanno con passione** (.) il ché non è sempre riscontrabile (.) nel mondo=scolastico=come (.) in tutti i settori della nostra vita e quindi (.) dipende dall'insegnante (.) **oggi i rapporti con i ragazzi sono diversi rispetto al passato**



**Figure 40.5** Negotiation space and dialogical tension.

of Educational Self would emerge from the process of active internalization and semiotic mediation of the significant adult voices that enter into contact with the child's idea of Self, in course of elaboration or as elaborated so far (see Figure 40.5).

The school-family meetings open a dialogical space where the different voices determine a dynamic system open to different “as-if” possibilities, contributing to defining what a person could be in future time. It is a space of dialogical tension characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty whose borders are permeable rather than rigid. It is a polyphonic space where the confrontation with significant others (myself-others) such as, for instance, parents and teachers activates a process of definition-redefinition-remodulation of the child's Self (Simao & Valsiner, 2007). It stimulates a dialogue and a process of definition and specification, stressed by both “what I think about Me” and by “what others think about Me.”

### Conclusion: Still Standing on the Balcony

Why not to do a little exercise now? You just try to rewind the tape of the visual and virtual tour of the school. What do you see at this moment? The building, the entrance-hall, then the corridors and classrooms. Can you visualize the balcony? The metaphorical balcony on which we have been and where we explored the work of schooling was a

position neither comfortable nor usual, but now we can start again from here. Having a quick glance and using a renewed attention, we would probably realize that the walls of the school, first rigid, now seem more porous, plastic, and permeable. As the contours of cell membranes they let through some elements from sociocultural world. We would, then, recognize that the limited space of the balcony is a very dynamic open-ended system. It's a boundary, which, just as every liminal threshold, is a meeting place. From the balcony we can, finally assume a different angle to see what occurs inside the school. In this way, we would become aware that the work of schooling is constantly interwoven with several elements related to what there is on the outside of the balcony (in society), what happens beyond the balcony (in the school) and what happened or is happening on the balcony itself.

It's always refreshing to summarize, at the end of a long discussion, the main issues stressed.

Using the metaphor of a balcony we pointed out how the school is a *place in between*, a border always interfaced with both internal aspects (practices, discourses, and different actors) and a wider sociocultural climate. The school balcony, as a border zone, is an area of contact with other relevant educational settings. In order to grasp the dynamic and fluidity of this interconnection we need to look at boundary phenomena. A binocular vision focused on inside and outside school allows us to take in consideration the many processes implied in the work of schooling, moving from the role played by the socio-economic and cultural dimensions, passing through the analysis of intersectional points with others educational contexts (such as family-school meetings), arriving at the definition of identity in the school (the suggested notion of the Educational Self).

Looking across the balcony, for example, we highlighted which elements reach school, becoming fundamental factors in constructing school's everyday life. We outlined that the first element to be taken into account is the socio-economic dimension of cultural context in which school acts. We also stressed the relevant effects of families' social and cultural capital on children's school experience.

Paying attention to what happens on the balcony means, primarily, takes into account the intercontextual connection between school and other life contexts as in the case of home-school interactions. Such boundary encounters make evident the intricacy of the interpersonal dynamics in an institutional setting.

The school-family meetings take place in a particular time and space (just on the metaphorical school balcony) within specific “formal/informal” and “open/closed” parameters established by the school. Along these lines, three main modalities of interactional activities (Opposition, Alliance, and Acquiescence) emerge during the parents-teacher meetings that are strictly connected to the family’s socio-economic status and child’s school results.

We have also suggested an economically oriented view of the school-family meeting to stress what is actually at stake in this crossing boundary phenomenon. The different representations of education (multi-dimensionality versus mono-dimensionality) and school (instrumental versus holistic vision) evoked by parents and teachers and the child’s value (in terms of how much he is worth as a person and not only as a student) are the objects of negotiation or, more roughly, the indexes of stock exchange quotations becoming, to a certain extent, commodities.

As we have underlined, the meetings look really heuristically interesting also because it is possible to observe the twofold articulation of the Educational Self. On one hand, the teachers’ and parents’ discourses on school evaluation make explicit several definitions of the pupils’ Self. Such definitions provide a range of identity options that the child should negotiate and cope with during the critical process of constructing his/her Self. On the other hand, during school-family meetings, adults are asked to manage different activities, which is very meaningful from a psycho-social point of view. They have to make sense of the child’s school experience, account for his performance, negotiate between the family and school culture, etc. These activities require the recourse to the symbolic system of autobiographical and social knowledge related to their personal educational experience. Through the balcony metaphor we can look with a new lens at current work of schooling, at its complexity and at its unavoidable interconnections with the broader cultural paradigms of a given society. Studying these extremely complex systems of relationships between inside and outside the school require the researchers to stand exactly on the balcony in spite of the rain or the heat.

### Future Directions

It seems to us that a common trace can be identified throughout our discussion. In this chapter, in fact, we have made an attempt to go beyond a

static vision of schooling, stressing concepts such as “boundary process,” “psychological membranes,” “intercontextual dynamics,” and “intersection points.” In a way, we have pointed out the movement and the openness rather than the static nature and the closure. It’s precisely this “being in between” that should be further explored. By standing on the border and by facing constantly the tension among different parts of the system, new intriguing research questions come forward:

1) How to develop theoretically the *balcony metaphor* and its implication in studying boundary conditions? In order to expand the Border Zone concept with respect to the home-school interaction, which other crossing boundary phenomena should one consider? There are many other different intersection points between school and family that could be empirically explored. One of these occurs when the parents accompany their child to the school. What happens during this daily entrance in the school’s territory? What kind of social processes take place on the liminal threshold constituted by the entrance-hall? Which are the institutional rules ordering this scholastic daily routine and under which conditions are they violated? What is admitted, what is rejected, or just tolerated on this border? In other words, what passes through the balcony and what does not?

2) Which types of experiences make the emergence of the Educational Self possible? The reciprocity of the relationships in motion (Past-Present-Future) and the dialogical nature of each “I” position in motion (the ambivalence between to-be and to-become) must be explored with respect to the formation of student’s Educational Self. Besides, how can we grasp the “polyphony of voices” affecting the definition of Self in others’ educational activities and experiences inside and outside the school?

3) How can one explore the regulatory function of the Educational Self at the level of social roles and power relationships? It represents, indeed, the framework both for the selection of the possible Selves to be constructed by the child within certain cultural parameters and for the regulation of social relationships and social valorization of the education within a given society.

4) Which is the role played by the Educational Self in the adulthood? How does it “work”? To understand the idea of adult Educational Self could be useful to study its reactivation when the person

is involved in an educational activity, for example, during significant turning points and transitions in life, such as higher education or professional training activities.

5) How to reveal the ambiguity of the measurement system used by the school in the evaluation report card? Are those measures (such as the marks) an instrument to commoditize the education? How does this translation of the complex educational process occur? What could be lost or added? Is the translation system clear or is it only outwardly evident? And to whom?

6) Which communicative strategies the school could be improved to make the meeting with the family more effective? Could they be constituted by “interaction protocols,” helpful in reformulating both conflict and acquiescence interactions?

### Appendix: Transcription Conventions

The transcription of school-family meetings and interviews is in line with the conventions of Jefferson’s (1985) Conversational Analysis.

.	descending tone
,	ascending tone
?	interrogative tone
:::	extension of preceding sound (proportional to the number of colons)
-	sound or word interruption
=	no articulation between words
—	(underlined) emphasis on the words underlined
<b>M</b>	(capital letters) increase of volume
° °	the words between these signs are whispered
> <	the words between these signs are pronounced in an accelerating tone
< >	the words between these signs are pronounced in a decelerating tone
( )	the words between these signs are not perfectly comprehensible. The brackets are empty when the talk is absolutely unintelligible

(( ))	short annotations about extra-verbal or contextual elements are reported in double-round brackets
[	beginning of juxtaposition of speakers; the square brackets are vertically aligned
]	end of juxtaposition of speakers
.h	heavy inspiration
h.	heavy expiration
(0.2)	length of pause in seconds
(.)	pause shorter than 0.2 seconds

### Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Jaan Valsiner for his constant support, for his generosity, for our insightful meetings that were essential for the development of the ideas presented in this chapter. We also want to thank Luca Tateo for his helpful feedback on an earlier version of the manuscript and the K-seminar’s participants for their numerous interesting suggestions.

### Notes

1. The chapter is the result of a shared reflection of the authors. However, Antonio Iannaccone wrote the paragraphs entitled “Homeostatic functions of the school,” “Maintaining status-quo of society,” “Some practical implications,” “Types of interactions, family’s socio-economic status, and school results.” Giuseppina Marsico wrote the introduction, the other paragraphs, conclusion, and future research’s directions.

2. In architectural terms the balcony is a part of the building that protrudes outward. It’s an element added to the body of the building, a sort of platform beyond the outer wall boundary. Therefore, the balcony enables the relations with adjacent surroundings. For this reason we can define the balcony as a real social space, a place to meet and exchange where many social events occur. As an example, one of the authors (Marsico) reports some “snapshots” of life during her childhood. Many times she has seen her mother calling their neighbor across the balcony to borrow, for example, eggs for a cake and then give her a piece once the cake was prepared by passing the tray from one balcony to another. Many other times she has seen her mother on the balcony chatting with a neighbor of micro-events that had occurred in the little world of the neighborhood. In a sense, the balcony was a venue for exchanging gossip that performs the function of maintenance of the social order. She herself repeatedly has observed from the balcony the neighbor across, accessing daily to a series of actions and to life that flowed in the opposite house.

3. The research was realized in a middle school in the South of Italy.

4. Year 8 in the Italian educational system, which requires assessment in years 5, 8, and 13.

5. The authors are grateful to Luca Tateo for his participation in defining the emergence of adult’s Educational Self and in commenting on the related excerpts discussed in the chapters.

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## Collaboration and Helping as Cultural Practices

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### Abstract

This chapter examines children's collaboration and helping from the perspective that understanding prosocial development requires attention to the cultural practices and values in which children and adults participate. Children's ways of engaging with each other and with adults are based on practices of their families and the current and historical practices of their communities. We examine cultural values related to the helpfulness and propensity to collaborate that are common among Mexican, Latino/a, and Indigenous-heritage U.S. and Canadian children, as compared with European-American middle-class children. Central to this cultural difference are community values and practices regarding the relation of individuals with their communities—values that can be seen in the organization of children's families and communities.

**Keywords:** Helping, collaboration, prosocial development, initiative, observation, cultural practices, history, schooling, Indigenous, Mexico

This chapter focuses on cultural and historical bases of collaboration and helping. We draw attention to children's development of helpfulness and collaboration in the context of the value placed on these ways of interaction in families and communities, for adults as well as for children.

Child development research often treats children's prosocial development as individual maturational stages of accomplishment, as children learn to help others and collaborate. Helping or altruistic behavior is characterized as developing through nine stages through adolescence, originating in simple prosocial behavior such as responding positively to others and reacting to others' distress in infancy; as children grow older they become more able to detect subtle cues if someone needs help (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

However, in communities that emphasize community-mindedness, helpfulness, and collaboration, children may be more prepared to detect such cues indicating that others need help and to initiate

helping. Children show more prosocial behavior in contexts where such behavior is encouraged and required or expected (Kartner, Keller, & Chaudhary, 2010; Nsamenang, 1992). In communities where collaboration and helping with initiative are the norm, children may be encouraged to develop these aspects of prosocial skill.

Our cultural/historical analysis brings together community values and practices that help to make sense of population differences in Mexico and the United States in children's collaboration and helping. A number of studies indicate that children from Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage communities of Mexico are especially helpful and collaborative in research settings as well as in school and in work with their families and communities. We suggest that their helpfulness and orientation to collaborate are related to community practices, values, and organization that appear to be widespread in Indigenous communities of the Americas.



## Indigenous and Indigenous-Heritage Practices of the Americas, and Schooling

Our cultural/historical focus is on experience with cultural practices and values, which are distinct from people's ancestry and place of residence. We examine historical roots of cultural practices surrounding collaboration and helping, in examining the traces of Indigenous practices among two related populations: (1) Mexican children who live in families or communities that identify themselves as Indigenous, and (2) children whose families are likely to have ancestral ties to Mexican Indigenous communities but who do not live in Indigenous communities nor even necessarily recognize Indigenous roots. We suggest that both are likely to have experience with Indigenous communities' practices, and examine research investigating the extent to which this is the case.

About 12% of the current population of Mexico is identified as Indigenous (CONAPO, 2005; Corona, 2001), and a large proportion of immigrants to the United States are from Indigenous communities. For example, in 2003–2004, 16–20% of California farmworkers were of Indigenous origins (Aguirre, Intl., 2005; CONAPO, 2005.) In addition, the majority of families emigrating from Mexico to the United States come from *campesino* (rural) areas in states such as Michoacán, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Jalisco, and Zacatecas (National Population Council of Mexico, 2000) where many populations have Indigenous histories (López, Correa-Chávez, Rogoff, & Gutiérrez, 2010; Lorente Fernández, 2006).

However, because of national attempts to erase such an identity in Mexico, many *campesinos* in Mexico prefer not to identify as Indigenous-heritage as it is an identity that is often subordinate politically, economically, and socially (Fox, 2006; Lorente Fernández, 2010). In the early 1900s in Mexico, there was a strong nationwide agenda to “modernize” the nation by cutting ties with Indigenous traditions and language (Bonfil Batalla, 1987, 1988; Stavenhagen, 1988). In some rural *pueblos* (towns), people still consider themselves to be Indigenous, but in others they make reference to previously being Indians, with a dynamic view of Indianness that focuses on changing social status and cultural practices (Lorente Fernández, 2010; Urrieta, 2003). In the early 1900s, many Indigenous towns were transformed into *campesino* towns, but they often retained recognizably Indigenous practices (Frye, 1996; Lorente Fernández, 2010; Urrieta, 2003; Vigil, 1998).

Hence many Mexican families, in Mexico and immigrating to the United States, have involvement in communities that were historically Indigenous. However, most Mexican immigrants in the United States do not live in communities that recognize themselves or are recognized as Indigenous-heritage (Urrieta, 2003), and participation in Indigenous practices among U.S. Mexican-heritage families is often not recognized.

Limited maternal schooling may often serve as an index of familiarity with Indigenous practices among recent Mexican immigrants to the United States and among many *Mestizo* people (of mixed Indigenous and European heritage) from rural Mexico (Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2009; López et al., 2010; Silva, Correa-Chávez, & Rogoff, 2010). Because of power dynamics and unequal distribution of resources, rural and Indigenous towns in Mexico have historically had little access to Western schooling—a European and U.S.-origin institution (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Najafi, Mejía-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2008; Reese, 2002). Although Mexican communities with limited schooling are not always ethnically Indigenous, Mexican communities where schooling is limited are often marginalized rural communities that have connections with Indigenous practices stemming from community history and/or from contact among neighboring communities, with exchange of ideas and practices.

Families coming from *pueblos* that once considered themselves Indigenous are more likely to maintain some Indigenous practices and have limited schooling than families that have migrated to cities and have more access to formal schooling (Frye, 1996; López et al., 2010; Vigil, 1998). In a town that was considered Indigenous a generation ago, families have little involvement in Western schooling and engage in several longstanding Indigenous practices, whereas in nearby Guadalajara, people with extensive schooling in the last generation engage in these Indigenous practices in an attenuated form, and professional families with generations of schooling do not report engaging in these practices (Najafi, Mejía-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2008).

We speculate that the notable helpfulness and collaboration among Mexican and Mexican-heritage children fits with a valued cultural practice that may stem in part from the organization of family and group work in Indigenous communities of the Americas. This practice—being *acomedido/a*—basically involves being alert to surrounding events and ready to

spontaneously contribute to the direction of the group. Being *acomedido/a* fits with a cultural tradition in support of learning that appears to be widespread in Indigenous communities of the Americas—intent community participation.

### A Valued Learning Tradition of Indigenous America: Intent Community Participation

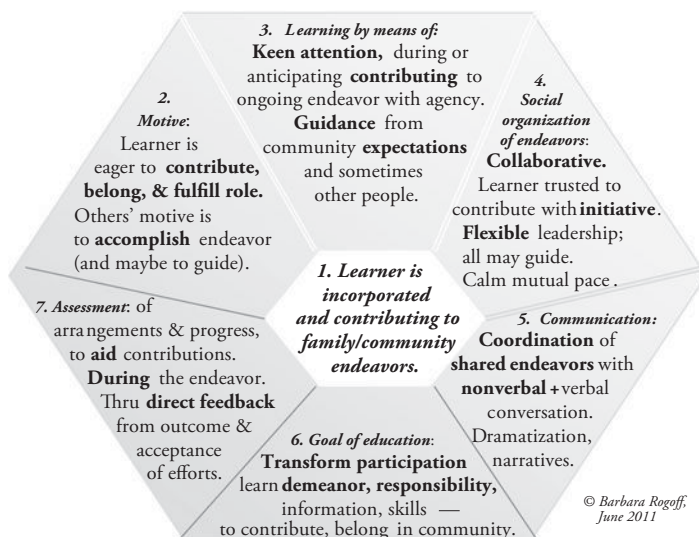
The distinctive approach to helping and working with others demonstrated by children from families with Indigenous Mexican histories is in keeping with a cultural tradition in support of learning that Rogoff and colleagues have dubbed *learning through intent community participation* (Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía-Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003; Rogoff, Moore, Najafi, Dexter, Correa-Chávez, & Solís, 2007). In this approach, children are included in the wide range of activities of the community, and they are encouraged and expected to learn by observing and pitching in to ongoing collaborative activities (Chamoux, 1992; Corona & Pérez, 2005; de Haan, 1999; de León, 2000; Rogoff, 2003). Collaboration and helping (along with learning through observation) are key aspects of learning through intent community participation.

Learning through intent community participation is a part of all children’s lives but is limited in communities that restrict children’s access to observing and participating in the range of everyday activities of their community. In middle-class communities where high levels of schooling are prevalent, children are seldom included in a wide

range of community activities and therefore have less opportunities to learn through intent community participation (de León, 2000; Gaskins, 2000; Morelli, Rogoff, & Angelillo, 2003; Rogoff, 2003). In communities where young children are regularly included in the wide range of social and productive activities, they are often in a position to observe and listen to ongoing events, and they are expected to pay attention and contribute to them. In turn, such inclusion seems also to encourage children’s active interest in knowing what is going on and in contributing to it with initiative.

The defining features of learning through intent community participation are articulated in a prism with seven integrated facets, which together describe this cultural tradition for organizing learning. Here we present an updated version of the prism (Rogoff, 2011), which continues to be under revision as we learn more about how to characterize this cultural tradition for organizing learning. Reading from the upper left-hand facet on Figure 41.1, learning through intent community participation has these seven interrelated characteristics:

1. Learners are *incorporated* in the range of ongoing endeavors of their families and communities, with expectations and opportunities to *contribute*.
2. Learners are *eager to contribute, belong, and fulfill roles* that are valued in their families and communities. Other people present are involved in *accomplishing* the activity at hand, and may provide guidance.



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**Figure 41.1** The multifaceted prism articulating the features of learning through intent community participation.

3. Learning involves *keen attention*, during or in anticipation of *contributing*, guided by community-wide *expectations* of responsible contribution and sometimes by other people.

4. Social organization involves *collaborative engagement* in family and community endeavors, with *flexible leadership* and trust in learners to take initiative, along with others who also participate at a calm mutual pace.

5. Communication occurs through coordination of shared endeavors through *articulate nonverbal conversation and parsimonious verbal means*, as well as through narratives and dramatization that contextualize information and ideas.

6. The goal of education is *transformation of participation*, which involves *learning to collaborate, with appropriate consideration and responsibility*, as well as learning information and skills to be responsible contributors belonging in the community.

7. Assessment includes evaluation of the success of the *arrangements* as well as the learner's *progress, in support* of learners' contributions, *during the endeavor. Feedback is direct*, from the outcome of learners' efforts and the acceptance (or not) by others of the efforts as productive contributions. (Rogoff, 2011)

This chapter focuses on the first three facets in examining research on children's collaboration and helping with initiative and keen attention to ongoing events. In addition, our suggestion that the cultural value of being *acomedido/a* helps understand Mexican-heritage children's collaboration and helping with initiative highlights an aspect of the fifth facet.

After reviewing research on cultural differences in helping and collaboration, we argue that the cultural value of being *acomedido/a* contributes to the explanation of cultural differences in studies of helpfulness and collaboration, and we draw attention to cultural differences in keen observation and listening, which are an important part of knowing when to pitch in and help. We also relate cultural differences in collaboration and helping to historical changes in the circumstances of and assumptions about childhood in the United States and Mexico. We argue that children's prosocial development is based not only on the growth of individual children but also deeply reflects the social organization and valued practices of their communities.

## Collaboration among Mexican and Indigenous-Heritage Children of the Americas

### *Cultural Differences in Children's Extent and Means of Collaboration*

To our knowledge, all of the available investigations comparing cultural backgrounds find more, or at least as much, collaboration among Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage and Mexican children as compared with those with less experience with Indigenous practices, including European-American children. Several of the studies have uncovered different ways of coordinating among children from different backgrounds.

Mexican-heritage children have shown a more cooperative orientation than European-heritage children in game situations (Kagan & Madsen, 1971, 1972; Knight & Kagan, 1977; Nelson, Kagan, & Gumbiner, 1982). Also, Mexican-heritage children from regions of Mexico with Indigenous history more often attempted to become collaboratively involved in their sibling's toy-building instruction than did Mexican-heritage children whose parents had extensive experience with Western schooling (Silva et al., 2010).

A study of sibling collaboration found widespread collaboration but with different ways of coordinating among the three siblings (Angelillo & Rogoff, 2005). Sibling triads, aged 5 years to 15 years, spent almost all their time collaborating as a threesome or at least touching base with each other in exploring a miniature museum exhibit, in both European-heritage and Mexican-heritage children from the United States (with mothers averaging 17 grades and 8 grades of schooling, respectively). In an average of only 7% of the time segments for both backgrounds were any of the three siblings not coordinating with or monitoring the others.

However, the ways that the children coordinated with each other varied in the two backgrounds (Angelillo & Rogoff, 2005). The European-heritage U.S. siblings usually coordinated with each other by dividing up access to the exhibit by explicitly negotiating whose turn it would be (in 62% of the 30-second time intervals). They often interrupted each other's exploration agendas and discussed how to manage turn-taking, whose turn it was, and how long turns would be; their turn-taking negotiations sometimes included friction: "But you've had a lot of turns. We haven't even gotten to touch that thing." Among the Mexican-heritage U.S. sibling groups, turn-taking occurred half as often (in 31%

of the time intervals in which the siblings were coordinating with each other), and when turn-taking occurred, it generally was smooth and undisputed, with few interruptions of each other's turns. The Mexican-heritage U.S. siblings' intervals of coordination without dividing up turns often seemed to involve coordination by fluidly blending their agendas together, combining their interests.

Turn-taking may be a strategy, like division of labor, for subdividing an activity or access to resources, contrasting with engagement together with a common agenda. European-American children relied on turn-taking more than Navajo children when pairs of 9-year-olds were asked to teach a 7-year-old to play a game (Ellis & Gauvain, 1992). When asked to work on group projects, Warm Springs Indian students in Oregon worked together effectively without intervention from the teacher, whereas Anglo students often disputed over turns, who would lead, and how to carry out the tasks, requiring teacher intervention (Philips, 1983).

Similarly, European-American middle-class mothers commonly regulated their toddlers' and young children's access to desired objects through turn-taking, and they reported enforcing turn-taking to manage disputes between their young children; these strategies were almost never used or reported by Guatemalan Mayan mothers (Mosier & Rogoff, 2003). The Mayan 3- to 5-year-olds often got access to a desired object by blending agendas with the toddler, such as by helping the toddler with the object or enhancing the toddler's efforts with the object, rather than trying to get it away from the toddler, unlike the European-American middle-class 3- to 5-year-olds. The Mayan siblings' collaboration with the toddler involved little intervention from their mothers.

Fifth- and sixth-graders in a Mazahua Indigenous community (in central Mexico) worked in small groups with smooth and flexible roles, in figuring out how to install panes of glass into window frames in a school construction project:

Each decided what to do and when to do it by coordinating his or her activities with the others of the group... At no time was there any sign of tension or of one member of the group disputing when another took over the more active role. Neither were there signs of children in any way asking or signaling when they were about to 'take over,' or that it was their 'turn.' On the contrary, there was no way to foretell when the role switching between performer and observer-supporter would take place. It was

smoothly done and, apparently at least, with no disagreements or negotiating.

(Paradise & de Haan, 2009, pp. 192–193)

### ***Cultural Differences in Staying Engaged When Not Directly Interacting***

There also appear to be cultural differences in remaining engaged when another child has a more active role. When their partner took a more leading role in instructing a younger child how to play a game, pairs of Navajo children remained more engaged than European-heritage children. The European-heritage children more often became sidetracked and inattentive or made statements that repeated or were unrelated to their peer's previous statements, whereas the Navajo children were more likely to extend or support information given by their peer to instruct the younger child (Ellis & Gauvain, 1992).

In a study of collaboration among U.S. Mexican- or European-heritage 7- to 9-year-old children constructing a three-dimensional wooden honeybee puzzle according to a model, Najafi and Rogoff (2007) also found differences in the children's collaboration and their staying on track when another child took the lead (*see* Fig. 41.2). The children's communities differed in Indigenous histories and experience in Western schooling across generations. The 13 European-American triads were from families with extensive schooling—their mothers averaged 14 grades of schooling and most of their grandparents had completed at least 12 grades of school, as is common among European-American populations (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The 16 triads of children whose families had immigrated to the United States from Indigenous-heritage regions of Mexico had mothers with an average of 7 grades of schooling; their grandparents had usually completed less than 6 grades. (Most of the children were born in the United States; most of their parents were born in Mexico.) The children of both backgrounds had similar amounts of experience making 3D puzzles and model toys.

The Mexican-heritage children from a community with Indigenous history usually worked with at least one other child either in dyads or as a coordinated ensemble with all three children pitching in together and staying in touch, in 72% of the 30-second time segments, compared with 57% of the segments for European-heritage U.S. children whose families had generations of extensive experience with Western schooling (and related traditions). In turn, the triads of European-heritage U.S. children



**Figure 41.2** Three Mexican-heritage children work together to assemble a honeybee puzzle according to a completed model, in the foreground.

from families with extensive Western schooling had a higher proportion of segments in which they did not work with others in their triad (Najafi & Rogoff, 2007; *see also* Correa-Chávez, 2010), and they more often went off task. Occasions when one or two of the children were off-task for more than half of the 30-second segment were twice as frequent among the European-heritage U.S. triads than among the triads of Mexican-heritage U.S. children from a community with Indigenous history (23% of the segments versus 11%).

Thus, the comparative findings indicate that children from communities with Indigenous-American histories are more, or at least as, likely to collaborate than children from families with extensive Western schooling (and related) experience. The collaboration among children from communities with Indigenous American histories seems to be more fluid and less likely to involve turn-taking to divide the activity, and the children appear to be more engaged when not directly involved.

Children's collaborative strategies are likely to be related to familiarity with distinct formats for interaction, as they develop repertoires of cultural practice based on their experiences in the surrounding social and societal organization (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). This calls attention to the organization of the institutions and communities in which children and their families participate.

### ***The Organization of Collaboration within Families and Communities of the Americas***

Collaboration in family and community work from early ages is common in Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage communities of the Americas, including many Mexican rural communities (Cazden

& John, 1971; Deyhle, 1991; Lipka, 1991; Romney & Romney, 1963). Children often take on helpful roles where they are responsible for family work and caring for young siblings and for animals, contributing to celebrations and festivals, and serving as language brokers for their parents (Alcalá, Rogoff, Mejía-Arauz, Coppens, & Roberts, 2011; Delgado-Gaitán, 1987; Gaskins, 2000; González, Moll, & Amantí, 2005; Lorente Fernández, 2010; Maynard, 2002; Nájera-Ramírez, 1997; Orellana, 2001; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000; Urrieta, 2010; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Children's involvement in such activities is often more common in Mexican and Indigenous-heritage communities than in European-American middle-class communities (Farver, 1993; Telzer & Fuligni, 2009; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Zukow, 1989).

The children's contributions often fit with the organization of family and community endeavors, which ethnographic work in various Indigenous-history communities characterizes as involving wide-ranging multi-way horizontal collaborations with respect for individual autonomy (Lamphere, 1977; Paradise, 1987, 1996; Paradise & de Haan, 2009; Sindell, 1997). For example, Pelletier (1970) described a form of horizontal collaboration in an Indigenous community in Canada where everyone contributed as they were needed, "observing and feeling" the process of life and work (p. 21). The collaboration was community-wide, exemplified by the smooth, horizontal organization of community events such as banquets and funerals. When outsiders tried to impose a hierarchical organization on such events, the organization of community events became much less effective.

The horizontal organization noted in a variety of Indigenous communities of the Americas resembles the teamwork described by Senge (1990) in very successful teams. Such teams show *alignment*, which is when a group of people function as a whole, complementing each other's efforts with common direction and harmonizing individual energies. "Individuals do not sacrifice their personal interests to the larger team vision; rather, the shared vision becomes an extension of their personal visions" (pp. 234–235). Senge illustrated these points with the alignment within leading sports teams and jazz ensembles that are "in the groove." The process includes spontaneity, innovations, and coordinated action, "where each team member remains conscious of other team members and can be counted on to act in ways that complement each others' actions" (p. 236).

### ***Solo Work Related to Western Schooling, in Contrast with Collaboration***

Solo involvement is common in Western schooling (Au & Mason, 1981; McCollum, 1989; Mehan, 1979; Philips, 1983). In classroom settings, biases sometimes occur against groups with cooperative social orientations, and competitive or solo-performance orientations are often favored (Widaman & Kagan, 1987). Common practices of Western schooling—such as enforcement of turn-taking, individual work assignments, individual rewards, and punishment of students who aid each other—may often discourage students from helping each other (Graves & Graves, 1983; Kagan, 1984; McClintock, 1974; Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974; Whiting & Whiting, 1975).

A contrast between cooperative adult-child and teacher-directed approaches is clear in a study asking Mexican Mazahua parents and non-Mazahua teachers to put together a market stall with a Mazahua child. The parents treated the children as part of the endeavor throughout, welcoming their contributions and suggestions as responsible and active collaborators (de Haan, 1999, 2001). In contrast, local teachers took charge, assigning and dividing parts and evaluating how well the task had been carried out. In general, the teachers did not engage with the children in the task and did not welcome their suggestions.

Family involvement in Western schooling (and related practices) may compete with experience with Indigenous community practices. Among families with extensive Western schooling, children's individual solo efforts may be encouraged in division of family labor and individual rewards. When students

become parents, their interactions with their children may reflect the practices related to schooling that they have experienced (Chavajay, 2006; LeVine et al., 1991; Mejía-Arauz, Rogoff, & Paradise, 2005; Richman, Miller, & LeVine, 1992; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993).

For example, when Guatemalan Mayan mothers with extensive Western schooling constructed a puzzle with three related children, they took on a role resembling the managerial, hierarchical approach common among school teachers, often dividing the group into solo or dyadic teams (Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; parallel results were found among other Mayan families interacting with fathers, *see* Chavajay, 2008). Mayan mothers from the same town whose families engaged in relatively traditional Mayan practices were more likely to interact with the three children in multi-way collaboration, with all of the participants working together in a coordinated manner where everyone contributed to the task.

Similarly, European-American and Mexican-heritage U.S. children whose mothers had extensive experience with Western schooling more often worked as dyads or alone in the presence of two other children, during an origami paper-folding demonstration (Mejía-Arauz, Rogoff, Dexter, & Najafi, 2007). U.S. Mexican-heritage children from communities with Indigenous histories more often collaborated as an ensemble with the two other members of the triad.

In a follow-up study, U.S. children of both European and Mexican heritage showed less collaboration as a whole group than children from three Mexican backgrounds. However, no differences appeared in extent of collaboration among children residing in communities in Mexico that varied in Indigenous histories and in experience with Western schooling (Mejía-Arauz, Roberts, & Rogoff, 2008). The authors suggested that the social organization of the children's schooling might have canceled out the expected differences in the social organization that might occur in their families. The Mexican children whose mothers had extensive Western schooling attended a school that encouraged collaboration, whereas the Mexican children from a historically Indigenous town (and whose mothers had only basic schooling) attended a school that emphasized solo work. It makes sense that children's modes of working together are related not only to their families' practices but also to their experience in school (Matusov, Bell, & Rogoff, 2002). Children's collaboration and helping develop with experience

with their communities' practices and institutions, which may vary in values regarding collaboration and helping.

In addition to their experience with the practices of schooling, families with extensive schooling are likely to have experience with a whole constellation of related practices that are often characteristic of middle-class cultural traditions. Beyond providing experience with a distinctive form of social organization where helping others is often discouraged and children's work is often solo, extensive Western schooling connects with a set of related practices. These include bureaucratic occupations, cosmopolitan living arrangements, small nuclear families, age segregation, and limited contributions by children to child care and family work, as well as less likelihood of being involved with traditional Indigenous practices (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002; Rogoff, Correa-Chávez, & Navichoc Cotuc, 2005).

In the next section, we offer the idea that the collaborative orientation of children and their families in Indigenous and Indigenous-history communities may be understood in the context of a cultural value system that emphasizes helping with initiative, that is, being *acomedido/a*.

### **A Cultural Value Promoting Helping with Initiative: Being *Acomedido/a***

The cultural value of being *acomedido/a* may relate to the extent of collaboration and helping among Mexican-heritage children. According to interviews by López (in preparation), many Mexicans define being *acomedido/a* as helping not because one has been asked to but because one acts on an opportunity to pitch in. Such coordinated and collaborative interactions are characterized by ready helping.

The cultural value of being *acomedido/a* has rarely been the topic of academic discourse. We have only found the work of González (2001, 2006), who described being *acomedido/a* as being able to accommodate to the surroundings and make oneself useful. González described this as a common teaching among Mexican parents, to teach children to be *acomedido/a(s)* to fit in wherever they may find themselves by being able to empathize with others' needs in order to work collectively. She described the mothers' narratives in her study as teaching their children to be aware of their surroundings and interpret sometimes hidden meanings to what is said.

We speculate that the value system of being *acomedido/a* may stem in part from an Indigenous emphasis on collaboration, collective action, and horizontal social relations where everybody helps out. The concept of *tequio* (derived from the Nahuatl word *cuatequitl* meaning communal work) is a way that work is organized to benefit the collective. This is a practice that has been prevalent in Indigenous communities of Mexico, apparently since pre-Hispanic times. It involves service or work for a community project such as constructing roads, other public service projects or the introduction of new services such as formal schooling, potable water, and clinics. *Tequio* has been essential for marginal communities as one of the most vigorous institutions for perseverance and solidarity of the community; it is sustained with egalitarian discourse (Warman, 2003). The practice of community contributions has also been adapted to reflect modern day realities. Many Mexican immigrants in the United States routinely send money to build infrastructure and prepare fiestas for towns in which they no longer physically live.

The concept of being *acomedido/a* fits with ethnographic research that indicates that collaboration and helping is expected and often voluntarily offered among Indigenous-heritage and Mexican-heritage children (de Haan, 2001; Delgado-Gaitán, 1987; Lamphere, 1977; Paradise, 1996; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan, 1988). In many Indigenous Mexican-heritage and Mexican-American communities, children readily contribute to ongoing activities in responsible helping relations, especially in caring for younger children and in multi-age teams responsible for family work (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Maynard, 2002; Orellana, 2001; Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974).

For example, all 3- to 17-year-old children in a formerly Nahuatl town near Mexico City helped in their families' household, farm, and forestry activities from 3 to 7 hours daily and reported that their activities were satisfying (Ramírez Sánchez, 2007). In another Indigenous-heritage town in central México, children spontaneously join their elders in a complex organization of collective voluntary work (*cuatequitl*). "In the absence of any coercive attitude or pressure in order for them to do their work, children are enabled to find the jobs they like best, always in coordination with others" (Corona & Pérez, 2005, p. 8). Older children in Mexican heritage families in the United States and in Mexico

often help and guide younger children in how to do things like braid hair, tie shoes, carry out chores, and do homework (Azmitia, Cooper, García, & Dunbar, 1996; Valdés, 1996).

In cultural contexts where prosocial behavior and social responsiveness are important values, a reciprocal orientation is expected. Childhood is a system of reciprocity and exchange among the Nahuas of Tlaxcala, Mexico, where everyone helps members of their family, especially those in the same household (Ramírez Sánchez, 2007). The Nahua children in Tlaxcala claim not to be working even when heavily involved in family work. They describe their involvement as just “helping” as a matter of being part of the family, and regard “working” as paid work outside the family.

### ***The Centrality of Initiative in Helping***

In helping others without being asked, children act with initiative and also with a sense of interdependence with others (Kartner et al., 2010; Paradise & de Haan, 2009). Among the Mazahua of Mexico, “children learn to behave in ways that produce a high degree of apparently unplanned coordination, cooperation, and integration, yet [with] each individual child [following] his or her own path without being ‘organized’ by anybody else” (Paradise, 1987, p. 206).

Comparative studies indicate that Indigenous-heritage Mexican children more often pitch in to help with family activities with initiative, simply as members of the household, compared to Mexican-heritage children whose families have less connection with Indigenous practices and more experience in Western schooling (Alcalá et al., 2011). Mexican Indigenous-heritage children often underplayed their extensive contributions to household work and spoke of their work in collective terms, whereas Mexican children whose families had extensive schooling played up their more limited contributions in individual terms (Coppens, Alcalá, Mejía-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2011). However, Mexican children of both backgrounds claimed that children should help their families by pitching in to help with household work, simply to be responsible, like anyone else in the family.

Such helping with initiative has also been found in classroom settings with Indigenous and Mexican-heritage children. Inuit (Canadian) children have been found to share information in order to help their peers (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 2003). Inuit children often walked around the room to

observe and directly interact with their peers; this was described by Inuit teachers as “students helping each other” (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 2003). Though such behavior is often penalized, this method may be a primary form of classroom interaction for some students (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1985; Mercado, 2001; Paradise & de Haan, 2009; Trueba & Delgado-Gaitán, 1985). It may reflect the value placed on helping with initiative, in the concept of being *acomedido/a*.

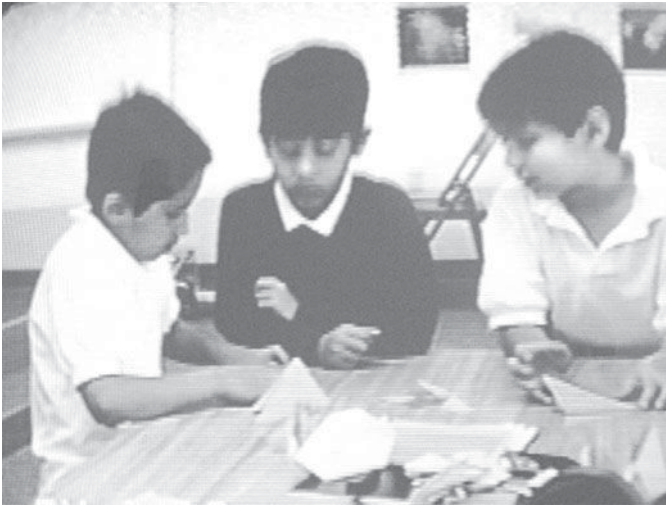
### ***A Study of Children Helping with Initiative***

During an origami paper-folding demonstration, cultural differences appeared in the extent to which children helped each other with initiative or in response to other children’s requests for help (such as when another child asked “Can you show me how to do that?” or “How did you do that?” or slid the paper figure toward the child with an imploring expression; Najafi, Mejía-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2005). Triads of 6- to 10-year-old children were from one of three cultural backgrounds in a California town that has a high proportion of immigrants from rural regions of Michoacán and Jalisco, Mexico: 10 triads of U.S. Mexican-heritage children from backgrounds likely to include experience with Indigenous practices (with mothers who had completed an average of 7 grades), 10 triads of U.S. European heritage middle-class children whose mothers had completed an average of 15 grades, and 11 triads of U.S. Mexican heritage children whose mothers had completed an average of 13 grades.

A research assistant showed the children how to fold their origami figures, following a script that encouraged them to help each other as each child folded a paper figure. Most of the help given by the children was in the form of a demonstration, across all three backgrounds; there were also small amounts of fixing another child’s figure, monitoring and verifying another’s folding, and explanation (see Fig. 41.3).

The U.S. Mexican-heritage triads composed of children whose families are likely to be familiar with Indigenous practices (whose mothers had only basic schooling) often spontaneously offered to help other children, without being requested to help. They did so more often than triads of European-American and U.S. Mexican-heritage children whose mothers had extensive Western schooling (averaging 2.0 times versus 1.2 and 0.7 times, respectively). There were not significant differences between the backgrounds in the extent of





**Figure 41.3** A triad folds their origami figures; the Origami Lady is seated to the right, facing the children, just off camera.

help in response to another child's request for help. (However, children from the Mexican-heritage backgrounds with basic or extensive maternal schooling helped in response to 70% and 85% of other children's requests for help, respectively, compared with European-heritage children responding to 51% of other children's requests for help; Najafi, Mejia-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2005.)

Helping with initiative may support smooth coordination among members of a group. Thus a child who notices another child's error in folding could quickly reach over and offer help that is readily accepted. The pace of the activity would not be interrupted as it would if the child had to ask for help and then wait for it.

### ***Mexican Adults Explain "Being Acomedido/a"***

To examine the concept of "being *acomedido/a*," López informally interviewed 17 adults in Guadalajara, México regarding how they define and use the term. All 17 adults were familiar with the term and did not have trouble describing it. They reported that being *acomedido/a* connotes having human quality, humility, and *educación* in which one helps spontaneously, without being asked and without thinking of getting anything in return. It differs from simply helping in that helping can imply doing something from a feeling of obligation or having been asked, but in being *acomedido/a* the desire to help comes from within.

Many of the adults stressed that being *acomedido/a* has to do with the values that are inculcated early in childhood. One participant explained,

*Mi madre me enseñó a saber ayudar. Eso fue el primer conocimiento que yo tuve. Me dió responsabilidad desde temprana edad.*

[My mother taught me to know when to pitch in. That was one of the first things I learned. She gave me responsibilities at a young age.]

(54-year-old male taxi driver)

Participants were also asked if they felt there was a difference in the prevalence of the cultural value of being *acomedido/a* in different regions of Mexico, for example, in a small town or in a metropolitan city like Guadalajara or Mexico City. Of the 15 respondents who responded to the question, 14 (93%) said that people in small towns were more *acomeditos/as*. For example,

*Definitivamente sí, hay diferencias increíbles porque en el rancho se nota la diferencia y gente es como, y no quiero decir que es gente pobre porque también hay gente con lana pero sí, gente más sencilla, entonces hay gente con más de esa actitud.*

[Definitely, there's incredible differences because in the hamlets, you can see the difference and people are like, and I don't want to say poor people because there's also people with money but yes the people are simpler, there's people with more of that attitude.]

(29-year-old female research assistant)

Another respondent explained,

*Pienso que en la ciudad se da menos, como la gente anda tan a la carrera y tiene miles de actividades y como que ya no se da tan espontáneamente eso. A diferencia de las poblaciones más pequeñas, yo creo que sí se da más.*

[I think there's less of it in the city, because people are in such a hurry and have thousands of activities and it's like that isn't done as spontaneously. In contrast with smaller towns, I think it's seen more.]

(52-year-old female professor)

A 29-year-old research assistant explained that to be *acomedido/a*, one has to be aware of the surroundings, be attentive, and be ready to pitch in when necessary, knowing when and how to contribute. When asked about what it means to be *acomedido/a*, she responded:

*Yo creo que ser acomedido es tener sobre todo la iniciativa, o sea, como no esperar a que te lo pidan, sino tener esa iniciativa para hacerlo, pero también tener la visión y la sensibilidad de saber cuando es el momento para hacer las cosas. Y además, sí, tienes que a veces tener conocimiento de la situación porque si yo quiero ser acomedida en algo pero no sé de que se trata, pues a veces estorbas más de lo que ayudas.*

[I think that being *acomedido* is to have above all initiative, that is to say, not waiting to be asked, but having the initiative to do it, but also having the vision and the sensitivity to know when is the moment to do things. And also, yes, you do have to sometimes have knowledge of the situation because if I want to be *acomedida* in something but I don't even know what it's about, well sometimes you would disturb more than you help.]

A common proverb echoes this respondent's explanation that one does not want to be a nuisance when helping because of not knowing what is going on, but rather useful by being alert and ready to help: "*El acomedido siempre queda mal* [the *acomedido* person always winds up looking bad]." This proverb highlights the importance of keenly observing ongoing activities and knowing when and how to pitch in. People are sometimes criticized for being too *acomedido/a(s)* if their actions are interpreted as being in others' business. Thus, the concept of being *acomedido/a* involves being attentive, keenly observing surrounding events, to be able to appropriately pitch in with initiative.

### ***Keen Attention as a Basis for Taking Initiative in Being Acomedido/a***

Keen attention to surrounding events is essential to being *acomedido/a*, to know when and in what way to pitch in. Comparative studies indicate that children from communities with Indigenous American histories more often attended keenly to an interaction not directed toward them, compared

with children with less connection with Indigenous practices and more family experience in Western schooling (Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2009; López, Correa-Chávez, Rogoff, & Gutiérrez, 2010; Silva, Correa-Chávez, & Rogoff, 2010; Silva, Shimpi, & Rogoff, 2009).

Traditionally, in Indigenous communities of the Americas, observation has been a prevalent method of learning that includes children's active engagement in the range of their community's work and social activities, as they learn through intent community participation (Chamoux, 1992; Corona & Pérez, 2005; de Haan, 1999; de Leon, 2000; Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2003, 2007). For example, adults in a Mazahua community in Mexico describe observation as a more crucial and direct way of conveying knowledge and learning than actually giving directions during work situations, especially when dealing with more complex skills and knowledge (de Haan, 1999). Because young children are regularly included in a wide range of social and productive activities of their community, they are often in a position to observe and listen to ongoing events, and they are expected to pay attention to be able to contribute to them. In turn, such inclusion seems also to encourage children's active interest in knowing what is going on and in contributing to it (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009).

### **Distinct Conceptions of Childhood**

Historically, several distinct conceptions of childhood met up and are interwoven in the lives of families with roots in Indigenous communities of Mexico: those stemming from Indigenous practices and values and those that came with Spanish, British, French, and U.S. formal schooling and colonization. In communities where learning through intent community participation is prevalent, children are often included as participants in the community along with everyone else and are encouraged to pitch in helpfully (with or without use of the term *acomedido/a*). They are treated as people whose contribution and initiative are valuable to the group.

In contrast, in modern Western societies childhood is often treated as a period of continuous dependency in which children are considered not to be able to act independently (Strathern, 1988). In this sense, children are consumers of care and are seen as inadequate to meet their needs of being clothed and fed through production activities (Hecht, 1998; Ramírez Sánchez, 2007).

In Mexico, current childrearing practices of the middle class, such as child-focused activities and age segregation, were highly influenced by discourse regarding childhood at *los Congresos Panamericanos del Niño* [Panamerican Congress on Children], which began in 1916 (Corona Caraveo, 2003). During 1916 to 1935, discussions on childhood revolved around “improving the race,” focusing on the majority of children who were impoverished children of Indigenous communities, mestizos, *negros* (of African descent) and *criollos* (of European descent) whom the state tried to “purify” racially. The goal was to make them more like children of the upper and middle classes, whose childhood was populated with toys, children’s literature, and child-focused educational methods. The middle-class household was considered a private domain and children’s education was considered a tool to open doors for individuality in life, without collective goals. This concept differed radically from childhood in rural and farmworking communities where members defined themselves in terms of collective work and solidarity. According to authors of this time (1916–1935), there was no clear differentiation between adult and child work, in contrast with the upper and middle classes (Corona Caraveo, 2003).

Social welfare programs have had heavy influence on how childhood has been viewed in Mexico. Compulsory schooling took effect in Mexico in 1917 for grades 1–6 and in 1993 for grades 7–9, although many children continued to drop out before completing 9th grade (*Ley General de Educación*, art. 4). The *Oportunidades* program (which began in 2002, but formerly operated as *Progresá* since 1997) provides cash payments to low-income families in exchange for regular school attendance as well as family participation in talks aimed at changes in parenting, producing social and cultural transformations (Escobar Latapí, 2009). These programs have segregated children from the range of activities of their communities and discouraged children’s contributions to the ongoing work of their families and communities.

However, views on childhood in Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage communities can still be contrasted with those of Western societies. For example, children in a Tlaxcala Nahua community are still considered contributors to the family’s economy, although now they attend school. “Work plays a key role in that period of life rather than being a problem that undermines and harms children” (Ramírez

Sánchez, 2007, p. 90). The definition of a good child in this community includes “being a child that helps out,” which is similar to ideas related to being *acomedido/a*. As one participant in this research explained, people do not want to be labeled or want their children to be labeled as *desacomedido/a* (unacomedido/a). Ramírez Sánchez (2007) describes work and *icnoliz* (the Nahuatl word for respect) as going hand in hand, where the reward of work is to give respect as well, and mutual respect is instilled to maintain good relationships. In this Nahua community, the child is seen as a complete social actor from the moment of birth, contrasting with ideas in Western societies where childhood is conceptualized as dependence on adults and a child must go through several stages to learn to be a contributing member of their community.

### **The Importance of Individual and Cultural Processes in Research on Human Development**

Throughout the twentieth century, psychological research on childhood was oriented around controlled research situations that produced a tendency to examine developmental processes and mental functions of childhood without consideration of cultural or historical processes (Cole, 1996). During the second half of that century and since then, the role of culture and social arrangements in children’s development has become clear, thanks to the work of many scholars, especially the Whittings, Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, Cole, and Scribner, and the influence of Vygotsky.

In order to understand helpfulness and collaboration in Mexican-heritage children, the family and community practices in which children participate need to be examined, moving away from focusing solely on individuals as they mature or assuming that their environments match those in which the researchers grew up. Childhood and family functions are tied to the histories of communities and nations, including their education policy, nationalism, and colonization.

In particular, the cultural value of being *acomedido/a* appears to be related to Mexican national and Indigenous communities’ interrelations. The Indigenous practices of inclusion of children in nearly full community functioning may be a source for the cultural value of being *acomedido/a*, even in the face of industrial and colonial pressures to individualize. Indigenous practices may even have spread to the colonizing populations, yielding

cultural values that persist for many Mexican and Mexican-immigrant populations beyond particular Indigenous communities. This may help to explain the widespread findings of collaboration and keen attention among these populations.

We have tried to move beyond the view of helpfulness and extent of collaboration as solely individual characteristics and have suggested that a view of community dynamics is necessary to understand such practices. The cultural value of being *acomodado/a* sheds light on research on helpfulness and collaboration among Mexican-heritage and Indigenous-heritage communities of the Americas.

Likewise, analyses of cultural values and practices can illuminate the extent and means of collaboration and helping among children who have experience with other cultural practices, including those of Western schooling. Historical analyses are indispensable to understanding the origin of such values and practices in the context of the roles of children in a community. Historical analyses are key to understanding the dispersal and transformations of cultural practices with changes across generations and with contact and mobility of communities. The study of childhood needs to take into account worldwide changes and conditions in which children are developing, contexts that may be distant from the conditions that inspired psychological theories based on recent Western cultural traditions.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the participation of the children and the assistance of the teachers and principals of Starlight, Valencia, Loyola Village, El Dorado, and Sierra Vista Elementary Schools in the research reported here. We especially thank Eileen Fuller, Noni Reis, Maureen Callanan, Catherine Cooper, and Nameera Akhtar. The research was carried out with support from CONACYT (Mexico), a traineeship from the National Institute of Health (1 T32-MH20025), a grant from the National Science Foundation (Grant No. 0837898), a UC Santa Cruz Presidential Dissertation Award, and the University of California Santa Cruz Foundation endowed chair held by Barbara Rogoff. Author Mejía-Arauz is now affiliated with the ITESO University in Guadalajara, Mexico.

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## A Cultural-Historical Approach to University/Community Collaborative Interventions

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### Abstract

In this paper we explore approaches to intervention research viewed from a broadly conceived cultural-psychological perspective. Although scholars who adopt this perspective share a belief in the centrality of culture in human development, they may differ in how they conceive of culture and how it enters into and participates in human thought and action. We examine two cultural-psychological strategies for developing and sustaining innovative educational environments: design experimentation and mutual appropriation. *Design experimentation* is an approach in which researchers and practitioners collaborate to simultaneously engineer innovative learning environments and understand salient aspects of human cognition and learning. They do so by developing and implementing, in a specific educational setting, a version of a learning design and iteratively revising this design in light of results from each implementation. *Mutual appropriation* refers to interventions in which the nature of the intervention is not prespecified, but negotiated among participants over time. We examine these approaches by introducing two examples of university-community research and educational collaborations. The first collaboration, The Beach Boys & Girls Club, is an example of an intervention based on the principles of design experimentation, while the second, the Town and Country Learning Center, illustrates the mutual appropriation approach. Through this comparative examination of the two intervention perspectives, we endeavor to show that a mutual appropriation approach can help the field create interventions that are themselves developmental in their fundamental methodology.

**Keywords:** Cultural Historical Activity Theory, Design Experiment, Intervention Research, Learning Ecology, Mutual Appropriation.

In this chapter we posit two strategies for designing, implementing, and seeking to sustain collaborative intervention programs located in community settings during the after-school hours. Both systems involve cooperation between university groups (undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors) and community organizations (children and their adult caretakers). Both are intended to create new forms of activity, the motive of which is to promote the development and well-being of the participants and the organizations from which they come. Both instantiate a variety of principles of learning, development, and instruction derived from the work of Vygotsky

and his followers working in the tradition of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

Our discussion centers on the ways in which the two strategies differ with respect to how the relationships are established, how they are structured, and how the activities are organized in response to the needs of the respective communities, the participants involved, and the resources available. The first strategy adheres most closely to what has come to be called "*design experimentation*." The second strategy follows a logic that we refer to as "*mutual appropriation*." We argue that both approaches have their merits and their challenges. Through the creation of functional



systems of interactions appropriate to their historical/sociocultural/ecological circumstances (local and global) they require us to focus on culturally organized activities in their institutional settings as units of analysis. Both provide useful ways to bridge the gap between standard, laboratory-style experimentation and situations-of-use, which include the broader sociocultural environment beyond the immediate circumstances under investigation.

## Design Experimentation

In the early 1980s, Ann Brown and her colleagues embarked on a series of classroom-based studies focused on guided instruction and assessment in social contexts. These studies challenged mainstream psychology and education research, creating what Brown and Campione called "... a sea of change in theories of learning... an awakening to the fact that real-life learning is intrinsically entangled with situations" (Brown & Campione, 1998, p. 154). Brown (1992) and her colleague, Allan Collins (1992), referred to this new methodology as "design experimentation." They viewed design experiments as a serious alternative to, or supplement to, randomized, tightly controlled research paradigms. In recent years the idea of design experimentation has been taken up by a number of researchers interested in advancing theories of learning and development (see the special issues on this topic in the *Educational Researcher*, 2003; and *Journal of Learning Sciences*, 2004). Despite differences among them, proponents of design-based research are likely to agree with three principles that will be central to our discussion:

1. "The metaphor of ecology is used to emphasize that designed contexts are conceptualized as interacting systems rather than a collection of activities or a list of separate factors that influence learning. Ideally design experiments offer a greater understanding of a learning ecology by designing its elements and observing how these elements work together to support learning. Components of a learning ecology typically include the learning activities or achievement goals that are set for the students, the types of discourse and ways of participating that are encouraged, the material artifacts provided, and the practical means through which relations among these elements can be orchestrated." (Cobb et al., 2003, p. 9)

2. For design experiments to achieve its goals, it is necessary to conduct iterative embodiments of the designed pedagogical activity. Collins and his

colleagues (2004, p. 18) summarized this aspect of the approach as follows:

"Design experiments were developed as a way to carry out formative research to test and refine educational designs based on theoretical principles derived from prior research. This approach of progressive refinement in design involves putting a first version of a design into the world to see how it works. Then, the design is constantly revised based on experience, until all the bugs are worked out."

3. Those who adopt design experimentation as a method also argue that it is important to study a wide variety of "authentic" (DBRC, 2003) or "natural" settings or "contexts" (Barab & Squire, 2004; Cobb et al., 2003).

The first line of research we discuss was carried out very much in the spirit of design experimentation as characterized above, although, with a somewhat different orientation both toward the relationship between tasks and their settings and with respect to the expectation that all the "bugs" would be, could be, or should be worked out.

## Intervention through Mutual Appropriation

In a follow-up paper on design interventions, Brown and Campione (1998), having by this time had several more years of experience implementing their idea of "communities of learners," introduce the idea that not only do design experiments *seed* the environment with ideas and concepts that *take root* in the community, *migrating* and *persisting* over time, but participants *appropriate* these ideas and concepts, reshaping and deploying them in unpredictable ways through personal interpretation and experience. They used the term, "*mutual appropriation*" (a term they attribute to Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989) to describe this transformation of the original design experimentation concept. In using the term "mutual appropriation" as an explicit alternative to the idea of design experimentation, we should note that we are applying the idea at a different level of analysis than that deployed by Newman et al., who were seeking to describe the bidirectional quality of participant learning in a zone of proximal development (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989). In the present context, "mutual appropriation" is used to characterize the interactions between organizations representing those who are doing the intervening and the partner organization in which, in the spirit of Long's (2001) work on "developmental sociology," both university and community participants

attend to each others' attempts to "appropriate, manipulate, subvert or dismember" (p. 233) particular new initiatives introduced by their partners in the process of their ongoing joint activity. However, contrary to the usual negative implications of such terms as "subvert" and "dismember," our experience, following our own version of a mutual appropriation approach, sees these features of the intervention process as perfectly normal and healthy. They are required for reciprocity, in which the both sides of the interaction (organizationally speaking) are doing their best to achieve the common goals that anchor their continued interactions, while staying focused on their individual activities, which may or may not mesh perfectly with those of the other participants.

### **Resisting Dichotomizing: Some Common Principles of Our Two Interventions**

Up to this point we have been focused on drawing a distinction between the two strategies of intervention research for purposes of setting up a useful comparison. But it would be foolish, in our view, to draw too clear a distinction between the two approaches as we have experienced them. The distinctions matter, but the two interventions, despite important differences (perhaps unsurprisingly because they were carried out by the same research group) share certain theoretical assumptions concerning the nature of desirable environments for promoting development of children and undergraduates as a result of collaborations, under either of the two contrasting interventionist banners. Consequently, before digging more deeply into the differences between the two intervention strategies as we have practiced them, we stop to consider the assumptions common to both lines of research. These assumptions played out differently in the two research projects, but as ideals to be sought for, they are shared presuppositions on our parts, even though they were differentially shared with our community partners, who have their own ideas on the subject.

1. The intervention strategies reported on here are both joint undertakings between a university and a community institution. In both strategies the university brings theoretically guided experience and expertise at building activities and artifacts that promote learning and development, as well as supervised undergraduates to the community institution as labor. The community

institution furnishes local experience, children, space, equipment, and supervision of the activities to provide the undergraduates with a valuable research experience.

2. The programs are mixtures of "leading activities" (as proposed by cultural-historical activity theorists, e.g., Elkonin, 1999) including affiliation, play, learning, peer interaction, and work. The physical location can be crucial to shaping how play, learning, and other leading activities are combined. For example, rules of decorum in a school or library encourage quiet attentiveness but discourage play. Rules of decorum at a Boys and Girls Club or a HUD Learning Center may afford a great range of possibilities for engagement, play being one prominent possibility, but also offer constant invitations to become distracted from the task at hand.

3. Whenever possible, participant structures are designed to minimize power differentials between the participants, particularly between the undergraduates and the children with whom they work. The issue of participation structures and power differentials is also greatly affected by the combination of sponsoring institutions and the concrete activities that are the focus of the collaboration. In both of the cases we examine, formal education in the form of homework was considered mandatory by the local community participants, and the rules for "homework time" were different than those for "enrichment time." Parents from different ethnic backgrounds may demand from their children higher levels of deference to adults and educators than we are accustomed to. In addition, the age of the children involved interacts with both the nature of the institution and the parental cultural expectations to shape authority relations.

4. Heavy emphasis is placed upon the value of communication in a variety of media including computers, conversation, and writing, in the service of solving goals that are provided within the activity setting. Not only is "the thought completed in the word" but in other forms of externalization that enable the transformation of sense into meaning (Vygotsky, 1987). Consequently, the principle of forefronting the use of a variety of communication means is one of the central principles governing our pedagogical intervention research. The ways in which this principle is embodied in the activities varies enormously, depending on the institutional venue, the availability of computers and other digital technology resources, the age of children involved,

and the expertise of the participants, both local and from the university.

5. Participation by the children is voluntary. Children are free to leave at any time. Consequently, the games and other activities that participants engage in must adhere to goals that the children find compelling. In practice, the principle that children should not be forced to engage in the activities is routinely breached at times when homework is mandated by the local adults representing the community organization. Nonetheless, this norm is maintained in as many activities as possible and routinely produces strong affective bonds among the participants after as few as 9 weeks.

### ***The Design Experiment Intervention: The Fifth Dimension***

The Fifth Dimension (5th D) is an after-school activity system designed for elementary-school-aged children. University students enrolled in a course that focuses on fieldwork in a community setting visit these after-school sites to play, work, and learn as the children's partners. A detailed account of the history, design, and implementation of the 5th D model can be found in Cole and the Distributed Literacy Consortium (2006).

The activities at these sites are designed to instantiate the principles summarized above. This is done using a variety of artifacts including educational computer games, written instructions for playing these games in a goal-oriented, collaborative manner, artifacts for distributing the children's and the university students' use of the games, and imaginary figures (instantiated via letters, email, or electronic chat) that interact with the participants to encourage them to externalize their thinking and critically reflect upon their joint activities.

### ***Evaluating the Fifth Dimension Interventions***

A variety of analytical methods have been specially designed to evaluate the usefulness and shortcomings of the 5th D principles and the resulting activities and programs (Blanton et al., 1997; Cole & the Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006; Mayer, Schustack, & Blanton, 1999). The specific data sources used by different implementers of a 5th D (approximately 40 different research groups from different parts of the world) depend heavily upon the expectations of their local communities, the professional criteria of the academic disciplines they answer to, the specific interests of the

investigator, the social ecology of the activity, and the resources available to them. Evaluations have included videotaped records of 5th D participant interactions, data mining of student fieldnotes, questionnaires, on-site observations by third-party spectators, and indices of the monetary support provided by both the university and community institutions.

Looking first to the 5th D activity systems as an ensemble, perhaps the most striking result is that both the particular combination of activities and the form of the individual activities that evolve from the initial design are highly sensitive to local constraints and resources. No two 5th Ds, even when implemented by the same researcher with the same group of undergraduates in two community organizations of the same kind in highly similar communities, behave like replicas of each other. Within a period of months, if not weeks, each system takes on its own characteristics, a blend of values, norms, and practices characteristic of the local institution (its staffing, architectural structure, its location in the community, etc.) and its university partners (who may be from backgrounds in a variety of social science disciplines, sophomores or seniors, predominantly of one ethnic group or several, etc.).

Tracing implementations in widely disparate conditions quickly reveals that some 5th Ds have failed to survive initial meetings between universities and potential community sponsors. Others have been implemented and run successfully, only to cease operation after less than a year as a result of inability to satisfy institutional imperatives that went undetected in the startup phase. Some 5th Ds have continued to a point where the two collaborating institutions discover that they do not really share a common vision of a good developmental environment for children. Some have been forced to close when the level of continuity in staffing (on either the university or community side) is inadequate, degrading the quality of the ensuing activity. Still others have continued for several years, but coincidence of several "risk factors" (decreased funding, loss of key personnel in two or more parts of the system) have led to their demise despite their recognized value. Finally, many implementations prosper and increase in scope, sometimes "giving birth" to new generations of 5th Ds. At the time of this writing, 30 years after the experiment began, dozens of 5th Ds and their associated university-community superstructures are in operation.

Evaluated in terms of a study of sustainability, the form of design experiment represented by the 5th D can be summarized as follows: (1) Provide a “starter tool kit” consisting of artifacts, rules, and standard roles as resources for creating the joint activity system; (2) begin with a central structure and core activities and watch them change over time in relation to the local setting; (3) seek to sustain the activity system as long as possible, focusing on the factors that threaten sustainability and the measures that are successful in extending the life of the ever-changing experimental design; (4) identify the factors precipitating the death of the program.

From this summary, it is clear that the 5th D is a kind of “upside-down” form of design experimentation. Instead of seeking to fine-tune a single design until the experimenter has “gotten it right,” the interest is in how a system of activities that has been shown to “get it right” when faithfully implemented, is pulled apart, rearranged, and melded with its social ecology (or expelled) in the course of joint activity between the partner institutions over a long period of time.

### ***The Beach Boys and Girls Club: A Concrete Example***

In the spring of 2006, the partnership between the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC) at the University of California, San Diego UCSD and the Beach Boys and Girls Club (BGC) was the oldest in the UCLinks program and served as the prototype upon which a number of subsequent 5th D programs were modeled (*see* Cole & the Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006 for details). At the time this project began (mid-1980s), the research team was determining to what extent new communication technologies could provide effective tools and legitimate motives for children to engage in reading, writing, and problem solving, and whether such technologies could also unite researchers with each other, universities to their communities, and different communities with each other. The team was also concerned with working out a means of *in situ* evaluation that would justify the amount of resources necessary to maintain such a program.

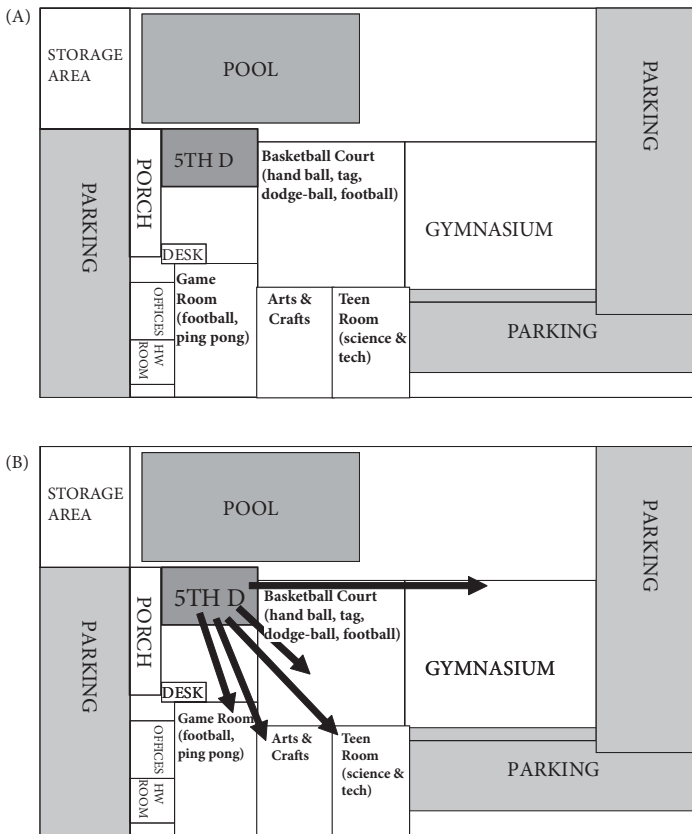
The BGC was located in a relatively affluent San Diego suburb. It sat next to a public middle school and across the street from a public elementary school. However, while the neighborhood’s population was mostly middle-class Anglo-American, there was a

sizable working-class Mexican-American minority. Among the school-age children, the Mexican-American population was considerably higher than it was among the adults, and many of these children attended the after-school program at the club. The BGC charged a nominal fee for participation, but children from families who could not afford the fee were given scholarships.

Figure 42.1 presents a schematic overview of the local ecology provided by the building in which the 5th D was housed. The 5th D was separated from the entrance-hall “control center” of the club by a large window wall, making the 5th D activities visible from most everywhere in the building. The opposite wall of the 5th D room had big windows that looked out on a large swimming pool, which was in constant use. The doors of the 5th D were always kept open, so children could come and go at will, as was true in the rest of the club. At any given time most of the areas of the club were populated by children engaged in a wide range of activities. Club policies changed slightly in keeping with the priorities of the current directors. At times the large central area would be blaring with rock music and children playing hopscotch, while at other times the current director would see that the children were engaged in one of the specialized activity rooms and the central area was quieter.

The 5th D program operated Monday through Thursday afternoons, competing on a “come as you choose” basis with other BGC activities. On any given day, five to eight undergraduates<sup>1</sup> and one or two graduate students, plus a “5th D coordinator” were present to interact with the children. Daily attendance at the BGC fluctuated between 30 and 40 elementary- and middle-school children. Typically 10 to 20 of these children participated in the 5th D program at some point in their afternoon stay.

In the early 1990s the partnership was structured so that the BGC provided the space and the administrative support associated with the running of the club, while the LCHC paid for most of the 5th D activities by employing a site coordinator, sharing in the cost of computers and software, and generally providing and maintaining the supplies necessary for the day-to-day running of the 5th D program. Unfortunately, the BGC experienced chronic staffing problems and the high turnover of BGC employees became an ongoing challenge for the 5th D program. In the fall of 1996, by prior agreement, the BGC hired and paid a site



**Figure 42.1** (A) Schematic overview of the Beach Boys and Girls Club. (B) Overview showing direction of influence in the instigation of change.

coordinator to run the 5th D, but the funding was insufficient to support a permanent employee. At times, former university students who had participated in the practicum served as coordinators for a school term, or a school year after graduating, but more often the club hired someone new, who was then trained on the job by 5th D staff.

### *Tracking Changes in the 5th D as a Learning Ecology*

BGC events showcased the friendly and relatively stable relationship between UCSD and the BGC. For example, children from the 5th D were recognized publicly on awards nights at the club, and at the end of each quarter a sort of going-away party was held as a ritual way of thanking the undergraduates and easing the pain of separation for both the undergraduates and the children, who often had formed strong bonds of affection. In addition, the BGC regularly advertised the presence of the 5th D in its publications. The relationship was also reflected in the BGC budget, which showed an increase over the years in the number of hours and the salary for the site coordinator, who also served

as the computer room staff member when the 5th D was not in session. On the university side of the partnership, the changing organizational arrangements for the practicum course provided opportunities to study issues of sustainability that few had anticipated in the beginning.

During the years of its operation, the 5th D morphed well beyond its initial design, although the “core of the activities” remained relatively unchanged: undergraduates and children played an ever-changing variety of computer games together, children advanced through the individual games on their way to the role of “Young Wizard’s Assistant,” and various unobtrusive ways of assessing children’s academic progress were studied. After many years of instability, the university had built hiring of temporary teaching staff into its budgetary and curricular regime, while the BGC had hired an extremely effective 5th D site coordinator, and the undergraduate students flocked to participate.

The inclusion of a variety of BGC activities, including arts and crafts, board games, and outdoor sports achievements within the 5th D’s regime of interaction, served to infuse the 5th D program into

virtually all of the BGC activities (see Fig. 42.1B). As a result, the 5th D program became the best-attended part of the programming offered by the BGC. However, in the summer of 2006, the BGC closed for renovation for a period of 2 years and the 5th D program ceased operation. An attempt was made to open a 5th D in a nearby BGC, but at that institution the program was not welcomed by staff who had worked out their own regime of activities. Unlike the Beach BGC, the children at the new club did not qualify as an underserved population, making efforts to sustain the partnership difficult to justify from the perspective of the university. When the Beach BGC did reopen 2 years later, the 5th D program was not reinstated. So, while 5th Ds continue to exist and prosper in many locations, this particular design, effective by many criteria, could not be sustained.

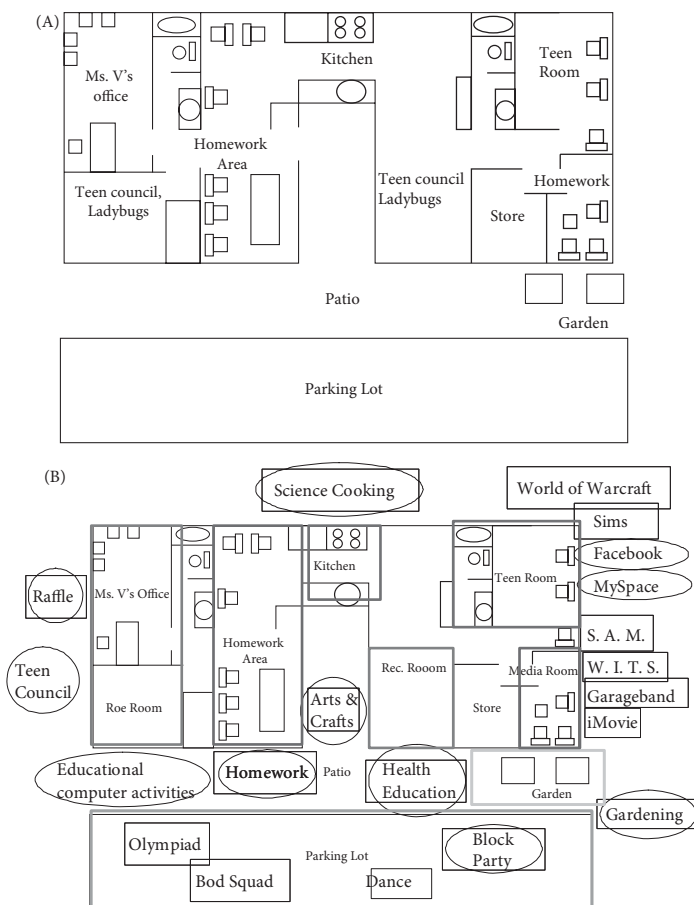
### Using the Mutual Appropriation Strategy: Town and Country Learning Center

In early 2007 the Director of Education of the San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC)

approached members of LCHC about establishing a Fifth-Dimension-style, university-community partnership in a local after-school community center. The site chosen, Town and Country Learning Center (T&CLC), is housed in a federally subsidized, 144-unit apartment complex called Town and Country Village. The complex is located in a neighborhood of South-Central San Diego, where the majority of the residents are African-American. Two adjacent apartments inside the complex have been converted to serve as a community/learning center for the exclusive use of the residents.

From the beginning it was clear that applying the 5th D model at T&CLC would be difficult, if not impossible. Neither the geography of the local center (see Fig. 42.2) nor the federally mandated expectation that adults as well as children could use the limited computer facilities, afforded a child-centered, relatively closed space that could serve as the hub of 5th D activities.

An added consideration was the program of structured educational and enrichment activities already



**Figure 42.2** (A) Schematic overview of the Town and Country Village Learning Center. (B) Schematic overview of the Town and Country Village Learning Center showing concentrations of influence. Key: Circle = T&CLC original activity, Rectangle = LCHC activity, Circle & Rectangle = hybrid activity.

in place for the resident youth. These activities were primarily organized by the site coordinator, Ms. V., and were geared toward helping the youth negotiate their personal as well as academic lives (e.g., book clubs, teen service projects (Teen Council), elementary-school-girl etiquette club (The Ladybugs), food sales). Responding to health concerns of some of the resident women, Ms. V. would also on occasion organize nutrition and exercise activities at the center. In the process of familiarizing ourselves with the circumstances on the ground, we simply joined in and tried to help Ms. V. with whatever it was she was already doing. When help was needed with homework, we helped with homework. When the computer network was unstable, one of our team members with a computer-science background helped stabilize the network.

During this time we kept in mind the possibility that individual activities that had proven successful in the 5th D system might be adapted for use in the T&CLC program. Of equal importance, we hoped that lessons from our past university-community partnerships could be applied in developing our relationship with Ms. V. and the youth at T&CLC, as well as with the broader community of residents in the apartment complex. It was out of these circumstances that the approach we are referring to here as “mutual appropriation” was born and is evolving.

What is emerging is a reflexive way of collaborating on the design of activities at the T&CLC that privileges and builds upon the already-established practices at the site. For purposes of exposition (since all of the resulting changes were linked in various ways to each other, not only in our activities at the site but in the way we organized the corresponding course at UCSD), we can crudely distinguish three parts to the mutual appropriation strategy that have so far emerged (*see also* Fig. 42.2):

1. Pre-existing activities that underwent changes because of the addition of 10 to 12 UCSD undergraduate students to the daily program.
2. Hybrid activities that arose from discussions among LHC participants, Ms. V., and the children/youth at the site.
3. New activities introduced by LHC that could fit into the ongoing structure of T&CLC but which depend critically on the presence of LHC and the special resources it brings to the site in the form of technology and expertise.

It is this more or less horizontal mixing of approaches, where leadership is exercised by both

sides of the partnership, that motivates our use of the term “mutual appropriation.” We have some history with the phrase, as discussed earlier in the paper, but here we’ve begun to think about mutual appropriation in new and specific ways. Not only do the partners in this project *mutually appropriate* the activities and the activity system in ways that further their own goals and the overarching goals of the program (in this case, to promote the development and well-being of all those involved) but the participants also strive to act in ways that are *mutually appropriate*, support, or at very least do not subvert, the efforts of the other players. Through mutual appropriation, so conceived, a yours-mine-ours activity system is able to spawn hybrid activities that neither of the original players could have conceived nor implemented on their own.

### ***Tracking Changes in the T&CLC Mutual Appropriation Model***

Before we began our collaboration with the T&CLC community, Ms. V., as the sole site coordinator, had the difficult task of organizing activities for a group of 20 to 40 participants who varied widely in age, interests, and consistency of attendance. She had to be strategic about the kinds of activities she developed because it was impossible for her to supervise all of these activities at the same time. In order to monitor the flow of youth in and out of the center, she locked all entrances except the one door that was in her line of sight as she sat at her desk. She distributed activities throughout the center according to age and proximity to her office, placing the younger children engaging in schoolwork in the areas closest to her, while the presumably more mature, self-reliant teenagers were allowed to work independently at the far side of the center.

That was our starting point. Over time, the structure and content of the activities changed depending upon who initiated the new, joint activities and the source of ideas for the innovation.

### ***Pre-Existing Activities***

As noted earlier, we began our partnership by helping out with the programs that were in place when we arrived. We started with homework—something we knew a lot about, but soon found that we would need to make some fairly substantial adjustments in our approach.

Ms. V. could not, as a practical matter, offer a great deal of individualized homework assistance, so her routine was to insist that the children com-

pleted assignments to the best of their ability before asking for help. Once undergraduates were present, the routines at homework time changed. Our desire to get the kids through their homework and leave time for enrichment activities that were the heart of our interests meant that we had to relax some of our power-leveling preferences and ask the undergraduates to take on more of a tutoring role than we normally like. Ms. V.'s request to do the tutoring quietly put further constraints on what in our view could have been time productively spent by the children and undergraduates delving deeply into the content of the homework. Asking the kids to finish their homework first and then get quiet help from the undergraduates created an atmosphere where "checking" homework was preferable to discussing it. Over time, however, we found compromises. Ms. V. eased her requirement that the children do their homework within eyesight of her office, and allowed some children to work with undergraduates in other areas of the learning center. When the weather was pleasant, tables would be moved outside and tutoring could take place without concern for making too much noise. These adaptations not only addressed the problem of a distracting homework environment, but allowed the undergraduates to tutor the children in deeper and more focused ways.

Another change that occurred, owing to our presence and the resulting increase in manpower, was that a concerted effort could be made to collect report cards and progress reports for each of the children. LCHC needed such information to document the effectiveness of its program and Ms. V. needed it for her own accounting purposes, but it was a time-consuming task that had routinely been pushed aside by more pressing demands. An unintended consequence of actually tracking children's progress in school was to bring to the fore severe deficiencies in the academic achievement of many of the children. This information led to discussions about how best to support the children in their current school assignments while simultaneously providing enrichment experiences that would fill in sometimes gaping holes in their knowledge that made independent completion of homework assignments impossible for many.

### **Hybrid Activities**

Over time, activities began to emerge that are best described as hybrids of ideas from the two sides of the partnership (see Fig. 42.2B). One illustrative

example concerns after-school snacks. A number of issues compromise the ability of T&CLC families to provide nutritious foods for their children. Not only are funds extremely limited for virtually all of the resident families at T&C, but local options for buying fresh food are virtually nonexistent and fast-food chains are ubiquitous.

As mentioned earlier, when we first started to work with Ms. V. and the residents at T&CLC, food sales were a regular practice designed for raising funds for basic materials at the center. Items for sale consisted primarily of prepackaged sugary or salty snacks, or easy-to-prepare items, such as nachos. The children were purchasers as well as purveyors of these snacks. The unhealthy quality of all these foods raised concerns for us. Ms. V. was well-aware of the health issues, but she was balancing the need to raise money and the kids' enthusiasm for consuming these familiar snacks against her concerns about health.

Early in our work at T&CLC we began to work out an arrangement in which we supplemented her monies for providing snacks. Of equal importance, we began to introduce new ways of engaging in the preparation of snacks, including the development of the Science Cooking Club. The club was initiated by a number of undergraduates who organized collaborative cooking sessions for the kids, complete with nutrition lessons that entailed Internet research to find nutritional information and recipes for food that were both healthy and agreeable to the kids. For example, fruit and vegetable smoothies were a big hit. These cooking activities sparked a number of new projects that included making a video documentary about preparing healthy and tasty smoothies and producing a smoothie recipe book. The video and recipe book were in turn digitized and posted to the T&CLC website, not only to showcase the collaborative work between the kids and the undergraduates, but to allow succeeding generations of undergraduates and local youth to build upon these achievements.

In order to ensure that the kids could reasonably apply their new knowledge of nutrition at home, Ms. V. asked that whenever possible, the cooking activities used only ingredients that could be obtained locally. The sad fact that the only place within walking distance to buy fresh produce (in a very limited selection) was a local "99¢ Store" complicated the food project and exponentially increased the educational value of the enterprise for the university students.



The center had a struggling vegetable garden. Taking advantage of this situation, we organized for a routine where, as some of the kids and undergraduate buddies worked in the kitchen, others labored in the garden, breaking soil, building raised garden plots, and doing online research about vegetables and their optimal growing conditions. The results included salads and sautéed greens, which in turn led to new recipes, salad dressing taste tests, new documentary films about gardening, and a garden recipe book.

The kitchen-garden connection turned out to be a cross-cultural connection as well. Collard greens, beloved in the African-American community, were unfamiliar to the undergraduates. In their research, the kids and buddies found that the traditional ways of cooking the greens were not all that healthy. With the assistance of a local parent (who for the first time began to participate in the activities at the center), a compromise recipe was worked out that made everyone happy.

As these examples show, the new, hybrid activities were beneficial not just in terms of providing material, educational, and social resources, but also in terms of motivating the creation of additional new activities. The new recipes, the new garden, the multiple video and textual documents of these activities, and their representation on the T&CLC website helped create a network of interrelated artifacts and practices that the undergraduates and youth could draw upon as they redesigned existing activities and developed new ones. These documentary and representational practices also fit perfectly, both with UCSD's ethos of encouraging reflection and communication about site activities and with Ms. V.'s custom of staging quarterly block parties for the youth and local residents. We grasped the opportunity provided by these parties to present the products of the children's work to their community. As others have shown (i.e., McLaughlin & Brice-Heath, 1993) such public presentations can be a source of motivation for new joint projects.

### ***New Activities Introduced by the University Partners***

With Ms. V.'s approval, LCHC has also introduced a number of activities geared toward developing the T&CLC kids' interests in, access to, and knowledge of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math (what we have learned to call a "STEAM curriculum"). Typically, these activities also serve as research foci for graduate students

because they have relatively defined goals, can be carried out in separate areas of the center to ward off intrusions from other activities, and thereby make professionally acceptable levels of documentation and orderly data collection possible (see Fig. 42.2B).

One such activity involved building a virtual world, called "Worlds of Internet Technology and Science" (WITS). Similar in look and feel to "Second Life," WITS uses a kid-friendly computer programming language for easily incorporating flash animations and digital photos and videos. These arrangements make it possible to build a variety of environments, fill them with objects collected from various media, and display them in an attractive fashion to others. The builders of WITS were interested in learning if this kind of facility would be useful in after-school science education.

When it was first introduced, WITS attracted a number of the elementary- and middle-school children who built rooms, filled them with pictures, and explored the potentials of this world-building program. But after a few sessions, they lost interest. Obligated to "push the envelope" of WITS's potential, Ivan Rosero, a graduate researcher in our lab, sought to redesign the way in which WITS was implemented to determine how it could be made useful in our after-school setting in a manner that would be motivating for the youth. With the support of a local oceanographic institute interested in extending its public education program, Ivan developed a project he called the Ocean World Activity (OWA) in which a group of elementary-school girls explored topics in marine science. He used a partially designed WITS undersea world as one component of a multi-modal activity that included a visit to the local aquarium, use of plush toys representing various ocean creatures, and artwork to be placed in the WITS virtual ocean.

This new form of activity generated excitement not only among the children, but among the oceanographers who were struggling to figure out new ways to engage the general public, and especially under-represented groups, in oceanographic concerns. Because the multi-modal WITS activity involved many new forms of mediation and representational practices, communication technologies, and challenges for social organization, it served as perfect site for Ivan's thesis work.

Over time, several such UCSD-initiated projects have been implemented at T&CLC. Some have involved encouraging physical exercise including

one activity called the “Bod Squad.” Developed by a UCSD triathlete and graduate student researcher Tamara Powell, the Bod Squad introduced pedometers into races around the apartment complex’s circular drive and expanded existing activities such as jump rope and freeze tag to include academic elements. New UCSD initiatives are a continual source of new activities that are seen as valuable by the community, fun by the children, and objects of research for the UCSD partners.

### **Contrasting the Two Strategies**

Our goal, as stated at the outset, was to contrast two strategies for university-community collaborative interventions in local after-school programs. It is to that topic that we now return.

Both of the research/intervention strategies discussed above are versions of an iterative, action research program. Both allow us test and improve upon our theoretical understanding of how to use CHAT to chart the development of joint activities within the collaborating organizations. Both are longitudinal studies anchored by our desire to understand the process of sustaining the activities as long as possible; our data allow us, albeit imperfectly, to trace development at three different time scales: microgenetic interactions in structured activities, ontogenetic changes in the children over months and years, and cultural-historical time, represented by the interactions among the participants as representatives of their institution that do or do not result in sustainability. Both approaches provide insight into the changing relationships between the designed activity and its ecology over time.

However, they also differ in important respects. A 5th D had already been shown incapable of existing in a HUD housing center in prior years, and it failed, despite a great deal of effort and mutual goodwill. Neither partner could adjust sufficiently to meet the legitimate, local requirements of the other. But a system employing the principles that were a part of the theory that is still growing out of the 5th D intervention could be implemented in such an environment. This could be done if the basic system of joint activity at the institutional level could provide the coordinated resources to ensure that the activity occurs at the face-to-face level of kids, undergraduates, and researchers (who we refer to as “observant participants”).

Two leading design principles are at the heart of the implementation of the T&CLC project.

First, LCHC did not initiate the project. It was originated in discussions that came to us “second-hand.” As a consequence of this mediated initiation, each side of the institutional partnership could feel as if the other were initiating the suggestion to interact. The equal power sharing embodied in that beginning was quickly fused into a variety of ritual joint, communicative gatherings, most prominently, Ms. V.’s participation via conference call in weekly class discussions with the UCSD students. This gave voice to both Ms. V. and the students’ interests and concerns, while the researcher/teachers could step back and allow everyone to speak and be heard. During the afternoons at T&CLC, Ms. V. ruled. There was never a question of UCSD overpowering her. She has done her utmost to make sure that the students’ experience is academically valuable to them, but at the same time that she wants them to adhere to the organization she suggests; lots of discussion goes on informally in the midst of the activity itself.

Second, the two projects differ in the relationship of the joint activity center to the ecology of the children’s lives, their “contexts.” The BGC exists as a safe and healthy place for kids to go after school *separate* from their homes. Although they vary in size, every BGC we know of has a building of its own, often a large, multi-purpose public space. It is a place where kids go until their parents come to get them, or until a specified hour when they are to go home. They are often escorted in groups. It is a group activity in a place set apart. T&CLC, on the other hand, is located near the geographic center of an apartment-house complex. Parents sometimes send their children to the center to get help with their homework or simply to get them out of their hair. The children come and go freely, but the center is virtually never empty from the time it opens at 3:00 p.m. until it closes at 7:00 p.m. It came to be called “The Learning Lounge” when UCSD students were there. But it was, and remains, a crossroads and source of varied support for many of the families in the community.

This combination of a genuine sharing of power and responsibility and the particular location of T&CLC within its community where a large number of the community’s concerns become a part of the joint activity, gave rise to an entirely new set of challenges. Over time, swamped by special needs, the activity system, T&CLC “learning lounge” expanded. It became a *runaway object*.

## *T&CLC as a runaway object*

*Runaway object* is a term coined by Yrjö Engeström, who explains the meaning of the term as follows:

Objects are concerns, they are generators and foci of attention, motivation, effort and meaning. Through their activities people constantly change and create new objects. [Runaway] objects are often not intentional products of a single activity but unintended consequences of multiple activities. [Runaway objects] have the potential to escalate and expand up to a global scale of influence. They are objects that are poorly under anybody's control and have far-reaching, unexpected effects. (Engeström, 2009, p. 304)

The 5th D remained a familiar object of analysis because of its socio-ecological position between the school and the home and the relative affluence of the community. The social circumstances of the children and their families were rarely a focus of concern in organizing the 5th D activities. The routines were sufficiently flexible to permit the inclusion of children dubbed "special needs," which included in our case a child with Asperger's syndrome and mentally challenged children, as well as myriad children who were deemed difficult in some way.

As time progressed, we discovered that at T&CLC the special needs of the children extended well beyond anything we had been confronted with before. We were not dealing with a few special-needs children. At T&CLC we were dealing with a special-needs *community*. Health problems appeared in the form of widespread obesity and diabetes, among the children's caretakers as well as the children. Unemployment was so bad that families were constantly moving out because they could no longer afford subsidized housing. Healthy food was not locally available, and affordable healthy food amounted to an oxymoron.

Initially we tried to incorporate the required new activities into the center. We contacted colleagues in the medical school for help in organizing educational activities for parents. We began to collaborate with our colleagues in CALIT2, the local UC technology center that takes an interest in new uses of technology for health and education. We contacted people in the Urban Community Gardens movement. We searched for, and found help from, a UCSD extension in identifying ways to increase the availability of local and affordable workforce training programs.

At first it seemed that the addition of new activities, and bringing in different constituencies of local residents would fit well within our mutual appropriation approach, but we soon discovered that there can be too much of a good thing. At total capacity, we found it an effort just to maintain the Learning Lounge and a few activities that could be made attractive to the kids. Before long we were spending so much of our time coordinating with all of the new organizations whose expertise we were calling on that we no longer had any time for analysis of what we were doing, and we could no longer even specify our object of analysis!

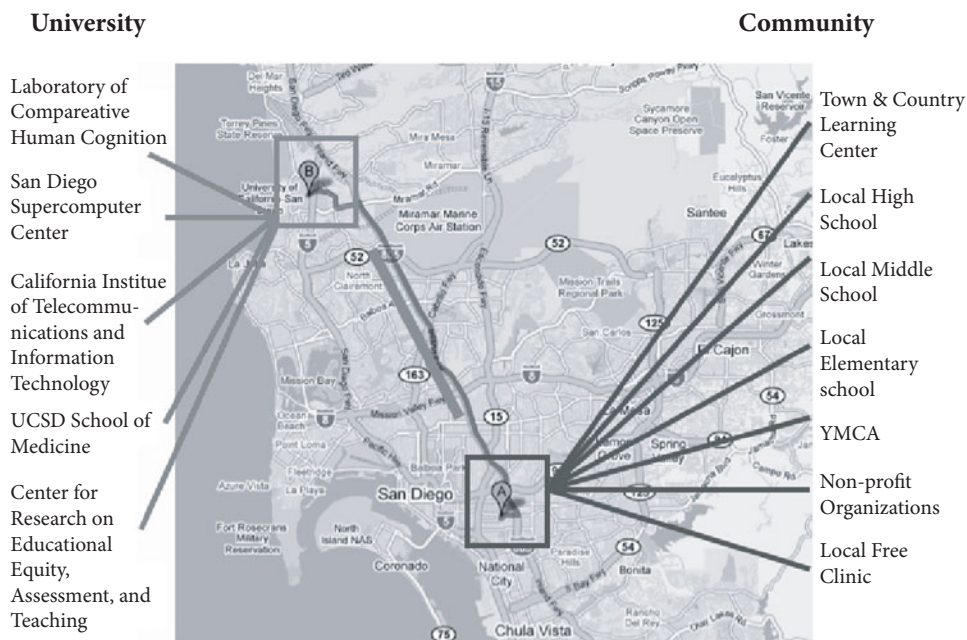
## THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

As might be expected, the strains that we were experiencing were also being experienced, in their own way, by all of the parties we had involved at T&CLC. As a consequence, while we have continued to develop the Learning Center Learning Lounge activities, we have banded together with colleagues from the university as well as the larger community that is home to the T&C Apartment complex to create the Center for Community Well-Being (CCW; [www.ccw.org](http://www.ccw.org); See Figure 42.3).

To the CCW has fallen the task of engaging the runaway object that emerged at T&CLC. It coordinates the activities of an interdisciplinary group of UC San Diego faculty and staff with partner organizations in the Southeastern San Diego community to develop integrated projects aimed at improving education, health, economic development, neighborhood safety, and community services.

## Final Comments

Both of the strategies we describe here were developed under the constraints of the specific local ecologies in which they were embedded. The encapsulated nature of the BGC partnership is typical of Fifth Dimension projects, but not universal. Members of the LHC research group, for example, have maintained an in-school and after-school program for more than a decade at a local elementary school where numerous 5th D activities have become part of the daily practices of the classroom teachers. This can be seen as evidence that some 5th D programs can and do morph into arrangements that come to resemble the mutual appropriation model. The vast majority of its specific routines and local cultural features evolve into hybrids of those of the contributing institutions.



**Figure 42.3** Schematic showing the relationships between the university and community participants in the Center for Community Well-Being.

The project at T&CLC is also specific to its historical/social/cultural time and space. Whether initiated by the university or the local community, the specific activities that, as an ensemble, came to occupy T&CLC evolved into a hybrid new form of after-school educational activity. The explosive expansion of the institutional arrangements that were required to implement and sustain the various new objectives—health, employment, nutrition, etc.—seemed naturally to evolve into the CCW with its broader mandate and greater institutional and geographic reach. As a result we are witnessing at present the objectives of our original program extended into areas and in ways we could not have imagined.

The two research strategies, involving two kinds of cooperative social arrangements, clearly have important precedents in their general impulse. The connections to the work of Dewey’s laboratory school and general philosophy are obvious in each. They also have some well-established precedents in Jane Addams’ work at Hull House, where she put “enrichment” programs like poetry reading on hold until some very practical services like temporary housing, daycare, education, medical and legal services could take root. Addams insisted that the value of the neighborhood program rests in its “...flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness

to change its methods as its environment may demand.” (p. 126) She described the Hull House as a place where information was interpreted, rather than as an agent for social leveling. In her eyes, Hull House was first and foremost a meeting place where a cross-section of Chicago residents united around common social problems (Addams, 1893/2002b).

Addams’ sentiments are echoed in more recent works of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Matusov, St. Julien, Lacasa, and Candela (2007). For Lave and Wenger (1991) the business of a community is the ongoing activity that shapes and sustains the community itself. Learning is a byproduct of the processes of negotiation and renegotiation of one’s participation in community life. Matusov et al. (2007), who, like us, make undergraduate education a key element in their approach, note that learning and development are integral parts of the process of transcending one’s life circumstances, and as such require a certain amount of directionality. They ask, “Who defines that directionality? How is it defined? Who talks on behalf of the “transcending” (p. 36)?

It is precisely these complicated issues of agency, both personal and institutional, that continue to vex and inspire the development of the design experiment and mutual appropriation strategies. As we continue to explore these programs we hope to bring them into conversation with others

sharing common theoretical grounding, such as Yrjö Engeström's Developmental Work Research approach (Engeström, 2010) and allied approaches in the participatory action research tradition (Schensul, 2010). Although it seems clear to us that these alternative strategies have much in common, they are developing in very different social, economic, and cultural ecologies, and so are certain to diverge in unpredictable and interesting ways. We look forward to fruitful discussions among the various approaches.

## Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the support of our collaborators at the University of Colorado, Boulder's Physics Education Research group and Tufts' Center for Engineering Education and Outreach as well as the research group at Cornell University who supported our learning of, and use of Worlds for Internet Technology and Science (WITS). Robert Lecusay acknowledges support from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and the American Educational Research Association's Minority Dissertation Fellowship Program in Education Research. Support from a grant to the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition from the UCLinks Program from the Office of the President of the University of California is also gratefully acknowledged.

Portions of this chapter draw upon the previously published Downing Wilson, D., Lecusay, R. & Cole, M. (2011). Design experimentation and mutual appropriation: Two strategies for university/community collaborative after-school interventions. *Theory & Psychology*, 1–25.

## Notes

1. Undergraduates attended twice a week in addition to attendance at class on campus twice a week, where they read academic texts deemed relevant to their site participation.

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PART

11

Social Networks and  
Cultural Affectivity

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## Affective Networks: The Social Terrain of a Complex Culture<sup>1</sup>

Nandita Chaudhary

### Abstract

Affective networks of relationships frame every social encounter that a person has in life. Mainstream psychological research has, however, failed to take adequate consideration of these dynamics in the writing about and exploration of human conduct across cultures. In every step of research, we espouse elements of our habitual cultural dynamics. When we consider a context unfamiliar for us, we tend to superimpose our familiar ways of living onto the other culture, the other person. Also, there is a preference for quantifiable, observable elements of human conduct, which has contributed to much knowledge about human phenomena in specific settings but everyday lives of ordinary people all over the world remain largely ignored by psychological research. This occurs on account of the tedium involved in searching the streets for processes that defy simple labeling and categorization. The greater the distance between the socio-economic, cultural, and geographic conditions of a researcher and the researched, the more arduous the journey of intersubjectivity, the agreement between partners in research. This makes our judgments more prone to incorrect exploration. Indian community life is characterized by complex, confounding and contradictory manifestations of ways of living owing to internal and external factors. This makes it all the more critical to inform ourselves about ambient social reality and personal proclivity in order to understand people and their conduct. This chapter discusses some of these features of social life in India that impinge upon interpersonal encounters, and thereby need to be attended to in research.

**Keywords:** culture, person, environment, ecology, social cognition, cultural differences, Indian family life

As a term, culture has continued to defy simple elucidation. Scholars persist in searching for ways of defining culture with reference to nature, communication, meaning, material, or activity. It is essential to reflect on academic discourse related to the term precisely because there has been an inadvertent marginalization of non-Western, minority, subaltern societies based on the definition of culture in scholarly discourse, especially in the field of psychology. Thus the definition of culture and its application has become recognized as a political issue over the years. In theories, methods, and interpretation—in fact, in every step of our research—we espouse elements of the explicit and implicit relations among people and between people and their worlds. The

intersubjectivity of any encounter and the interobjectivity of the social group determine the ways in which a people are going to be constructed, whether as objects to be guided into making sense of their own lives, or as participants, capable of defining their own reality. Whereas intersubjectivity refers to the agreement in perspectives between individuals; interobjectivity is relevant because there are culturally shared variations regarding the world around us (Moghaddam, 2003). Moghaddam contends (2011) this is an essential consideration in academic discourse; otherwise we will continue to have increasingly isolated dialogues within the social reality of our own cultural or academic affiliations. Human relations “rely on the non-conscious engagement



in practices that occur within a social field” outside of the subjects, and not primarily on intersubjective relations (Sammut, Daanen & Sartawi, 2010, p. 452). Priming intersubjectivity over and above interobjectivity creates a bias toward individualism and reductionism emerging out of Western individualistic traditions and suffers from what Moghaddam (2010) labels as the “embryonic fallacy” (p. 465). This tendency to assume that psychological experiences are initiated at birth has resulted in intersubjectivity becoming a “problem” to understand since it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to explain HOW we comprehend others’ perspectives IF we are the source of our own understanding? The solution to this is contained in the cultural resources that surround us.

This chapter focuses on the study of social relationships among Indians from within, primarily to inform the academic audience about the unique ways of understanding the world that characterize Indian communities. If an “outsider” position on Indian culture and tradition is adopted, interpretations are not likely to fit the phenomena very well, precisely because of the different emphases that are placed on cultural activity. And yet, in this world of created contrasts, compare we must. In order to advance reasonable comparisons and constructions about people, we need to better understand their realities by adopting favorable approaches. In this manner, culture is not seen simply as a disturbance for the elegance of a research design. Cultural activity and ascribed meanings are so “dense” that if these are not considered from an indigenous perspective, the basic agenda of the (re)search could be obfuscated.

### **Inclusive Separation and the Person-Environment Interface**

A meta-conceptual paradigm for dualisms constructs the person and environment as distinct from each other. Duality is a favored format precisely because it facilitates simple heuristic advancement in the study of any phenomenon. However, when we are dealing with human social phenomena, metallurgical precision is not a precondition, and the ways of presenting social processes has to fit. For instance, the person in any given social setting is at the same time influenced by, and influencing the context. The complete separation of the two processes will have to be an artificial one. The interaction between person and environment in such a system is visualized as a transfer of information

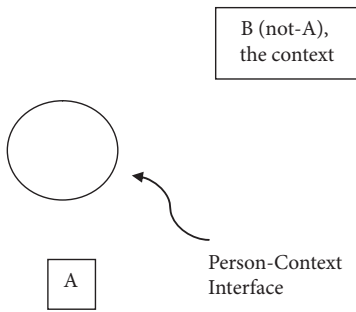
between two separate elements of reality, in independent existence. Reality is constructed with logically separate processes of individuals on the one hand, and their environments on the other. This formulation is neat, but somewhat inadequate when it comes to explaining the human condition. Another way of considering the person-environment interface is *inclusive separation*, where a person is viewed as distinct, but without being independent of, but in constant interaction with the environment (Valsiner, 1998). This approach has several important consequences on the way in which theory and research is advanced.

### **Conversational Structures**

In cultural psychology, attempts are made to understand culture at the individual level as it is guided by collective culture, while simultaneously creating it (Valsiner, 2001). The study of culture as social interactions between individuals and small groups was identified as critical by Simmel (1971) when he distinguished between “subjective” and “objective” culture. By analyzing individual action, Simmel studied how social institutions are influenced. He advanced an idea that structure of a social setting (whether it is dyadic and triadic) is fundamental; interactions between two people, and those between three or more, would be very different in nature, to the extent that the increase in size of group would result in greater “individual freedom.” The “inner unity of a group loosens as a group becomes larger” (Farganis, 1993, p. 40) on account of multiple mutual relationships. Rather than going into size of group and beyond, I am going to select the distinction between the dyad and triad that Simmel makes in order that we can understand the fact that the structure of social interaction can have deep impact upon the dynamics of discourse through the examples provided in this chapter. This demonstrates that cultural reality operates not only at an individual level, but also at the group level—in this instance implying that the size of a group can impact social dynamics. I will pick up this point for discussion a bit later.

To return to inclusive separation and the interface between a person and the environment, we can visualize the intersection of person and the surrounding context (read culture here) in Figure 43.1.

If we visualize a person as object A in the below Figure 43.1, and the environment as not-A, or B; using Valsiner’s notion of inclusive separation (2004, p. 18), we can assume a point X on the surface



**Figure 43.1** Person-environment interface

where a person and the context meet. There are two ways of understanding this interface. One that argues for what Valsiner calls *exclusive separation*, the point where non-A starts and A ends; and the other where this is seen as the meeting point between A and non-A, and thus the interface of BOTH A (the person) and non-A (the context), resulting in a dialogical interface between these two features that is at the same time, both A and B. This dialogically (as distinct from a dialectically) constructed view of the *person-in-context* allows for us to argue for a space where we can include both processes. Dialogicality between phenomena (Bakhtin, 1981), whether these are perspectives or persons, permits us to consider different processes not in opposition (A versus not-A) but as relational (A or not-A); focusing on the interface between the two positions. After all the formation of not-A in itself originates the moment that one considers A, and is thus foundational for this. If we apply the dialogical principle to the relationship between a person and her environment, there is an inevitable dynamic re-description of the world. We can therefore construct such a relationship with the following elements that are not distinct from each other, but in constant dynamic exchange with each other. Culture can be visualized as the activity that belongs *in between* the person and the environment rather than the person belonging to culture, or the culture belonging to a person (Valsiner, 2007). This interface, the semipermeable membrane allows messages to travel both ways; from the person to the environment, and from the environment to the person.

### Supplement, Surplus and Excess: The Process of Abducting Meaning

In the dialogue between nature and culture, the person and her context, there emerge several processes that require explication. When a person enters

a culture, whether as a child or an outsider, we are confronted by a context that is “*overexplained, overdetermined by meaning*” (Valsiner, 2001, p. 117, emphasis original). How do these meanings become manifested? Valsiner continues with a statement that human minds have the proclivity for jumping to conclusions in any encounter. When symbolic forms are created in collective culture, where multiple motives contribute toward polysemy, or multiple meanings, the mind rushes to make sense of these experiences (Obeyesekere, 1990, p. 56). We are it seems, primed for telling stories (Turner, 1996):

The constant yet unnoticed ‘power of story’ as a mental activity like vision, for instance, is really the quality of the mind that makes everyday life possible in the human sense. Here we mean story not in the sense of entertainment, but as a thread that we are capable of weaving. Much as these networks bind us, they also create complex webs of activity, identity, reality and family.

(p. 13)

The teleological function of the capacity of humans for storytelling was really to save our worlds from collapsing into chaos, dealing with the overwhelming uncertainty that confronts us at every moment of our lives. Toward this end, we take everyday experiences and color them with our own (socially guided) meanings and connections, and manufacture our stories about experiences, people, ourselves. We are able to see patterns in phenomena, come to conclusions, or adduce reasoning. However, there is another process in operation that we use with amazing alacrity: abduction. *Abduction* is the tendency of the human mind to pick out a possible solution (Peirce, 1955). Somewhat like a hunch where we have an intuition that there is some connection, even sufficient similarity can be the criterion for problem solving when we use abduction. In scientific research, for instance, the initial idea of a study is obtained through the process of abduction. It is after that initial identification that we move toward inductive and deductive processes for logical analysis. In social encounters, this abduction of meaning is formative for the ways in which collective sense is constructed and applied, as we will see later in the chapter.

There are some other processes in cultural encounters that have relevance for this discussion. Here I would like to introduce the notion of *supplement* (Derrida, 1974/1997) that is described as that activity exterior to original, natural element, that

attempts to replace it in any given situation, like child-rearing practices that realize the completion of the deficient natural system (Gillespie, 2003). Interestingly, it is both the accretion as well as substitution functions of any supplement that characterize the idea of a supplement according to Derrida (1974/1997). When human beings interact, the emergence of one idea leads to the simultaneous production of its alternative, and we have to understand the open, dialogical relations between social phenomena. In dialogical relations, for instance, it is the relational rather than the logical, dichotomous categorization of phenomena that are considered. Perhaps cultural activity can be assumed to be accumulated “supplementarity,” both adding to and substituting for natural processes and perhaps in many domains, even overtaking these. Of course taking a dialogical approach to the interaction between nature and culture (and not dialectics) make it quite impossible (and rather futile) to disentangle the points of departure from nature and the entry of culture in most instances. Linked with the notion of the supplement in human activity is the process of communication that becomes essential for any cultural process to sustain. Meaning already exists when a person enters social interchanges and is not something that each individual person manufactures afresh on his or her own. In the communication, social groups set up individuals for certain confrontations over and above others through conversations, rituals, myths, and several other cultural processes. This predetermination of individual reality is clearly intended by the social group, and then actively reconstructed through everyday interactions during which a person both “gives” and “gives off” certain messages (Goffman, 1959) what Bakhtin (1990) terms as “excess,” thus making the “other” a very larger than life element in the reality of humans (Mead, 1934). This perhaps reflects almost an opposite orientation from that of the bias of individualism where intrapsychic phenomena are privileged. The “surplus,” the enlightened information that our minds are capable of engaging with regarding Self in the world of others (Gillespie, 2003) are central to the dynamic construction of culture.

### ***Cultural Dynamics in a Specific Instance: The Indian Mother***

Cultural processes precede and succeed every individual's life, and impact these in long-lasting ways by preparing the setting with prior attention. Thus the culture that we live within can be argued

with, fought against or discussed; but it cannot be ignored. In the co-construction of meaning, individual minds contribute actively to collective meaning by tugging at these in specific ways, constantly renewing the organic reality of cultural meaning systems.

Let me take an example from Indian cultural dynamics and attempt to apply some of the theoretical ideas presented in the preceding paragraphs. Among Indians, we find that there is an impressive and almost exaggerated centrality that is placed on others. One such other is the mother who finds place in the dramatic as well as the everyday (Chaudhary & Bhargava, 2006; Desai, 2010; Kakar & Kakar, 2007; Thomas, 1995). In a more detailed examination of gender relations, we find that the status of the mother is not simply a question of gender relations that places men at a superior place as is often misconstrued on account of the predominant patriarchy of Indian society. The status of women is believed to be lower than men on account of demographic, traditional, and social findings. This makes it quite difficult to understand paradoxical manifestations of attitudes toward women in contemporary Indian society from an outside perspective (Bumiller, 1990).

The woman may be discriminated from birth, seen as a burdensome liability in her youth, be treated unfairly and badly by the husband, actively harassed by her in-laws, but somehow when came to her role as a mother, particularly of a male child, her power and influence knew no bounds. To the Indian imagination, the mother represents the source of all things.

(Desai, 2010, p. 25)

There is a clear worshiping of the idea of motherhood by people; despite the fact that the same person may not be respected within another relationship. As Desai suggests further, that in the sociopolitical context, it is not the person but the position that is marked. It is not surprising therefore, that India has been home to some of the most powerful women in the political arena. Social positioning is another activity that needs mention in order to understand this fully. One of the first features of a person that an Indian will attempt to assess (perhaps as important as gender) is the social status, which would include economic status, ethnic membership, place of origin, caste group, etc. This is not simply to get a picture of a person's circumstances, but to assess what the position is with respect to himself or herself; as

a guide to appropriate conduct after considering whether the person is above or below in social status with reference to the self (Varma, 2005). In interpersonal interactions, similarly, it is the role and relationship rather than demographic descriptors that define conventions for close social encounters. The Indian sense of self is believed to be constantly changing, partly because context is considered to be formative in determining conduct (Menon, 2003). An imposition of an assumption of “ontological individualism” (Bellah et al., 1985) while analyzing social interactions in India would be misplaced. The variability in the ways people can approach a situation will be limited to predetermined categories guided by the ideology of individualism, and would thus fail to be understood appropriately.

To advance the point about “mothers” in India, we find that in the care of children, although the mother is considered pivotal, this emphasis does not preclude the importance of other members within the child’s network. But before going any further I would like to add a cautionary note here. When I speak of Indianness, I do not imply a homogenous, monolithic structure of a consolidated, coherent way of living. If anything, Indian culture provides us with the exact opposite of each of these adjectives. The number of people, the diversity in languages, ethnic practices, stories, and spirituality makes such statements rather impossible to make. Even the past is textured with variety and multiplicity. India “does not have one past, but many pasts” (Ramanujan, 1999, p. 187). To add to the texture of variability is the fact the past always has a constant presence in our present (Anandalakshmy, 2010).

At certain levels there are aspects of cultural traditions in India that can be traced to roots as far back as a few thousand years, but such a continuity must not be confused with stagnation.

(Thapar, 2000, p. xxv)

Thus we find that there is an intricate interweaving of “pasts,” which, along with geographical distance and ecological variation, make it possible that people of one area may not have stepped over into another, and thus “every description of tradition can be as a negation or contradiction of another” (Anandalakshmy, 2010, p. 19). So when we write about any phenomenon, this reality must be kept as an essential clause. Returning to the issue of motherhood in India that I am using as an example of a dramatic domain of activity in India, what are some of the manifestations of this centrality and how does

this weave in with other relationships that the child has to live among?

I have argued, in fact that when a mother is so important, then perhaps there would be wisdom in preparing for unfortunate eventualities, especially where survival rates may be compromised on account of health status. Several scholars (Kurtz, 1992; Trawick, 1990; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010) have found a corresponding importance that is placed on other people in addition to the importance of the mother that could be characterized by the dialogicality, the inclusive separation of mothers and others (Chaudhary, 2006). The child is believed to be naturally attached to the mother, but very intense and intimate exchanges between mother and child are often private, even within the socially dense context. In the presence of others, the mother is actively encouraged to distance herself and correspondingly promote closeness of the child with others. The dynamic arrangement for corresponding supplementary resources enhances her activity along with creating a substitute for her role in a person’s life. Here we find possible instances for both enhancement of as well as the potential substitution for the mother. Women in the larger family network often compete between each other playfully for the child’s care and attention. Perhaps why this happens is precisely on account of the putative centrality of a mother’s role in a child’s life. This is perhaps an instance of supplementarity in the Derridean sense. This emphasis is also communicated in the kin term *Ma-si* in Hindi that refers to the mother’s sister as “like-mother,” as this term translates. It is also noteworthy that the mother’s sister is also potentially substitutive in several ethnic groups in India; in the event of a woman’s death, the marriage between her husband and her sister is not only permitted, it is also seen as the best possible option (for the children). This theme resonates widely in Indian literature and popular media.

Regarding maternal love, Hindi has a special expression “*Mamta*,” also a popular name for women, which finds an important place in everyday discourse. An investigation of people’s understanding of the term demonstrated that mother’s love had a sort of magnetic quality with regard to meaning. In the interviews, people were eager to discuss meaning, sometimes extending the feelings of (this form of) love to other relationships, debated about the specificity or flexibility of mother’s love, and even chose to say in some instances, that *Mamta* was responsible for making mothers

more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by uncaring children! There seemed to be no doubt about the “natural” quality of Mamta, although it could transcend the specific mother and her biological child and manifest itself in other affiliations as well (Chaudhary & Bhargava, 2006). I will deal with this in greater detail in a later section.

### Social Setting and Situated Discourse

Everyday conversation has a fluid and flexible quality that makes it rather elusive to consider for academic study. However, in order to approach people in context, it is essential to explore ordinary experiences of unexceptional members of any given society. Rommetveit (1992) discusses the essential components of a dialogically based sociocognitive approach to the study of human beings. Proposing basic distinguishing features of this approach, he places importance on context-situated discourse:

What distinguishes a socio-cognitive and dialogical paradigm from orthodox ecological psychology is an acknowledgement and superordinate concern with cultural invariance and variance, with social construction of shared realities, and with issues of ‘intersubjectivity’ encountered in our encounters with ‘Lebenswelt’ (lifeworld) from within. (p. 21)

If this approach is accepted as a basic tenet of human activity, then we have to accept some of the corollaries about the human mind as well. These are extracted from Rommetveit (1992, p. 21–23):

- The human mind is basically social and informs us not only about a person, but also that which is being interacted with
- Ordinary language mediates this activity for known as well as novel experiences
- Shared social reality guides a person’s approach towards any encounter with the ecological-cultural reality
- These predispositions place limits on potential conduct, although not entirely
- On account of these predispositions, activity is always from a ‘particular’ perspective
- ‘Attunement to the attunement of the other’ characterises human activity
- In any situation, the respective meanings are guided by subjective perspectives, and can never be absolute
- Joint attention and dialogue facilitates the ‘attunement to the attunement of the other’

- Any declaration about a particular phenomenon by a person is based on the ‘dialogically established shared social reality at this stage’
- Transcending of specific perspectives is inevitable through assimilation of terminologies into everyday language

Advancing this proposal, we can visualize any construction of potential activity with the self and others as arranged in the following manner. Consider a person who is approaching an event. I propose these four domains of activity as dialogically related (rather than separated from each other). The first category is the self and itself, we carry an elaborate range of predispositions that we have inherited and created for ourselves as people, a strong internal proclivity that constitutes our subjectivity. Another domain is a person’s information and approach toward the outside world that constitutes our objectivity. I define this not simply as the “unbiased, impartial” attitude as defined, but the belief in an impartial, unbiased element of our collective reality! Then there is the real or imagined “other person(s)” in any encounter. The individual under discussion here will have an element of intersubjectivity, the belief about the beliefs of the other. This is taken as a stance which the person operates from, an assumed objectivity about the world. Once the intersubjective capacity is developed ontogenetically, we conduct ourselves with this basic element of our reality. Then the last element is the putative knowledge of collective and social reality, tradition and convention. This presentation can be seen as one possible way of understanding the constituents of a person’s perspectives in any given encounter.

### Methods of Approaching the Study of Human Beings, Intersubjectivity and the “Psychologist’s Fallacy”

Every cultural community creates over the years a range of shared understandings of social reality. These “collaboratively constructed objectifications of the world” that are shared within and between cultures is what Moghaddam (2003, p. 222) refers to as *interobjectivity*. If we search ancient Hindu texts for defining human activity, the delineation of *sravana* (hearing about or experiencing), *manana* (thinking about, cognition) and *nidhidhyasana* (meditation), make the three important methods for study of reality, what can be argued as first-person, second-person and third-person methodology (Rao, 2008). The focus is placed on transactional AND transcendental reality, and consciousness receives a central

place in such a construction. The complex and confounding construct of consciousness has driven its study outside of mainstream psychology, focusing largely on measureable domains of activity. In the study of the self, the primary search has been for the consolidation of literature about a notion of self that is based in the ideology of individualism. More recently, we have encountered several approaches to research and theory that have attempted to contrast the development of self in other cultures where there is a departure from the ontology of individualism that characterizes most theorizing about the self (Menon, 2003, Misra, 2010).

### *Ambiguity in Cultural Dynamics*

It has been my experience that most industrial projects in our discipline have tended to suffer from a syndrome that could be characterized as an “avoidance of ambiguity.” We search for means and standard deviations in the troubling conditions of the central tendency that is (often unquestioningly) assumed. To speak of “*a* culture, this culture, as a consensus on fundamentals—shared conceptions, shared feelings, shared values—seems hardly viable in the face of so much dispersion and disassembly; it is the faults and fissures that seem to mark out the landscape of collective selfhood” (Geertz, 2000, p. 250).

Psychology’s stories could be argued as being told largely from the stance of an informed academic discussing a naive subject both within any culture and cross-culturally. James (1884) remarked that psychologists become confused about what is in their minds and what exists in the minds of their subjects, what he calls the “psychologist’s fallacy.” Consequently, psychologists tend to attribute and impose ideas that they have in their minds onto others, initiating the debate about assumed positions, privileged perspectives and putative objectivity in research and other academic activity. The mutual recognition of consciousness is an essential ingredient in the methodology for investigating human experience. If we use Table 43.1 as a template, it

is possible to see this phenomenon as confusion between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, a capability for social cognition that children are believed to develop around the age of 4 years of age! Several other overlaps can also be visualized: that between interobjectivity and objectivity, where social reality is assumed as being a universal principle; or between subjectivity and objectivity, a common mistake that our version of the truth is the final word.

Moscovici (1976) stated that societies are constructed largely around their own survival. As far as human conduct and social processes is concerned, ambiguity and ambivalence prevail over exactness and clarity. Depending upon the situation, society “inhibits what it stimulates” (p. 149) with the simultaneous excitement and inhibition of particular tendencies like aggression, sex, or hunger. The chances for satisfaction of these is either inhibited or enhanced depending upon the situation, and within cultural dynamics lie the prohibitions as well as strategies for transgression. Thus when we speak about meaning and culture, it is possible to see how meanings are complex, multiple, and even contradictory. Everyday talk is authored by human beings but it is constantly attributed to society (Valsiner, 2007) since the distinctive quality of social processes is that they seamlessly enter personal positions and vice versa.

The study of linguistic terms has been a very important introduction in unraveling cultural reality (Wierzbicka, 1997) and providing a local framework within which culture is manifested in the minds of its members. There are other symbolic modes like ritual, icons, art, and music, which provide valuable insights into the meaning systems of any culture. Through decades of the dance of meaning and symbolism, collective culture becomes focused on some elements of created ideas more than on others. Through this sifting of symbols, the unique collection of ideas that emerge at any given time is the substance of culture. To return to the domain of motherhood in India, we find it is greatly “overdetermined” by meaning (Obeyesekere, 1990) such that it is believed to be at the center of existence of every woman within herself and for every man in his association with his mother, as was discussed in the earlier section. If we look at the vocabulary for a mother’s love, there is an interesting dynamic arrangement of ideas that emerges. Like any culturally valued symbol, motherhood in Hindi is labeled by a special term that is at the surface simple and straightforward to understand.

**Table 43.1 An orthogonal arrangement of self-other understanding**

Person Level	Individual	Group
Self	Subjective	Objective
Other	Intersubjective	Interobjective

With this objective we (Chaudhary & Bhargava, 2006) proposed a study to investigate people's beliefs about the meaning of the Hindi word Mamta, which is commonly believed to be the "natural" love of a mother for her child. Although there were several dictionary meanings available in addition to "mother's love," through the interviews it emerged that both collectively and individually, the meaning seemed to have first become quite reduced at a collective level, and then was found to again expand in the individual meaning. At the collective level, the several dictionary meanings had actually become simply reconfigured into a single meaning, "mother's love" characterized as deeply selfless and devotional. A mother's life is constructed as revolving around her children and vice versa. This dictionary meanings of Mamta which originally carried meanings like *Yeh mera hai, is prakar ka bhav* (this is mine, this kind of feeling), *mamatva, apnapan* (self-feeling), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (love), *abhimaan* (pride), *garv* (pride), *sneh* and *prem* (both meaning love); and lastly we find *mata ka apni santan ke prati sneh* (a mother's love for her child) (Pathak 1995, p. 612). The Sanskrit root word from which Mamta derives is *mamatva*, meaning "love for the self" and pride. So the idea starts with love for the self, or selfish love, expands to reach pride, love, ownership, and greed. Additionally, Mamta is also a popular name for a woman in India. Over the centuries, the dictionary meanings have become rather obscured as "society" has adopted (or abducted) the last meaning, that of mother's love toward her child, as the single accessible meaning for ordinary users of Hindi. We find that social history made up of contributions by individual people and collective movement

gradually transforms the meaning of words that become over-laden with a singular meaning. But the story does not end there. Actually the story never ends. In our conversations with individual people, we found that although the starting point becomes the well-known meaning, people's arguments take the meaning in other directions, like the possibility that the meaning could also include father's love, love for a pet, feelings toward a friend in need, quite easily. However, none of these meanings return even remotely to selfishness, pride, and greed. The meaning is unequivocally positive, despite the fact that it could have harmful outcomes (like the spoiling of a child with unconditional love could make him or her dismissive toward the parent).

In Figure 43.2, there are two points in time at which meaning is being transformed, or at least changing in emphasis. Firstly, we have the collective shift over the centuries of a term originally created with a certain range of meanings (Point A in Fig. 43.2). Guided by cultural priorities, one meaning takes precedence over all others and remains dominant in the initial reaction of all respondents without exception. Soon after this declaration is made, and people actually say they may not know about this since they are not "experts" or experienced in the matter (some men and unmarried women said this), the participants in the study went comfortably into a detailed description of their views on the matter. This is characterized by point B in the diagram (see Fig. 43.2). This is the moment in the interview where people were actually constructing their views on the matter. It is proposed that in every social encounter, this is precisely what happens. People's views on matters are not something

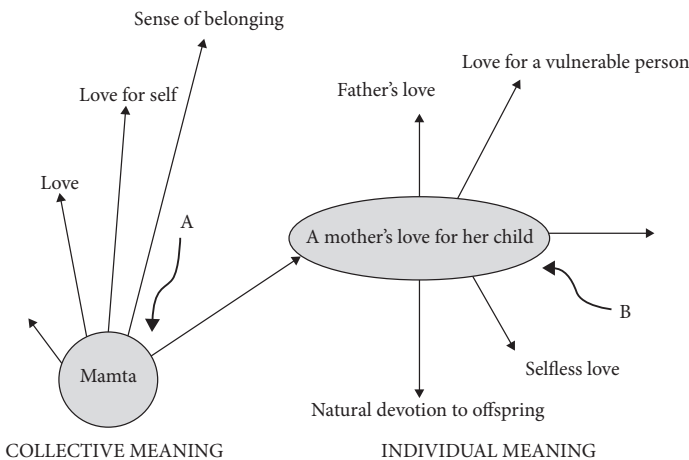


Figure 43.2 Schematic diagram of instances of "abduction" in the meaning of "Mamta"

they always carry around in their heads a priori; these meanings are actually constructed and re-constructed in the actual encounters of everyday life. The interview is simply a social opportunity, albeit with its own particular formalities and this is precisely why the active, flexible interview method becomes critical as a technique for data collection (*for an excellent illustration, see Bernheimer & Weisner, 2007*).

If we return to Table 43.1, we can conjecture that there is an obscuring of the distinction between two sets of processes, one between interobjectivity and objectivity: that people believe the cultural meaning to be a natural endowment. Menon (2003) supports this interpretation in her declaration that Indians do not distinguish between convention and natural law. The other mixing is between the collective meaning as being personal. The latter connection is typical of cultural activity where collective beliefs are articulated AS IF they are personal. This is a process at the individual level that strengthens and sustains society and culture. What we experienced during the interviews was an enthusiastic defense of a culturally valued notion. People defended the presence and need for this love in order for society to survive and prosper through the careful nurturing of individual children. This unequivocal acceptance of an idea is a demonstration of the power of cultural activity and its active recreation through individual voices. Also, the confusions that we have between what we believe as individual agents and collectively shared ideas, prepares us for supplication.

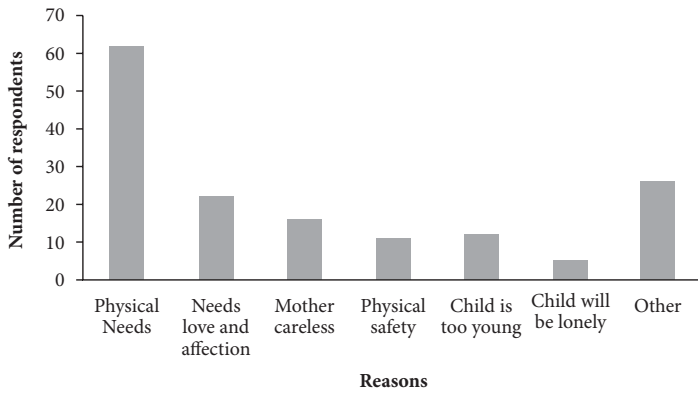
### **Justifying Cultural Practices: Sleeping Arrangements in the Home**

Advancing the reason/randomness debate related to cultural practice, another important feature of any cultural practice is that although it may be arbitrary and/or adaptive, in its justifications provided by members of culture, it is argued as strategic and meaningful. We find that people actively justify actions and invest much emotion in the choices that they putatively “make” in ways of living. At the risk of sounding dismissive, there is some evidence for a sort of exaggerated ownership that is communicated while discussing personal choices that may simply have been a matter of adopting prevailing practices. The commitments that we are primed toward from a very early age become the glue that binds people to their culture. Gradually, these ties may become loosened as we travel through our lives and encounter other ways of living.

Let us take another example of cultural beliefs and practices from a recent study. A total of 46 female university students in New Delhi, India were asked about the sleeping arrangements at home (Chaudhary & Gilsdorf, 2010). It was reported that at the age of 5 years, all of them were sleeping in the same bed with another person: parents, grandparents, siblings, or another family member; and currently, 23 of them still continued to sleep in the same bed/room as their parents. Although these patterns may have persisted on account of several factors, especially the space available and number of members in a home, the electricity costs of using extra power and therefore extra expense; these sleeping arrangements were argued mostly on the basis of emotion, security, love, and care. It was found that the young women justified co-sleeping with reasons like: the young child needs physical contact for love and security (at age 5 years) and predominantly “fun” and affection at their current age. Those who had moved into an independent room reported that they often returned to their parents’ room whenever the mother was alone at home, as in the afternoon or when the father was away; something that they found very pleasurable. It is important to note that these were all young women, and responses of men would have been different. Inspired by Shweder’s work (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1988), a second phase was added to the study related to gathering opinions about a specific hypothetical situation: A young mother who shifts her 5-month-old baby out of her bed to a cot in another room. This question was asked of 51 college-going female students and 103 parents and other family members in the students’ homes (51 men and 52 women). The findings showed that with the exception of one respondent (a student’s mother) who argued that the mother must have had her reasons, there was an unequivocal objection to the action of separating the child. “How could she do something so ‘cruel?’” “When the child grows up she will also not care about her parents since she was rejected by them at this tender age?” “It is very *inconvenient* for the mother to run up and down to another room at night?” “How will there be love and attachment?” “A ‘*real*’ mother would never do such a cruel thing!” (Emphasis original).

In another study of mothers and their young infants and choices for sleep arrangements through observations and interviews of mothers and other caregivers (Kaur, 2010), there was a similar finding related to opinions about proximity during sleep.





**Figure 43.3** Opinions of respondents about independent sleeping of a 5-month-old baby (N=154)

Although it was considered essential for the mother and child to be close together, it was also possible to substitute the mother for any other person, like a grandmother. This was done as much to release the mother for household work and other children as for the baby; and also sometimes to make the older person feel involved in the home. This resonates well with the earlier discussion about the coexisting importance of the mother and others presented earlier in the chapter. In response to the query about proximity during a baby’s sleep, 11 (out of 27) participants shared a legend as a justification not only for sleeping close to the baby, but actually always remaining “facing the baby” during sleep, preferably with your hand on the child in order to protect the child and facilitate a sleep “free of fear.” Regarding facing the child during sleep, however, all of them asserted its importance, to the extent that if the mother got tired of sleeping on one side, she would flip over lengthwise rather than face away from the child. Consolidating the responses of the different people who had different versions and lengths of the story, a close approximation of the legend would be:

This story is about the Hindu god Shiva and his wife goddess Parvati. As the legend goes, one day Parvati was taking her bath and wanted to have a person guarding her bathing area. For this purpose, she created a ‘son’ from the dirt of her body. Shiva was not aware of who this person was when he returned home. This was his own son, Ganesha whom Parvati had created for her own safety. Ganesha also did not know who this man was at the entrance to the home, and thus prevented Shiva from entering his own home. Deeply angered by being prevented from entering his own home, Shiva severed Ganesha’s head. Upon seeing this, Parvati turned upon Shiva

indicating the enormity of what he had done and pleaded him to return her boy to life as he was innocent. She threatened to leave Shiva if he was unable to do this. Shiva then asked his guards to search the world to find a mother who was sleeping with her back towards the baby and bring the head of the baby to him so he could replace the son that he had killed. The guards searched everywhere until they discovered an elephant mother and her baby where she was turned away from the baby. They took away the head of the baby elephant and Ganesha was recreated. This legend carries a strong and resounding message: Mothers who turn away from their babies in sleep run the risk of losing their child to the forces of danger.

(Kaur, 2010, p. 34–35)

Here we find the instance of a *phantasm* (Boesch, 1991; Valsiner, 2001), a personal reconstruction of a myth in order to make it available and applicable to an individual person. Whereas myths are collective stories that guide cultural reality, the phantasm makes these myths adaptively available for individual consumption. In most instances, we are unable as individual minds, to grasp the reasons for the bind that these collective realities place on us, whether it is attachments to the homeland, the people in our lives, or the things that we cherish (Boesch, 2002, p. 134). We find again that similar to the instance of the meaning of Mamta that derived from older meanings, one of these meanings seemed to be abducted for personal use. Similarly, in the retelling of this story, the women of different ages were using the myth in a very personal manner since the question was not about myths they know about divine mothers and children; but when they were asked how they sleep and why! As indicated in the review of research on morality referenced above,

Hindus do not make a systematic differentiation between convention and morality in everyday conduct. I argue here, that a similar confounding exists between mythical reality as constructed in daily discourse and everyday conduct, what Pattanaik (2009) calls the tendency to understand the world according to principles of “Mythos” rather than “Logos,” which he describes as a propensity for the subjective, discursive and descriptive rather than being bound by logical argumentation. But this does not also imply an absence of logical thought among Indians, it simply indicates preferences and propensity in the ways in which the world is understood.

There seems therefore, no confusion in combining scientific reasoning with spiritual discourse, no difficulty in blending traditional and modern beliefs, using adaptive strategies that Tuli labels as “elective interdependence” (Tuli, & Chaudhary, 2010). Ambiguity, according to Trawick (1990) is an overarching principle of social life among the Indian community. It is true that it remains hard if not impossible to characterize a billion people with one overarching feature, but this term is one that certainly has appeared as a descriptive label for Indians often enough.

### ***Culture, Context, Relationships and Social Cognition: Another Example***

In the preceding arguments, I have tried to reference examples that display the critical importance of context in understanding findings, although much of psychological research persists in adopting the opposite view: that context-free, “pure experimentation” is the best method of studying people. Certainly, the engagement in relationships that occurs in a particular setting gives us critical information about intersubjectivity and interobjectivity that are needed to understand conduct. Unless we notice and explore affective networks in a cultural setting, we are unable to advance toward a comprehensive analysis of events, whether these are within or outside of scientific research.

In another study that was conducted in two distinct subcultural conditions to explore precisely how the social setting will influence children’s conduct and adult interactions with and about children, Bhargava (2010) examined 3-year-old children’s social cognition in urban Mumbai (a large metropolis) and rural Rajasthan. The village selected for the study was small (population of 2,904, primarily agricultural, and typically rural). Mumbai has been the commercial capital of the country for centuries

and is characterized by dense, plural communities from all over India, with an estimated population of 13,662,885. For the families that participated in this study, most young couples were living as nuclear units (average family size was 3), all with only one child at the time of the study. Although the mothers were not working outside the home, they were all educated and fathers of the young children were employed in salaried jobs in the private sector. There was a characteristic enthusiasm for education among the urban residents and a great deal of effort is placed on children’s preschool education and future school selection at this age. The homes were equipped with toys, books, and other materials that children played with regularly, and mothers typically were engaged very closely with the actions of the children, deeply curious about the study and what the researcher was doing with the children and how this would be interpreted. The participants in the study were eager about the study, primarily on account of the fact that they considered such a participation to be “good for the child.” In contrast, the rural families were usually large, with several couples and children living in co-residence with their relatives. Apart from this, the movement between families within the community was characterized by fluidity and flexibility. Children were relatively free to roam the streets at this age, usually in the company of other children who were older. Very few of the children attended the one government-run preschool program, and although education was valued, the educational future of the children did not emerge as an important concern at this age. It is important to note that the economic and religious profile of the groups was quite similar, although very difficult to compare on the basis of the different ecological and economic characteristics of the urban (read corporate) and rural (agricultural) economy. The rural and urban families had a similar relative socio-economic position *within* their community. They were neither from among the very rich nor the very poor in their respective regions; and in that sense were assumed to be comparable. That is the differences between the two groups could be attributed mostly to the ecological differences, that is rural urban differences in family life. The study was focused on children’s sociocognitive abilities, to map the ways in which the ecological setting, epistemological orientations, and social interactions framed children’s expressions of self and other persons. While using multiple methods, the study focused on using standardized methods (false-belief task), language assessment

(receptive and expressive language based on picture descriptions), a play task (using similar materials) developed especially for the study, and a storytelling task where an ancient Indian story was used for gathering adult input to the child. The presentation of play materials required the family to put away all toys belonging to the child so that there was some similarity in the conditions for the activity. There was a tremendous contrast observed here, since only one rural home had some toys for the children that were within the child's reach.

The findings indicated that although 3-year-old children fail the false-belief task as is expected of their age, the reasons for their responses within the task could be attributed to their handling of dolls/puppets, and the discourse features of their community. Both these findings also demonstrated marginal advantages for urban children over the rural children. Let me elaborate this point. In the play with objects, there was a distinct "fear" of the dolls as could be seen from the videos of several rural children. Additionally, even those who were not fearful found them to be unfamiliar, despite the fact that these dolls were custom-made to "look" familiar in terms of hair, clothing, and appearance. Urban children on the other hand went speedily to play with dolls, often making sounds while simulating quarrels or other actions. It is not that this sort of play was not found among rural children, but its frequency and arrangements were appreciably different. During the play task, the researcher asked children to attribute feelings and activities to the dolls since that is a requirement for the false-belief task and she wanted to investigate whether the assumption and expectation of projecting thinking and feeling capacities to dolls was actually on an equal footing for all children. An activity that emerged with frequent manifestation (although the dolls looked nothing like babies) was rocking and breastfeeding the baby by giving it to the mother's breast! The dolls were also used for placing other materials on (e.g., a purse, spectacles, etc.) In urban homes, children were much more exposed to play materials that were clearly absent in rural homes, and the play with dolls was far more intense and complex, there was NO evidence of fear or hesitation. The children named the dolls with ease, and assigned roles, gender, and names. It is also possible to find support for this finding from Edwards (2005) where she found that doll play is more frequently observed among cultures that do not permit children to play with babies.

These two groups belong within one nationality and certainly also one cultural group if we take the popular meaning of culture. However, we can see that in many ways the social context forms an essential part, not only of the child's social cognition, but also of the shared understanding of the world, the objectivity and interobjectivity. To act as if the experience of playing with a kitchen set with a mother doll and a baby doll is "free" of context, and can be expected to manifest in all children at around the same maturational stage is another addition that we can safely add to the list of common fallacies with which psychologists can be afflicted. As a consequence, if a dyadic, "context-free" experimentation with objects is considered in a multi-party social context, then the child will certainly be reacting more to the transformation in the social setting rather than the task at hand. There were other very engaging differences that emerged in discourse strategies. This time, it was the number of interacting adults rather than rural and urban differences that emerged. For example, when dyadic homes (with mother and child) were separated from multi-party homes (the child with several adults, including the mother, grandparents, others), irrespective of location, the differences in discourse strategies (amount of talk by adults to child, for example) were significant, rather than by the rural-urban division. It is thus immediate context and the larger ecological setting *both* that need to be considered along with several other factors. This certainly loops back to the importance of the structure of the social setting discussed earlier (Derrida, p. 167, in the sense that children in rural areas did appear to have greater "freedom" from adult supervision. This was also reflected in the ways the people talked with each other. Far more conversation was directed to "everyone in general and no one in particular" (Chaudhary, in press) in rural areas than in urban, where there was more focused, dyadic conversation observed.

### **Conclusions: Affective Networks and Effective Strategies**

If the workings of culture are contingent upon social history and ecological and immediate setting, then affective networks in any encounter become integral to its study. Social interactions are not only a domain of study, they are also the context within which things are happening. Taking any example from developmental psychology, it is possible to explain the point raised here. We assume that a

trait like compliance, for instance, is something that a preschool child has *inside* her mind as a trait by which she is likely to agree or not agree to do something. We link the findings of such a trait to children's capacities to listen to others OR to follow their own minds, which are a priori assumed to be opposite behaviors. Then, if a researcher is considerate to the context, she may chose to link the children's said attitude to what is vaguely referred to as cultural context or goals. That is, whether the cultural group under study is inclined toward reinforcing children to be compliant or independent (as if there were only two options the child has). In such instances it becomes a requirement of meaningful research to search the layers of reality surrounding the child a little bit further. As an example of such a probe, a student of mine (Tomar, 2009) selected different tasks to investigate compliance in children: throwing an attractive-looking chocolate piece out of the window, placing a toy scoop (used in the sand pit of the school) on the head and placing his or her own shoes on the table between the researcher and the child. Although we expected the child to be least willing to throw the chocolate out of the window, the findings of the study showed the exact opposite. The preschool children in the study had NO hesitation in throwing the treat out of the window, and quickly justified it by saying it must have become dirty or spoiled, many did not even give a reason. But the (socially unacceptable) task of placing the shoes on the table received the least compliance. In between was the placing of what was assumed to be an unclean toy (it was not dirty) on the head. What Tomar (2009) concluded from the children's conduct is that taking any one or two tasks without first checking out some of the collectively shared beliefs about objects, would probably lead to superficial and even erroneous interpretations of children as autonomous or compliant! Here, the simple task of lacing one's shoes on the table is in complete violation of social conventions since any table is seen as a base for revered activity like placing books or food. Such a violation would be internalized very early by a child. This example demonstrates the existence of layers within layers of human conduct that are prepared for at a very early age, and the child's compliance may not simply be linked with her agreement with an adult, but to WHAT the agreement requires her to do. The loading of affect onto such tasks may go unnoticed by a person who approaches the phenomenon from the outside. It is thus necessary to pry open these layers

of affect that surround any given social encounter even if it is a research study.

It is possible to use self-other and individual and group dynamics (see Table 43.1) to assist in unraveling the complexity and in providing a framework for its study. In the example of compliance above, the young children's understandings of the world around them overtook the desire to comply with a friendly and engaging adult. Intersubjectivity seemed at this moment to have surpassed intersubjectivity, even at such a young age, since the act of throwing away the chocolate must have been rather difficult for the children.

Regarding reason and randomness, is it possible that there is a randomness to the reason in the sense that what may seem reasonable in one socio-historic setting, gathering meanings over the years, is not seen as such in another, such that collective meanings and attributions to nature, convention or individual agency may be different in different situations, individuals, and cultural settings. In order to understand these phenomena, it is critical to disentangle the distinct arrangements between an individual and the other in such a way that we are able to identify the levels of activity in a culturally relevant fashion. Meanings derive significance only within a particular worldview and despite the fact that the human situation (of sex differences, power, authority, politics, relationships, conflict) may seem to manifest universally, their dynamic reconstruction and meaning attribution is contingent upon local reality. Is it possible that reason is simply a post-hoc justification for what may simply be gut reactions of people in lived circumstances, driven by motives that range from greed to empathy as has been recently argued for the rather contentious domain of morality and human history (Bloom, 2010)? We have, Bloom argues, given far less importance to the forces of deliberation and persuasion in our research of choices that people make. Language is a critical process in this regard, as the author argues:

Stories emerge because people arrive at certain views and strive to convey them to others. It is this generative capacity that contemporary psychologists have typically ignored. Moral psychology in particular focuses nearly exclusively on studies in which volunteers are exposed to artificial moral dilemmas that have been thought up by other people, such as situations in which one must choose.

(Bloom, 2010, p. 490)

Perhaps reason and randomness coexist in locally meaningful ways and thus it may not be productive to actually see this in opposition as much as a layering of reality by local communities in making sense of their lives and the lives of others. This opposition that has been created between the arbitrariness of culture and its reason has in fact been an important reason for truncating the progress of dialogue between different theories about culture and human dynamics. It is, perhaps, time that we move beyond debate and into dialogue between different perspectives, and treat each theory as having some justification *within* the defined framework. After all, the historic and situational setting within which an idea is promoted, whether it is Skinner's "Beyond freedom and dignity" or Goffman's "Presentation of self in everyday life" or Geertz's "Available Light," each inspiration has a certain logic of its own that is best placed within the social reality of that particular intersection of time and place. It is during active recursion and application in a different world that we find ourselves and our minds having moved from the local significance of an idea to its global evaluation. Culture, Geertz (2000) argues, is set of "control mechanism" plans, recipes, instructions, rules, and other advice, that are superimposed on the genetic predispositions that we inherit.

Human evolutionary theory thus rests on the concept of a 'dual inheritance,' in which genes and cultures both are powerful determinants and each co-evolves with the other. We can distinguish cultural change from genetic change and can see how cultural change can follow an independent path from genetic change, but no great or eternal chasm separates them. Over time, genes and cultures interact repeatedly, constraining or reinforcing each other, forming the dual inheritance that shapes the life ways of the human organism. The human mind is remarkable for finding multiple pathways through the natural world, but those paths are always contingent on what came before and what is happening now to the planet. Historians need to acknowledge the importance of the environment and to embrace the theory and worldview of evolution for the dazzling light it sheds on the origins, development, and fate of humanity. (Worster, 2010, n.p.)

It is only by productive collaborations between different disciplines that a reasonable advancement of the scientific study of human conduct can be advanced. It is by focusing on social networks and interpersonal interactions among people that we

can make reasonable advances in understanding human conduct *in situ*. We need to find our ways back onto "rough ground" as Geertz suggested (2000, p. xii) in order that the friction thus created by using unfocused and unformulated ideas, that can take us from our smooth (and slippery) practices of understanding ways of living to more realistic ones.

### Future Directions

Several critical arguments emerge from this chapter that have potential contribution for future directions in research and theory. Firstly, psychological theory has to incorporate both personal and collective reality, since separating them is confounding and artificial. Secondly, any investigation of social-psychological processes must employ multiple methods in order that the complexity of phenomena may be attended. Further, quantification of human phenomena must be considered as and when there is a meaningful application of and sufficient grounds for assigning numbers to the processes under study. Also, the creative collaboration between disciplines: anthropology, sociology, literature, and psychology will go a long way toward developing a meaningful scientific study of people. The ideas that we develop for research and scholarly discussion must remain grounded in everyday reality, rather than only those pulled out from secondary and tertiary abstractions manufactured in university departments. Ordinary conditions of everyday lives *must* become the main focus of our study so that we can make reasonable interpretations of and contributions to the scientific understanding of the human condition. In my understanding, the loyalty and commitment must be toward the phenomenon, and not toward one or another way of looking at it. When ideas become industries, we (unwittingly) become constrained to think in particular directions, with specific meaning attributions. The discursive, open, and creative approach of cultural psychology allows us that freedom for exploring ideas within the context as well as from above.

### Note

1. I would like to acknowledge my doctoral students Pooja Bhargava and Punya Pillai for their assistance.

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**Abstract**

The topic of peer relations is a hotspot in contemporary developmental psychology. However the specific foci of research in that area vary under different viewpoints over development. Here we look at peer relations from the perspective of potential development and with the purpose of guiding self-development. Thus, the researcher is not merely concerned the relationship between peer interaction and self-development, but also emphasizes its significant value in analyzing individuals' developmental status. As an individual usually externalizes his/her inner world in peer interaction, peer relations provide a principle way to study the development of self-identity through analysis of the changes in peer interaction. Our investigations in Chinese primary and middle schools also revealed that the organized peer relations (which are called *Jiti* in China) was imbued with driving force for self transcendence. The activities carried out in *Jiti* provided students with creative opportunities to develop their potential, based on which the school cultural ecology was constructed.

**Keywords:** peer relations, potential development, organization, school cultural ecology

The essay mainly comes from the author's research findings under the background of Chinese educational reform program—New Basic Education (NBE)<sup>1</sup>—which forms the study position of guiding children's active development as well as an intrinsic perspective on peer relations. The essay involves the following subjects: The methodological standpoint of research on peer relations from the position of development; the self-developing dynamic from peer-relations organization in school context; the function of subliming; growing potential within school cultural activity; how to research the developmental stage features of students' self-identity from the aspect of peer-relations performance; constructing school cultural ecology by organizing students' peer-relations and developing their potential.

**The Development Perspective**

The topic of peer relations could be discussed in multiple psychological subdisciplines, because it is a phenomenon that exists universally in human beings. Peer- relation functions in various forms and influences individuals of all ages in diverse ways. Nevertheless, in the field of psychological research, it is particularly emphasized in children's development. Therefore, the discussion of this article is based on the perspective of developmental psychological research and the author's practice of a series of field researches aimed at promoting school students' development in the program NBE.

Theorists from different fields tend to choose different focal points when discussing the same topic. It is not only affected by investigators' research interests, but also influenced by their values orientations.



It is no longer believed that science should be of neutral value. In fact, the practical value and effectiveness of a research has become an important criterion both in project approval and assessment of findings. In terms of psychological research, especially in those applied branches, the practical significance seems to be especially important. With regard to developmental psychology, I think its value lies in guiding children's development through investigating the underlying mechanism.

### ***Intrinsic and Extrinsic Relationships***

There are various angles from which to study peer relations. As for a "relationship," it could be studied in the following two ways: (1) *intrinsic relationship*, which describes relations within the individuals, and (2) *extrinsic relationship*, which focuses on the outside relations between individuals.

The studies of extrinsic relationship tend to compare an individual's state or characteristic in peer interaction and to investigate pertinent influencing factors. Measurement is widely used in extrinsic relationship studies. I should say that the accessibility of measurement tools makes comparative studies very popular in peer-relation researches. Through comparative research and correlation analysis, researchers attempt to find out the characteristics that popular children possess, or to investigate the relation between peer-relation quality and well-being. However, the majority of the findings seem just to certificate people's common knowledge. For example, the popular children are more amicable and animated. Science should go beyond the immediate accessible information (Valsiner, 2000), while how to define "beyond" still remains questionable in psychological research. It may be believed by some that to prove the existence of daily phenomena with psychological experiments could be considered as kind of transcendence of ordinary experience. In other words, whether observed phenomena or human experience are widely existing facts are not sure until they are fully demonstrated by data. But, is it really necessary or indispensable? Objectively speaking, it is a psychological research's conundrum because everybody is so involved with the topics studied in this field. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the value of psychological research lies in adding knowledge by providing interpretation of the well-known experience and exploring the yet unrevealed psychological facts.

In contrast, the perspective of intrinsic relationship focuses on the relationship between peer

interaction and individual development, which emphasizes the interaction between the two counterparts. For example, friendship participation can operate as moderator in conflict solving (Lansford et al., 2007). Also, intervention with peer relation was of developmental and contextual sensitivity (Dishion, Dodge, & Lansford, 2006). In fact, the typical intrinsic relationship perspective can be seen in some famous theories (for example, Piaget's cognitive development theory, Kohlberg's moral development research, Selman's research on self-consciousness development, and Kegan's theory in self-development). Peer relation as an important organic component of a child's relation system, plays a significant role in promoting his or her development. On the one hand, peer interaction shapes children's development. And on the other hand, peer relations can be viewed as externalization of children's psychological states, through which children's inner worlds can be observed. Thus, the intrinsic perspective seems fit for research of developmental psychology.

In the field of psychological research, it is emphasized to select representative samples to make sure that the results could be inferred to the whole population. However, it is not executable in operation. In fact, we can only conduct research in a particular context with a small group of people. Nevertheless, deductive inference is still feasible when the research is conducted in a dynamic and systematic perspective. The intrinsic perspective possesses this advantage. It puts the features of peer relation and its changes in a developing dynamic relational system, thus it can generate insights of the characteristics of the Self developing process, which are not limited to the specific peer relation observed.

As mentioned before, comparative studies are common in the extrinsic approach, which is undoubtedly useful in some cases. However, when we only simply compare complex features, it is probable that we can only obtain limited fragmentary information. This limitation is especially distinct when the research is conducted in large samples, such as cross-cultural studies, for example individualism vs. collectivism. It is because that: (1) there are so many factors functioning together in a complex phenomenon that any single feature extracted from it could not fully explain it; (2) the larger the population is, the more complicated the situation will be, which makes sampling more difficult to be well-representative. Thus, comparative studies in this case usually are oversimplified, the researchers would be

like a blind man who feels an elephant—by taking a part for the whole

Let's take the cross-cultural studies on children's emotion expression as an example. It is believed that children from collectivist culture are more inclined to conceal anger in contrast to those from individualistic culture (*see* Eisenberg et al., 2006). Chinese children are often chosen as representative of collectivist culture. The explanation of the phenomenon described above is that individuals in collectivist culture usually regard open emotion expression, especially negative emotions, as a threat to close ties, therefore they choose to suppress emotion expression, even unconsciously (Kleinman, 1980).

Comparative studies like this only discussed the cultural attribution of emotion expression, but it still left subjects' psychological meaning embodied in emotion unknown. I could say it may be cultural anthropologists' task to reveal principles and rules included in culture convention, while the field of psychological research need only be concerned with the activities in individuals' psychological sphere. And actually, the emotion expression of Chinese children is various. Even if a researcher take hundreds of children as subjects, it only occupies one-millionth of the total 300 million Chinese children. Furthermore, if we fail to analyze the data by exploring the subjective meaning in certain context, it will not make much sense for children's psychology and cultural recognition, even though we have 100 million children for comparative study.

Recently, some longitudinal studies about friendship attempted to investigate the psychological meaning of emotion expression (Corsaro, 1994, 2006; Winterhoff, 1997). Findings suggest that African American, Italian and Latin children usually forge and develop friendship by arguing or teasing with each other. By contrast, children from Caucasian American middle-class families are more anxious about conflict because they sensitively regard conflict as an adverse factor to friendship. Thus, they tend to ask for help from teachers when there is an argument or collision. The researchers suggest that children's attitude toward conflict is intensely related to adults'. If teachers are sensitive to the threatening influence of conflict, they are more likely to intervene when the children are involved in conflict.

The longitudinal studies mentioned above walked into children's daily lives and studied their behavior in certain contexts. It is only when the behavior is analyzed in specific situations that we can see

the psychological meaning behind it. Then we can understand the individual sense or his/her mind theory (Li, 2009b). According to the sensitive reaction of the children and teacher to conflict, we can infer that both of them may consider conflict behavior as rudeness and it will jeopardize friendship. The close connection of conflict and friendship may bring different understanding toward conflict-related emotions such as anger. Thus children may tolerate them. Interestingly, these findings from process-focused research seem quite incompatible from the assumption provided by the cultural attribution mentioned above.

In fact, the culture in any country is a multivariate system that evolves over time. In China, for example, the understandings of anger expression are quite different in different social classes. In the eyes of traditional high-level cultured class, it is considered to be indecorum for a man to lose his temper. But to the roughscuff, things are totally different. There's an old saying: "no discord, no concord." It means that in many cases people get to know each other through a quarrel or fight. As the society of China undergoes a tremendous change, the diverse manners of anger expression that used to be a typical feature of social classes, in current times become personal action; even within a family, the anger expression manner may be totally different.

The progress-focused approach may be more proper to investigate dynamic topics such as conflict and emotion expression. For example, Corsaro (2006, p. 105) discovered in his longitudinal study that the children were more cooperative in friendly competition with each other. Meanwhile, the researchers from Taiwan (Huang, 2008; Li & Chen, 2002) studied conflict using depth interview and longitudinal tracing skills. They indicated that conflicts could be described in different types and may develop and transform.

### ***Gained and Potential Development***

How to define development in research of peer relations from developmental standpoint? There are multiple definitions about development. At present, it is mainly believed that development is the collection of those already gained features in each stage. The underlying hypothesis of gained development is that the rules of development are settled. Hence, pertinent methodology of research requires that the samples should be selected to be well-representative of the population, and to make sure that the

outcomes are verifiable. However, the development by no means keep to predetermined rule, but is realized through interactions among multiple factors. For unconscious beings, occasionality and variety in life can only be explained as doomed, but for human beings it is the arena to act out subjective activeness.

It is expected to create Hartmann's saying "an average expectable environment" to the new born generations (Erikson, 1998, p. 212). That is why developmental researches could not only focus on already gained features, but also to explore potential capacity and make it possible. As Vygotsky emphasized, teaching should go ahead of development. It is worth noting that well-adapted development is not spontaneous outcomes but the result of guidance with advancers. Thus, psychological development could be viewed as an active constructing process based on individual's potential capacity. The potential development perspective provides a more productive way to study development that contributes to direct practical activities.

The idea of potential developing was formed through research on students in primary and middle school, in Chinese NBE program (Li, 2009a). It is observed that students of each stage (mainly characterized by grade) develop certain self-identity tendencies that could be viewed as a value orientation of self-positioning. The tendencies could be expressed in adaptable or unadaptable ways, or could just be suppressed. Problems may come out in the latter two situations. Thus, cultural activities that are in accord with students' self-tendencies and created by peer cooperation provide a chance not only to adjust problematic states, but also to urge on active development.

In my opinion, development could be realized both in vertical and horizontal ways. The former means individual enters a higher stage, which is already emphasized in developmental studies so far. And the latter means expanding or enriching one's capacity in every stage. It may be parallel to the concept of fulfilled personality that Abraham Maslow mentioned. Vertical development takes place with the growth of age and is to a great extent based on and constrained by physical maturation, while horizontal development takes place by full potential expanding and culture creating in peer relations. Children could gain those two types of development and achieve a fulfilled personality if they are guided under school culture, which also improves their quality of life.

### ***Teachers' Double Roles in Children's Potential Development***

In the point of potential development to research, the focus is developmental tendencies of different grades, which are manifested in the self-identity orientation. It is a tough question because the orientation inside is not easily observed by others or perceived and reported by themselves, as Kegan (1982) indicated in his Self-evolving theory. He said that the Self develops through a continuing process of immersing into a certain state and then transcending it. When the individual was immersed in certain state, he/she could not yet take the psychological state of himself/herself in this stage as a regulatory object, thus it is impossible to initiated active self-regulation. Conscious self-regulation usually emerges later than the unconscious self-regulating behavior (Li, 1990).

Because the individual's self-consciousness of a certain state develops later, we can get little information through direct interviews or questionnaires. However, the orientation of self-identity is embodied in the peer interaction. It is because the self in essence is the organization of relationships and the individual's experience. Especially for the developing children, peer relationship is of vital importance.

Because direct observation would produce little effect, multifarious equipment and tools are invented as an extension of human sense organs to expand observation in scientific research. Psychologists also invent pertinent tools, such as measuring scales and experimental equipment. Unlike tools like the telescope, periscope, or microscope, psychological scales usually don't measure the psychological phenomena in a straightforward way. However, sometimes we can only get a superficial understanding from designed scales as they could only provide insufficient and fragmentary information of ordinary experience. Just like a person who has myopia but wears a pair of presbyopic glasses, it would probably lead to even worse visual images. It is necessary to explore other suitable ways to enhance the insight of psychological research. In terms of psychological observation, the human beings may be most efficient resources, especially the two types below: the ones who are close to the one observed and the subject themselves.

The teachers are the uppermost important resources in children's research conducted in school because, as teachers, it is part of their responsibility to concern and observe the students as they work with them. They always evaluate the students

in a relative perspective under certain context, for example, comparing to other grades. In this way, the teachers can most possibly notice the changes that have happened in the students. It is worth noting that through our educational reformatory experiments, student's developmental stages seem more obvious, and the teachers are more sensitive about the changes happening in children.

In China, there is an appointed teacher in charge of a class called the class advisor. They usually not only have to supervise the whole class all-sidedly, but also have to teach one of the subjects. In a sense, the information provided by a class advisor is equal to a large sample with even higher ecological validity. It is obvious in my experience that talking to class advisors is more efficient than to students, especially when students are in the lower grades. The original information provided by class advisors that are close to students' daily lives will be the materials for further investigation.

The teachers also have the principle roles in guiding children's development, which could not be realized outside school. Thus, the cultural ecological approach needs to be introduced into developmental research, rather than abandoned or rejected. Kohlberg used to transplant his psychological model of moral development into school education, but failed at last. He considered it a psychologist's fallacy because the research applied in school education should come from those school education practices (Kohlberg, 1983c, 1985a). The question of how to construct an active school life for students deserves more attention in the developmental field.

### **Construction of Peer Relations and Developmental Dynamics**

As we know, the individual develops during the process of interaction with his or her environment. However, the interaction is carried out by medium activities, in which development realizes. The medium of development exists in relationship, which contains special meaning and the developing motive power.

### ***The Medium of Personality Development: Jiti and Cultural Activities***

George Herbert Mead (1934) has early discriminated the difference between object and stimulus and suggested that the stimulus could be considered as objective while objects were subjectively constructed. Individuals construct their personal meanings of the stimuli presented during activities that

are social in essence. Lev Vygotsky proposed two kinds of mediums: psychological tools and social others. The intermediate others endue meanings to related symbols during activities, thereby to make them function as psychological tools (Kozulin, 1997). Leontiev also emphasized that "activities should be associated with the concept of motivation," and an activity "contains underlying motivation in both subjective and objective ways" (Leontiev 1980, p. 68).

Vygotsky explored the micro-mechanism of cognition development in his research. He suggested that cognitive function developed through the organizing process of symbolic tools, while the social others were significant in forming those tools. Leontiev's theory of activity also has its own contribution to personality development. He emphasized that individual internal need also functions as a potential motivation force.

School provides abundant mediums to guide development. Not only individual teachers or classmates, but also the organized student peer relations called "Jiti" serves as an important medium. The symbolic tools that are beneficial for enriching personality development could not only be obtained from classroom learning experience, but also from the cultural activities. In other words, the cultural activities created by Jiti are the main medium for personality development.

Collectivity can be translated into Chinese as two words, "Qunti" and "Jiti." *Qunti* means crowd, *Jiti* are groups with organization. In Chinese school, we say that the class "forms Jiti" meaning, it is a growing force that unites the classmates and draws them closer to one another. If we say that a class "fails to form Jiti"—that means that the organization of this class is slack and inactive.

### ***Developing Motivation in Jiti***

Environmental factors can stimulate or impede development, depending on whether they can arouse an individual's inner motivation or not. Jiti and related cultural activities can function as mediums to help children to achieve self-transcendence just because they are satisfied with the individual's need.

### **BASIC ASSUMPTION AND THE ORGANIZED TEAM ACTIVITIES**

For one thing, Jiti activities provide places for peer interaction. It is human being's instinctive demand to live in a group, especially during adolescence. However, the influence of peer communication

might be positive, or not. The *basic assumption* was suggested by Bion (1961); he said “the individual must assume in order to be a part of a group.” It is particularly obvious in the school context.

The organized activities are not only aimed at providing a place for peer interaction, but also at helping young adolescents to put their energy into creative exercise. It really was an challenging work. The children in experimental classes participated with great interest in the activities of team constructing. They negotiated with other team members to give their team a lovely and meaningful name; for example, the Bees, which represent hardworking, the Ants, which means team spirit, Ultraman, which indicates great power, and Ikkyusan (a Japanese cartoon character), which means bright and intelligent. Even the naming process gave the team members a chance to learn how to negotiate to achieve a consensus.

A class meeting was followed to pronounce the establishment of the teams. Each team prepared elaborately to attract other’s attention. Some drew a painting to illuminate the team’s name or composed a children’s song to declare the slogan. They did the preparation work after school so they could ask their parents for help. In the class meeting, all the children presented themselves, team by team. All the team members wore a badge with the team name on it. They were so proud of it that when a little boy lost his badge, he burst into tears.

It was observed that in some nonexperimental classes, some energetic boys usually crowded spontaneously and ran after each other after class. They kept on running in the corridor and fought as a group with another group. This example showed that children need appropriate ways to release extra energies. That is also a specific demonstration of the basic assumption proposed by Bion (1961).

#### **A DEVELOPMENTAL CIRCLE: COMPETITION—COOPERATION—SELF-TRANSCENDENCE**

The findings of cross-cultural studies showed that Chinese children tend to cooperate more but compete less. However, cooperation and competition are in fact two inseparable concepts in the organization of peer relations. We designed activities that require competition between classes to form each Jiti, which spontaneously promotes cooperation within the class. Only when the whole group runs for a common purpose, all the members are driven to work together.

However, cooperation and competition are not of the same level in the psychological development state, as competition functions more instinctively while cooperation doesn’t. Although people need to be socially connected, they are not born to collaborate with each other. In contrast, the human being has an innate motivating force striving for perfection (Adler, 1932), or self-enhancement. Cooperation requires individual to be capable enough to assume a shared goal and to realize it.

Competitive situations are set to activate students’ cooperation within groups as well as competition between groups. But the competitive task could easily end with contests among outstanding students of each group, then the others couldn’t participate. Therefore, it is of prime importance to emphasize that all members’ active participation is the foremost evaluation criterion. And, it is also the reason why cooperation needs direction and training.

Our ultimate aim is to achieve individual development through collective cooperation, which in fact serves as an essential and effective pathway. Groups can generate a strong driving force to its members. But sometimes it results in problem behaviors. For example, the phenomenon of conformity revealed in Solomon Asch’s experiment might be a principle reason in gang fighting or anti-Semitism in World War II. Therefore, it requires proper design to make sure the group driving force functions positively, which is also one of the primary rules for Jiti organization. Once the groups are motivated to win by cooperation within the groups, each member will try hard not to be a drag on his/her group. Jiti can provide individuals, especially those less independent or capable, with courage to challenge themselves with tasks beyond their own present ability, as the risk of failure is shared by all members and the tasks carry some playful color with peer context. In this way, the sense of honor of Jiti becomes a strong motivation for self-transcendence.

#### ***Peer Relation within the Mechanism of Ideal Self-Regulation***

In my doctoral dissertation research, I found significant discriminating features between adaptable and unadaptable students, which existed in their peer relation. The well-developed individuals could form and modulate their own goals during interaction with peer(s), while the problem students tended to avoid or reject peer communication (Li, 1991). Following are two examples.

Chen used to be a shy and timid boy. He always talked in a quiet voice and never spoke aloud in public. But when he entered fourth grade, he changed a lot. By then, he was so active to express himself to the whole class with a clear and sonorous voice. Following is the interview with him about his change.

Li (L): Why are you not timid anymore?

Chen (C): It doesn't feel good to be timid. But it feels great to be valiant.

L: Is there any advantage to be[ing] valiant?

C: Yes. Now I have more friends.

L: Do you think your classmates prefer valiant ones?

C: Yes, I think so. Some of my classmates are quite lively and active. My dad asked me to learn from them.

L: How did you learn then?

C: In the winter vacation, I try to seek chances to talk to strangers in the park.

L: Didn't you feel embarrassed?

C: Yes, I was very embarrassed at the beginning. But I encouraged myself that 'it's not a big deal, just practice.'

L: I can notice that you're quite courageous now in class. You dare to speak and often try to be the first one to speak.

C: I said to myself, 'the sooner I finished the presentation the better, because the pressure is released after that.'

Another student Xu WC, who was also in fourth grade, was excellent in self-reflection and self-regulation. He was good at self-analysis by comparing himself to other students.

Xu (X): I am not satisfied with my performance this term. I only got 91 or 92 in Chinese examinations and in math the scores are seldom above 95.

L: What's the reason do you think?

X: I did quite well in basic knowledge and composition. But I lost many scores in reading.

L: Why does it happen?

X: I think the main reason is I hadn't made clear the questions before I answered.

L: Do you have any plan to improve it?

X: I have to read more.

L: Do you have any reading material after school?

X: I prepared some by myself. I usually visit the bookstores every several months and buy myself some books.

L: Are these ideas from your parents?

X: No, they are my own ideas.

L: Why?

X: Because my academic performance was not satisfying last term. And I was not so active in class.

L: Why do you think so?

X: Comparing to some of my good friends in class.

Individuals usually become aware of their own disadvantages by interpersonal comparison. However the awareness of self-deficit doesn't necessarily lead to developmental self-regulation. It is difficult to protect the self-esteem for both sides compared (Baumeister et al., 1996). But the situation is not the same when the comparison takes place between close friends. The affection involved in friendship would eliminate the threat to self-esteem caused by comparison. This psychological mechanism provides the basis for the function of self-development: (1) The children who have established friendship with peers tend to make objective self-assessments through peer comparison; (2) the children then build up the goal for self-improvement; (3) the sense of belonging and acceptance by others drives the individuals to produce positive self-regulation.

#### RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF PEER RELATION: APPROACH OF IMPROVING SELF-IDENTITY

During my doctoral program, a student who used to be unadaptable made marked improvement, which attracted my attention. In the interviewing analysis, I found there were two main reasons for his progress. First, he joined in a team and was accepted by others in the team. The members of the team were enthusiastic and willing to help him when he was in trouble. Second, some of the members were quite outstanding in class. He was happy to have the opportunity to be teammates with them. The student who used to be a scrappy defendant tried his best to control and regulate himself in order to make the team work harmoniously.

I realized that it may be a feasible approach to intervene by helping unadaptable students with establishing good peer relations. In my doctoral program, I chose four cases to follow, three of which were quite successful (Li, 2001). Here are the records about two of them; one is successful and the other unsuccessful.

Zhang and Xu were both fourth-grade students, both moderately intelligent. Zhang lived in a middle-class family. His parents took very good care of him. And Xu's parents were less educated. His mother took charge of a little café and his father spent much time playing cards outside. Neither of them returned home until midnight, so Xu always had to stay home alone after school.

Zhang was a vivacious boy, and had been diagnosed as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He had accepted treatment in a hospital for over half a year but it didn't help much. Zhang was in a boarding school; he couldn't accomplish his homework every day and could not get along with others well. He even kept a diary, which recorded every conflict with his classmates as a plan to get revenge one day. His deskmate Duan, who was a girl, and the boy behind them, Wang, who was also a roommate (classmate) of Zhang, were both excellent students. They were chosen to establish peer relations with Zhang.

After 2 weeks, I found Zhang didn't improve much because Duan and Wang hadn't changed their relation with Zhang. Then I required them to do something to show they were friendly to Zhang.

After that, Duan and Wang came to Zhang and showed their willingness to make friends with him. Moreover, all the roommates were involved in discussing useful strategies to help Zhang. Wang also played the record of the roommates' meeting they shared ideas to help Zhang to Zhang. Zhang was quite moved. Below is our conversation after that.

**Zhang (Z):** Duan and Wang told me that they wanted to make friends with me and would not treat me as before anymore. If I did something wrong, they just reminded me to correct it instead of reporting to the teachers. Previously, they always told the teachers, but now they don't do it anymore.

**L:** What do you think about the roommates' meeting?

**Z:** I will not fail them.

(Several weeks later)

**L:** Do you find that you're more popular now?

**Z:** (thinks for awhile) Yes. At the very beginning, only Duan and Wang showed kindness to me. But now more and more classmates would like to be friends with me (and he gave many examples).

**L:** And they are happy for your good performance. Do you feel that?

**Z:** Yes, when I got 83 in math, or when I finished my homework before 5 o'clock, they even applauded to me.

**Wang (W):** One of our classmates said, 'We were so happy to see Zhang finished his homework, even happier than when I finished mine.'

**Z:** I feel so good about myself, ever since Grade 2. But there were less and less classmates who were willing to play with me, because I quarreled with them quite often and never apologized. Therefore, my friends were quite few.

**L:** How do you feel about that?

**Z:** It was fine when nothing went wrong. But when I was in trouble, for example, when my pencils were used up, they wouldn't lend me any. They might say, 'I treat you the way just as you did to me before.' As a result, I grew to dislike them.

**L:** But now you expect them to like you, right?

**Z:** Yes.

**L:** What have you done to make yourself more popular?

**Z:** Just in some respects. For example, I used to be reluctant to accept their advice, so I always would like to say, 'Why don't you make better of yourself first?'

**L:** But now you know that it isn't a good reaction, right?

**Z:** Yes, actually it is quite offensive.

By then, Zhang had behaved much better than before. Duan and Wang were excited about that, and discussed what to do next.

**Duan (D):** I find that Zhang gets along with us quite well now. He would like to talk to us or even help us when we are short of stationery or something else. Sometimes he answers back when I remind him something. But a few minutes later he may come back and tell me a joke to amuse me as apology. He is quite different now. And our classmates are nice to him. I think what we are going to do next is help him to pass the tests. He failed two mid-term examinations. If he still can't pass in the finals, the situation will be tougher.

**L:** Do you have any plan?

**D:** First of all, I can help him to make his homework better. Now he behaves quite well in class, listening very carefully.

**L:** Does he have any trouble in homework?

**D:** He will ask me for help if he has problems.

**L:** Do make sure that he really understands and improves the quality of his homework. Do you think the improvement of his relationship with classmates also has benefited in his academic performance?

**D:** I think so. People would not be so willing to help him if he is in bad with others. But now if Zhang had any problems, we are happy to help him.

**L:** How does Zhang feel about it?

**Z:** I think he knows it is good for all of them. Our teacher also praised him because he can finish his homework on time recently, and carefully.

Zhang also told me that Duan and Wang tried their best to find out ways to improve Zhang's relationship with others. For example, when someone is looking for a ruler, they may give their own ruler

to Zhang and ask Zhang to lend it to the student actively. Along with the improving of peer relation, Zhang gradually stepped into self-monitoring and self-regulating of his studies.

But things didn't go smoothly as we imagined. Sometime later, Zhang resumed his former manner. It was known that Zhang was participating in a drama play representing the school at that time, so he didn't have enough time for his homework. In that case, Duan's reminding might sound like a threat to his self-esteem. Also Duan was upset and complained a lot to me. After mediation, Duan decided to forgive Zhang. Meanwhile Zhang also realized that if he didn't accomplish his homework as required he might fail the exams. Then they became reconciled.

It is quite normal to have twists and turns during the development process. Individuals tend to detach from the Self-Object relations (the term of Kohut's self psychology, the Self is formed from the Self-Object relations), which may be a prelude before being independent as they gain inside growth and seem to undergo a retrogression. Therefore, it is also a great challenge for the helpers. They should not only provide assistance appropriately, but also handle the target's retrogression, or even attack behaviors. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to get involved to intercede.

Since then, Zhang stepped into a steady progressive period. At the end of that semester, Zhang actively invited Wang to have a conversation with me together. Following is a selection.

Z: I set a schedule for myself.

L: For preparing the final exams?

Z: (nods his head) Yes, I've made the plan. I found that there were 15 days left. So I planned to revise the new learned characters, one lesson a day. Until now I've finished ten lessons. And there are five left.

L: Is it an assignment required by your teacher?

Z: No, I do it by myself, in a notebook.

W: (to me) Zhang is very self-disciplined now. Just the other night, Zhang's handwriting practice wasn't going smoothly. I set an example for him, he was glad, and promised to do better next time.

L: How did it happen?

Z: I desire to get better.

L: Why?

Z: I find that my brain doesn't work when I reject accepting their advice. But when I really think over their suggestion, things go through.

The improvement in his relationships with others enables Zhang to consider his classmates' suggestions

in a less aggressive way that contributes to his growth, as it eliminates the threat to his self-esteem. In his final exams, Zhang made remarkable progress. His class advisor told me that Zhang's parents also noticed Zhang's change at home. He could finish his homework during summer vacation all by himself. In the following semester, although Zhang's<sup>2</sup> academic performance was still not good enough, he could manage himself in class and in homework.

Another case, Xu, was not successful. Xu was 12 years old and he behaved more childish than his age. He also couldn't accomplish his homework every day and could not get along with others well. The interventional tracks of Zhang and Xu were almost opposite. Zhang moved slowly at the very beginning but progressed quickly later on, while Xu changed immediately when intervention was involved. But the happy days did not last long. Antagonism appeared between Xu and his teammates. The intervention program was termination. Xu then acted in his original manner again.

Because there were no students of great capabilities like Duan and Wang in Xu's class, I tried to involve the natural team to which Xu belonged as a base for intervention. Xu immediately raised an objection because there was no captain in his team. But some students on the team to which the captain belonged were incompatible with Xu. On balance, Xu accepted his natural team.

At the very beginning, Xu was excited that the teammates invited him to be their friends. And he didn't feel lonely anymore, because his teammates called him in turns after school to remind him to finish his homework or answer his questions. During the first several weeks, I often heard that there had been a noticeable improvement in Xu's behavior and academic performance.

However, as Xu improved, especially when he did better than his teammates in some aspects, the relationships within the team changed. Xu began to show his discontent with his teammates again, and complained to me that there was no captain on his team. Moreover, he began to criticize his teammates for their reading or examinations. As Xu kept on censuring and attacking others in the team, the just-established relationship between them ruptured. Thereby, the intervention came to an end.

Throughout this process, we can observe the need for object relation in Xu (Kohut, 1985). He cared so much about the status of his teammates in class, because it was related to his self-esteem satisfaction. It reflected his attempt to look for Ideal Self-Object



(one of the Self-Object relations found by Kohut which offers value attached) in his peer relations. When he made an improvement, he began to depreciate others to magnify himself, in which the others functioned as a Mirroring Self-Object (another kind of Self-Object relation which pays close attention to and appreciate the Self). However his team failed to provide him appropriate sources to satisfy Xu's wants. It can be seen that the Jiti atmosphere is quite important for peer intervention. In Zhang's case, his change was largely contributed to the social support provided by the peers of whole class.

### **School Cultural Activities and the Sublimation of Developmental Potential**

The incompleteness in evolution drives human beings to pursue self-actualization as a distinctive force. However it could only be achieved in jointly creative activities. The school culture constructed by students with peer-cooperation provides a platform for students' potential development. The creative cultural activities not only conform to the growth needs of children and adolescents, but also create chances to realize their self-transcendence.

### ***Developmental Problems as Expression of Potential***

Many problems can be viewed as normal phenomena in growth, because it is ordinary that individuals may experience maladjustment during transition. As a Chinese adage says that children usually gain prominent growth after sickness, the crisis as Erik Erikson (1968) described could turn out to be an opportunity for further development, although frustration or rapid change often brings uncomfortable stress. Problematic behavior may emerge if it isn't appropriately expressed. Aggressive behavior doesn't necessarily result from aggressive motivation. It is possibly driven by other needs. One of our researches (2001) demonstrated that sometimes an individual may attempt to fulfill his/her self-esteem by attacking others. In my interview, a well-known assaulter in school told me, "I have no chance to be the best, so I choose to be the worst. Anyway, I am still one of the most powerful students in school."

In junior middle school, young boys usually manifest their masculinity by fighting with each other. A student of that age said they probably fight with close friends as a solution of conflict and the fight might be stirred by a skirmish. But they usually didn't deal with strangers in this manner.

Because close friends wouldn't consider it too seriously as they know each other well. When he was asked why he'd like to choose this way, he said, "it's okay for boys." It means that fighting equals masculinity for boys (Guan, 2008). The teachers also found that they might fight heavier when they were surrounded and watched, especially when there were some girls around.

Another researcher Honggang Sun (2005) compared the fight and quarrel behavior in third- to ninth-grade students in Dezhou (it is a more traditional small town in Shangdong province) and Shanghai. He found the fights and quarrels that happened between the sexes were related to puberty, because it increased in the fourth grade when most girls' puberty begins. Sun also found that as the fighting and quarreling between sexes increased, it decreased within sexes. But the situation in middle-school students was a little different between the two cultures. In Dezhou, quarreling and fighting within the sexes raised while it decreased between the sexes in middle-school students. But in Shanghai, the contrary was the case. We can see from the findings that fighting and quarreling could possibly be viewed as an approach adolescents taken to release their energetic drive.

The drive boosts with hormone increasing during puberty, which easily transforms to skirmish or similar behavior. Ma (2009) found that in the third-grade students in China, girls and boys tended to interact with each other in a "hit and hit back" manner. While in fifth grade, they would like to run after each other or quarrel. Gossip emerged in sixth grade and prevailed in junior middle school, and would not confine within the class.

In fact, it is ubiquitous that drive is expressed in transformed ways, especially in rapidly growing adolescents. Drive should be released, but it is not good enough. The drive also is potential, it should be expressed in a sublimation way as Freud described. Creative school culture activities can serve as an effective approach to guide to sublimation. At present in most schools counseling and other interventional ways are a principle approach adopted in the school's psychological health program. Such a working model tends to prevent unhealthy activities but does not necessarily promote health. We can borrow ideas from Higgins' (1987) theory of self-discrepancy, the former approach works to prevent "ought-not-to-be," but not moves to the "ideal" state. The activities aiming to guide sublimation not only provide the opportunity to express children's

growth needs, but also direct them to approach the ideal self.

### ***Positive Intervention Realized in Creative Culture Activities***

When the activities are designed in accord with children's developmental potential, they can initiate the creativity of children. As school cultural activities are carried out in the form of play, which are full of challenge but without any risk of failure. Thus those culture activities aiming at developing children's potential can produce positive psychological intervention, which also works on some special children. The following cases will demonstrate this.

Case 1: There was going to be a dance contest held in a fifth-grade class. They competed by team. All the students gathered together by team after class to discuss what to dance and practiced it again and again. The dance contest was wonderful, everybody improved, including several problem children. One boy whose parents were addicted to drugs and gambling had been impaired in social interaction. He changed to be positive and genial. Another boy who suffered inborn movement disorder even had problems in walking. His father worried that he was not competent to participate in the dance and tried to ask him to quit. But the teacher and all the team members encouraged him not to give up. He enjoyed so much in the performance and became self-confident.

Case 2: A sixth-grade girl was well-known in her school because she once escaped home at night and committed suicide. It seemed no one can touch her heart. She was good at drawing, so she joined the publicity team and took charge of writing articles to report news in class. Once, she wrote a piece of news on the blackboard to praise a student in class whose ability was poor but studied hard. The student hence received warm concern from classmates and really gained improvement from then on. The class advisor asked the girl to write a poem about the whole story, and her team performed the poem at class meeting. It was too difficult to name which factor contributed to her improvement. Whatever the reason, it was a great encouragement to the girl. She has been much more positive since then and also improved a lot in her academic performance.

Case 3: A less intelligent eighth-grade girl used to have trouble with social avoidance. After joining the activity held in her class, she became much more outgoing and confident. All the students were organized in groups to interview the graduate-school

fellows to find out their working experience and use it as materials to create a story, poem, or short play to share with other classmates in the class meeting. Later on, there was a basketball-shooting contest in school. The boys were much more enthusiastic but a few girls were interested. Surprisingly, the girl mentioned above stood out and won two shots for the class. The once self-abased girl told her class advisor, "I am not good enough in academic record, but I'm happy for my good performance in other respects."

It could be noticed that different activities were organized in different grades, because only when the activity can satisfy students' developmental potential, can it inspire children's initiation and creation to the utmost extent. Moreover, it also benefits students' self-efficacy. We can see from many cases that, the positive effect gained in Jiti activities can transfer to other aspects of children's lives. They will not only be more enthusiastic in Jiti life, but also acquire academic improvement.

### **Developmental Studies in School Context**

The construction of school cultural ecology is based on the understanding of student's developmental features at each stage. The researches in this perspective need to focus on development of the whole personality rather than specific areas. Also, it should be emphasized that the researches need to be conducted in the school context. So, we focus on children's self-identity development in school. As we mentioned before, we selected peer relation as a main focal point.

### ***The Cultural Ecological Approach of Developmental Research***

There are two approaches to explore the characteristics of each developmental stage. The first one is interview based on observation in the school context. As we discussed above, the teachers are the main target for interview, because they can provide us rich information about the children's changes through their daily observations. We also can get information from the research conducted by researchers in the university on the topic of self-development, such as relational representation, the development of self-disclosure, self-presentation, emotion regulation and gender identity, etc. The information collected from the two approaches are different, as the teachers in primary or middle school can tell us more information about the students' behavioral changes that happened in school while the latter can reveal more information about their inner world.

It is worth mentioning that the observations under the school context can not only provide information about students' daily lives, but also can serve as an examination of the intervention implemented. As it was stressed above, only when the cultural activities adapt to students' self-development trends, is it possible to involve them to participate with great enthusiasm, and generate positive outcomes. Conversely, the after-effect of activities works as an important evaluating indicator to judge whether the designs are reasonable or not. It could be called *cultural ecological validity* (Li, 2008).

From the two ways described above, we can get omnifarious information about students' development in school. It leaves another question to the researchers that they need to discriminate the proper information that could be used to describe stage characteristics. Although quantitative analysis is much more common used in psychological research, in my sense, it is not suitable here.

For one thing, the stage characteristic of students is embedded in the school context in which they live. It is determined by school culture to a certain extent. Secondly, as in our research, the phenomena that contain useful information usually are obtained by observation or teacher's report, which are difficult to be transformed to quantified variables directly. It is because the phenomena observed by teachers usually still remain unconscious to the students themselves. Still, sometimes some typical phenomena only appear in a few students in a certain stage. Although they are not prevalently presented among all students, they provide a breakthrough point to the researcher to analyze the change that happened in different grades. If so, extensive measurement would probably obliterate valuable information. Considering the reasons described above, I think a qualitative method is more applicable to analyze the data obtained by the methods discussed above and to thus conclude stage characteristics.

However, the findings generalized from everyday phenomena are not bound to get essential understanding beyond daily knowledge. Only if we make clear the evolving mechanism underlying the characteristics of different stages, the stage characteristics generalized could afford the process of reasoning. So we need further analysis based on inferential explanation. In fact, it is not only a further step of study but also a step of verification. Inferential explanation is also an approach of verification, it is common in some other disciplines, such as history or uranography. Because in these areas it is not easy to

get sufficient empirical evidence, the reasonableness of inference of theory thus functions as an important approach for verification. In our research, it is only when the underlying mechanism that explains the logic of change happening in different stages is clear, the stage characteristics demonstrated could be viewed as universal law, which then could be extended to different school cultural contexts. The more important thing is it makes the construction of school cultural ecology possible.

### ***The Generalization of Stage Characteristics***

At the beginning of our research, we found that similar phenomena emerged in the same grade, although maybe in different classes or different schools. We also found that the developmental characteristics were related to school experience. For example in China, in some places 5-year primary school is standard while in other places there is 6-year primary school, thus the junior middle school starts sixth grade in some places but at seventh grade in the others. The students entering sixth or seventh grade as the initial period of middle school behave similarly. They tend to be more positive so as to leave a good impression on others at the beginning (Peng, 2004; Xu, 2004). The similarity of school experience for students in the same grade may be a significant factor to shape the developmental characteristics in the certain stage, especially when guidance is intervened (Magnusson, 1999). This exactly manifests that development is historical.

After 4 years of research accompanied with educational reform in schools, the stage characteristics from first to ninth grade became clarified. On the whole, each grade could be distinguished from others by its special features, especially in the transition period: third or fourth grade in primary school and seventh or eighth grade in junior middle school. In the transition period, the individual develops with identity change as well as peer relation evolvement (Jiang, 2006; Chen, 2008; Hu, 2009; Li, 2010). Following is the generalization of the characteristics in the two transition periods.

The following phenomena are common in second-grade students. They are eager to be praised by teachers, so they try hard to project themselves to attract teachers' attention. And, they may be unhappy when they see others getting praise but they don't. It is different from students of first grade for they will be happy no matter who in the class is praised by teachers. There's an unusual phenomenon

that the straight-“A” students may falsify their papers in order to get the highest score. Also, in this stage, parents are more impactful than peers to impel the children to study harder (Li & Shen, 2007). The common characteristic in this stage is that children are obedient to teachers and parents, as they follow the teachers’ rules and behave conformably to get positive evaluations.

While in third grade, students would like to show their cleverness. But unfortunately they usually make silly mistakes because they are unable to attend to everything at one time. They may conflict with each other because both of them would like to take an active part in the activities without noticing that they may interfere with each other. They seem to be undisciplined and disobedient to the class leader. In third grade, students tend to play with peers of the same gender. The interesting thing is the children may depart from their normal behavior to capture others’ attention. For example, the good students may break the discipline in class and the backward students may take any chance to assert themselves (Wang, 2007). What’s more, when asking them to imagine what will happen if they fail in the exams, their own imagined feeling and reaction in that situation seems the most driving force to make themselves work harder (Li & Shen, 2007). We can see from these phenomena that the individual in third grade has developed intense self-consciousness, they desire to present themselves but without corresponding planning and regulating ability.

Students in fourth grade become quiet and sophisticated. They begin to develop a circle of friends, and keep touch with each other after school by phone or others ways. Those used-to-be-helpful students seem insensitive to other’s difficulties anymore. Those who are not smart or beautiful may be desolated by others. The girls begin to pay attention to their appearance and the interaction with the opposite sex becomes sensitive (Ma, 2009; Liu, 2009). In addition, more private topics emerge in self-disclosure talks (Zou, 2007). Also, they become more independent of teachers and parents. These phenomena reflect that the personality of students in this stage has gained structural development. The selective peer relation becomes dominant in their evaluating system instead of teachers or parents.

Students in seventh grade form their own peer groups quickly after they become familiar with each other. Individuals of this age are interested in popular culture. They star-chase celebrities and follow the

fashion, and share the popular information within their groups. The students in seventh grade are also most vigorous and active; they like to participate in all kinds of activities such as sports games with great enthusiasm. They also enjoy wandering around the campus and easily conflict with others. The students in seventh grade are the ones who are zealous in peer interaction and school activities. Moreover, they begin to build up their own culture through peer interaction.

Compared to students in seventh grade, those in eighth grade tend to be more sedated. They are more rational in celebrity chasing but act more passively and sophisticated in daily school life (Li, 2001; Qian, 2007). They would like to help friends to conceal their mistakes. Also, they try not to embarrass others by judging or assessing their disadvantages. However, they are can be honest with close friends and the mildness of their expression is inversely proportional to the closeness of their relationship, which is opposite in lower-grade students (Jiang, 2006; Chen, 2008). Compared to other grades, they are least willing to confide their troubles or worries to others (Zou, 2007). Furthermore, they express their emotion in accordance with the cultural custom. For example, they don’t express intense emotions in public. It is also found that the individuals of this age express the emotion with the intensity parallel to the way they experience it when confronted with minor emotional affairs. However, when they are facing big issues, the degree of expression is much lower than feeling (Li & Li, 2007). It seems in eighth grade, another structural transformation of personality happens. The social custom plays an important role in regulating the individual’s behavior.

### ***Analysis of the Evolutive Mechanism of Self-Identity***

As we discussed above, we need to analyze the internal relation of the observed phenomena from the perspective of self-development tendency and explain the change trajectory in a historical view. In fact, the generalization of stage characteristics and the analysis of the developmental mechanism are two processes closely interacted, which could be called *double cyclical research* as Tania Zittoun suggested (Zittoun, 2006, p. 88). We can’t understand the development tendency or the possible problems until we can provide a full explanation of the evolutive mechanism between various grades.

The developmental trajectory of students from first to ninth grade could be described in terms of self-identity development in line with the evaluation system, which determines the developing individual's value orientation and thus influences their feelings and behaviors. In general, individuals transcend their previous state and immerse into a new one as they move to the next stage. In each transition, individuals integrate the evaluating rules of certain significant others and move to new relationships. In each step, tendencies of both development and problems are engendered. The trajectory of development from first to ninth grade is briefly described below.

The children who enter the primary school in the first year are still unfamiliar with the school conduct norms. As most of them find it difficult to take goal-oriented activities, they can only focus on the present task. After 1 year of school life, individuals are able to transcend the previous state and become sensitive to the evaluation from others, especially the teachers. Thus, they strive to get praise and avoid criticism by others, which functions as a driving force to self-regulation.

The school life shapes individuals original sense of themselves as historical beings. They begin to step over the state of pursuing exterior evaluation and begin forming his/her own sense of evaluation. They begin to concern their own abilities, and being brilliant becomes the dominant desire. The original sense of historical perspective is still strongly self-centered with narrow consciousness. Thus, the students in third grade usually have difficulty completing things comprehensively, although they are quite active to make themselves prominent. It is worth noting that the self-presentation behavior impels peer interaction, which encourages individuals to turn to positive negotiation of self-identity construction.

Individuals can reach a holistic understanding of themselves and others through frequent interactions. The peer interaction spurts in fourth grade, through which individuals realize self-positioning. But in this stage, individuals selectively build up relationships with peers, who actually function as an externalization of his/her self-concept. In addition, as the girls at this age begin puberty growth, peer interaction also provides a place for them to share private topics. On one hand, the selectivity of peer interaction at this stage is beneficial for children to pick and develop ideal characteristics. On the other hand, it may cause alienation and rejection

between peers, especially in a class exhibiting weak cohesion.

The interaction experience in fourth grade provides an opportunity for students to integrate various types of relations. Students in fifth grade gradually tune in to other people's needs and their internal experiences. They also internalize the school norms and teachers' requirements as school experience increases and the thinking develops. Thus, "generalized other" (Mead, 1934) is formed to regulate individuals' behavior initially and reasonably (Li, 1993a, 1993b, 2010).

The children are eager to project themselves once again in order to take a favorable advantage in the new environment when they attend junior middle school. Based on the experience in primary school, they soon get over the evaluation rules provided by school and enter the stage of individualization. So they also enter selective communicative activities. But now they don't select friends for self-positioning, only with the purpose of making friends. Also, children in puberty tend to identify ideal gender roles and develop romantic relationships. The peer relations mainly based on common interest construct the specific cultural circle for the adolescent, thus subcultural evaluating rules come into being, whose influence on adolescents may go beyond that of school norms.

The personality structure of students in eighth grade tends to be multidimension. Most obviously, they become identified with the mundane culture, which is embodied in their interactional style and social values. They would like to behave sophisticatedly at that time. Such a phenomenon indicates a transitional period in personality development.

We can observe the spiral developmental trajectory of self-identity from primary school to junior middle school. Each step is achieved by forming evaluating rules in certain relationships, which guide the individual to construct self-identity. Students in lower grades tend to adopt teachers' assessments as rules. Peer interactions get strengthened in the intermediate grades but the influence of teachers is still dominating. When students enter in junior middle school, peer relations prevails and the culture constructed through peer interaction is of great influence. The spiral trajectory reveals that when the child has mastered the rules in his/her present stage, he/she would turn to the process of individualization to transcend the present state of relationship. Once the individual achieves a relatively stable state, he/she has the ability to become involved in

new relations and construct new evaluation rules. We can see a similar description of track in the theory of Loevinger (1976) in the development of rules guiding self-regulation, and also in the theory of Kegan (1982) on immersing and transcending within relations.

### **Peer Relations and School Cultural Ecology**

The main target of schooling is to guide development. Because the constructing process is implemented by people, it is possible to bring unsuitable coerciveness, which will cause a negative effect on developing children's capacities. The activities that are in accord with children's potential development would guide children to be involved in the self-transcendence, and produce positive outcomes as well as the process itself. Thus, the organization of a supportive peer relations network, which is based on the potential of students in each grade, becomes fundamentally important to the construction of school culture.

### ***Borrow Ideas from Cultural and Ecological System Study***

How to construct the school culture? We can borrow some ideas from the law of cultural development and the ecological system. As Valsiner suggested, "in the sense of semiotic mediation of the relation of the person with the external world, culture operates on the basis of functional opposition" (Valsiner, 2000, p. 53). It is a very interesting topic, as the phenomenon of culture operates on the basis of functional oppositions mainly exists in the forming process of culture. The culture usually originates from human being's predicament, which is similar with the individual's development as the individual tends to realize self-transcendence by overcoming all kinds of problems when he/she is growing up. Furthermore, during the process of culture development, the emergence and prevalence of a new culture is for the purpose of meliorating the deficiency of the previous culture. When the new culture matures, it will encounter unprecedented problems again. Through the process of continuously discovering and resolving new problems, the culture thus evolves.

The ecology develops in a systematic way. Each part of the system plays a certain role as the system works as a whole. The wholeness of the system derives from its multiple hierarchical nested structures, which make the system operate in a dynamic

way. The structures open to each other and make the interaction between different levels possible. The system gains vitality through energy exchanges within and between systems, in which each part participates in production as well as consumption. The interaction within and between systems would bring changes to the structural hierarchy and also the boundary between systems, thus modifying the relationship between the system and its surroundings.

### ***The School Cultural Ecology System***

The energy of cultural ecology is spiritual in essence. The developmental potential serves as the fundamental energy resource for school culture construction. In the school cultural ecology system, each participant produces as well as consumes the spiritual source. When the students of various grades are involved in expanding their potential, it would probably create a richer school experience.

The process of production and consumption of energy of school culture is realized in peer interaction. The resource of development comes from various ways, including individuals' inner potential, the societal history and culture, and also the relationships between individuals of different grades or capacities. The peer-relation organizing was the foundation for school cultural ecology construction. The ecosystem of school culture is constructed by inter-related organizations, which are based on the characteristics of each grade.

The peer relations organized in different structures can be viewed as Jiti of different levels, as the subsystems of the whole school culture ecosystem. Jiti organizes the activities for the students, which consist of two major parts: (1) the students' self-management of their daily school lives, and (2) creative cultural activities. The former is similar to social customs for adults and the latter is equivalent to festivities or celebrations. These activities are designed according to the orientations of self-identity and potential, and are aiming to prevent probable problems. The activities guide and encourage self-transcendence.

### **Cultural Activities According to Developmental Tendency**

The organized activities construct the hierarchical structure of school cultural ecology, and constitute the students' developmental lives. It is because the activities are provided with a dual function: to construct Jiti and to guide self-transcendence. That

means, Jiti is formed through activities and meanwhile the cultural activities organized by Jiti, during which students' self-development is realized.

Because students are in different grades, they have different abilities in understanding and assimilating the culture resources and also they differ in emotional experience and expression. For example, students in lower grades are more imaginative, so they're especially interested in activities related to fairy tales or myths. The children in puberty become more sensitive and they are easily emotionally aroused. Students of higher grades in primary school are well-developed in thinking, thus the intellectual challenge might be more attractive to them. The cultural activities in accordance with children's developmental potential are easier to gain resonance among them, thus resulting in a better cultural ecological vitality.

The activity design also needs to consider the stage characteristics of self-identity because it reflects individuals' developmental orientation. When the evaluation system has not internalized yet, then children operate only with external evaluation rules, therefore it is important to strengthen the intrinsic value of the rules. The activities assume the responsibility to internalize the rules, which are embedded in the designs. Sometimes, an individual overemphasizes the external evaluation rules just because he/she is provided with too simple and arbitrary rules. So it needs to adopt a multivariant evaluation system into the activities, which is beneficial to broaden his/her horizon of value orientation. As in the transitional period, individuals' positioning of relationships change, the activities also serve as a medium to help the individuals to develop new relationships. For example, helping students of lower grades, or conducting social investigations and sharing them with classmates in the form of art. These activities can bring a new visual field for the students and help them to establish new relationships, and the students can obtain a sense of self-value never experienced before.

Although children in the individualization period show more activeness in exploration, they usually can't attend to everything at the same time. Thus it is necessary to direct them to behave reasonably and efficiently as well as gain independence in an acceptable way. For example, students in third grade are eager to show their abilities, therefore, the idea of "being bright and smart" is most encouraging for them (Lu, 2008). The pertinent activities around this topic also show great cultural ecological

validity. We have practiced a series of activities around the theme of how to cleverly study, cleverly communicate, and cleverly manage their lives.

### ***Autonomous Management and Culture Creation in Peer Organization***

Students with different potential have different demands in peer relations. Some need to be supported by accompaniment, some need to be inspired in cooperation, and some need to be encouraged to self-transcendence through helping others. The Jitis and pertinent activities are supposed to provide a dynamic network to fulfill the internal need and realize potential development.

It is important to encourage students to manage the school life for themselves, as it is helpful to build up and maintain the Jiti. There are many things in school daily life, for example, cleaning the classrooms, arranging the desks and chairs, handing in and out homework, producing the publicity column, being librarians of class, taking care of potted flowers in classroom or managing the campus order, and so on. Some of the things are requisite while some are dispensable. But it is necessary to pick up these dispensable trivial things and turn them to all kinds of jobs, which provides many opportunities for students to participate in daily management, especially for the students in lower grades. Most of them are excited and honored to take a job in class at the beginning. However, it is not surprising that they will lose interest soon. Then it provides another opportunity to guide the students to construct meanings in their ordinary work. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of cooperation and creation as well as autonomy in the daily work. As they are a member of Jiti, they are responsible to protect its honor. It is observed that children are easily motivated once the trivial things are endued with significant meanings.

Jiti as the organization of peer relations not only provides the place for activities but also generates the driving force to initiate development. The leading structure of peer organization varies between grades, from job groups, teams, class committees, to associations across the grades. The structure grows larger and more complex in higher grades. But it also contains the structure of the lower level, thus the structure of peer relations in higher grades is multilevelly organized.

The individual's relationship network develops as the organization grows. More and more, physical and psychological spheres are available

to be involved in activities. Students mainly work within the class when they organized by team. And the class committee can carry out activities across classes or grades, or take the responsibility to manage the campus; for example, third-grade students are suitable to perform guard duty on campus as it is too difficult for lower grades but too simple for the higher grades. The fourth-grade students can assume the responsibility to help the students of first grade to adapt to school life. Students of higher grades can establish school-wide associations with the assistance of teachers. The positioning of self-identity develops as the responsibility changes in different peer organizations.

The dynamic of the organized cultural ecological system can exert influence on students of all levels. Take the fourth-grade activity called “hand in hand” for an example. The fourth-grade students become big brothers or sisters to the first-grade students and help them to acclimate to school life. It is especially helpful to the Chinese children, as they seldom have the chance to be brothers or sisters because of the one-child policy. In order to help the litter brothers or sisters, children in fourth grade consciously behave better than they used to. For example, they will finish their homework on time and learn to do the housework at home. They also dare to raise their hands and answer the questions because they want to be a desirable model to follow. During the process of giving and receiving, both students of fourth and first grades gain improvement.

### Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I discussed the research methodology and related work on peer relations and construction of school cultural ecology.

1. Concerning the study on peer relations from a psychological development aspect, the viewpoint of intrinsic relations should be taken, and close attention should be paid to the necessary connection between peer relations and self-development.

2. Organized peer relations basing on growing characteristics is a powerful medium of students’ development.

3. The energy of growing could be transformed, which could lead to trouble or positive creation. School cultural activities may catalyze potential development of children and adolescents. The designing of cultural activities depends on stage characteristics of the self-identity and potential.

4. The research on stage characteristics of students’ development gets help from multiple approaches. The reasonableness of the explanation on the stage-evolutive mechanism and the guiding effect of cultural activities should be taken as the foundation of research validity judgment.

5. The peer relations are organized in the students’ self-management of their daily school lives and creative cultural activities. The structure of peer organization varies between grades, the differences between grades become the condition of interaction. This structure constructs school cultural ecosystem.

### Future Directions

During our work with the children, we noticed that the individual’s development was closely related to peer relations and its organization, which is called “Jiti” in this chapter. In fact, the peer interactions, social identification, and self-development usually happen concurrently, however in the psychological field they are often studied separately. Thus, considering the peer relations, we need to further investigate the following questions: In what ways does peer interaction have an effect on self-development? How do children construct the selves in the Jiti and activities? And, how do the various structured Jitis and activities influence the individual’s personality development?

Generally speaking, children can achieve better flexibility and complexity in their personality structure if they are immersed in multilevel organizations and diversiform activities. However, it is difficult to adopt the mainstream research method in present studies because it is incongruous to the research topics that focus on dynamic process. For this reason, it is necessary to explore a cultural and ecological approach in developmental studies, which is often used in clinical psychology or anthropology.

My research of peer relations shifts from research of self development, the research experience made me ponder this thought: It is common in the psychological field that further research is often carried out by gradually subdividing with same perspective, in a sense, which is similar to the methodology prevalent in atomism era in physical history. However, ceaseless subdivision may not make much progress and even become trivial. To a certain degree, the development of physics benefits by turning into a dynamic and relational perspectives. As in psychological research field, the expansion of horizon should always be better than a narrow and stagnated perspective.



## Acknowledgment

Research of this chapter was funded by support of the Chinese Ministry of Education. The author is grateful to her doctoral student, Shuzhen Hu, for translating this chapter.

## Notes

1. New Basic Education is a famous reformatory educational practice in primary and middle schools that was initiated by Professor Yelan in 1994, who worked in the Education Department in East China Normal University. As the only psychologist in the research team, I mainly focused on the students' development.
2. Now Zhang studies art in Moscow.

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**Abstract**

Playfulness is a distinctive feature of human behavior across history and cultures. The status of playing in society is still a matter of dispute. In order to understand the phenomenon of play in its relation to culture, two issues deserve further study. First is the development of the social representation of play itself. The other issue consists of studying the possible ways cultural influences get into play. This latter query needs a conception of play that articulates the relationship of play and culture that includes an explanation of the position of adults with respect to play, and an explanation of learning in play. This chapter presents an activity theory approach to play, in which play is seen as a particularly formatted activity. This interpretation of play provides us with an analytic description of play (and its possible consequences) in various cultural practices, and with an outline of play development.

**Keywords:** play, culture, development, activity format, rules, freedom, involvement, learning, adult

**Introduction: Scouting the Field in the Wars on Play**

A considerable number of studies all over the world have revealed that play is probably a universal form of human behavior. In his *Politics* (book VIII, 6, pp. 20–32), Aristotle already wrote about play and, for example, considered the rattle a “capital invention,” because the rattle is a useful toy for young children to play with “in order to amuse them and prevent them from breaking things in the house” (Barnes, 1985, pp. 2126–2127). Toys (like dolls, balls, hoops, wheeled cars, play animals, etc.), as well as game playing were quite common in ancient cultures (Castle, 1961).

Descriptions and pictures of playful activities and toys are well-known from various cultures. Examples have been found from Mayan culture (fourth century) and from many different other cultures all over the world ever since (see for example Roopnarine, Johnson, & Hooper, 1994). Playfulness seems to be a distinctive feature of children’s behavior all over

the world (Serpell, 1994). The belief in the significance of play for human development is widespread and persistent. Not without reason, Smith (2010, p. 28) dubbed it the “the play ethos,” which he circumscribed as “a strong and unqualified assertion of the functional importance of play, namely that it is essential to adequate (human) development.”

Despite the seeming universality of play, the cultural status of play is today still an issue of debate: is it a necessity of immature developmental state (a feature that human beings share with young animals), is it a cultural invention for occupation in leisure time, is it a developmental necessity for the beginnings of early learning in the areas of physical exercise, social relations, creativity, and elementary cognitive skills, or is it a characteristic quality of contexts for real human cultural learning?

In his seminal work on play and cultural history, Huizinga (1938) defended the view that a human being is essentially a playing creature (a *Homo ludens*) that could create culture as a

result of this nature. In his view, culture starts *within play* and develops as play (Huizinga, 1938, pp. 102, 224)—i.e., as an element of playfully accomplished human activities. In his study of the evolution of playing within Western culture since the ancient Greek times, he explains that many modern cultural activities and institutions (like language, religion, law, and art) have their roots in human endeavors with a playful nature. However, Huizinga also pointed out that the cultural-historical process tends toward the expulsion of play from everyday activities, leading to a separation of play and serious work. In the heydays of positivistic science (in the 1930s and 1940s), Huizinga was particularly concerned about science and learning, which seemed to break away from its playful origins as a result of a strong methodification of learning (Huizinga, 1938, p. 263).

### ***Rhetorics about Play***

As Sutton-Smith (1997) already has pointed out, the debate on play in the past century is populated by a number of different rhetoric, representing implicit narratives “wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 8). He distinguished a number of different rhetorics in the play literature, based on the different claims with regard to potential developmental outcomes of play (e.g., cognitive progress, identity development), or to appreciated behaviors that may emerge in play (like for instance showing autonomy or power, using fantasy and imagination, playing out the Self). Scrutinizing the evidence for each of the claims, Sutton-Smith concluded that there is little ground for substantiating the different rhetorics on the basis of available research outcomes. Finally, he came to the conclusion that play is essentially an opportunity for learning to adapt through dealing with variability (comparable to the variability that the human organism had to deal with in the evolutionary process). “Variability is the key to play” (p. 229). As such, in his view, play is “a facsimilization of the struggle for survival” and “as an exercise in adaptive potentiation [it] is no guarantor of actual progress, apart from becoming a player” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 231). He ends up with a definition of play as “a virtual simulation characterized by staged contingencies of variation, with opportunities to control engendered by either mastery or further chaos” (p. 231).

Obviously, Sutton-Smith does not want to do away with play in education. Education has to stage the contingencies of variation and opportunities for control. However, Sutton-Smith’s analyses of the value of play for development, and his definition remain disappointing as he does not specify the types of contingencies and opportunities that are required for becoming a player in a specific cultural context or life form. Basically, his definition can also apply to a pedagogy of leaving the child on the streets in the wilderness of present day’s life forms. Sutton-Smith’s definition of play seriously suffers from this neglect of the relationship between play and culture, and its pedagogical consequences.

Remarkable in the analyses of both Huizinga and Sutton-Smith is that they accept the idea of play as a special type of activity that can be distinguished from types of disciplined goal-directed activities. Today this evolution of the status of play into an exclusive activity is particularly evident in education and leisure activities. For sure, play in modern societies is still an accepted way of behavior, but it is often dispelled to special places and special moments, where benefit is not a purpose and learning may only be an incidental by-product of spontaneous actions. The consequences of this situation are fiercely debated in education.

One position in this debate maintains the view that play belongs to the nature of young children, who have the right to play out their fantasies, to exercise their newly developed capacities in their own ways, and to develop according to their nature. Play is said to be the work of children, creating opportunities to explore, pretend and practice (*see for example* Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Paley, 2004). It is:

... the model for the life-long practice of trying out new ideas. Pretending is the most open-ended of all activities, providing the opportunities to escape the limitations of established rituals. Pretending enables us to ask ‘What if?’  
(Paley, 2004, p. 92)

Proponents of this point of view often refer to Piaget as a theoretical foundation. Their maxim for children until at least 6 years of age could be summarized as follows: *Let them play, engage them in rich situations, and give them socio-emotional support, and then they will learn (provide minimal guidance only when it is needed)!*

The opposite position maintains that the purpose of education is to help children with developing the

necessary abilities for participation in their cultural community. The nature of the acceptable participation for each of the individual members is a matter of dispute in society, but whatever the choice, the outcome is assumed to depend on the nature of the developmental tasks that children from an early age learn to accomplish at home and in institutions like school. The development of children primarily depends on teacher-directed activities especially designed for them (i.e., cultural development results from their work at learning tasks). Play, according to this view, is different from work, as it is mainly a moment of free activity, leisure, and relaxation for children. The basic maxim here is: *Let them work at developmentally-appropriate tasks for their future welfare. Let them play freely after work, and they will more effectively learn on later tasks!* Playing and working are seen as different and strictly separated activities. Playing is conceived of as more or less free play, with minimal interference of an adult and with main outcomes in the area of self-regulation, social competence, and emotional development. Work is generally seen as a teacher-led activity with primarily cognitive outcomes. In a literature review, Hart et al. (1998) demonstrated that young children's enrollment in direct instructions was associated with higher levels of stress. Combining work with relaxation in free play in a classroom might be seen as a way of reducing stress and keeping young children at ease. This "work-and-play-approach" is popular in standard-driven early childhood education (*see for example* van Hughes, 1999, pp. 3–5; Hyson, 2008; Jacobs & Crowley, 2007; Leseman, Rollenberg, & Rispen, 2001; Maxwell, Ritchie, Bredekamp, & Zimmerman, 2009; [www.pyramidprinciples.com](http://www.pyramidprinciples.com)). As a result of the separation between play and work and their respective functions, there is a tendency in modern Western culture to capitalize on cognitive-task work in schools and marginalize play under the pressure of preparing children for cognitive achievements (e.g., Moyles, 1989; Michnick Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006).

More recently, the insight is growing that educating young children is not purely a matter of alternating didactic instruction and work with free play periods (Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sá, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2010). New approaches have emerged that try to go a middle-way and look for possibilities of adult participation in children's play that do not impair the quality of playing, but still contribute to children's learning. The basic idea of these approaches is that adults try to get children

involved in culturally meaningful activities and collaboratively assist children in acquiring the abilities for improving their participation in these cultural activities. Evaluation studies have demonstrated that this is a viable way to go, and that play can indeed be used as a context for cognitive learning (Hirsh-Pasek, Michnick Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Barnett, Jung, Yarosz, Thomas, Hornbeck, Stechuk, & Burns, 2008; van Oers, 2010a, 2010b). The basic maxim of this approach is: *Let children playfully participate in cultural activities and assist them in appropriating the necessary tools for improving their participation.*

### **Pressing Problems for a Theory of Play**

Though different from Sutton-Smith, the three approaches described above can also be seen as rhetoric about play, often based on implicit conceptions and beliefs. As a consequence, the debate among these rhetorics is seriously hampered by a lack of clear definitions of what play is and how it relates to culture. In modern literature on play following one of these rhetorics, at least three interrelated problems can be identified that need to be solved, in order to advance understanding of play, its cultural value, and applicability for educational purposes:

- **Definition of play:** In many studies on play, no clear and explicit definition of play is given. Play is assumed to be self-evident, and often characterized as "immature," or "juvenile" behavior. A large variety of definitions are available from the literature (*see* Pellegrini & Smith, 2003, pp. 277–278). Most of the time some criteria are mentioned that characterize the activities of children as self-chosen, spontaneous, and purposeless activity, based on imagination and fantasy, no interference from adults. The problem with these loose operationalizations is that they do not give a positive description of what play actually is: "no interference from adults," for example, only indicates the absence of a specific condition, but does not positively articulate what play actually is. A frequently cited quality that play does not seem to serve any immediate purpose, is also problematic as a definition of play, as many forms of role-play and games have some quite specific goal within the ongoing activity for children. Similar doubts can be expressed with many other attempts at defining play: adult-free activity, for example, is not by definition play. Moreover, some qualities or dispositions (like self-chosen activity) may not exclude activities that are

not acknowledged as play, like practicing a newly learned ability. Furthermore, much of the literature is limited to specific types of play, like symbolic play, role-play, constructive play, manipulative play, outdoor play, rough-and-tumble play, etc. It remains unclear what these different types of playing have in common. Piaget's (1951) definition of play as a form of adaptive child behavior in which assimilation dominates accommodation also suffers from serious flaws as the mechanisms involved (assimilation, accommodation) haven't been easy to operationalize, independently from observed behavior already identified as play, which leads to hopeless circularity in the definition. Vygotsky (1966/1978, pp. 92–104), finally, tried to define (role)play more directly by characterizing children's play activity through referring to the rule-governed and relatively free nature of activities in an imaginary situation, which satisfies the child's desires to be like the adult. In his view, a preschool child in play emulates adult roles on the basis of generalized affections he has assigned to these roles in the course of his development (Vygotsky, 1966, p. 64). In the enactment of these roles the child creates an imaginative situation that adds a predominantly affect-based interpretation to a situation (i.e., sense or *smysl*), which opens the possibilities for the child to act on the basis of fantasy, emotions and affect, rather than being determined by perceptions of the situation and conventional meaning (*značenie*)<sup>2</sup>. As a sense-based activity, the child has considerable freedom in imagining the situation and its action affordances, but this is a limited freedom, according to Vygotsky, as actions are also determined by the rules dictated by the meanings of objects. In Vygotsky's words:

In his play a child is free, i.e. he determines his deeds on the basis of his own 'I.' However, this is an illusory freedom: he subordinates his actions to a certain sense, and acts on the basis of the meaning of the objects.

(Vygotsky, 1966, p. 76)

However, Vygotsky's definition is also too wide, as, for example, a mathematician's thinking when studying the peculiarities of inflection points on cubic curves also fits this definition. Although there is no theoretical reason why we should exclude this type of activities from the category of "play," it is unlikely to believe that this is what Vygotsky had in mind when he tried to clarify the notion of play.

All in all, there is still much work to be done for a clear definition of what may be counted as play. After summing up the evidence that substantiates a mandate for playful learning, Hirsch-Pasek et al., (2009, p. 53) stipulate that a more specific and consistent definition of play and learning is needed in order to advance the dispute on the relevance and usefulness of play in education. However, Wittgenstein's (1953) revelation of the difficulties in defining play may seem to apply here. Wittgenstein's analysis, however, was linguistic (about the meaning of words), rather than psychological, and the core of his argument was that we don't need a definition in order to use the word "play" correctly in a specific situation (*see* Wittgenstein, 1953, pp. 66–78). The referents of the word "play" are interrelated by a "family resemblance" ("*Familienähnlichkeiten*," *see* Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 67): they belong together within a certain outline without sharing a common element (essence) that a definition of play may refer to. Nevertheless, despite these linguistic-philosophical problems with the definition of play, it still remains possible that people can agree on the use of the word "play" as a qualification of a specific current activity, without being able to define its essence unambiguously. Notwithstanding these linguistic problems, it may be viable from a *psychological* point of view to specify the criteria of the activities that underlie the family resemblance of play, and that people may refer to as "play," despite its diversity in appearances.

- **Position of the adult in relation to play is not conceptualized:** as play is not an isolated phenomenon, it must be clear how it relates to its (cultural) environment. Regardless of its status (natural or cultural), play is still a phenomenon that is part of a cultural environment, so the position of the sociocultural community (particularly the adults as first representatives of that community) toward play must be specified. Part of the debate about play in schools is directly related to this question of the extent to which an adult is permitted to participate in children's play. Basically, the clarification of the position of the adult with respect to play has to be based on a conceptualization of the more abstract relationship between culture and play.

- *In the prevailing approaches to play, no explanation is given of the process of learning in the context of play.* Mostly, learning in play is admitted as a spontaneous and incidental event.

How learning in the context of play can be psychologically explained remains unclear. In concluding their review of research outcomes that give evidence for the relevance of play as a context for learning, Hirsh-Pasek et al., also conclude:

With a clearer definition of playful learning, we could isolate the mechanisms through which play influences children's learning. That is, we know that play fosters academic and social learning. We also know that play is characteristic of developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Yet, many of the studies do not directly examine the pathways through which playful learning relates to child outcomes.

(Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. 54)

In this chapter I want to address the question of the relation between play and culture from the perspective of cultural-historical activity theory, which answers the problems stated above. In the next section, I will dwell on the different ways that culture and play are related. In the following sections I present some tenets of cultural-historical activity theory, and develop a notion of play as a specific activity format. This format also provides us with a way of describing the development of playing in ontogenesis. A description of this process will be presented including an interpretation of different types of play in terms of the proposed approach. In conclusion I will briefly reveal some urgent queries that need to be solved through future research.

## Culture and Play

### *Conceptualizing Culture*

For an explanation of the relationships between culture and play, and more particularly the role of culture *in* play, we first need to clarify what we mean by culture. Defining culture, however, is a complex and extremely tricky business (see Cohen, 2009; Jahoda, 1993, 2012). The reason for this is the same as the previously described problem with the definition of play. Culture is not a uniform phenomenon that can be characterized by one essential core element. As Cohen (2009) points out: there are many forms of culture, each with their own beliefs, ideas, values, moral rules, symbols, and rituals. Fiske (2002, p. 85) defined culture more or less exhaustively as:

a socially transmitted or socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values,

norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment.

In all definitions of culture we find references to the notion of shared elements and to the fact that culture is transmitted across time and generations. Culture is represented both in the social world (e.g., as institutions, practices), and in the individual. An important function of a culture is to control diversity within a community in order to maintain identities (at a communal and personal level) in the present and in the future. The components listed by Fiske above can be seen as means for this control of variety. The basic functions identified by Boesch (2012) can also be interpreted as means to control variety within the limits of expectations and desires. Such means help members of the community to figure out what it means to be a part of this community, to make decisions about how to participate in this community and to reflect on acceptable variations. An important function of culture is to retain, to guard, and to negotiate values with members of a community. Therefore, culture is sometimes also defined as a system of meanings (see for example Serpell, 1994). However, as Leont'ev (2003) points out, cultural meanings can only function and contribute to personality development as far as they make sense for the individual members of the community (i.e., insofar as they are personalized *meanings, are related to personal interests, and make personal sense*). According to Leont'ev (2003, pp. 412–418) culture is basically a field of collective senses. To put it in more mundane terms: culture is everything we find is valuable for us.

However, this does not mean that each community only hosts one uniform culture. The historical process of cultural selection of those means and values that have turned out to be effective for the control of variation, depends on different factors (ecological, social, psychological, biological; see Tavory, Jablonka, & Ginsburg, 2012). This very fact may lead to a differentiation of subcultures within a community that may even be partly incompatible.

For the present argument I conceive of culture (in line with the reflections above) as a family of historically developed expectations in the members of a community about acceptable varieties of acting in their community. These expectations are controlled, transmitted, maintained, and changed with the help of the shared cultural tools (see for example the list of Fiske given earlier) within the context of cultural

practices. Culture (i.e., its expectations about what is acceptable or not) is interactively represented in the ways of behaving of agents and most of the time implicit in current practices (Christopher & Bickhard, 2007).

For the study of the value of play and the relationship between culture and play, this is an important starting point. Obviously, in most cultures play is one of the accepted ways of behaving and of participating in the life of a community. However, given the diversity of cultures, it should be taken into account that play may have no or less value in certain (sub)cultures, as historical and cross-cultural studies of education have revealed (Baggerman & Dekker, 2005; Smith, 2010). Play is not always an acceptable type of behavior. Following up on Huizinga's point of view, we can now conclude that culture probably has emerged out of playfully carried out activities, but also has acquired a position that made it possible to control play and make out what is acceptable as play as well as within play. Our question about the relationship between play and culture now turns into an inquiry of culture in play—i.e., into the question of how culture exerts its influence in play.

Starting out from the definition of culture above, we can see two lines of possible influence of culture in play:

(1) along the line of social representation—i.e., the cultural-historical evolution of the concept of play;

(2) through the introduction of cultural elements (artifacts, norms, etc.) into play activities.

Both lines will be examined below, with a special emphasis on the second, as here we can unfold how an activity interpretation of play (as a product of line 1 above) can answer the problems stated at the end of the previous section, concerning the position of the adult and the relation between play and learning.

### ***The Evolving Social Representation of Play: Three Views on Play***

One of the fundamental control devices of culture on play is based on the culturally produced conceptions of play. A conception of play defines what should be counted as play within the community, and consequently what is permitted in a context of play. Culturally shared and sanctioned concepts control the behavior of educators and, consequently, also delimit the actions of the players

themselves. Educators often guide children's play in ways that are consistent with their own culturally transmitted views on play (see Valsiner, 1989, Chap. 7). Institutions like schools perpetuate cultural values and convictions (including their view on play) in explicit and implicit ways through their habits of organizing and valuing educational sessions and outcomes (see Daniels, 2012).

Looking at the history of discourse on play, one can see that the notion of play is an evolving "social representation" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 230), in which a socially shared notion of play is developed that serves as a basis for a social group to communicate about play, consolidate its notions, and through intensive and permanent communication eventually may change this notion over time.

The prevailing social representation of play today has developed over a long period of time and is expressed in different narratives (as can be seen in the previously described approaches to play). For a long time the social representation of play could be labeled as "*Play as a natural kind*," which was based on two assumptions:

(1) Play is a *natural behavioral type*, which is inherent in human nature. Basically, this view is grounded in a naturalistic interpretation of human development that was romanticized in the eighteenth century, for example by Rousseau and his followers. This naturalistic conception attributes the capacity for playing to human nature, which is especially manifested during childhood. The play studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing on comparisons between animal and child behavior (Groos, 1898, 1901; Buytendijk, 1932) are clear examples of this point of view. A basic assumption of this perspective is that free and uncultivated ("wild") fantasy is the origin of play. An interesting and influential elaboration of this point of view was proposed by the German philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) (although his contribution is rarely acknowledged in the discourse on play). According to Schiller (Letters 14 and 15, in Schiller, 1980, pp. 394–400) play follows from an urge that originates from the tensions within the human being between being an object (with a need for being sensually stimulated and formed) and a subject (with a need for giving form to the material world). In play the human being has the freedom to solve this tension one way or another. Especially in the arts, according to Schiller, a human being



finds the optimal conditions for practicing the urge to play. In Schiller's view, play is a necessary phase of preparation for the civic and political freedom in later life (Schiller, 1980, letters 14 and 15). In this sense, we have to interpret Schiller's statement: "A human being plays only when he is human in the full sense of the word, and he is only then genuinely human when he plays"<sup>1</sup> (Schiller, 1980, letter 15, p. 399). Play makes a human being complete as it creates the opportunities to be free and to learn to manage this freedom. Schiller's ideas have deeply impregnated thought on play, and may be seen as one of the roots of the widespread associations of freedom, creativity, and expression with the phenomenon of play (as for example in Froebel's approach).

(2) Play is seen as a *special type of activity "sui generis," in distinction to other activities like learning and work*. From this point of view, play is seen as a specific type of activity alongside reading, constructing, fighting, traveling, gardening, shopping, etc. Many theories of play assume a distinction between play and work (e.g., Hughes, 1999, pp. 3–5). Play is often conceived of as a specific activity that prepares one for adulthood, where children can learn and practice important skills for later adult life (work).

As a consequence of these assumptions, the social representation of play as a natural kind is characteristically an ahistorical and individualistic view on children's play.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, a new discourse on play emerged in the wake of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of human development, leading to a new social representation of play, which could be dubbed "*Play as a cultural kind*." On the basis of this view, human play became conceived of as one of the cultural means for adjusting the process of enculturation to children's physical and psychological characteristics and capacities. Elaborating Vygotsky's point of view, Leont'ev (1983/1944) explained that children's play is not comparable to playful activities of animals, as the child is surrounded by a world of cultural things and activities. The wish to participate in the social group, make contact with this world, and participate in it leads to the desire to act like an adult (Leont'ev, p. 305). The start of the child's play does not originate from some innate fantasy or an urge for freedom (p. 313), but from his imagination of the ways these cultural activities may be accomplished (p. 310). Fantasy, according to Vygotsky and Leont'ev, is a

product of playing and not the origin. The imagined situation, as taken by Vygotsky, is further specified by Leont'ev as the child's way of imagining a cultural *activity*, and of the role the child may play in it (p. 315). In this role the child plays out its version of the adults' behavior. Precisely in the constraints the social environment puts on role-playing, culture exerts its controlling influence (by articulating necessary rules, tools, objects, and goals).

Following this point of view, El'konin (1978, pp. 39–64, 1989, pp. 67–68) emphasized the historical dimensions in this approach to play, while he pointed out that play depends on the *historical conception* of the position of the child in society, with regard to cultural activities, peers, and adults. The conception of play changes across history and cultures in compliance with specific historical, ideological and economic conditions. From this point of view, we can see play indeed as a cultural invention to give children access to important cultural experiences, in a way that is not risky and gives room to explore new combinations of actions (Bruner, 1972; Karpov, 2005).

Continuing on the Vygotsky-Leont'ev activity-theoretical view on play, Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, and Johnson (1999) summarized the main constraints for the realization of a cultural-historical activity view on play. In a general way this also exemplifies the ways play and culture are related, and how culture controls the concrete embodiments of play in social life. According to Göncü et al., children's play in a particular community at a certain moment in the cultural-historical development is determined by:

- *The economic structure of children's communities*: Depending on the economic structure of a society, special types of cultural practices are available for children during their life in that community. Participation in these practices (or imitation of these practices) opens specific roles for children and creates particular activity-based opportunities for learning.
- *The beliefs of children's communities about play*: The opinions of the members of the communities about what play is, when and where it should be permitted etc., determine to a great extent the occasions for play for children in that community.
- *Children's values about play, conveyed to them by the community*: When children themselves believe that play is frivolous and for the little ones, they will most probably refrain from playing when they grow older.

- *Children's interpretation of the situation that they regard as play opportunity:* This includes the affordances for playing that children notice in a situation, children's perceptions of adult roles that can be adopted for their personal purposes, how they may be transformed, as well as the perceived possibilities of idiosyncratic use of cultural artifacts and rules.

The social representation of play based on cultural-historical activity theory is evidently different from the social representation of play that propagates the idea of play as a natural kind. The conception of play as a cultural kind controls the actions of educators and players by controlling basic constraints as to what is allowed in the context of specific cultural activities, and by co-regulating the course of an activity by providing cultural tools and rules. In the following I employ this perspective for my further analyses of the role of culture in play. In order to do so, I have to elaborate a more specific definition of play within the outlines of a cultural-historical activity theory. A brief account of cultural-historical activity theory will be given first.

### **A Brief Account of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**

In his theory of activity, Leont'ev (1975) distinguishes a number of fundamental constituents of activities. He characterizes an activity as a cultural-historical category for the analysis of human behavior. Activity originates from a  *motive*  and is directed to a (mental, verbal, or concrete)  *object* . Basically, the motive-object defines the general nature of an activity. An activity where a ball is the object is essentially different from an activity that takes a book or vegetables as an object, because they call for different rules, different instruments, different goals, etc. At specific moments, an activity is always instantiated as a series of goal-oriented actions. To give a simplified example: in the activity of starting a car, different coordinated steps have to be taken. Every step is a particular subgoal-directed action, which has to be realized at the right moment in order to reach the final goal (e.g., drive away). For starting a car, a person has to insert a key (action 1), then (action 2) check if the car is not yet in gear (unless you have an automatic gear change), declutch by putting down the corresponding pedal (action 3), turn the key (action 4), if the engine starts, move into appropriate gear (action 5), etc. Depending on your specific goal, some actions may be different

from the one here described, some may be omitted (e.g. action 5), some may be carried out in parallel. Finally the steps have to follow some definite logic in order to coordinate the actions in an effective way and accomplish the activity. Activity in this conception is a structured way of acting.

Critical appraisals of the theory of Leont'ev have extended this theory in at least two ways. Brušlinskij (1982; Brušlinskij & Polikarpov, 1990) has argued that the strongly morphological character of Leont'ev's theory misleadingly pictures human activity as an unrealistically stable structure, whereas the living human activity also develops  *as*  a structure. That is to say, according to Brušlinskij, that human activities are plastic and most of the time gradually changing while being accomplished. The motive might shift, goals become more detailed and slightly different, tools are replaced sometimes by others, the use of the tools becomes more automatic, the order of goals may change because of experience, some of them may be lost without notice, skipped (on second thought), or be corrupted. This continuous change of the activity constituents over time is what Brušlinskij called the  *process aspect of activities* . In his view this aspect is particularly important for the understanding of thinking and communicating as activities. In my view, this is particularly relevant for the interpretation of play in terms of activity theory.

A significant expansion of activity theory was also proposed by Engeström (e.g., 1987;  *see also*  Sannino, Daniels, & Gutiérrez, 2009; Daniels, 2012) in his argument to link the activity theory of Leont'ev with the institutional dimensions of cultures. Engeström explained that the relationship between an agent and his object is not only regulated by the artifacts that structure the course of actions, but also by the culturally instituted rules of behaving, the agent's position in a community, and the way agents within an activity are assumed to cooperate (division of labor). He transformed activity theory into a theory of activity systems. In his research of the institutional dimension of regulation of activity systems, Engeström has demonstrated that the actual course of activities often depends on the tensions that emerge between the different components of the activity system (rules, division of labor, artifacts, etc.). Activities (and the culturally accepted variety of actions within that activity) are deeply influenced by institutional constraints.

The Leont'ev-Brušlinskij-Engeström approach to human activity is a powerful instrument for

the analysis and understanding of human actions. However, it does not give us the criteria for defining the potential of cultural activities for human development. My theoretical and empirical analyses of cultural activities over the past decade, lead to the claim that the way an activity is carried out (i.e., the activity *format*), may be decisive for its developmental effect (van Oers, 2003, 2008b, 2010b).

In many cases the order of the actions is regulated by cultural rules (in cooking, starting a car, or otherwise). Taking the activity of cooking as an example: if, for example, you want to save energy (for environmental reasons), there is a rule that says: don't switch on the stove before the pan is on it. It is important to notice here that a realization of an activity at a certain moment is always a *rule-governed pattern of actions* that may differ across situations or persons, or even across time (dependent on new cultural insights). Whether the actor is in the position to vary the actions depends on many different (situational, institutional, or personal) factors, like the tools available, (limiting) conventions regarding the ways activities have to be carried out, expertise, moral-ethical point of view, etc.

From the perspective of activity theory, I maintain that activities can be qualified on the basis of three parameters that constitute its format. First, the nature of any activity depends on the *rules* that define the activity and how the object should be treated, as well as the rules that prescribe how a role within that activity is to be accomplished. Secondly, the character of a cultural activity depends on the *degrees of freedom* that an actor is allowed in choosing or changing actions, tools, rules, goals. It is obvious that the process aspect of an activity is to a great extent dependent on this quality of the activity format. The extent to which the community (responsible adults) allows the participants to make their personal versions of actions, rules, tool use, etc. determines the course of the activity. Thirdly, the *level of personal involvement* of the actor in an activity also determines the quality of an activity, particularly its personal value for the actor, and his engagement to abide by the rules, or creatively adjust them, his willingness to endure and to spend efforts.

Summarizing, any activity can be characterized by these three dimensions: the nature of the *rules*, the *degrees of freedom* allowed to the actors, and the *level of involvement* of the actor. These three dimensions can vary, according to the nature of the situation. These three dimensions constitute

the format of activities. The format with the highest developmental potential for human beings is the format that is characterized by explicit rules, some degrees of freedom for the participants in the activity, and high levels of involvement. Leont'ev (1959, pp. 325–327) has argued that the absence of involvement is a result of a complete lack of relation between a person's meanings (as expressed in his actions and goals), and the purpose and products of the activity he is engaged in. According to Leont'ev, this condition leads to alienation in the agent from the cultural activity in which he or she is involved, and has severely negative consequences for identity development.

It is important to note here, that a specifically defined format of activities is a cultural invention depending on cultural conventions (like the social representation of play), theoretical background, image of the child, ideology, etc. For a given activity format, it is the cultural (pedagogical, educational) environment that allows a certain level of freedom to the participants, that takes care of awareness of rules and their acceptable variations in participants, and that organizes an activity in such a way that chances for involvement are optimized.

### ***Activity and Learning***

An important characteristic of cultural activities (or practices) is the function of learning. Participation in an activity always includes the possibility to improve the agents' way of participating in that activity, either as a reaction to contingent conditions (like impediments), or on provocation and guidance by others. The change of the ability to participate is a result of learning. Within the context of activity, the process of learning can be seen as the process of (spontaneous or intentional) change of the actions that constitute the person's accomplishment of an activity. The types of changes can be of various kinds. Sometimes the accomplishments of an activity change through the appropriation of new tools and actions (like the change in the communicative activity as a result of appropriation of the techniques of writing). In other instances, the accomplishment of an activity can also change as a result of learning an action to perfection (automatization). This activity-based learning theory was developed in the 1950s in the Netherlands by van Parreren (1951, 1971) as an elaboration of the action theory of Kurt Lewin (1953), and by Gal'perin in Russia (1964, 1976). For the present argument, there is no need to elaborate this theory at length here (*see* van Oers,

1996a; Haenen, 1996). It suffices to say that each cultural activity includes the possibilities of learning and teaching.

In the next section I will show that play can be conceived of as a specific type of activity format, and how it includes adult participation and learning.

### Play as a Particular Format of Activities

From her sociocultural studies of children's lives Rogoff (2003) concludes: "children's play builds on what they observe, but what they have the opportunity to observe differs greatly depending on whether they are included in the full range of their community's activities or are segregated from many settings that are restricted to adults" (p. 299). In terms of activity theory, she articulates that "play" has no object of itself, and always borrows the object from other cultural activities children in which have been engaged. In fact, this denies the idea of play as an activity *sui generis*. It asks for an explanation of play in terms of cultural activities carried out in a way that people in our culture call playful.

The activity format previously described is a useful means for characterizing activities in the play format. From this point of view, play is an activity that is accomplished in a particular format. The parameters of this play format (rules, degrees of freedom, and involvement) will be discussed below.

- Play is a rule-governed activity: a basic parameter in the play format is the presence of (implicit or explicit) *rules* that guide the players' actions and interactions. These rules may be object-bound or implied by the practice the children are involved in, like in the well-known activity wherein children try to push blocks of different shapes through the differently shaped wholes into a box. Or in role-play, when children play house and take care to follow the rules of the dining table script. The importance of the rules for the children's play is evident in cases where the players rectify each other for complying with these rules. A well-known (often not explicitly stated) rule in children's play is the *as-if rule*. Children can start a role-play with the call "let's do as if we were pilots" and then start playing. When the rules become more explicit and sanctioned, the play becomes a game according to Leont'ev (1959, pp. 498–500) and Piaget (1951, Chapter 5).

- Players have some degrees of freedom in the choice of actions, instruments, goals. The second basic parameter of the play format is the

presence of some *level of freedom for the player*.

This is an essential element for an activity to be playful. Like Vygotsky (1966) already pointed out, absolute freedom is not possible and it would be contradictory with rule-parameter of the play format. The degrees of freedom give the players the right to use their fantasy and make their own (idiosyncratic) version of a sociocultural activity. The universal use of the "as-if rule" is a clear expression of the child's relative freedom in play. The players' freedom is also obvious in the often-observed gradual changes of the rules, goals, or meanings in play. These are expressions of the process character of activities (*see* Brušlinskij's contribution described above) and belong to one of the most remarkable features of play. How much freedom is allowed in a particular situation is largely a matter of cultural acceptance. In a doctor play, for example, one child put the stethoscope on the patient's knee, and ended up eating the medicine he had prescribed (sweets). Most certainly this child has never seen this before in a doctor's practice, but he makes his own version of the activity, and nobody protested against it. On the other hand, cultures sometimes do limit the child's freedom in play, as is the case with versions of the doctor's play that are deemed as sexually unacceptable in most Western cultures. A play would be seriously threatened as being play, when the degrees of freedom were reduced to (next to) zero. Activities with no degrees of freedom (if ever possible) become rigid behavior patterns of sheer mechanical operations that have nothing to do with play.

- Participants in a playful activity are always highly involved in the activity. Play is their own activity. *Personal involvement* is the third parameter of the play format. When personal involvement is low or decreases, an activity will stop being play for the player but will become a compulsory activity. In a play activity, children have the right to voluntarily decide if they participate and when they quit. For children, play activities fulfill basic desires to be like significant others and be part of a social group (Vygotsky, 1966, p. 64). Activities that children want to play contain elements (like roles, tools, peers) that make participation attractive and raise emotional or affective reactions in the participants, which stimulate involvement. Involvement in play can be interpreted in terms of flow in the sense of Csikszentmihalyi (1997). This personal involvement is a result of an intense (emotional)

relation between the player and the moment of his activity in a given situation, called “*pereživanie*” (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 382). Involvement in play activity expresses the harmony between the player’s actions and the intrinsic purpose of the activity. The player at a particular moment is what he acts out and even doesn’t feel his activity at that moment as play, distinct from “normal” behavior. Involvement, according to the Russian stage director Konstantin Stanislavski (a contemporary of Vygotsky), is the basis of authentic play. It is related to an intense experience (“*pereživanie*”) of being the real actor in a particular situation. It is this state of mind that he tried to create in stage players to help them learn to play a role as credibly as possible (see Stanislavski, 1989; see also Luria, 1982, p. 162). Activities in the play format always exhibit this type of involvement.

Play activities can now be defined as activities that are based on (implicit or explicit rules), that allow some degrees of freedom to its participants, who carry out the activity with a high level of involvement. From this view on play, it can be seen that an enormous variety of play is possible depending on the concrete value of the different parameters. It is noteworthy to add here that the often-articulated criterion of play as having no immediate purpose or intended goal is no part of the definition. In the view presented here, play can include activities with and without immediate purpose. The previously discussed distinction between goal-directed work and play can be distinguished precisely as a difference in degrees of freedom of the actor. Basically there is a gradual transition from work to playing. Nevertheless, most of the time (school)work does not allow much freedom for the actors (pupils or teachers) in the choice of goals, tools or actions (nor does it take high levels of involvement as a requirement either).

In some cases, players use their freedom to subordinate themselves to the laws of chance (Callois, 1958), like in games with dice, lotteries, or casinos. These activities can be conceived of as play in which the actor freely chooses for himself the role of problem-solver (as the game challenges the player to invent new solutions or strategies on every surprising turn), or even to let themselves be put in the position of the object to be played with (like in the casino or lotteries). As a last example I can also refer to humor as an example of play with meanings in which the player takes the liberty (and is

permitted to do so!) to combine different meanings of one object (or word) into one plot of a narrative (Koestler, 1964). Humor is often an element of play and is the direct consequence of the freedom of the players in an otherwise rule-governed context.

A consequence of this approach to play is that basically any cultural activity can be formatted as a play, if this is accepted by the cultural environment in a certain situation. Sometimes, children spontaneously transform works they have to do in a school context (like setting the table) into a format that complies with the notion of play, as was apparent from the observations of Hännikäinen (2001). On the other hand, Callois (1958) pointed out that adult activities, like gambling with money on the financial market, can be seen as a culturally accepted play version of trading goods. It is obvious that this activity complies with the play format, as explained here. It is also clear (in the context of the financial crisis of 2008), that the acceptability of the variations in cultural versions of activities (like playing on the financial market) is dependent on cultural ideas and norms.

The variations allowed within activities also cause ambiguity with respect to the meaning of a person’s actions. For this reason, our culture has invented different signs that communicate the meaning of activities, for example by designating special places as “play places,” (like playgrounds, sport fields, casinos). Bateson (1972) and Garvey (1990) have also pointed out on the basis of rich observations, that children themselves also develop different behavioral signals to communicate in the play the status of their participation and their compliance (or not) to certain tacit rules. A smile for example may signal “I am joking,” or a change in verb tense may signal that one steps out of the play momentarily for comments, reflection, and revision of the rules.

### ***The Role of the Adult in Children’s Play***

Having defined play as a particular activity format, we can now from the perspective of activity theory answer the two last questions that were posed at the end of the first section, and clarify the relationship of the adult to children’s play and explain how learning should be conceived of in the context of play.

By analyzing play as a certain type of activity, play is interpreted as a culturally defined quality of activities. Cultural activities are by definition social and historical entities, and by the same token other people (like adults) are always involved, either concretely or

virtually. In a specific situation an adult can decide to stay physically out of a child's (children's) activity. However, in his play the child uses culturally developed objects (including instruments) that somehow canalize children's actions into specific forms, that prevent risks or otherwise unacceptable forms (*see* Valsiner, 1987). In these cases the adult is physically absent, but virtually represented in the objects or the rules of the practice that the child is imitating. On the other hand, adult participation in children's play in no way necessarily violates the playfulness of children's activities. There may be a danger that the adult intrudes into the activity of children in a way that annihilates children's degrees of freedom, or reduces their involvement. In those cases the style of participation seriously threatens the quality of children's play, rather than his/her participation *per se*. The participation of an adult in children's playful activities is the main point of influence of culture on play and children's development (Karpov, 2005). As we have demonstrated in our research, this is the main reason why play can serve as a productive context for meaningful cultural learning (*see* van Oers, 2010a, 2010b, 2010d).

As to the process of learning, activity theory has elaborated a conception of activity-based learning that was explained above. In the context of playful activities, children structurally may change their actions as a result of experiences with objects, instruments, or communications with adults or peers. When these actions turn out to be sustainable over situations and time, we can speak of learning. There is no inherent contradiction between play and explicit learning. There is evidence that children in play strive for improving their actions by learning, as this improves their ability to take part in the activity. That is why they sometimes call for help of an adult in their activities (e.g., Prammling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009). Notwithstanding the possibilities of learning within the context of play, learning cannot be seen as a defining aspect of play. Learning can take place in play on a spontaneous and incidental basis, learning can be promoted within the context of play by a participating adult or peers (*see* van Oers, 1999), but it can also be absent. It may even be possible that a particular organization of the playful activity prevents learning—e.g., when the child is preoccupied with one aspect of the play situation (like the boy involved in a role-play in a supermarket who wanted to hear the ringing noise of the counter over and over again).

On the basis of the presented interpretation of play as a specific activity format, it is clear that a huge variety in play activities is possible, depending on the nature of the objects or instruments involved, the nature of cultural practices imitated, the type and complexity of the rules to be followed. The types of play that I have discussed so far, were presented from a synchronic perspective, focusing on types of play that may appear in a certain period of life. From a diachronic perspective, however, it is necessary to ask if we can distinguish developmentally different types of play that follow each other and perhaps emerge subsequently. This is a question of the development of playing, or the development of playful activity during ontogenesis. In most developmental theories play is acknowledged as a dominant phenomenon in the early stages of child development (a leading activity, according to Vygotsky, 1966, p. 75). According to most theories, play remains present in the child's life after the age of about 8 years old in the form of games and fulfills no clear developmental function (except as a domain of social learning or leisure and creativity). From that age (school age), according to Vygotsky (1966, p. 76, author's translation):

play becomes a more limited form of activity, predominantly as sport, which fulfills a specific role in the school child's development but lacks the significance of play for the preschooler. (...) At school age play does not die away, but permeates the attitude towards reality. It has its own inner continuation in school instruction and work (compulsory activity based on rules).

Vygotsky seems to suggest that in the course of development a transition takes place from playing to work, whereas the fate of playful activities remains obscure. He continues: "Only a profound internal analysis makes it possible to determine its [i.e., play's, *author's addition*] course of change and its role in development" (p. 76). In the next section I will demonstrate how an activity theory approach to play may be able to answer this question about the ontogenetic evolution of play.

### **Ontogenetic Evolution of Playing** ***General Outline of a Cultural-Historical Developmental Theory***

Several attempts have been made to construct an order in the development of playing (Piaget, 1951; Smilansky, 1968; Vygotsky, 1984; El'konin, 1989). El'konin (1989) criticized Piaget's theory

as too exclusively focused on the development of symbolic function and cognitive progress. The same critique might be leveled against the stage theory of Smilansky (which is actually an elaboration of Piaget's by adding a phase of constructive play between sensorimotor play and sociodramatic play). Rubin, Watson, and Jambor (1978) elaborated these theories by adding a dimension of development in social participation. Close scrutiny of the stage theories of Piaget, Smilansky, Rubin et al. demonstrates that these theories do not cover all types of play and lack a clear definition of what play is and an explanation of how the stages should be ordered (see Pellegrini & Smith, 2003, p. 279, for a brief summary and critique).

El'konin (1989) constructed a stage theory of development, focusing on the mechanisms of development, and elaborating Vygotsky's idea of *leading activities*. Play in this view is a leading activity for young children in our Western industrial society from the age of about 1 to about 8 years old. Play at these ages, is a leading activity because children in this period have a propensity to playing and play yields the greatest developmental benefits for the child at these ages, which moves them into a new stage of development (Karpov, 2005; Leont'ev, 1983, p. 306; Vygotsky, 1966, p. 75).

The mechanism of development and for the transitions from stage to stage is explained by El'konin by the tensions that emerge over time between development in the cognitive-technical domain (the use of cultural instruments) on the one hand, and the development in the social domain (volition, motivational, emotional moral aspects) on the other. Different stages of development can be characterized as leading activities in which one of the two domains of development dominates until the moment that the discrepancy between the two domains of development has passed a certain threshold, and becomes a psychological problem for the child. In some periods the child makes a spurt in

appropriating cultural tools, but the necessary motivational development required for the use of these instruments lags behind. In these periods the focus of activity and learning is on objects and tools. In other periods, the development in the motivational sphere dominates while the instrumental development lags behind. The focus of activities and learning is on social interactions with other people that help in developing the required volitional qualities (motivation, interests, emotions, attitudes, moral stand). Critical points in development, according to El'konin, are based on these discrepancies between the two domains of development, which urge to a transition from one leading activity to the next. For the sake of brevity, El'konin's theory of leading activities can be summarized in Table 45.1.

It needs to be mentioned that previous leading activities and their alternating foci do not completely disappear after transition to later leading activities. They become less dominant, but the faculty of changing from one focus to another (at will) remains. As can be seen in the scheme in Table 45.1, play dominates in the second and third periods. The focus of the dominant activities alternates and will be embodied in the course of development in different types of activities, with different motivations and demands from the social world.

Karpov (2005) gives a valuable overview of El'konin's developmental theory of leading activities and summarizes lots of empirical evidence demonstrating the essential role of the adult in the transitions from one leading activity to the next. His presentation, however, is not systematically based on activity theoretical analyses, and fails to characterize play and the position of the child in each of the leading activities (see van Oers, 2010c). In his presentation, play seems to disappear after stage III and it remains unclear what precisely happens with play after the age of 8 years.

Our own systematic analyses on the basis of conceptual work and empirical research has now

**Table 45.1 Overview of successive leading activities (adapted from El'konin, 1989)**

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<i>Leading activity</i>	Looking for contacts	Manipulative play	Role-play	Learning activity	Defining social position in a group	Labor
<i>Focus</i>	World of persons	World of objects	World of persons	World of objects	World of persons	World of objects

produced a developmental course of playing, based on reinterpretations of El'konin's ordering of leading activities from the perspective of activity theory. I will argue that each leading activity can be interpreted in terms of the play format. In this interpretation, play does not necessarily disappear or take a marginal position, but changes in the course of development. Depending on cultural decisions, the play format (particularly allowing degrees of freedom to the children, and the educators' willingness to create conditions for high involvement) will be implemented or not. If a cultural community indeed fully accepts the activity format (rules, degrees of freedom, and high involvement) as "normal practice," then play becomes a continuous characteristic of human cultural development, throughout individual development.

As demonstrated above, the role of culture with regard to play is undeniably present in the concrete manifestations of play. Culture controls the varieties of human actions by defining the constraints of human activities, sanctioning the outcomes, pre-defining the rules and time restrictions, providing tools (sometimes in versions that limit the individual's actions, e.g., for reasons of safety). Schools and families have an important role to play in controlling acceptable behavior. They constitute the royal road of cultural influence on human activities by their defining the acceptable values of the parameters. Despite the importance of cultural institutions for the manifestations of play, I cannot dwell too long on this dimension in the following descriptions of the types of play.

### ***The Development of Playful Activities in Ontogenesis***

Starting out from a reinterpretation and elaboration of El'konin's description of the course of human development in terms of leading activities, it is possible to give the following descriptions of the different types of play that may occur in the course of human development. It should be borne in mind, however, that once emerged, types of playing will never completely disappear or become irrelevant. They may adopt new forms and are still accessible alongside newer forms of play.

According to El'konin, in the first six months of life children are engaged in activities that are motivated by their search for socio-emotional contact. It is evident that these activities fit into a play format. From the very first day of their life children are received in communicative practices that introduce

regularities (answer-response) in children's behavior, and that allow them a high degree of freedom in the choice of responses. Part of the regularity in this stage of activity development is probably based on what Piaget called primary and secondary circular reactions to stimuli in the environment. Highly significant, however, are the cultural forms of regularities introduced in the child's activity by engaging them in interactive practices. Peek-a-boo is one of the universal forms of play at this stage of development that teaches children to be part of a rule-governed (communicative) activity (see Bruner, & Sherwood, 1976). A significant moment in this contact play is when objects (toys) become a part of the interactions. Objects play an important role in directing attention, pointing, building shared attention, and learning to see another person as an intentional agent (Tomasello, 1999, p. 56; 2008, pp. 135–165; Karpov, 2005, p. 106). The focus on objects by shared attention and (proto)communications between child and adult sets the stage for a new form of play in which the social orientation of the contact play changes into an object-oriented activity.

Manipulative play. Characteristic of this type of play (starting in the first year of life) is the repetitive handling of objects available in the environment, like feeling, putting in the mouth, tasting, throwing, hitting, breaking, rolling, etc. The format of this activity also fits in with the previously defined play format. Within certain limits, children are more or less free to choose the exploratory or instrumental actions they want to perform on the cultural objects, and they can continue as long as they are interested (which is an important condition for involvement). A specific type of manipulative play must be mentioned here, as it takes place in most children's life for a longer time: rough-and-tumble. While playing around and play fighting, children manipulate and explore their own and other children's bodies and learn about their own possibilities, but also about social values. In the manipulative activities, explicit cultural constraints are put on the children's actions by providing them with restrictive rules (like in rough-and-tumble) or with toys with specific affordances. On the other hand manipulative play activities like toy play also essentially show the child's relative freedom in handling the toys and even redefining their nature by using them in unexpected ways (Pellegrini & Jones, 1994). The communication with the children largely focuses on object-related language (Lisina, 1987) and opens important ways



for the emergence of symbolic thought (Callahan, 1999; Puchova, 2005; Karpov, 2005, p. 133). By the production of toys, a culture exerts significant influences on the child, through the affordances it raises and the type of communications with adults and peers it elicits. The toy often implies cultural roles, like a car toy implies a driver, or a toy hammer implies a carpenter. Through observation and communication, children often adopt a new form of manipulative play that is imbued with meaning from the child's interpretation of the related role ("playing the chauffeur"). This role-bound manipulative play forms a step toward role-play (thematic play) and imitation of sociocultural activities in which different roles are coordinated.

Role-play. This is probably the most widely studied form of play. Characteristically, role-play is an imitation of a cultural activity in which the play format is optimally worked out. Actually, it even creates the opportunities for the child to participate at all in these types of cultural practices. The status of these activities as play is not disputed. As Vygotsky already pointed out, children are motivated to get involved in adult activities and learn about the rules and tools of this activity. At the same time children also need some freedom in acting out the adult roles in their own ways. According to El'konin (1989), the major motive for the child for this type of thematic role-play is to learn about social relations and about the ways people interact in the contexts of the cultural practices they encounter in their daily lives. It follows from the nature of this type of play that culture has a significant influence on the child's activity, his learning, and identity, through the tools that are provided, the way the use of these tools is regulated by information and social values, the type of interactions that are required and accepted. A bus driver interacting with his passengers has to apply specific abilities, possess specific knowledge, and has to follow certain rules of interaction. The same is true for the cashier in the supermarket, the waitress in the restaurant, the guide in the museum, etc. By participating in these activities in a playful way, children learn about these practices, the roles, instruments, and social rules of interaction. Particularly important in such role-play activities is the expansion of children's communicative abilities. As a result, children start making their own means for communicating with the help of others, and begin constructing signs for communicating new aspects of their play activity to others (see van Oers, 1996b, 2008a). Since the 1990s, research has

demonstrated that the forms of role-play in which adults take part can have a positive effect on children's learning (Wood & Attfield, 1996; Singer et al., 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Dolya, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; van Oers, 2003, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d). In our own applications of the concept of role-play we have discovered an important (but in literature neglected) type of role-play, which we call *director play*. In regular role-play, children play out the roles in concrete behavioral ways. In director play, children project their ideas about a role onto external objects (e.g., dolls, play animals) and play out a role-play on a table or screen, like in playing with a doll house, or a miniature garage, kitchen, shop, etc. In schools, children are often invited to play out a narrative in a role-play in order to stimulate literacy development (see Christie, 1991). In our own research school, we discovered that playing out a story on a table with little dolls in reconstructed environments (we call these tables "story-tables"), has similar positive effects on language development as role-play wherein children themselves feature (e.g., Nauta, 2010). Director play frees the child from limits of physical reality and might be seen as one way of dealing with cultural restrictions in schools and other educational situations. Director play is a special type of play as it continues in children's lives for a longer time than actually enacted role-play. Director play transforms in our industrialized culture into all kinds of simulation games that children play on their computers (like SimCity, the Sims, World of Warcraft, etc.) from primary school onward. In director play, children organize a virtual world, and play roles in that world without the real dangers, or some of the limitations that are put upon players in the real world. The only limitations are cultural limitations, embodied in special features of the games or in pedagogical conventions of the environment in which the game is played. Much role-play continues in children's cultural development in the form of director play that already starts at the ages of 5 or 6 years old in primary school. In the context of role-play (including director play) children are confronted with tools and their possible applications and expected outcomes. The motive to master such tools (both physical and ideal, like mathematical symbols) in order to improve participation generates a new motive that marks a new form of play, which we dubbed *productive play*.

Productive play. The type of activity that children are engaged in from their middle childhood

onward is mostly not recognized as play, because of its purposeful nature. El'konin refers to it as “learning activity” as the new leading activity, a designation adopted by Davydov (e.g., 1996, 1999) and Karpov (2005) as well. However, there is no logical prohibition to conceive of human productive activities (production of meanings, knowledge, rules, norms, or commodities) as activities in a playful format. Production processes always abide by (implicit or explicit) rules (construction rules, economic rules, ethical rules, etc). However, in our industrial Western society, large differences are found in these activities as to the freedom attributed to the agents, and to the conditions created for keeping agents intrinsically involved in activities. For economical reasons, productive activities in our industrialized society are usually evaluated on the basis of effectiveness. Therefore the organization of these activities tends to be strictly regulated and leave little or no freedom to the worker. Leont'ev (1959) analyzed these types of activities and argued that they tend to minimize the personal sense of the worker's actions, and to obstruct the feeling of connectedness with the activity and its products. According to Leont'ev, this leads to alienation and hampers the development of a broad cultural identity. The latter types of activity occur frequently in industrial societies, both in the production of meanings (like in schools) and in the production of goods (factories). They tend to be the opposite of playful activities. In the following, I will briefly sketch two general types of productive activities that incorporate playfulness.

Productive activities in school have to do with the *production of meaning* and operations in different intellectual domains (such as language, mathematics, science, economics, history, music, etc.). Recent understandings of these types of learning activities emphasize the importance of creativity and personal meaning in these processes (*see for example* Wells, 1999). They conceive of subject-matter learning as a process of guided co-construction of meaning in which the pupils are allowed to explore and critically discuss their own solutions and hypotheses (*see* Kuhn, 2005; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2008). Good examples of productive learning activities in a playful form can be found in the movement of Realistic Mathematics Education (RME). The rule-bound nature of mathematical activities is beyond doubt. Within such activities RME tries to support pupils in the production of relevant mathematical meaning by getting them involved in meaningful activities in which they are

challenged to solve problems and to produce their own solutions, compare them with others, discuss them, and improve them with some freedom within the boundaries of the accepted mathematical rules (*see for example* Freudenthal, 1990; Yackel & Cobb, 1996). When schools can accept (and deal with) a relative freedom of pupils in a learning activity, learning can be organized according to the play format, co-regulated by pupils and teachers, and based on engaging problems. Actually, pupils and teacher are emulating an adjusted version of a cultural activity, called science. Obviously, in science the existence of rules, academic freedom, and high levels of involvement are deemed essential features. Davydov (1983) too—following Hegel—has pointed out that science in its optimal form is essentially “free intellectual labor,” producing knowledge by dialogue (direct and critical discourse with participants in an activity) and polylogue (discourse with all other absent experts; *see* van Oers, 2001). Davydov, however, was initially very reluctant to adopt the model of academic inquiry-based learning for educational purposes (*see* Davydov, 1968). From the point of view, presented here, academic learning can be playfully accomplished in primary school, provided a teacher participates in this play and upholds the standards of science by taking account for those elements of the activity the children cannot accomplish yet. It goes without saying that through the dialogues and polylogue, culture has a significant influence on the course and outcomes of this playful learning activity.

Another type of productive activities in a playful format are the activities that purposefully aim at the *production of variations*, in actions, tool use, interpersonal relations, etc. Well-known examples of such activities can be found in games and sports in which variations of actions (or the invention of new or surprising actions) is essential for winning the competition with other players. In educational contexts, playful formats of productive activities can be found in pupils' imitations of adult cultural practices. Elsewhere, I gave an analysis of how 5-year-old children appropriate parts of musical culture by imitating a musical performance practice under adult guidance (*see* van Oers, 2010d). As another more elaborated example, I can refer to a Dutch school where 12-year-old pupils run a Third-World Shop in their school, under guidance of the teacher. The pupils are highly engaged in this practice, do have the freedom to organize it in their own way within the rules of this type of practice, and

within the limits of the law, ethics, and financial constraints of the school. Their way of running the Third-World Shop obviously fits in the play format of this type of cultural activity. Further examples of cultural learning in playfully formatted activities can be found in the use of gaming in secondary (vocational) education (see Shaffer, 2006; Veen & Vrakking, 2006; Gee, 2007a, 2007b), and in the Fifth Dimension settings supporting literacy learning in out-of-school contexts (see for example Brown & Cole, 2002). It would go too far here to analyze productive activities in institutionalized labor from the perspective of the play format. Inherently there is no reason to assume that they couldn't, but for the present argument it suffices to say that particularly labor resists the play format for cultural reasons (economy, finances, international competition). The cultural tendency to view teaching (as one type of cultural labor) as a goal-directed, curriculum-based, and effective type of activity mostly does not allow much degree of freedom to the teacher. It is, however, only one way of formatting this activity. Exactly this view on teaching is incompatible with playful learning of pupils. It is one of the cultural arguments for separating play and learning.

### **Conclusion: Play as a Specially Formatted Activity in Culturally Structured Environments**

Play is an essentially cultural phenomenon. Understanding play requires understanding of the relationship between culture and play. This chapter argues that the influence of culture on play runs via two different routes: on the one hand, via the social representation of play in a cultural community at a certain moment, and on the other, through the ways invented by a community to control variety in play activities in order to maintain cultural coherence, cultural values, and identity.

Analysis of play from the perspective of cultural-historical activity theory leads to a number of significant conclusions and implications.

First of all, the fundamental conclusion that play as such, as a specific entity *sui generis*, does not exist. Play is a qualification of cultural activities, and can be identified as a particular *activity format* that is manifested as highly involved accomplishment of rule-governed activities that allows the participants a significant degree of freedom in the choice of goals, actions, objects, tools, and rules, and in making personalized versions of them. Consequently, the classical ideas of free play owned by the child, and

of the play-work distinction must be abandoned as untenable.

The activity point of view solves at least two of the recurrent problems in play theory: the role of the adult and the problem of learning in play. Viewing play as a cultural activity implies that the participation of other people is by definition acceptable. This is not to say that other people (e.g., adults) must always participate in children's play, but there is no theoretical objection to the participation of adults in children's play as long as this does not destroy the typical play format. If and how an adult should participate in children's play depends on the community's social representation of play and the adults' educational intentions. It is partly an empirical question regarding the efficacy of a specific structured environment for the achievement of educational goals.

The participation of adults in children's play also creates opportunities within the play context to support and guide the playing child in the appropriation of new actions and meanings. As all cultural activities, activities in the play format inherently imply the faculty of learning. The frequently practiced separation of moments for playing and moments for learning has no theoretical ground. Learning as a process of changing actions and meanings is intrinsic to play.

This point of view also further extends the cultural-historical theory of development of El'konin. Considering the fact that meaningful learning consists of the appropriation of cultural contents in ways that make personal sense to the learner, we can still maintain with Vygotsky and El'konin that play is the leading activity for young children—i.e., the activity in which young children's learning contributes optimally to the child's development. But from the activity point of view it is clear now that the play format should not be abandoned when the leading activity changes into new forms (e.g., into productive learning). The child's developmental trajectory as a procession through different leading activities is at the same time a trajectory of learning to participate in these new activities (with new foci), formatted as play. As is argued in this chapter, the activity approach also opens a productive perspective on the question of what happens with play when children grow older.

In ending, it must be noted that the activity theory approach to playing as presented here has various implications that couldn't be addressed here. In passing, I mention only two of them. The

activity approach throws a new light on the issue of *play training*, which can be conceived of in this perspective as assistance of children to participate safely in new activities, with new and more complex rules, while feeling free to employ them in ways that suit them best. Play training begins with creating involvement and feeling safe and free in a cultural context with others. Another eternal problem is the query about the return effect of playing on culture. Of course this is a complex and long-term process, but in general it is comprehensible that children who have been accustomed to their right to modify cultural activities in play, may grow older with a more liberal attitude toward cultural activities as playfully formatted and (consequently) changeable. The innovation of culture depends on the innovation of activities and its including tools and rules for the control of variety in this activity, and on the attitude of future generations to do so. This is probably also what Vygotsky (1966, p. 76) might have meant at the end of his play article when he writes that play evolves into a new relation to reality.

The first signs of the research from this perspective show that playfully formatted cultural activities can be productive as well, and benefit the development of both individuals and their communities. However, like always, more research is needed to substantiate that claim.

## Future Directions

In our department “Theory and Research in Education” (VU University, Amsterdam) we are contributing to a network of schools, innovators, and researchers that works at the implementation of a play-based curriculum in primary schools (Developmental Education for 4- to 12-year-olds). Our research program<sup>3</sup> is continuously gathering evidence for the support of this curriculum. Positive evidence has been provided in recent publications, quoted above.

Independent from our locally inspired efforts, the approach to playing needs further elaboration and empirical support. For the future, the following research themes might be valuable contributions for a deeper understanding of the relationships between culture and play:

1. (Educational) *What are the psychological, cultural, and economical consequences of playfully formatted cultural activities?* Educating children and youngsters in an activity format that gives them much freedom and responsibility for their own

actions and others’, will presumably have positive influences on children’s development as a cultural individual. We may think of deeper understandings of cultural contents, but also of developments at the social and moral-ethical levels. Further studies are needed to explore these effects both at a personal level and at the level of institutions (like schools), communities, and societies. In particular, systematic studies are needed into the possible ways of feeding culture into (children’s) activities without destroying the basic requirements of the play format. However, more problematic consequences might be expected too, because of the revaluation of tradition and authority (see Ziehe, 2008; Arendt, 1961), that may follow from the play format. These too deserve serious study in the near future.

2. (Psychological) *Describe the development of playing as developments of play activities.* According to the presented view of play, the development of playing in ontogenesis should be conceived of as a development of the accomplishment of activities in a play format. Currently I hypothesize that this development is strongly dependent on the use of more complex rules. In manipulative play, the rules are often implicit and embodied in the features of the play objects, in role-bound play the rules are more articulated but still dependent on the person’s imagination of that role, in role-play (both director play and thematic role-play) the rules are related to a player’s narratives about the theme-based play activity. Rules can be seen as one of the points of access of culture into play. Further study of the development of playing in terms of increasingly complex rule employment is urgently needed. Furthermore, formatting cultural activities (like learning, work, institutional behavior) as play can be expected to have prominent effects on the development of attitude, identity, and critical agency. Further psychological study of this process is urgently needed.

3. (Anthropological/cultural) *Studying the dynamics of the social representation of play in different cultural communities.* Play is a cultural phenomenon depending on what a cultural community accepts as variations in the accomplishment of activities. The development of social representations of play in different cultural contexts calls for further study in order to both understand better the existence and value of playing in cultures, and the educational potentials of play activity in a multicultural society.

## Notes

1. "Der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Worts Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt." (Italics from Schiller).

2. There is a serious translation problem here. Vygotsky systematically refers to "sense" (*smysl*) when explaining the dynamics of play. Sense refers to the personal and emotionally colored interpretations of reality, and should be distinguished from conventional meaning (*značenie*), as Vygotsky clearly explains in his *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky, 1934). Unfortunately, in most translations of Vygotsky's 1966 article on play (in Vygotsky, 1978 and in the translation on <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1933/play.htm>) this crucial distinction is lost. From the Russian text it is unambiguously clear that in Vygotsky's view, personal *sense* (rather than conventional meaning) dominates play actions.

3. Research program "Developmental Education in the school context" of the department Theory and Research in Education, Faculty of Psychology and Education, VU University Amsterdam.

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### Abstract

The chapter starts with an overview of the ongoing debate between evolutionary and culture-relativistic approaches and their contributions to describing and explaining cultural similarities and differences in emotions. As a theoretical and methodological completion of existing approaches, the chapter highlights the importance of an integrative developmental perspective on the ontogenetic emergence of emotions, in identifying the ontogenetic roots of their cultural similarities and differences. A developmental perspective can also serve as a validation of indigenous approaches, as well as for cross-cultural comparisons of adult emotions. This approach focuses on emotional expressions as a culturally constructed sign system that mediates between the cultural and psychological spheres. The acquisition of expression signs in interpersonal interaction leads to a transformation of biologically determined precursor emotions of neonates into the culturally functional and differentiated emotions of adults. Such an approach facilitates the identification of constitutive components of culturally differentiated emotions and their constitutive sociocultural factors that channel common and culture-specific pathways of emotional development.

**Keywords:** body language, emotional development, emotion regulation, emotions, emotion socialization, nonverbal communication, parent-child communication, sociocultural factors

Emotions are everyday and omnipresent phenomena to which people pay considerable attention and which provide them with many positive, but also sometimes painful experiences. Emotion researchers from different theoretical traditions are relatively unanimous about the function of emotions. They assign an adaptive function to emotions in regulating human activity. Emotions signal significant personal concerns or motives under changing situational circumstances (*see* Frijda, 1986; Mesquita, 2001; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994). Researchers agree that the specific causes of emotions and expressions displayed in given situations yield enormous diversity across cultures (Levenson, Soto, & Pole, 2008; Mesquita & Leu, 2008; Safdar, Friedlmeier, Matsumoto et al., 2009; Shweder, Haidt, Horton, & Joseph, 2008).

This is in sharp contrast with the few and straightforward causes and expressions of animals, which seem equipped with only a few emotions, namely seeking, rage, fear, panic, sexual lust, care, and play as a form of pleasure (Panksepp, 1998).

In contrast, researchers do not agree on the issue of how emotional diversity can be classified and explained. There is a long-standing controversy between exponents of the different theoretical traditions as to which necessary and sufficient criteria indicate an emotion and to what extent individual emotions are biologically prewired or culturally co-constructed.

The origin of the modern universally oriented emotion theories can be traced back to the work of Charles Darwin (1872), and the modern culture-relativistic



emotion theories to the ethnographic observations of Malinowski (1922) and Margaret Mead (1928, 1935). Darwin supposed emotions and their expression to be a product of phylogeny, they are evolutionarily adaptive and could be found in humans, as well as in primates and mammals. He assigned the capacity of each human individual to feel and express emotions in the same manner. Emotion theories in the tradition of Darwin's evolutionary approach have focused on providing evidence of the universality of so-called basic emotions. By contrast, emotion theories in the anthropological and co-constructivist tradition have claimed that emotions are culturally co-constructed. They have focused on describing indigenous concepts of emotions (e.g., Lutz, 1988) and on observing culture-specific modulations of emotion (e.g., Briggs, 1970; Levy, 1973). Research on emotion and culture has so far ranged between these evolutionary and culture-relativistic approaches.

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of this ongoing debate and present an approach that can mediate between these contrary positions. Our approach takes a developmental perspective on the ontogenetic emergence of emotions. It focuses on emotional expressions as a culturally constructed sign system that mediates between the cultural and psychological sphere (*see* Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). The acquisition of expression signs over the course of interpersonal interactions leads to a transformation of biologically given precursor emotions of neonates into the culturally functional and differentiated emotions of adults. Such an approach enables us to identify constitutive components of culturally differentiated emotions as far as they are developmentally rooted and constitutive sociocultural factors that channel common and culture-specific pathways of emotional development.

### **Paradigms of Cross-Cultural Research on Emotion**

There are many emotion theories that can be assigned to four overarching emotion paradigms (*see* Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). Each paradigm can be defined by a specific standard of equivalence for cross-cultural comparisons in which classes of indicators or components are used to define and classify an emotion (*see* Friedlmeier & Matsumoto, 2007). These standards also contain implicit assumptions about the development of emotions. In the following section, we consider these different

standards associated with each paradigm and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

#### ***Structuralistic Paradigm: Emotion as an Innate Configuration of Reactions***

By nature, humans are equipped with a set of basic emotions as their phylogenetic heritage, as stated by Darwin (1872). This notion has been developed in subsequent evolutionary theories of emotion, such as the neuro-cultural theory of Ekman (1992, 1994a) and Levenson et al. (2008), as well as its developmental counterpart, the Differential Emotion Theory of Izard (1977, 2009). Common to all these theories is the assumption that each basic emotion can be defined by a prototypical inborn hard-wired configuration of an expression, especially a facial expression, a peripheral-physiological body reaction and a subjective feeling. Facial expression is of particular significance, because its internal feedback serves as basis for the subjective experience of the emotion, called feeling.

What remains controversial is the number of identifiable basic emotions. Ekman (1984, 1992) assumes at least six, namely joy, fear, sadness, anger, disgust and surprise (*but see* Ekman 1994a). Izard (1977) assumes that there are 10, adding shame, contempt, interest, and guilt, because a prototypical facial expression can also be assigned to these four emotions. Tracy and Robins (2008) add pride to basic emotions, because it can be recognized from body expression (erect body, arms up in the air or akimbo) by members of very different cultures. The components that can vary according to the specific culture are the cause of a specific emotion (e.g., fear of cancer or heart attack in Western cultures vs. fear of the curse of their ancestors in tribal cultures) and cultural display rules of expression that prescribe who must display which expression to whom in which situation (Ekman & Friesen, 1972).

In empirical research, the assignment of the prototypical facial expression to the label of the corresponding emotion by members of very different cultures is considered to be the standard of equivalence for defining a basic emotion. Additionally, it is assumed that basic emotions can be observed from birth onward in each culture, while the modification of expression according to display rules occurs only over the course of ontogenesis. Cross-cultural studies that have been conducted along this standard of equivalence have found the following:

1. Prototypical facial expressions were assigned to the corresponding labels of joy, fear, anger, sadness,

disgust, and surprise, beyond chance level in very different cultures, including those that had not had any contact with Western media before the study. This was taken as a proof of the universality of basic emotions (Ekman, 1972, 1992).

2. Evidence of culture-specific display rules (see Matsumoto, 2000, Chap. 11 for an overview; Safdar et al., 2009) and their development (Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002; Garrett-Peters & Fox, 2007; Saarni, 1984).

The structuralistic paradigm and the associated studies have been criticized for several reasons:

1. The unreflected application of English-language terms for classifying basic emotions (Wierzbicka, 1999) and the forced-choice format for matching facial expressions with terms of emotion might prevent participants from using more culture-specific assignments. A free-choice format for labeling the six prototypical facial expressions revealed significantly more culture-specific assignments (Russell, 1994; *but see* Ekman, 1994b).

2. Emotional expression has, *a priori*, been narrowed down to facial expression. From a methodological perspective, this reduction provides a clearly operationalized criterion for measuring emotions, but it excludes all other channels of expression that are obviously used by people of all cultures such as gestures, posture, tone of voice, etc. (see Collier, 1985). The analysis of expression remains incomplete and possible culture-specific variations in these other channels thus undiscovered.

3. Cross-cultural studies refer mainly to the recognition of emotions via pictures of (mostly) posed prototypical facial expressions (Ekman, 1972; Russell, 1994). The recognition of a prototype, however, is not the same as the observation of emotion expression in daily life. This also applied to situations in which display rules could not serve as an explanation, such as in solitary situations in which people display mainly reduced expressions instead of full-blown expressions (Chovil, 1991; Fridlund, 1994; Holodynski, 2004).

4. Many studies revealed that neonates and young infants did not display the prototypical facial expressions of sadness, anger, fear, and surprise that are categorized as basic emotions. It was not before the second half of the first year of life, that infants started to express these emotions. On the other hand, distress, with its expression of crying, is an expression that can be observed already at birth,

but is not labeled as a basic emotion. From birth onward, only expressions of these basic emotions are observable: interest, pleasure, and disgust (see Camras, 1992; Oster, 2005).

### ***Functionalistic Paradigm: Emotion as a Relationship and Process***

Theories of emotion that are allocated to the functionalistic emotion paradigm define an emotion through its function in regulating individual activities. The definition of emotions by Campos, Barrett, and Campos (1989) is prototypical. Emotions are “processes of establishing, maintaining, or disrupting the relations between the person and the internal or external environment, when such relations are significant to the individual ...” (p. 395). Accordingly, an emotion represents an action readiness, which is triggered through an appraisal of occurrences or facts, with respect to their relevance for motives and personal concerns, and is intended to change the situation in a manner that serves the motives. This action readiness can be displayed as expressions, body-related and experience-related forms (Frijda, 1986).

The appraisal pattern that triggers the emotion and the action readiness are considered as a standard of equivalence for determining an emotion. The latter can be expressed in the full range of differentiation of expressions and bodily reactions, i.e., not only in patterns of facial expressions. Major cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that both appraisals and patterns of action readiness can be universal and culture-specific (e.g., Frijda & Mesquita, 1992; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994; Scherer, Wallbott, & Summerfield, 1986).

The following criticisms were leveled against these approaches and studies:

1. The appraisal and action readiness components were almost exclusively assessed by self-reports of experienced emotional episodes. Thus, the ethno-theories of the participants with respect to the emotions have been assessed rather than real emotional episodes. Real episodes might contain additional features that the participants might not remember anymore.

2. The emotional concepts preselected by the researcher and the classification of both components are generally oriented toward Western emotion theories. An indigenous analysis of appraisal and of patterns of action readiness was not conducted, and

therefore, it was not possible to discover concepts other than the preselected Western ones.

3. Whether appraisal or action readiness patterns for a given emotion are universal or culture-specific depends on the level of abstraction that applies to the categorization of respondent answers. The more abstract the categorization, the more likely is the evidence of universality (Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997). Accordingly, all cultures have experience of physical threat—and that of fear in the broadest sense. Likewise, there is experience of losing someone who is close and loved or important, leading to grief. Furthermore, there is an obstruction of motive satisfaction by third parties, and thus anger. In order to avoid hasty generalizations, the suggestion is made that patterns should first be extracted from an indigenous analysis of reports and only then, the cultural comparisons will follow (*see* Shweder et al., 2008).

4. No cross-cultural developmental studies have been conducted, which have investigated the development of these emotion-specific appraisal and action-readiness patterns.

### ***Co-Constructivist, Language-Focused Paradigm: Emotion as a Cultural Concept***

Theories of emotion referring to the language-focused paradigm can be found mainly in the cultural anthropology research. The main goal of these extended field studies was to provide a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of individual cultures including emotions. The work of Lutz (1986, 1988) and Abu-Lughod (1986) are groundbreaking in this context. The methodology entailed detailed and repeated questioning and observations of members of the particular culture, with the aim of capturing the emotional concepts in their culture-specific uniqueness. In these studies, emotions are considered as a combination of an unspecific bodily arousal component with a linguistically coded scheme of interpretation. It is assumed that the scheme prescribes how the stimulation is interpreted and how one is to react (Lynch, 1990). The linguistically coded concepts of emotion for the culture in question, in combination with bodily arousal, constitute the standard of equivalence for determining an emotion. The ethnographic studies have concentrated on reconstructing the concepts of emotion and single emotion qualities that indigenous people hold.

1. Some families of emotions within a given culture have been linguistically overrepresented—there are a large number of similar emotion concepts—whereas other families are underrepresented. The former are characterized as hyper-cognized and the latter as hypo-cognized emotion concepts (Levy, 1984).

2. Some of the emotion concepts of a given culture directly reflect the uniqueness of relationship formation within this culture. The emotion labels assigned to these concepts of emotion cannot be translated into terms of other cultures without a loss of meaning. Accordingly, the indigenous concept of *fago* from the Ifaluk of Micronesia in the Pacific, cannot simply be translated into English. The reason is that it represents a culture-specific mixture of comprehensive care, sadness, and love that can only be understood through cultural practices of the Ifaluk (Lutz, 1988). Analyses of culture-specific emotional concepts and their terms such as the German *Angst* or *Weltschmerz*, are of similar difficulties. In order to resolve this translation problem, Wierzbicka (1999) proposed a Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) for describing emotional concepts in terms that occur in almost all languages. In this manner, the extracted concepts can be translated into all languages and their content and meaning compared.

3. The ethnographic studies cover a series of socialization and upbringing concepts that refer to the socialization of culture-specific emotions (e.g., Briggs, 1990).

With regard to these language-focused theories of indigenous emotion concepts, the following should be noted critically:

1. The bodily components of an emotion are conceived too simplistically, as a nonspecific arousal component, which meaning only becomes specific through integration into emotional concepts. This approach, which is reminiscent of the emotion theory of Schachter and Singer (1962; Schachter, 1964), has proven to be too simple (*see* Reisenzein, 1983). Similarly, the insufficient consideration of the expressive components of an emotion has been criticized and a re-embodiment of ethnology was recommended (Lyon, 1994, 1995).

2. Based on this simplified perspective of expressive and bodily components, it has been assumed inappropriately, that the indigenous emotion concept

describes and determines the real emotional episode completely. Accordingly, it is no longer possible to determine whether there is a difference between a real emotional episode and the corresponding concept of the emotion. This becomes clear with respect to the emotional concept of romantic love, which is mainly a concept in Occidental societies, and does not occur in everyday life in some societies such as the ethnic groups of the Bara in Madagascar or the Makassar in Sulawesi, Indonesia, in which marriages are arranged by the parents. Where this concept does not prevail, neither do the corresponding emotional experiences. However, this is not necessarily the case, because young members of these cultures in particular, do present bodily “symptoms,” which are very similar to those of being in love. However, in the culture in question, these symptoms are regarded as indications of a dysfunctional “love magic” or obsession, and accordingly treated as an illness (Röttger-Rössler, 2002, 2006). It is particularly interesting to consider this complex relationship between emotional concept and emotion as the subject of a comprehensive analysis, which is, however, not possible with an exclusively language-focused approach.

### ***Co-Constructivist Component-Oriented Paradigm: Emotion as a Multi-Component System***

The criticism of a mainly language-focused analysis of emotions has led to a culture-informed analysis of emotions that breaks down an emotion into its components and conducts a detailed culture-informed analysis of these components. Accordingly, emotions are defined as:

... multifaceted, open phenomena that are shaped to be effective in the sociocultural context in which they occur. The primary facets of emotion are emotional experience, which among others, is constituted by the appraisal of the situation and action readiness, expressive behavior, autonomic and central nervous system changes, and behavior.

(Mesquita & Leu, 2007, p. 735)

The focus is placed on a differentiated analysis of the components, to which the linguistically coded emotion concepts also belong, but to which they are not reduced. In their “symbolic approach to emotion,” Shweder et al. (2008) argue similarly, along the lines that each emotion can be broken down into

its components. These components must then be compared between cultures, in order to determine the extent to which they are universally comparable or culture-specific. Here, the equivalent measure is thus formed through the specific components of an emotion (see Shweder et al., 2008; Mesquita & Leu, 2007; Section on the components of an emotion), namely:

1. cause/antecedent events,
2. appraisal,
3. communication and symbolization/  
emotional behavior,
4. self-management/action readiness,
5. physiological reaction patterns,
6. affective experience,
7. normative social appraisals of the emotion  
itself,
8. social management/regulation.

Here it is assumed that each emotion in each culture can be described exhaustively on the basis of these components. Universality and culture-specificity are demonstrated on the basis of congruity or deviation in the configuration of these components. This culturally comparative component analysis of emotions has been extended in two directions. One direction refers to an indigenous analysis of emotions, with the emphasis on a reconstruction of selected emotions on the basis of its components. In this respect, one concentrates on those emotions that are regarded as central for a given culture, such as a re-analysis of the nine “basic emotions” from the Indian Sanskrit text *Rasādhyāya* from the third to fifth century AD (Shweder et al., 2008), which has little in common with the six basic emotions from the neuro-cultural theory of Ekman (1992; see also Horton, 2006, for an analysis of “*Lung Lang*” as a kind of Tibetan anger; Menon & Shweder, 1994; see Shweder, 2003 for an analysis of “*Lajja*” as a kind of shame in India).

The other approach aims to analyze the culture-specificity of the stated components of an emotion. Accordingly, cultural differences could be revealed in the individual emotional components, which correspond with the sociocultural conditions of the particular culture (Mesquita & Leu, 2007). For example, differences in the significance of the feeling component have been revealed. Western cultures assign a personal significance to emotions. They are perceived and interpreted as private and internal

experiences, which is why members view the feeling component as a central feature of an emotion (Mesquita, 2001). Asian cultures, in contrast, perceive and interpret emotions as situation-related indications of relations between persons and their environment. Emotions are therefore conceived more as a function of situations and tend not to be made dependent on the actual subjective feeling of the individual (Mesquita, 2001).

Both approaches focus on the cultural manifestations of the distinguishable components, with their normative embeddings, which lead to the fact that some emotions are more central for one culture than others, such as shame for India or for many Asian cultures, and anger for the U. S. culture. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that it is possible to understand and recognize the emotions of other cultures, but this does not mean that one is also able to experience them personally. One can easily recognize that a person who kneels down in front of an altar is feeling humility toward God, but may be unable to feel it personally if one is an atheist.

Some critical points can be raised regarding this paradigm:

1. The assumption that every component of an emotion is essentially subject to cultural modeling introduces many degrees of freedom to the theory. As a consequence, a falsification of such descriptions seems barely impossible because the criteria to identify an emotion and delimit it from others become ambiguous.

2. The proposed component analysis does not, so far, contain any indication of how the individual components are mutually related, as is the case, for example, in the neuro-cultural emotion theory, where the feeling component is conceptualized as feedback from the expression component. When the assumption of a feedback loop between the expression and the feeling component is valid, then culturally modified expression signs must also lead to correspondingly changed internal feelings. For example, when culturally constructed expressions of romantic love are used—such as tenderness, love songs, love poems—this emotion will feel different from an experience of pure sexual excitement.

### ***Conclusion: What Do Existing Emotion Accounts Tell Us?***

The discussion of current emotion theories and their culture-related consequences can be summed up as follows: First, the diversity of conceptual and

empirical work has not yet led to consistent results on the extent to which single emotions can be viewed as universal or culture-specific. Up to the present, the most differentiated approach has been presented by recent co-constructive theories that conceptualize an emotion as a multi-component system and propose conducting an indigenous as well as cross-cultural analysis of all components of a single emotion: cause of an emotion, appraisal, action readiness, expression, bodily reaction, feeling, normative evaluation of the emotion, and its regulation.

Second, such procedure could avoid dividing an emotion into a quasi-culture-free, evolutionarily prewired core and a culturally superimposed shell, as proposed by the neuro-cultural approach of basic emotions. By contrast, multi-component approaches suggest to divide even basic emotions into their components, analyzing these components first *within* a specific culture-informative framework and then checking for similarities and differences between these multi-componential emotional constructs across different cultures.

Third, the proposed procedure, however, raises the issue of operationalization. How different must two emotional constructs be, in order to label them as (disjunctive) emotions? The “elegant” solution of the language-based approach, which considers each emotional concept as a separate emotion, has been rejected as incomplete. A multi-component approach also has to deal with the methodological problem of specifying valid criteria for each component that allow a classification of single emotions and a decision as to whether or not two emotional descriptions belonging to different cultures are equal or not.

Fourth, the above-mentioned emotion theories provide an implicit answer to this problem, by referring to the development of an emotion. An emotion can be identified as universal when it can already be observed at birth or when it adopts similar features over the course of ontogeny in almost every culture; an emotion can be identified as culture-specific when it is possible to refer to culture-specific conditions of socialization that evoke substantial and demonstrable modifications in several of its components that transform the entire configuration into a different emotional quality. This developmental reconstruction of an emotional quality within and across selected cultures can be used as an additional method for validating the classification of single emotions as similar or different.

Finally, most studies conducted within the scope of the emotion theories have analyzed the emotions

of adults who are already socialized members of their respective cultures. The use of cross-sectional research designs does not enable testing the effects of culture-specific conditions, because such designs only ascertain a co-variation between features of an emotion and those of cultural conditions. Testing for causal relations requires longitudinal designs, at least a developmental approach that analyzes the developmental pathway of an emotion and its corresponding cultural contexts from birth onward. Some potential and provisional conclusions of such an approach are described in the next section.

### The Advantages of a Developmental Approach to Emotions

Reconstructing the development of single emotions within a culture and comparing their developmental paths between cultures can be used as a valid criterion for determining which emotions can emerge in a given culture over the course of ontogeny. An analogous method was used in evolutionary biology to provide evidence of the descents of species. Within this approach, it is not sufficient to compare recent species and to ascertain similarities. It is necessary to discover and provide evidence of common lines of descent between the species in question. This developmental approach can be adapted to the analysis of human emotions (Griffiths, 1997). The core idea is that the emotional system of an adult is the outcome of a developmental *history*, in which one has to take account of more than the current functionality of the system elements. A number of these system elements are already specified through the phylogenetic and ontogenetic history. These specifications then become the raw material for subsequent phylogenetic and ontogenetic transformation processes. Thus, a developmental approach of emotions does not start without certain preconditions. We use the following methodological considerations as a starting point:

1. For the emergence of universal emotions, two developmental scenarios are theoretically possible: (a) Each component of an emotion is innate; in this case, they have to be observed from birth in all cultures or emerge in the ontogenesis at a similar time period in all infants; (b) Not all of the components of a single emotion are innate, but the cultural conditions of their development are comparable within different cultures, with the result that these comparable conditions evoke a comparable emotional quality.

2. The emergence of culture-specific emotions is only possible when two conditions are met: (a) At least some of the components of an emotion are relatively undifferentiated and changeable at birth, which enables these cultural conditions to modify and adapt their components to culture-specific affordances over the course of ontogeny; (b) Culture-specific conditions can be identified that are responsible for the emergence of different features within the components.

### Ontogenetic Starting Point: A Limited Repertoire of Innate Emotions

An important source of evidence in a developmental analysis is the empirical study of the emotional repertoire of neonates, in contrast to the emotions of older children and adults. Emotions of neonates are less pronounced and more elementary than those of adults. A review of the relevant literature provides evidence of five distinguishable emotions that can be characterized by a distinctive expressive pattern, triggered by a specific cause: distress, disgust, startle reaction, interest, and endogenous pleasure (see Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Sroufe, 1996). The main purpose of the first three emotions is to signal need-related deficit states or impairments of physical integrity, whereas the last two (interest, endogenous pleasure) serve to build up psychological representations of the external environment and the internal body world (e.g., a feeling of tension and relaxation cycles in adventure games such as rocking, swinging, or jumping; see Sroufe, 1996):

1. *Distress* is expressed particularly through crying preceded by motor restlessness, and this crying signals an urgent need (be it for food, warmth, body contact, or attention) that the caregiver not only has to satisfy but also feels obliged to satisfy (see Boukydis & Burgess, 1982; Oster, 2005).

2. *Disgust* is expressed by screwing up the nose and sticking out the tongue in order to spit out food, signaling unpalatable food (see Rosenstein & Oster, 2005; Soussignan & Schaal, 2005).

3. A *startle reaction* is expressed by wide open eyes and a freezing of the body. It signals a threat of overstimulation that may be triggered by an abrupt and strong irritation (such as losing one's balance or being splashed with water). Here, we refer to a physical reflex, as opposed to the emotion of surprise or fear (see Ekman & Friesen, 1985).

4. *Interest* is expressed by turning toward the source of stimulation, visual focusing, and an inhibition of motor activity. It signals the novelty of an external stimulation (Langsdorf, Izard, Rayias et al., 1983) and serves to detect contingencies in perceptions of the environment.

5. *Endogenous pleasure* is expressed by smiling, which signals the completion of a tension-relaxation cycle triggered initially by subcortical stimulation. Nonetheless, over the first few weeks of life, it is triggered increasingly when the baby recognizes contingencies between stimuli, e.g., repeatedly seeing the face of the caregiver (Sroufe, 1996).

The observation of neonate emotions has been conducted mainly with neonates and young infants from Western cultures. Therefore, a compelling proof of universality has yet to be done. However, the assumption seems reasonable that the emotional repertoire of neonates does not differ fundamentally between cultures. If these results could be corroborated, it would disprove Bridges' (1932) hypothesis that neonates display only two distinct emotional states, a positive and a negative one.

### ***Expression as a Culturally and Biologically Necessary Component***

During the first period of ontogenetic development, children of all cultures are dependent on the care and support of their caregiver, who must notice the current needs and motives of their offspring appropriately and ensure their satisfaction. These initial conditions require a perceivable expression of the children's needs and motives. The expression serves as a signal of the prevailing needs of the child (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Sroufe, 1996). Therefore, the expression is a necessary component of an emotion. The expressions of the five emotions of neonates reveal a peculiarity (Sroufe, 1996). They are not yet fully adaptive as the expressions of children and adults that are fine-tuned toward the cause of an emotion. The expressive patterns of neonates do not yet focus on the cause of the emotion triggered and the eyes are often closed or do not focus on the cause (with the exception of interest). Additionally, the expressions are not triggered promptly after the cause appears; they need time to increase and decrease (with the exception of disgust and startle reaction).

Taken together, the causes of neonate emotions are not clearly marked by the expression with respect to

their temporal and spatial features. Because of these features, Sroufe (1996) has labeled these emotions as precursor emotions. This undirected and open feature of neonate expression compels caregivers to infer the specific need of their baby to some degree, by trial and error (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Sroufe, 1996). If emotional expressions are primarily undirected, the caregiver can focus the child on specific causes in the course of social interaction. It is obvious that expressions are the primary medium of communication by which emotional messages are signaled and socialized.

Comparing neonate emotions to the so-called basic emotions, it becomes clear that distress is not the same as anger and sadness, endogenous pleasure is not the same as joy, being startled is not the same as being fearful and interest is not the same as surprise (see Oster, 2005). These basic emotions cannot be observed from birth onward. From a functionalistic perspective, this observation seems reasonable because anger, sadness, fear, joy, and surprise require an ascription of meaning, of which young infants are not capable and that manifests itself in expressive patterns that are triggered promptly and focus on the cause.

### ***From Interpersonal to Intrapersonal Regulation of Actions by Emotions***

Most emotion theories proposed in general psychology (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 2001) assume that an emotion regulates the action of the individual experiencing it. The target of the emotion is the individual himself or herself, who then performs an act that serves his or her concerns. Because action regulation is intrapsychological or intrapersonal, it can be described as having an *intrapersonal regulation function*. Generally speaking, this seems to be the case in adults.

Taking a developmental perspective opens up another possibility. For infants, it is obvious that the main function of emotions is to regulate the actions of their caregivers. A cry expressing distress does not lead a baby to engage in any coping actions. Instead, it leads the caregiver to perform the necessary act to satisfy the baby's need. What is so special about this regulation is that it is directed toward influencing the mind of another individual, so that he or she will act to satisfy one's concerns on one's behalf. The target of the emotion is thus another individual. Because action regulation is interpersonal or interpsychological, it can be described as having an *interpersonal regulation function*. This differentiation

into an intra- and an interpersonal function can be applied to any individual emotion quality. For example, anger can lead one to merely threaten another individual, so that he or she will get out of one's way (interpersonal regulation). However, it can also lead to an assault on the other person, so that he or she is *forced* out of the way (intrapersonal regulation). Sadness leads one to seek somebody who can provide consolation. However, it can also lead one to cry alone and console oneself.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, the originally dominant form is the interpersonal regulation function (*see also* Fogel, 1993; Sroufe, 1996; Tronick, 1989).

This developmental mechanism can be viewed as just one example of a more general psychological principle governing the development of higher psychological functions. According to Vygotsky (1931/1997), every higher psychological function starts as a social action—that is, as an interpersonal function—before it subsequently emerges as an individual action—that is, an intrapersonal function:

For us to call a process 'external' means to call it 'social.' Every higher mental function was external because it was social before it became an internal, strictly mental function; it was formerly a social relation of two people. The means of acting on oneself is initially a means of acting on others or a means of action of others on the individual. (Vygotsky, 1931/1997, p. 105)

This mechanism has major consequences for the development of expressive reactions. If emotions essentially possess an interpersonal regulation function at the beginning of ontogenesis, then expressive reactions become the central mediators in the action regulation of (young) children, and they achieve this through their *semiotic* function as signs for others. This shifts the focus of analysis to the quality of the expression signs and the ability of caregivers to heed the expression signs of infants.

### ***Emergence of New Emotions in the Course of Ontogenesis***

A large body of studies in developmental psychology has shown that most of human emotions emerge over the course of ontogenesis. This is especially the case for social emotions, such as various forms of embarrassment, shame, guilt, empathy, pride, or gratitude (Barrett, 2005; Ferguson, Stegge, Miller, & Olsen, 1999; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992). These

social emotions are characterized by appraisals that require social competencies, including the ability to perform joint attention, inferring the intentions of others, distinguishing between self and others, and the acceptance of social norms. Children acquire these abilities demonstrably only in the course of ontogenesis (Denham, 1998; Quinn, 2005; Sroufe, 1996). Two conclusions can be drawn from this. On the one hand, if children from different cultures acquire these social *abilities*, it is likely that they will also acquire such social *emotions*. In this respect, these emotions may have universal features. On the other hand, the acquisition of these social abilities and emotions are embedded in a world of culture-specific ethno-theories and the educational practice of their social interaction partners (Quinn, 2005), which may also introduce culture-specific features in the components of these emotions.

A research challenge for the future is to formulate a timetable indicating the ages at which children of different cultures are confronted with educational practices that lead them to acquire the mentioned social competencies and at which age they display the various social emotions mentioned above. A comparison of the developmental pathways in different cultures can provide knowledge about the emergence of universal or culture-specific features within these types of social emotions.

### ***Windows of Culture-Specific Patterns of Meaning and Interaction in the Acquisition of Emotions***

The incompleteness of neonate emotional expression and cognitive abilities, as described above, opens up potential for shaping these emerging expressions and abilities:

1. Culture-specific educational practices determine the extent to which children are exposed to situational causes of single emotions, e.g., causes that trigger distress or joy.
2. Culture-specific patterns of how caregivers interpret children's expressions determine how caregivers react to them.

This can be illustrated by the development of smiling and pleasure in young infants in cultures relating to different ethno-theories about the significance of smiling and joy. Some cultures, such as the ethnic group of the Nso, who live in North Cameroon, do not interpret a smile of an infant as a social sign of making contact, as is the case in Western cultures (Keller & Otto, 2009). Therefore, Nso



mothers rarely establish situations in which visual contact is possible, namely face-to-face-interactions. Additionally, when their infants smile at them, they do not react contingently to this by smiling back. The opposite applies to German mothers. They frequently establish face-to-face interactions and reinforce their infants' behavior by smiling back. In response to these cultural differences, German infants show an increasing amount of smiling and joy, compared with the Nso infants, even in the first 3 months of life (Wörmann, Holodynski, Kärtner, & Keller, 2010).

Several cross-cultural studies demonstrate how different educational practices lead to different frequencies and features of expression, e.g., European-American children displayed stronger anger reactions than Nepalese children (Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002), also expressed more negative emotions in achievement situations than Japanese children (Lewis, Takai-Kawakami, Kawakami, & Sullivan, 2010) and Japanese children decreased disappointment reaction compared to German children (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999), but they increased distress/empathy reactions compared to German children (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 2010).

### ***Conclusions: What Do We Know of Early Ontogenesis of Affect?***

The reconstruction of developmental conditions and pathways of single emotions in different cultures can be used as an additional criterion of validity, in order to identify single emotions and their universal and culture-specific features. State-of-the-art developmental research yields the following general insights:

1. Neonates seem to exhibit a repertoire of five distinguishable emotions that can be labeled as types of distress, endogenous pleasure, interest, disgust, and startle reaction.

2. The primary function of these emotions is to regulate social interactions between child and caregiver. Through expression, the emotion signals an appeal to the caregiver to act on behalf of the child to satisfy the child's motives. Using an emotion to regulate one's own behavior in a motive-serving manner is a secondary result of learning.

3. The initial social medium that mediates social impact is the selection and type of emotionally relevant situations by caregivers, and secondly, within these situations, the interpretations and

reactions of caregivers to the child's emotional expressions.

4. From birth onward, both child and caregivers use expressions to communicate with each other and from birth onward, these expressions are modified by their mutual reactions and interpretations. By contrast, language-based emotion concepts impact on children's emotional reactions only when they start to use language and to acquire these concepts. This is possible only from the age of 2 years onward.

5. The described conditions of the ontogenetic starting point reveal that the number and cultural peculiarity of emotions increase only with increasing age. These emotions emerge initially in social interactions and serve to regulate these interactions. In a secondary developmental step, they can also be used for self-regulation.

6. A developmental analysis of social interactions between child and caregivers of different cultures enables us to assign culture-specific influences to particular age ranges and patterns of social practice. This approach can supplement cross-cultural analysis of adult emotions.

Our developmental analysis of emotions reveals that expression is a primary medium for the communication, regulation, and socialization of emotions and social relations. Therefore, in the next section, we take a closer look at emotional expression, considering how it works as a medium of cultural experience and tradition for the development of emotions.

### **Culture and Emotion-Related Sign Systems**

Expression and language are sign systems. Signs have the peculiarity that, on the one hand, they belong to the material cultural sphere, because expression and speech signs are perceivable for other people and can be used for communication and to influence others. On the other hand, they belong to the psychic sphere of a person, because one can use signs not only for communicating with others, but also with oneself, in order to regulate one's own actions and emotions (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Vygotsky, 1934/1987). Therefore, signs are an interface between the mental processes of an individual and his or her cultural environment. Co-constructivist emotion theories have already taken into account the significance of signs in the form of language-based ethno-theories of emotions

and their enculturation. In the following, we argue that even nonverbal expressive reactions can be conceptualized as a culturally constructed sign system, which specializes in mediating and regulating emotional processes. In addition to language signs, expression signs function as a second interface between culture and individual, by which socially constructed experiences are exchanged.

### ***Artifacts as Vehicles of Human Culture***

Using socially created artifacts (in the form of tools and signs) to reshape their naturally given environment within a process of social coordination, and passing on this cultural heritage to the following generations is a species-specific characteristic of human beings. Later generations, in turn, adopt the artifacts and apply them to regulate their activities and to maintain social and cultural life (see Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1931/1997). Artifacts are not just human-made objects such as tools, machines, and buildings, but also human-made sign systems and their tangible forms, such as speech or written language (Wartofsky, 1973). We also add the nonverbal language of facial expression, gestures, posture, tone of voice, gaze behavior, and spatial behavior. Artifacts are the vehicles of human culture. Wartofsky (1973) describes them as “objectifications of human needs and intentions already invested with cognitive and affective content” (p. 204). They are simultaneously both something real and something ideal (nonmaterialistic). They are tangible and therefore possess an objectively perceivable form. Artifacts need such a form so that their use can be handed down from person to person.

At the same time, cultural artifacts are also something ideal—that is, they have a signifying form when they are used as signs. This is necessary so that they can serve as a means of psychological regulation. For example, a knife is perceived as a tool for cutting meat or bread and its social existence calls on people to use it in this manner. A second possibility is to use it as a weapon to threaten another person. With this usage, the knife is not used as a tool to affect things (food), but as a sign to modify the intentions of the receiver, who is forced, for example, to hand over his money. The factual choice, however, depends on the motives and intentions of the sender—and its factual impact on the receiver, on his correct interpretation of the indicated appeal and his willingness to comply.

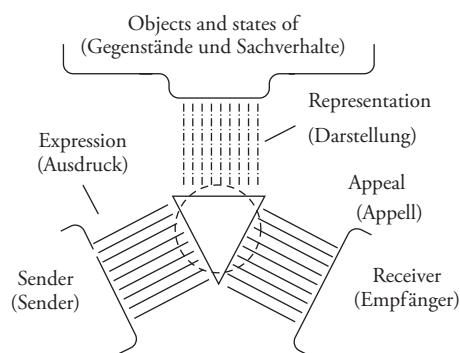
Looking at artifacts in this manner transcends the dualistic controversy that views culture as being

exclusively either something internal, consisting of learned signs and shared systems of meaning, or as something purely external, consisting of handed-down action procedures and material products (see Cole, 1996). Over the course of human history, the creation, generational transfer, and continuous development of the cultural sphere have led to the emergence of a cultural form of acquiring and passing on experience.

Artifacts can be divided into tools and signs, according to their predominant use. As a rule, tools serve to influence and reshape both objects and the nonsocial environment; signs serve to influence the intentions of other people. For the purpose of analyzing emotions, the sphere of signs is relevant. Signs can be used not only for transmitting messages about facts to others; beyond this symbol (or representational) function, signs also make an impact on the interaction partner, as both a symptom and an appeal, as Bühler (1934/1984) noted in his Organon Model of sign usage (see Fig. 46.1; see also Scherer, 1992).

If a sender uses signs to convey a message to a receiver, the message also serves these two purposes:

1. As a *symptom* (expression in Fig. 46.1), the signs used signal the intentions, wishes, and expectations of the sender. At this point, we do not take into account the distinction between genuine (sincere) and deceptive (fraudulent) intentions. When children grow older, they become capable of deceiving their interaction partners about their real intentions (Feldman, Jenkins, & Popoola, 1979; Feldman, Tomasian, & Coats, 1999).
2. As an *appeal*, the signs used simultaneously form an impression on the receiver, indicating that he or she should act in a certain way. At minimum, a sender requires a receiver to pay attention to the



**Figure 46.1** Karl Bühler's Organon Model

signaled message and to demonstrate an attempt to understand it. Usually, the receiver should also do something in conformity with the signaled message, e.g., to help the sender, give him information, stop doing something, etc. Whether the receiver will respond appropriately to the appeal depends on the intentions, wishes, and expectations of the receiver.

Thus, signs serve to regulate social interactions. As mentioned above, two sign systems in particular are relevant for a culture-focused analysis of emotion, language, and expression. In the following, we deal only with the system of expressions, because, in most emotion theories, expressions are not appropriately analyzed through a semiotic perspective and because expressions are the primary sign system that is already in use before children acquire a language.

### ***System of Expression Signs and Emotion Episodes***

In cross-cultural research, expressions have been analyzed especially within the neuro-cultural theory of basic emotions (Ekman, 1972, 1992, 1994b). Within this research tradition, expression has been conceptualized in a reduced form for several reasons:

1. Expression is reduced to an analysis of facial expression.
2. Expression is reduced to its symptom function, meaning that it primarily signals the subjective feeling state of the sender to the receiver.
3. Modifications of expression are mainly conceptualized as intensifying, weakening, neutralizing, or masking an emotional expression (e.g., Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine et al., 2008).

These reductions have contributed to the fact that the impact of expression on the construction and enculturation of universal and culture-specific emotions has been generally underestimated. The analysis of expression, however, can be supplemented by the following features and capabilities (see Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006).

*Expression signs are coded in all channels of expression.* They contain not only facial expression, but also body posture, gestures, tone of voice, touch, gaze behavior, and spatial behavior (Collier, 1985). Furthermore, symbolic actions can also be used as expression signs, for example the exchange of (wedding) rings as a sign of attachment or love, waving national flags as a sign of national belonging.

*Variety of cultural expression signs termed “emblems.”* Expression signs are also culturally constructed, as illustrated by countless examples of culture-specific emblems, which are used as emotional expressions, such as the victory-sign, giving someone the “finger” (or bird), kneeling down, etc. (see Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Morris, 1994; Posner & Serenari, 2003).

*Expression signs have a symptom function.* They refer to how the sender appraises the situation and also what the sender intends to do next (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Scherer, 1992). Thus, expression signs provide the receiver with information about the appraisal and action readiness of the sender. For example, in many cultures, bared teeth signal that the sender feels physically threatened by the receiver and is ready to attack. Wierzbicka (1995, 1999) has analyzed the assigned appraisal and action readiness of many bodily expressions like kissing, hugging, kneeling down, and also of the prototypical facial expressions (see Table 46.1).

*Expression signs have an appeal function.* They appeal to the receiver to follow the signaled message and react in accordance with the appeal. It is because of the appeal function that expression signs are culturally constructed and used by individuals. Expression signs are designed to have an effect on the receiver's intentions to follow the appeal and to signal approval in reciprocating to the sender through complementary expression signs. As a result, a prototypical course of interaction evolves (Goffman, 1967; Posner, 2001). The triggered expression signs of the receiver react on the sender, and the sender's emotion either disappears, if the receiver has followed the appeal or allows the sender to increase or modify his or her signaled appeal if the receiver disregards or even actively rejects the sender's appeal. For example, bared teeth convey the appeal for the opponent to withdraw, or face the possibility of attack. If the opponent withdraws, the sender's rage and bared teeth disappear; if the opponent resists the sender may increase his threat or attack physically.

*Differences between expression signs and language signs.* Besides the above-mentioned common grounds of expression and language signs, some substantial differences have to be taken into account that are important for an analysis of expressions:

1. In comparison to speech signs, expression signs have a limited scope of representation. They refer only to personally significant relations between

**Table 46.1 Assigned Meaning to Facial Expression Signs**

Expression sign	Appraisal of the cause <sup>a</sup>	Action readiness of the sender <sup>a</sup>	Appeal to the receiver <sup>b</sup>
Smile	I feel something good now.	I want to continue the current action or interaction. I want to join you.	Let's continue the current interaction.
Down-turned mouth	I feel something bad now and I know I can't do anything.	I don't want to do anything now.	Look after me. Make everything good again.
Wide open eyes with immobile eyebrows	What I perceive is threatening, but I can't do anything about it.	I want to know more about this, but I can't do anything now.	Don't hurt me, I submit. Help me out of danger (directed toward trusted person)
Raised eyebrows	What I can perceive right now is new or unexpected.	I want to know more about this.	Give me more information.
Eyebrows drawn together	I didn't think this would happen.	I want to do something now. I think I can't do it.	Stop blocking my goals.
Bared teeth	I feel something bad now.	I want to do something bad to someone now.	Hold off! Give way or I'll attack.

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Wierzbicka (1999, pp. 189–215). <sup>b</sup>Adapted from Fridlund (1994, p. 129).

person and environment, meaning aspects of the situation that are relevant to personal motives.

2. Expression signs have a particular perspective of reference: Basically, it is first-person present-tense (Wierzbicka, 1999). This means that the person who expresses is the one who feels, and the one to whom the expression is addressed is the one who is intended to act. Expression signs refer only to the relationship between sender and receiver (or cause, if the receiver is not the cause of the emotion). Only at an advanced level it is possible to refer to a past or future emotion or to an emotion of another person, and then only through using additional indications or information. Therefore, a complete analysis of expression must include the object or person to whom the expression is addressed (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). When using pictures of (facial) expressions that are only posed for the camera, as in studies on the recognition of facial expressions (Ekman, 1972; Ekman & Friesen, 1986), substantial information about the context is missing.

3. In contrast to language, it remains questionable whether combinations of expression signs follow syntactical rules. There are some indications of

syntactical rules (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006): (a) The level of exchange seems to matter and may refer to status differences between people; (b) The distance of exchange seems to matter and may refer to the level of intimacy between the interaction partners.

*A (culture-specific) lexicon of expression signs.* Expression signs used in a given culture can be gathered to a culture-specific lexicon similar to a lexicon of words. The meaning of an expression sign can be defined by the particular appraisal and action readiness each sign refers to and by the particular appeal each sign signals to the receiver. For example, a pout is an expression sign. Its meaning can be defined by compiling three facets: (1) the appraisal that the person who expressed it have not got what he wanted to get, (2) the action readiness that he is going to demonstratively show his frustration to the receiver, and (3) the appeal to whom the pout is issued that the receiver ought to console the sender and fulfill his wish. All three facets together reveal the meaning of a pout (Kottonau, 2010; Table 46.1, for additional examples; see, Posner & Serenari, 2003; Wierzbicka, 1995, 1999).

*Ritualization of emotional interactions.* Emotionally loaded patterns of interaction that frequently occur in a given culture usually adopt a ritualized mode. This ritualization provides a predictable frame of interaction for the involved members, such as modes of mutual greetings, excuses and forgiveness, showing dominance and submission, insult and revenge, grief and consolation, etc. (see Goffman, 1967; Posner, 2001). These ritualized modes have been analyzed partially as cultural display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1986) and cultural feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979), but these concepts focus predominantly on the emotion and expression of the initiating sender and not on the mutual exchange of expressions by both sender and receiver.

*The use of expression signs as display.* Expression signs can be used by a sender only as a display to induce the appellative effect on the receiver, but without a concurrent feeling. In analyzing expressions in the light of their appeal function, display rules can be conceptualized also as prescriptions regarding which appeal a person is allowed or obliged to send to which receiver in which situation. Parallels to Goffman's (1967) analysis of human's face-to-face behavior can be drawn.

*Universality and culture-specificity of expression signs.* The collection of expression signs and their meaning in different cultures is a precondition for answering the question to what extent single expression signs have a universal or culture-specific meaning. As far as we know from cross-cultural studies, some signs seem to be assigned a universally similar meaning across cultures like bared teeth as a sign of rage, kneeling down as a sign of humility, laughter as a sign of amusement. One reason for a universally similar coding may be the iconic mode of coding that is typical for expression signs and that differs from the symbolic mode of coding with respect to language signs. An iconic coding means that a sign is similar to the relationship or circumstances to which it refers (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). However, the cross-culturally similar interpretations of these iconic expression signs do not mean that a person also uses and shows these signs in his or her own personal expressions. People from Western cultures usually interpret kneeling as a sign of humility, but they probably do not do it themselves because they probably do not feel humility—except if they are highly religious people who feel humility toward God.

*The problem of classification.* A comparison of expression signs across cultures contains a methodological problem in terms of what level of analysis

should be used for classifying signs and rituals as either equivalent or different. The following two episodes can generally be classified as modes of insult and revenge: Imagine the community of “men of honor” in the Prussian city of Berlin in the nineteenth century. A sign of showing contempt to another man of honor was the insulting gesture of slapping the opponent's ears with a glove. This gesture obliged the insulted person to “demand satisfaction,” to restore his honor by challenging the insulting person to a duel (see Frevert, 1998). Compare this ritual of suffering and restoration to an insult by a German adolescent giving a Turkish peer “a finger” in Berlin in the twenty-first century. This gesture might provoke the insulted Turkish peer into a physical attack leading to a fight (Uslucan & Fuhrer, 2003). Although both episodes have a similar relational structure, both insults and reactions are embedded in different cultural frameworks of meaning and action, with different signs and modes of concrete interactions and different long-term consequences. A sound analysis of these modes of emotional interactions should not simply classify them as equal, but first conduct a careful and culture-informed analysis of the existing expressions and rituals in each culture and then compare them cross-culturally, according to the analyzed components of the involved emotions.

Taken together, it seems worthwhile to analyze human expressions within the perspective of a culturally evolved sign system handed down from one generation to the next. This perspective opens up not only an analysis of the existing emotional concept of a given culture, but also a second pathway to the cultural phenomena of emotions.

## **Components of an Emotion and Its Interrelations**

Emotion expression is only one of several components that constitute an emotion. For a complete understanding of the functions and features of individual emotions, it is necessary to take into account the other components. For this purpose, we draw on the cultural psychology approaches of Shweder et al. (2008) and Mesquita and Leu (2007). We focus particularly on the component of action readiness and its relation to the component of subjective feeling and discuss the feedback hypothesis that recently received increasing broad acceptance. Feedback models (Damasio, 1994; Ekman, 1984; Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Izard, 1977, 2009; Levenson et al., 2007) assume that a subjective feeling consists

of an internal feedback loop of expressive and body reactions that accompany an emotion. However, neither of the above-mentioned multi-component models has addressed these interrelations.

### ***Causes of an Emotion***

This component refers to the culture-specific causes of an emotion. The appraisal of an emotional situation is rooted in what the relevant cause is judged to be (Frijda, 1986). Cultures may differ or be quite similar, in terms of the prototypic causes they provide for eliciting the different types of emotions. These culture-specific contexts and their interpretations by emotional concepts of the given culture define the range of motives, actions, and experiences in which emotions are embedded (see Frijda & Mesquita, 1992; Mesquita & Leu, 2008; Scherer et al., 1986; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994).

### ***Emotion-Specific Appraisal of the Particular Cause***

This component deals with how a person appraises the relationship between a given cause and the actual motives and concerns. Whether appraisal patterns for a given emotion are universal or culture-specific depends on the level of abstraction that applies to the categorization of respondent answers (Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997). In order to avoid hasty generalizations, the suggestion is made that patterns should first be extracted from an indigenous analysis of reports and only then, the cultural comparisons will follow (see Shweder et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the emotional appraisal process must be distinguished from a deliberately enacted evaluation of the motive-relevant relationship between an individual and the environment. In the latter, the prior emotional appraisal process is reconstructed *post hoc* with the aid of conceptual knowledge (Fogel, 2009; Lazarus, 1991, p. 144). This reflective evaluation is stored in other neural circuits than that of emotional appraisal (Fogel, 2009, pp. 95–101). Only human beings are capable of performing such reflective evaluation. This ability starts to emerge only during the 3- to 6-year-old age range and requires the acquisition of language-based concepts (Campos, Frankl, & Camras, 2004; Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Holodyski, Seeger, Hartmann & Wörmann, in press).

### ***Action Readiness of an Emotion***

This component describes how an emotion is used to change the person–environment relationship

in a motive-serving manner. The component contains expressive reactions and actions that establish or enhance, weaken, or break some form of contact with aspects of the environment, or ones that either aim to do this or assist in doing so (see Frijda, 1986, p. 13). Such changes that are relevant to motives can be achieved by two different modes of emotional behavior (see Frijda, 1986, pp. 11–13; Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006):

First, expressive reactions directly change the relationship between the individual and the environment, by using instrumental and problem-focused behavior. Frijda (1986, p. 11) gives “disgust” as a prototypical example. This expressive reaction (retching, opening the mouth, pushing out the tongue, wrinkling the nose) reduces contact with distasteful substances and helps to expel them. Other prototypical instrumental behaviors are fleeing or freezing in the case of fear, or attacking in the case of rage. Shweder et al. (2008) subsume such behavior under the label of “self-management.” Many studies on anger and fear, for example, focus on this instrumental mode of action readiness (Stemmler, 2004).

Second, expressive reactions change the person–environment relationship indirectly, by using them as signs in order to influencing the behavior of an interaction partner. The latter should modify this relationship in a way that serves the sender’s motives. For example, when an infant displays an expression of disgust during feeding, this signals to the feeder, that the baby does not want any more food and that feeding can stop. This turns the expression into a sign. We have considered this form in more detail in the previous section. Using expressions as signs works only when both sender and receiver refer to a common pool of expression signs with shared meanings, and when the receiver feels obliged to obey the appeal. Shweder et al. (2008) subsume this aspect under the label of “social management” and “communication and symbolization.”

In most cases, the second alternative of an appellative mode is used. As already mentioned above, each emotion originally has an interpersonal regulatory function because young children cannot act by themselves; they are dependent on the support of others to whom they appeal through expression signs. Such signs, however, can also be used for intrapersonal regulation, in order to regulate one’s own actions in a motive-serving manner (See below section about interpersonal and intrapersonal regulation).

### ***Physiological Reaction Patterns***

Some emotions seem to have a very strong physiological reaction pattern, such as fear in confronting a life-threatening cause or rage in the face of an assault (Levenson, 2003; Stemmler, 2004). In some theories, this component is treated as the only valid indicator that a “hot” emotion and not only a “cold” cognitive evaluation have been triggered (*see* Lazarus, 1991). A second issue of long-lasting debate has dealt with the nature of emotion-specific physiological reactions and whether each emotion can be characterized by a specific response pattern (Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983; Jänig & Häbler, 2000; Stemmler, 1989).

A way of disentangling the diverse and contradictory arguments and results is to adopt a functional view including the physiologies of emotions (Jänig & Häbler, 2000; Stemmler, 2004). These physiologies combine at least three different components:

1. The non-emotional content of the ongoing activity during which the emotion appears; the specific bodily conditions immediately before a person experiences an emotion, e.g., if he or she is running, “only” sitting and thinking, or even weakened by a cold.

2. The specific physiological adaptations when the emotion is triggered, but before a coping action occurs. Different situational constraints require a different preparedness of the body: A sudden life-threatening cause needs a different bodily preparedness compared to a threat that is not life-threatening and does not appear suddenly.

3. The organismic, behavioral, and mental demands that are necessitated by the executed coping action in the pursuit of an emotion goal, e.g., to flee or to fight, or to signal deference or sympathy.

Because of these dynamic and multi-layered physiological adaptations, it is probably invalid to assign only one characteristic pattern of physiological response to each emotion. On the other hand, if the eliciting cause and the corresponding appraisal and action readiness is specified, e.g., preparation for an escape, in contrast to freezing in reaction to a life-threatening cause, both physiological adaptations are clearly distinguishable, regardless of whether the person perceives both emotional states as similar, namely as fear (Stemmler, 2004). The consequence for studying the physiology of emotions is to differentiate emotion families into subtypes, according to their situational causes, appraisals and available

coping possibilities, e.g., fear of being killed, of being beaten, of being teased, and to compare only similar subtypes cross-culturally.

Only a few cross-cultural studies have been conducted that directly measure physiological reactions in response to well-defined elicitors for specific triggered emotions. These studies used sad, disgusting, and amusing film clips (Roberts & Levenson, 2006; Tsai, Levenson, & Carstensen, 2000) on different ethnic groups (African, Chinese, European, and Mexican-Americans) within the United States and they used the direct facial action task (Levenson, Ekman, Heider, & Friesen, 1992) on European-Americans and Minangkabau of West Sumatra. The studies revealed similar cross-cultural physiological reactions for the elicitors used. These studies, however, cover only a few emotions, especially subtypes of anger, fear, disgust, and joy, and cover only a few cultures. Therefore, the issue of cross-cultural similarity and differences of physiological reactions remains unsolved and controversial (Larsen, Berntson, Poehlmann et al., 1993; Stemmler, 1989).

Furthermore, the functions of several physiological reactions that accompany emotions have not yet been fully explained, e.g., shedding tears or blushing, which can be observed across cultures. Displayed in a social context, they have an appeal function for the interaction partners, but it remains unclear whether they also have an instrumental self-regulating function (*see* Casimir & Schnegg, 2002; Vingerhoets, Cornelius, Van Heck, & Becht, 2000). Damasio (1994) argues that physiological reactions can serve as somatic markers of emotionally important situations. Because physiological reactions can also be perceived internally by interoceptive sensations, they can accentuate both the situational context and cause of the elicited emotion and support its long-lasting storage and subsequent retrieval from memory.

### ***Subjective Feeling of an Emotion***

This component contains the perception of one’s own emotional states from an actor perspective. This component is only indirectly accessible by self-reports. In narrative interviews, people use different descriptions of their subjective feelings (*see* Fogel, 2009; Frijda, 1986; Kövecses, 2008):

1. Descriptors of interoceptive sensations of accompanying physiological reactions (“I’m sweating,” “my heart is beating,” “I feel cold”).

2. Descriptors of proprioceptive sensations of accompanying expressions (“I laughed”), action impulses (“I could have hit you”), or actions (“I ran away”).

3. Descriptors of metaphors that circumscribe the felt sensations (butterflies in the stomach, having a lump in one’s throat).

4. Labels of emotion (“I am happy”).

The use of emotion labels is already an interpretation of subjective feeling, because a felt intero- or proprioceptive sensation is assigned to an emotional concept, which always refers to specific culturally colored interpretations of the emotional episode that can lead to different coping actions. It makes a difference whether a quick-tempered interoceptive sensation is labeled as an unjustified tantrum or a justified indignation.

The answers to the question whether subjective feelings can be conceptualized as a feedback of the person’s elicited action readiness remain controversial. One approach uses interoceptive sensations of ongoing physiological reactions as first assumed by James (1899; *see also* Reisenzein, 1983; Schachter, 1964), and another approach uses proprioceptive sensations of facial expressions as assumed by Izard (1977) and the neuro-cultural emotion theory (Ekman, 1984; Levenson et al., 2008). Recent models (Damasio, 1994; Fogel, 2009; Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Laird, 2007) conceptualize the feeling component as somatic markers that contain both components of sensations. The supporters of a feedback conception regard the adaptive function of feelings as a feedback of body reactions. The action readiness of an emotion is not only carried out, but it is also internally represented by a feedback loop that enables a continuous fine-tuning of the action readiness, in accordance with the affordances of the unfolding emotion episode. Furthermore, a large body of studies corroborates the feedback hypothesis (*see* Laird, 2007). The cross-cultural studies of Levenson et al. (1992) yielded instructive results. The voluntary manipulation of facial expression by means of the direct facial action task can trigger feelings linked with the particular emotions, in fact, in both analyzed cultures (the Minangkabau of West Sumatra and North Americans). However, the voluntary manipulation of one’s own facial expressions could be performed more effectively by North Americans than by the Minangkabau, but additional information that could explain these differences is missing. A feedback model of feelings yields

three further conclusions that could also be instructive for cross-cultural analysis, but have not yet been studied in detail.

#### **USE OF EXPRESSIVE SENSATIONS FOR INTERPERSONAL AND INTRAPERSONAL REGULATION**

In a feedback concept, the emotional expression signs designed to impress others, such as pouting or crying, are also proprioceptively represented as expressive sensations, in order to fine-tune their expressive appeals to the receiver’s reactions (Fogel, 2009; Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006). These sensations can be used just as effectively for *intrapersonal* regulation. The sensation of crying can lead to a search for somebody who can provide consolation. However, it can also lead one to cry alone and console oneself. Accordingly, a person can also interpret the accompanying expressive sensations as internal signals, in order to perform the necessary coping actions for satisfying his motives by himself and not through an interaction partner. Hence, from the actor perspective, the *intrapersonal* regulation of expression falls back on the same subjective feeling signs as *interpersonal* regulation, only the target of the appeal differs. The feedback process gives rise to *expressive* sensations in both cases. This makes it easy to switch between inter- and intrapersonal regulation, without the need for any additional rules governing the transformation between external expression and internal feeling (Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006).

The ability to use expressive sensations also for self-regulation must be learned by children. Studies with German children reveal that they become able to shift from inter- to intrapersonal regulation between the ages of 3 to 6 years (Holodyski & Friedlmeier, 2006). Because cultures differ in their degrees of intrapersonal regulation, the ability to become aware of expressive sensations might differ accordingly and may lead to cultural differences of feeling (*see* Friedlmeier, 2010).

#### **EXPRESSIVE SENSATIONS AS SOURCE FOR ENCODING AND DECODING EXPRESSION**

A feedback model can also explain how (facial) mimicry functions. (Facial) mimicry is the (more or less) involuntary imitation of the expressive reactions of another person (Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1987). Through body feedback, the imitated expression triggers expressive sensations corresponding to the state of feeling of the individual



being imitated. This can trigger a transmission of feeling known as emotional contagion, particularly in infants and young children (Field, Woodson, Greenberg, & Cohen, 1982; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Saarni, Campos, Camras et al., 2006).

The analysis of the expressive repertoire of a given culture can reveal many culture-specific new creations that are also part of social rituals, starting with greetings and ending with complex religious rituals (Klassen, 2008). As children and adolescents are introduced to these rituals, they watch and carry out the corresponding expression signs and actions by imitation, which again elicits corresponding subjective feelings via the feedback loop. The active imitation of these rituals can be regarded as the mechanism by which a specific mode of feeling can be handed down to the next generation. For example, social rituals that contain expressions signs of humility, such as kneeling down, lowering one's gaze and self-evaluations of being guilty and humble can very effectively also trigger the corresponding subjective feelings of feeling small and guilty in comparison to a mighty God or some powerful person (see Roberts, 2008). These forms of emotional imitation and contagion are also used especially in staged public rituals of collectives, such as religious groups or national gatherings (e.g., a politician commemorating of a famous military victory). These staged rituals are aimed at evoking a particular kind of belonging to the collective, by inducing a jointly felt arousal.

As early as 1912, Durkheim (1912/1995) drew attention to these staged rituals of jointly induced emotional arousal and referred to this as "effervescence" (see Cariton-Ford, 2005; Fox, 2006; Tiryakian, 1995). These collective rituals also contain ritualized forms of expression and action, which those involved have to carry out. The feedback loop also enables the internal sensations of these ritualized expressions and actions, and elicits and enhances the corresponding feelings of strong emotion and belonging to the collective. It is the particular mode of production that makes the difference in eliciting a corresponding feeling. Note, for example, the very different orchestration of a Memorial Day by the Nazi regime, in comparison to a remembrance day for those killed on 9/11. Sociological and historical research have already investigated such complex and clearly culture-specific emotional qualities (e.g., Fox, 2006; Olaveson, 2004), while emotion research has focused mainly on the so-called basic emotions of

anger, fear, sadness, disgust, joy, and social emotions of pride, shame, or guilt.

#### LEVELS OF SUBJECTIVE FEELINGS

Izard and Malatesta (1987) have claimed that the subjective feeling of an emotion would not change during the course of life. This claim seems to be correct, insofar as a proprioceptive sensation of a smile at the age of 2 years may be felt similarly to the proprioceptive sensation of a smile at another age. The point at issue, however, is how the proprioceptive and interoceptive sensations, which are triggered by an emotionally significant cause, are embedded in the broader sphere of subjective feelings over the course of ontogenesis.

There are several approaches that assume different levels of feeling, characterized by different levels of integration and generalization. In accordance with Craig (2008), Fogel (2009) proposed four levels and called the two highest levels *embodied self-awareness* and *conceptual self-awareness*. Valsiner (2005) stated over and above the mentioned levels two additional ones that are characterized by a higher level of generalization. At these two levels, a feeling is not related to a single emotional episode, but to a whole sphere of life, such as a feeling of justice or of depression, a feeling of *amae* in the Japanese culture (Morsbach & Tyler, 1986) or of *naklik* in the Inuit culture (Briggs, 1970) that are both generalized, but culture-specific forms of care and love.

In the following discussion we focus on the common levels of these approaches:

*Sensations without an object.* The basic form of subjective experience consists of a proprio- or interoceptive sensation as such, like a sensation of a frown, palpitation, or a dry throat. This corresponds with the second level of self-awareness in Fogel's (2009) model. Expressive and bodily sensations per se, however, are not *sufficient* to produce a feeling experience, if an orientation toward an external event or thought as the perceived cause of the sensation, is lacking.

*Embodied self-awareness.* It is assumed that, for a fully adaptive emotional reaction, the feedback sensations must be psychologically connected to the perceived cause of the emotion, in order to mark the cause and calibrate the emotional reaction to the particular circumstances and reactions of the interaction partners. As a rule, the cause of an emotion is represented simultaneously in one's sensory perception of the (real or imagined) event. The object from which the threat proceeds is manifest, for example, as the

visual image of a growling dog. This is why Damasio (1994, pp. 173–174) refers to sensations as somatic markers of an emotional cause. Fogel (2009) calls this level embodied self-awareness (*see also* Level 1 of Valsiner's model, 2005) A sensation evolves into a feeling, when it can be assigned to a suitable object to which it is directed and from which it is perceived as being elicited. We hear about the death of a loved one, and simultaneously feel how tears fill our eyes, which impel us to seek social support. These states of feeling are established already in late infancy and toddlerhood, before children learn to describe their emotional feelings with words.

*Conceptual self-awareness.* At the third level, a label and its related emotional concept are assigned to the relationship between sensation and eliciting object. Fogel (2009) refers to this level as conceptual self-awareness. The form of fine-tuning of an ongoing emotional episode that a person selects and performs depends on how this relation is interpreted conceptually. At this level, cultural display rules (Ekman, 1972) and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979) come into play.

A good example is provided by the conceptual self-awareness of specific body sensations that are triggered especially in adolescents, by seeing a very attractive potential girlfriend or boyfriend. In Western cultures, this is normally conceptualized as falling in love whereas it is conceptualized as a kind of sick spell of love or bewilderment in a culture such as the Makassar, an ethnic group on the Indonesian Island Sulawesi, where marriages are arranged exclusively by parents in line with status and other nonromantic considerations. As the observations of Röttger-Rössler (2002, 2006) revealed, adolescents of the Makassar also reported bodily sensations and displayed expressions that are similar to those reported by Western adolescents who fall in love. The different ethno-theories, however, lead to very different reactions and conceptual self-awareness. In Western cultures, the focus is on the positive aspects of these sensations and people are encouraged to cultivate this emotion, by specific expression signs of shaping and dramatizing the romantic relationship such as kissing, touching, holding hands, exchanging rings, etc. In the culture of the Makassar, however, the focus is on the negative aspects of these sensations and their consequences, and affected individuals are urged to suppress and avoid situations in which they are at risk of becoming overwhelmed by such feelings. As

a consequence, the adolescents of these two cultures may develop two quite different culture-specific emotions associated with love.

*Cultural differences in experiencing levels of feelings.* How these feedback loops are conceptualized and educated is a product of cultural ethno-theories and child-rearing practices. Ethno-theories differ in terms of whether an emotion tends to be viewed as the outcome of a private experience or as a public experience shared with others. Western cultures assign a personal significance to emotions. They are perceived and interpreted as private and internal experiences, which is the reason that members view the feeling component as a central feature of an emotion (*see* Mesquita, 2001). In Asian countries and some other cultures, e.g., Samoa (Gerber, 1989), emotions are rather seen as public experiences, i.e., emotions are perceived and interpreted as cues about relationships between persons and their environment. Emotions are therefore conceived more as a function of situations and tend not to be made dependent on the actual subjective feeling of the individual (*see* Mesquita, 2001).

Taken together, a feedback conception has far-reaching and instructive consequences for a culture-specific coloring of subjective feelings. Research provides evidence that the feedback loop seems to be a universal feature of an emotion. As far as expressions and bodily reactions have culture-specific features, also the subjective feelings are colored in a culture-specific form via the feedback loop. Furthermore, the level of self-awareness on which the feedback is felt, has also a culture-specific coloring, because the way in which a person interprets his or her sensations as a quality of feeling (conceptual self-awareness) depends on the acquired emotional concepts.

### ***Normative Social Appraisals of Emotions and Emotion Regulation***

The components of cause, appraisal, physiological reaction, action readiness, and feeling seem to describe an emotion sufficiently. Such a view, however, can be applied only to the emotions of young children who take only the relationship between their prevailing motives and actual situational conditions into account. For older children and adults, a further condition becomes relevant, namely the social norms that are connected to these emotions and situations.

Human motive satisfaction is not an individual act, but is always embedded in a network of social

relations. For many of the actions required to satisfy their motives, individuals are dependent on coordination with other people and *their* motives. Even just obtaining sufficient food to satisfy one's hunger requires a coordination of actions by numerous human beings. The way in which such social relations are coordinated cannot be varied at random, but is subject to material constraints, as well as cultural norms and rules. They map out how this social coordination of individual motives should proceed and how much scope is available to the individual. Hence, a fully developed activity regulation of an adult requires not only the prevalence of differentiated emotions, but also the ability to coordinate them with cultural norms and demands (*see* Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006; Quinn, 2005). As a result, emotions become the target of cultural norms and demands for regulation. Emotional qualities like pride, joy, anger, shame, or sadness, which seem to be universal, may well be evaluated completely differently in a normative sense.

Depending on the specific culture, these emotions may be welcome and appropriate; they may be tolerable; or they may even be unwelcome and inappropriate. For example, feeling of shame is considered problematic in Western cultures but appropriate in Asian cultures, whereas the exact opposite applies to anger (Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995; Stearns & Stearns, 1986).

From the perspective of culture, these normative demands appear as display rules (Ekman, 1972) and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979). The latter prescribe who should feel which emotion in relation to which cause. Hochschild (1979) reports the example of the working life of American airplane stewardesses, who are trained not only always to express friendliness toward their passengers, but also to feel it. A milder form of such feeling rules relates to the tenets for emotional expression, stipulating which expression should be shown to whom in which situations, termed display rules. The feelings that the person actually experiences in such situations, are irrelevant. A good example is Ekman and Friesen's (1975) study of Japanese and American undergraduate males, each in their own country, who viewed a disgust-inducing film in both a solitary and a social-interview situation. In the social condition, the Japanese college students masked their expression of disgust to a greater extent with a smile than the American college students, whereas neither cultural group masked its expression in the solitary condition (*see*

*also* Fridlund, 1994, for a critique; Safdar et al., 2009).

Display rules contain not only rules that end up increasing, decreasing, or masking an emotion, but also those that prescribe specific expression signs as how to exactly an emotion should be displayed, in order to send the prescribed appeal to the receiver, such as a particular expression of gratitude or humility. The culture-specific shaping of expressions by display rules also influences the accompanying internal sensations and feelings.

From the individual perspective, the developmental task consists of the acquisition of these rules and becoming able to regulate his or her emotions in accordance with them. This aspect deals with how individuals acquire the ability to contain or dam undesirable consequences of their emotions and to regulate them in line with normative display and feeling rules within their culture, but also with regard to (anticipated) motives and future expectations. This means that people are no longer directly at the mercy of their emotions and their action readiness, an ability termed *emotion regulation* (Campos et al., 2004; Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004; Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008).

A complete description of an emotion refers not only to the culture-specific causes, appraisals, action readiness, physiological reactions and feelings of the individual emotions, but also to the emotion-specific display rules and feeling rules of the given culture. In order to obey and follow these normative rules, people must acquire the ability to regulate their emotions in line with these rules. We have now described six components that comprehensively characterize an emotion. Such a differentiated approach enables also a differentiated comparison between emotions within a given culture, but also between cultures. In the next section, we deal with the features of sociocultural contexts and their norms, which contribute to culture-specific facets of the components and the emotional repertoire of members of the culture in question.

### **Conceptualization of Sociocultural Environment for Emotions**

As emotional phenomena evolve through and are modified by cultural contexts, we need to identify relevant characteristics of the cultural contexts that explain similarities and differences across members of different cultures. Several layers of cultural characteristics can be differentiated, from global cultural dimensions to emotion-specific norms regarding

the appropriateness of emotional expression and feeling. We outline some of these cultural characteristics below.

### ***Global Cultural Dimensions***

Cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism, masculinity, power distance) (Hofstede, 2001) or value dimensions (conservatism vs. openness for change) (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001) have often been applied in cross-cultural studies on emotion in order to explain cultural differences. Part of cultural variance could be explained with respect to the recognition of emotions (Matsumoto & Kuppertsbusch, 2000), emotional expression and display rules (Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine, et al. 2008), emotional expression and experience (Matsumoto, Consolacion, Yamada et al., 2002), as well as emotion regulation (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

Although cultural variations in emotions can be explained, these cultural dimensions are not sufficient to explain the individual differences of the emotional repertoire within a given culture. These dimensions are too abstract and global to explain how they affect the emotions of an individual person. We need more concrete concepts that bridge the gap between individual and culture in a meaningful way and that can be tested empirically.

The concept of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) may be a more appropriate approach. The meaning of cultural context for emotion and emotion regulation consists of the conceptualization of desired goals regarding emotions and their regulation. Emotion regulation is universally motivated by the needs and motives of the individual and the maintenance of relationships (e.g., Gross, 1998; Thompson et al., 2008) and to act and feel consistently with the self (e.g., Thompson & Virmani, 2010). These goals in the context of relationships and the self vary across cultures. Self-construals (independent and interdependent self) can serve as a relevant cultural model for cross-cultural studies in developmental psychology (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003). In contrast to norms and values, self-construal refers to a person's identity, which allows the determination and derivation of related socialization contexts, as well as the consequences for behavior, cognitions, motivations, and emotions (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). In Western cultures, self-expression and an open communication of "ego-focused" emotions such as anger, pride, and disgust are tolerated more readily, indicating the inner states of independent individuals, who are

expected to rely on themselves to meet their goals and whose states are not easily understood without emotional expression (Markus & Kitayama, 2001). Cultures with interdependent selves typically prioritize values such as the appropriate demeanor in hierarchical relationships (e.g., respect for elders and loyalty to family), social harmony, and group interests. Ego-focused emotional expressions are viewed as potentially disrupting interpersonal relations and should therefore be strictly controlled (Wang, 2003) and the emphasis is rather on "other-focused" emotions, such as sympathy and guilt.

Even the concept of self-construal may be too general, as it leads mostly to a dichotomous perspective of cultures. Culture not only affects emotion at the individual level, by the general self, but also entails shared expectations regarding the components of an emotion (appraisal, expression, action readiness, regulation). It is plausible that cultures differ in specific norms about emotions that can refer from general perspective of emotion to very specific expectations about appropriateness of feeling, expression, and regulation (*see* Mesquita & Leu, 2007). These emotion-oriented norms do not exist in a vacuum, but are reflected in cultural practices, as well as in the form of ethno-theories (subjective beliefs) of socialization partners. The transmission of cultural knowledge about emotion is provided by participating in cultural practices as well as through socialization. Caregivers shape children's emotional development by regulating their emotional episodes according to expectations and standards that mostly reflect shared cultural norms. As a result, children learn to display emotional reactions that concur with available cultural norms (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). Accordingly, the impact of culture increases the probability of emotional reaction that concur with cultural norms and decreases emotional reactions that are inconsistent with cultural norms. The emotional process is flexibly related with the specific contexts in which they occur. Emotional outputs vary across emotions, people, and cultural contexts.

### ***Cultural Norms of Emotions***

Norms of emotion may refer to *salience*. Similar emotions may occur in different cultures, e.g., pride, joy, shame, but the level of tolerance to displays of these emotions and their appropriateness may vary. Consequently, the same emotions are placed in different contexts and assume different meanings. Emotions like pride and joy are seen positively in cultures with an independent self. Cultural members

are open to such positive emotions, seek such situations and evaluate them more positively. They remain in these situations longer and try to maintain or even strengthen them (see Eid & Diener, 2001). A devaluation of the display can be expected when cultures evaluate emotions as inappropriate. An expression of pride about one's own achievements is acceptable, if this serves the welfare of others, but not merely serving the individual's interests (e.g., Stipek, 1998).

Culture-specific norms refer to the *importance of emotions* for personality development. Cultures with an emphasis on an independent self-evaluation regard emotions as a means of regulating actions, which is important for psychic well-being. Cultures with an emphasis on an interdependent self aim to overcome emotions by regulating them deliberately. For example, Chinese people tend to consider emotions as irrelevant and even dangerous, as they can make the person sick (Potter, 1988; Wu, 1982). Moderation and control of emotions is thus a valuable goal.

Furthermore, the *preference for regulation strategies* varies across cultures. *Problem-focused regulation* aims to change the social and physical environment in a motive-serving manner, whereas *reflexive strategies* like self-soothing, distraction, and reappraisal aim at changing one's own emotional state without changing the social environment. These two forms are specific examples of *primary and secondary control orientation*. As studies have revealed (cf. Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982; Seginer, Trommsdorff, & Essau, 1993) secondary control is preferred in cultures with an interdependent self-orientation, and primary control in those with an independent self-orientation. Finally, *cross-cultural differences in action readiness* can be expected. Lee, Aaker, and Gardner (2000) demonstrated that different self-construals are associated with different regulation strategies (approach and avoidance). People with an independent self are "promotion-focused," seeking for relevant information to achieve their objectives. They prefer positive information about themselves. People with interdependent self-construal are "prevention-focused," seeking information that avoids conflict with social norms and they also emphasize relatively negative information about themselves.

### **Cultural Practices**

Cultural norms about emotions are not written laws, but can rather be inferred through an observation of *cultural practices*, in which emotions are embedded. Furthermore, they can be observed in

socialization practices by caregivers, whose socialization goals and strategies are guided by beliefs that are at least partly culturally shared.

Cultural practices provide opportunities for emotional experiences and give meaning to them. These practices promote or hinder the occurrence of emotions. For example, social life in the United States is characterized by practices that emphasize individual values and specific achievements. A frequent exchange of compliments and encouragement are common, as well as institutionalized awards for special achievements (e.g., "scholar of the month" or "teacher of the year"). Individuals experience these practices, which allow more for frequent experiences of joy and pride. At the same time, these emotions acquire a specific meaning related to these experienced conditions (Mesquita & Albert, 2007).

Culture offers *contexts for normative forms of emotion expression* through rituals (e.g., birthday parties or funerals) or informal interactions (e.g., conversations between friends, meeting colleagues for a drink after work). These normative forms are also conveyed through the media. Tsai (2007) has argued that cultural differences between Asian and North American culture relate to the impact of ideals: European-Americans aim at positive affects related to stimulation and excitement, whereas Asians prefer positive affects related to balance and calmness. A comparison of the facial expressions in popular women's magazines and men's magazines in the United States (*Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*) and Hong Kong (*Chinese Cosmopolitan*, *Nano*) yielded that an excited smile was significantly more represented in the American magazines, compared to Chinese ones, reflecting these differing norms. This variations could also be confirmed for children's books (United States-Taiwan comparison) (Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007).

Cultural knowledge about the appropriate experience, display, and regulation of emotions is also provided through socialization practices by caregivers, as they transfer cultural knowledge to the next generation. Caregiver socialization goals and strategies are guided by their subjective beliefs, which are often referred to as ethno-theories, because it is assumed that they reflect shared cultural beliefs. Ethno-theories may refer to general or specific socialization goals (e.g., Friedlmeier, Schäfermeier, Vasconcellos, & Trommsdorff, 2008) or to developmental beliefs, e.g., what the characteristics of a competent child include.

Several cross-cultural and mono-cultural studies investigate socialization strategies and their impact on children's emotional development (*for a review, see* Friedlmeier, Corapci, & Cole, 2010). A differentiation can be made between two cultural models of emotional competence. Western cultures stress the importance of promoting self-sufficiency, autonomy and independence in children (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003). According to these norms and conceptions of emotions, caregivers emphasize the model of *individualistic emotion competence*. This model can be described as a self-reflective approach to individual emotional competence that is guided by an emotional coaching approach (Gottman, 1997; Gottman, Katz, & Hoven, 1997). Caregivers are aware of and accept a child's negative emotions, encouraging the experience of such emotions, providing comfort and assistance and a supportive self-regulation of distress. In contrast, an emotion-dismissing approach that is associated with a tendency to minimize, criticize, punish, or ignore children's negative emotion experience and expression, is less accepted as this approach is seen as detrimental to a child's emotional development (Gottman et al., 1997). In contrast, many East-Asian societies aim to foster "*relational*" *emotional competence* (Chan, Bowes, & Wyver, 2009). This approach is consistent with a cultural model of the individual being defined by relationships and a network of interdependent selves (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). Promoting an understanding of emotion display rules, and teaching the importance of interpersonal sensitivity are stressed.

These two models of emotional competence are also reflected in different preferences regarding emotion regulation strategies. Caregivers in Asian countries more often endorse strategies such as the unacceptability of expression, using the episode to teach the child a lesson, and reflection-enhancing responses, i.e., the caregiver does not encourage expression, but coaches the child to acquire the appropriate expression and regulation of emotion, without using dismissing strategies (e.g., Chan et al., 2009; Raval & Martini, 2009). The two models of competence—relational vs. individualistic—are not mutually exclusive, and both may be endorsed to different degrees. For example, Chan et al., (2009) developed a measure of these two models, and their study of mothers in Hong Kong showed a balance between both models, with a slight preference toward the relational emotion competence model.

In addition to these strategies, emotions themselves can be used as a socialization strategy to guide a child's emotions and emotion regulation in the desired direction. Emotions have a double meaning. They serve a purpose in motive-relevant episodes, but caregivers can use them to imply a higher level of action regulation by the child, i.e., to display appropriate and avoid inappropriate behavior, according to the social rules (Quinn, 2005). Emotions that can take on this function are *threatening* and the elicitation of fear, *shaming and teasing* in order to induce shame, *praise* and the elicitation of pride, or *empathy* and the induction of guilt. These emotional reactions are displayed by caregivers, in order to bind the children to social norms. Cultures may differ in their preferences and intensity of use of these emotions for socialization purposes.

## General Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the issue of how similarities and differences in emotions, within and across cultures, can be described and explained.

*An overview of the ongoing debate.* The overview of the debate between evolutionary and culture-relativistic approaches yielded a conceptualization of an emotion as a multi-component system and revealed the importance of conducting a cultural analysis of *all* components of a single emotion: (a) the causes of an emotion, (b) appraisal of the causes, (c) action readiness including expression, (d) bodily reaction, (e) feeling, and also (f) the normative evaluation of the emotion, including its regulation.

*A developmental perspective.* In handling the methodological complexity of such a comprehensive analysis, we argue in favor of supplementing the cultural analysis of emotions with a developmental approach. This contains a developmental reconstruction of: (a) how individual emotions emerge and develop over the course of ontogeny within different cultures, and (b) which sociocultural factors can be identified that trigger emotional modifications. An emotion can be identified as universal if it can already be observed at birth or if it adopts similar features over the course of ontogeny in almost every culture; an emotion can be identified as culture-specific if it is possible to refer to culture-specific conditions of socialization. These conditions inevitably evoke substantial and demonstrable modifications in several of the emotional components that transform the entire configuration into a different emotional quality. This developmental reconstruction of an emotional quality within and across selected

cultures can be used as an additional method for validating the classification of single emotions as either similar or different from one another.

*Findings from a developmental analysis.* Developmental research provides several insights that can constitute a starting point for a cultural analysis of emotions: (a) Neonates seem to exhibit a repertoire of five distinguishable emotions that can be labeled as types of distress, endogenous pleasure, interest, disgust, and a startled reaction and that are not identical with the so-called basic emotions. (b) The primary function of these emotions is to regulate social interactions between child and caregiver. The expressions of these emotions serve as appeals to the caregiver to act on behalf of the child in order to satisfy its motives. (c) From birth onward, both child and caregivers use expressions to regulate their interaction, and from birth onward, these expressions are modified by their mutual reactions and interpretations. (d) Therefore, expressions are the primary interface between cultural socialization and the psychological enculturation of emotions. (e) Using an emotion to regulate one's own behavior in a motive-serving manner is a secondary result of learning.

*Expressions as the primary interface for the development of emotions.* Expressions function mainly as culturally co-constructed signs that mediate and regulate the social interactions between members of a given culture. It is because of the appeal function that expression signs are culturally constructed and used by individuals. Expression signs are designed to have an effect on the receiver's intentions to follow the appeal and to signal approval in reciprocating to the sender through complementary expression signs. Emotionally loaded patterns of interaction that frequently occur in a given culture usually adopt a ritualized mode that includes culture-specific display and feeling rules (displaying grief vs. consolation; contempt vs. shame; admiration vs. pride). This ritualization provides a predictable frame of interaction for the involved members and channels their emotional feelings.

*The feeling component as internal feedback of the ongoing action readiness.* An analysis of the interrelations between the components of an emotion revealed that the subjective feeling of an emotion can be conceptualized as an internal feedback of expressions and bodily reactions accompanying an emotion. Research provides evidence that the feedback loop seems to be a universal feature of an emotion. To the extent that expressions and bodily reactions have culture-specific features, the subjective feelings

are also colored in a culture-specific form via the feedback loop. Furthermore, the level of self-awareness at which the feedback is experienced, also has a culture-specific coloring, because the way in which a person interprets his or her sensations as a quality of feeling (conceptual self-awareness) depends on the acquired emotional concepts.

*Sociocultural environments for emotions.* Finally, we dealt with sociocultural environments for emotions and presented several layers of cultural characteristics, from global cultural dimensions to emotion-specific norms regarding the appropriateness of emotional expression and feeling, which contribute to the emergence of similarities and differences across members of different cultures.

## Future Directions

*What are the universal or culture-specific meanings of expression signs?* In current emotion research, expressions are reduced mainly to a methodical index that is assigned to linguistic terms of emotions. There is, however, no unequivocal match between particular expressions and emotional labels. Therefore, it is useful to assess the meanings that members of a given culture assign to expression signs and to compare them cross-culturally as has already been done with linguistic terms of emotional states. As a result, expression signs used in a given culture can be gathered to form a culture-specific lexicon, and supply information as to which particular appraisal and action readiness each sign refers, and which particular appeal each sign signals to the receiver. This analysis would also enable a more fine-tuned interpretation of expressions displayed in an emotional episode.

An analysis of expressions has the advantage that no translation problem occurs, as is inevitably the case for linguistic terms. The same set of pictures or videotapes of expressions can be used in all cultures, although using pictures or videotapes of the same ethnic group may improve the ratings. It is, however, a challenge for the future to extract the appellative and semantic meaning of identifiable expression signs and to compile them into a lexicon with illustrative videotapes of all expressive channels (see Kottonau, 2010; Posner & Serenari, 2003; Wierzbicka, 1995, 1999).

*What are the developmental pathways to culture-specific emotions?* Up to now, the analysis of emotions as multi-component systems has revealed sound descriptions of culture-specific qualities, e.g.,

“Lung Lang” as a kind of Tibetan anger (Menon & Shweder, 1994), “Lajja” as a kind of shame in India (Shweder, 2003), “naklik” as a kind of care and love for Inuit people (Briggs, 1970). It remains challenging to reconstruct the developmental pathways of culture-specific emotions over the course of ontogeny and to identify the social interactions and experiences that are mainly responsible for inculcating these emotions. One aspect of this task is that of identifying the particular age period or developmental phase during which the emotion in question emerges. Another aspect is to uncover emotional and cognitive prerequisites that a person needs at his or her disposal, in order to acquire the emotion in question.

Particular attention should be paid to the impact of social rituals and the accompanying emotions displayed by the people involved, e.g., the interdependence between contempt/exclusion and the emergence of shame or the interdependence between admiration and the emergence of pride. Furthermore, some group-based emotions, such as national pride (or other kinds of belonging to a collective) seem to be promoted especially during social encounters that provide strong experiences of effervescence as a kind of socially shared excitement (Durkheim, 1912/1955). Taken together, a developmental analysis would bridge the gap between the universal emotional features of young infants and the culture-specific features of emotions such as *national pride*, *amae*, *fago*, *naklik*, etc.

*What is the impact of sociocultural environments on the development of emotions?* We still need to describe the pathways between cultural values, socialization goals, socialization practices, and children’s emotion skills much more comprehensively than has been actually the case so far. Emotion socialization is universal. Most parents in all cultures care about their children’s emotions, emotional well-being, and the acquisition of self-regulation. They are supportive, emotionally positive, and nurturing. Their caregiving practices already contain implicit messages about desirable emotion outcomes and cultural differences probably refer to the way support, nurturing, and warmth are expressed and how caregivers react to children’s emotional behavior. In order to assess these developmental pathways, emic and derived etic approaches, as well as a broad range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies are necessary. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration between ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists can enrich our scientific

knowledge about emotional development and emotion socialization.

Up to the present, mostly parents as socialization partners have been studied. Parents are highly relevant to children’s emotional development, but future research also needs to expand the sociocultural environment by analyzing the role of peer groups, teachers, neighborhood, and media as important contexts for shared meanings of emotions. As a further consequence, a more culturally sensitive approach, which takes a closer look at the particular developmental niche of children, may be an important step to overcoming the dichotomized view of cultural context, which continues to dominate the current research in this area.

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PART

12

Toward Methodological  
Innovations for Cultural  
Psychology

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# Ambivalence and Its Transformations

Emily Abbey

## Abstract

Humans are sign-creating and sign-using organisms. Humans use signs to organize their relation to the world, and the purpose of this chapter is to outline how new meanings emerge as the person uses signs. This chapter offers that new meanings emerge as the person attempts to overcome ambivalence. Humans make meaning in the present, but each sign addresses not only what is the case in the here-and-now but also what could be the case in the future. Assumptions for what could be the case in the future can function to guide the person toward one's goals—which are themselves semiotic constructions highly abstracted from the ongoing stream of experience. This chapter outlines a model for how meanings emerge on the basis of ambivalence between the present and future. The transformative power of ambivalence is discussed, and three levels of ambivalence are outlined. In the null condition, no ambivalence is present and meaning making stalls. Second, mild to moderate ambivalence leads to an erratic starting and stopping of the meaning-making process, with signs that tentatively control meaning without restricting change in the future. Third, maximum ambivalence leads to the construction of signs that preemptively try to determine the future, even though it cannot yet be known, effectively making an otherwise dialogical process momentarily monological.

**Keywords:** ambivalence, uncertainty, semiotic mediation, irreversible time, meaning making, ambiguity

It has long been observed that humans are sign-making and sign-using organisms. Humans make meaning using signs, which by definition *stand in* for other things and indeed for some, our ability to make and use signs differentiates humans from nonhumans. Vygotsky, for example, discusses “Buridan’s ass” (a hungry donkey standing between two equal piles of hay). This nonhuman cannot decide which pile to consume and therefore dies of starvation. A human, by contrast, could use a sign to tip the balance, rendering one pile more desirable and thus making the decision of which one to eat (Valsiner, 2000). Humans use signs to organize their relationship to the environment, and while in modern times few would draw as stark a distinction between human and nonhuman sign use

as the one depicted in the above example, understanding how humans make meaning using signs has become a central focus for many cultural psychologists (e.g., Valsiner, 1998; Wagoner, 2010; Zittoun, 2006).

As humans go about the process of meaning making, it is not hard to notice that individuals readily create multiple meanings for any given situation, constructing their relationship to the world in a variety of ways over time. A central task for cultural psychology then, is to understand how meanings emerge and change over time. Articulating a basic model of how meanings emerge through time can further our understanding of this central aspect of human thoughts, feelings, and behavior.



## Irreversible Time

Responding to the question of how meaning emerges begins through careful consideration of the temporal embeddedness of the human life experience. Human lives, rather than being separate from time, are rather deeply colored by temporality. Any given event, no matter how similar to a previous event, experientially is nonetheless unique by virtue of the fact that it occupies its own unique space, a space that changes continually on the basis of what has come before. As such, it can be said that humans live within an irreversible stream of experience, a stream where the concept of “sameness” does not apply.

Henri Bergson's (1913) notion of time-as-duration (*durée*) forms the basis for this claim of temporal embeddedness. The notion of duration provided numerous points of inspiration for how scholars conceptualized movement and change during the transition from nineteenth-century philosophy to twentieth-century science (e.g., Prigogine & Nicolis, 1971). So too, key figures in the history of developmental psychology have been influenced by Bergson's notion (e.g., Baldwin, 1915; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1994). As Bergson explains, the irreversibility of experience happens through a *pure duration* of the ego—where our consciousness is freed from keeping past and present experiences separate, and instead is allowed to endure through time. Bergson writes:

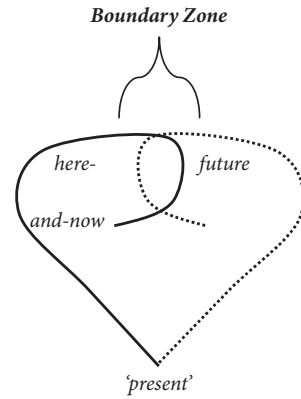
Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states . . . it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then it would no longer *endure*.

(Bergson, 1913, p. 100 emphasis original)

Much like a rolling snowball, Bergson goes on to point out, as the ego endures, the experiential whole is growing, and thus, ever-changing. Even actions that have been carried out many times before—e.g., viewing a still object from the same angle, in the same light—become tinged with novelty for the experiential whole is composed by a different, richer, accumulation of the past (Bergson, 1913).

### The Boundary Zone

Within irreversible time, therefore, novelty is an ever-present quality of experience. Given the swiftness of experiential shifts as the ego endures, the person can be said to live not within an elongated



**Figure 47.1** Boundary zone between here-and-now and unknown future

“stable” present, but rather, at the *boundary* of an infinitesimally small here-and-now and unknown future (Simao, 2011). In irreversible time, any notion of the present as one may commonly mean it can perhaps better be understood as merely a *boundary marker*, useful in delineating what is now known (the past) and through its realization—stipulation of the known—axiomatically introducing the next experiences as part of the unknown future (Matte Blanco, 1975, 1988). As depicted below, (see Fig. 47.1) our lives happen within what can be described as a *boundary zone* of the just barely known moment and the unknown future.

As contrasted with the notion of the “present” one usually assumes, the boundary zone is an ambiguous space (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005), for it is neither purely part of the present nor exclusively the future. Rather, it is part of the here-and-now and the future simultaneously.

### Sign Use in Irreversible Time: Preadapting to the Uncertain Future

Humans use signs to provide some sense of order within their experience, yet on the basis of what has been said so far, to order experience humans need not only account for the here-and-now, but also the uncertainty of the next moment. Within irreversible time, humans make meaning not only to relate to their immediate environments, but in an effort to be prepared for what might happen next—to preadapt to uncertainty.

As depicted in Figure 47.2 below, this means that in each contextualization the sign represents *what is* in the here-and-now (and in so doing, organizes the immediate moment), yet also creates an open field

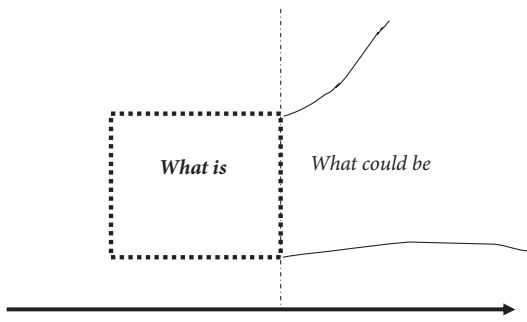


Figure 47.2 Openness of the sign to possible future meaning

of implications for *what could occur* in the future (Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999).

For example, a person may hear a wailing noise in the distance. The representational significance of this noise is likely that “it is a siren.” Yet this is not the only sense of that sound. Simultaneously, the person also constructs possible ideas for what that sound could mean for the future—for example “the arrival of aid” or “danger is afoot.” The presentational meanings may be multiple, yet in all circumstances, having some sense of what comes next helps the person begin to plan for the next moment, allowing them to preadapt to uncertainty. For some, hearing a siren could indicate authorities will soon arrive to provide assistance.

### *A* <> *Non-A Sign Fields*

The relationship between the present and the future discussed here leads in an alternative direction to the one commonly explored. In science one is typically accustomed to accepting that the past influences the present. That said, it is less usual that one focuses on the conceptualization being presented here—the notion that the future influences the present. Such relationship between the present and future can be described formally in terms of “A” and “non-A.” Within this system, any mention of A (what is the case in the immediate moment) simultaneously refers to A’s opposite field, non-A (what could be the case in the future) (see Fig. 47.3 below). The non-A field is composed of all the possible



Figure 47.3 A and non-A

transformations that A—in the present—is not, but could become in the future (Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999).

Critically, as in any duality, A and non-A are not exclusively separated from one another, but rather, exist on the basis of one another. Thus, in terms of the discussion above, the siren (A) would include a non-A field of possible future meanings, including “danger,” “arriving authorities to provide assistance,” etc. Of course the field of non-A meanings is fuzzy and vague, the person is not completely sure of what occurs next. A sense of approaching danger that may accompany a siren does not pinpoint what happens, yet it guides the person as he or she moves toward the unknown next moment.

### **The Centrality of Ambivalence in Making Meaning**

As the person goes about the process of actualizing the future from within a set of possibilities, he or she functions within the *ambivalence* of A and non-A. There is ambivalence for the person because each present sense is in tension with what could be the case in the next moment. Necessarily, if the future is reliably different from the present moment, each presentational non-A field creates a discrepancy with A, its representational sense. The ambivalence within meaning insists upon resolution. As the person sets out some sense of what is, this sense is immediately challenged by the presentational sense of what could be. Making a meaning—arriving at the next representational sense—is thus a process driven by the person’s work to overcome tension between the representational and an imagined presentational sense of the sign.

### *Transformative Power of Tension*

As an example of how the tension between two alternate interpretations of a situation can lead to the emergence of a new idea, take Bullough’s introspective narrative recounting the experience of standing on a ship’s deck as the vessel is suddenly enveloped in a cloud of fog. In his description of the event, Bullough describes how his immediate sense of the situation is one of danger—for one has little sense of orientation. Yet in his narrative, Bullough also describes how he simultaneously distances from this immediate sense, realizing that the being shrouded in fog could also be a peaceful experience. As seen at the conclusion of this narrative, as tension of these juxtaposed alternate meanings—danger and

peace—is overcome, a new meaning for the situation emerges. Bullough writes:

For most people it is an experience of acute unpleasantness. Apart from the physical annoyance and remoter forms of discomfort such as delays, it is apt to produce feelings of peculiar anxiety, fears of invisible dangers, strains of watching and listening for distant and unlocalised signals. The listless movements of ships and her warning calls soon tell upon the nerves of the passengers; and that special, expectant, tacit anxiety, and nervousness, always associated with this experience, make a fog the dreaded terror of the sea (all the more terrifying because of its very silence and gentleness) for the expert seafarer no less than the ignorant landsman.

Nevertheless, a fog at sea can be a source of intense relish and enjoyment. Abstract from the experience of the sea fog, for the moment, its danger and practical unpleasantness, just as everyone in the enjoyment of a mountain climb disregards its physical labour and its danger (though, it is not denied, that these may incidentally enter into enjoyment and enhance it); direct the attention to the features ‘objectively’ constituting the phenomenon—the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outlines of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesques . . . note the curious creamy smoothness of the water, hypocritically denying as it were any sense of danger; and, above all, the strange solitude and remoteness of the world, as it can be found only on the highest mountain tops: *and the experience may acquire, in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavor of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects.* This contrast, often emerging with startling suddenness, is like a momentary switching on of some new current, or of the passing ray of brighter light, illuminating the outlook upon perhaps the most ordinary objects.

(Bullough, 1912, pp. 88–89, emphasis added)

As Bullough’s narrative description makes clear, through tension new sense of a situation can emerge quite suddenly, creating novel meanings such as the “delight” portrayed here.

### ***Transformation through Tension in Poetry***

Another way to begin to understand the transformative power of tension involves considering what occurs when a person uncovers the meaning within a metaphor (Abbey, 2007). As a person

reads a given metaphor, again there is ambivalence, in this case between the literal and imagined senses of words. For example, in the metaphor “Let sleeping dogs lie,” the person must maintain both the literal sense of these words, as well as extend beyond them. It is by overcoming that tension that he or she arrives at the new meaning: not to recreate trouble where it has already been resolved. Ricoeur stresses this emergent quality of metaphor, showing how imagination *suspends* ordinary descriptive reference (Ricoeur, 1981), creating the discernable disturbance of the linguistic structure in poems through which a new reality emerges: “The suspension of the reference proper to ordinary descriptive language is the negative condition for the emergence of a *more radical* way of looking at things . . .” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 240, emphasis added).

### **Three Levels of Ambivalence**

In daily life, new meanings emerge as the person is driven to overcome the ambivalence between representational and presentational senses of the sign. It is perhaps somewhat usual to think of ambivalence as a relationship of polar opposites. However, within the current framework, *ambivalence* can be defined as ***a tension produced by a system entailing a kernel and at least two vectors that are non-isomorphic in size and direction.*** In such a system, ambivalence can occur under all conditions except one, where the vectors are of exactly the same size and direction (Condition D; see Fig. 47.4, below). Condition A represents the most typical understanding of ambivalence: two equally strong forces pulling the individual in opposite directions. In the current framework, this represents the maximum degree of ambivalence between the present and the future. Conditions B and C produce ambivalence that is weaker, yet nonetheless present. In Condition B, although the two forces are not completely opposing, they create a tension between two different orientations. In Condition C it is the discrepancy in strength of forces that creates ambivalence.

This notion of ambivalence created by vectors of different sizes and directions borrows from Lewin’s (1936) topological psychology in which he offers the notion of a life space filled with forces that are of different degrees of attraction and repulsion. Lewin focused his work on the description of forces that were either exclusively positive or negative. That said, one can offer that ambivalence is also possible. In this latter case, the life space is composed by forces

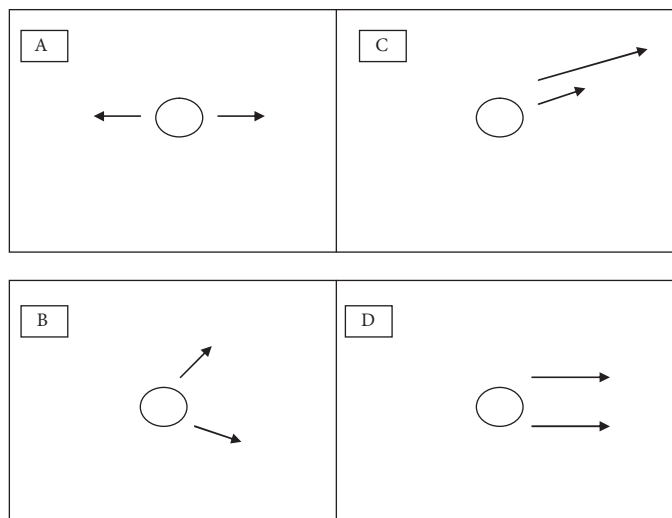


Figure 47.4 Levels of ambivalence

that pull him or her in differing, if not outright opposing directions. Within the current model, the person necessarily experiences ambivalence caused by the future-oriented nature of human meaning making, where each sign's meaning represents and presents simultaneously.

### *Fluctuations in Ambivalence and Semiotic Emergence*

Within this model, increasing and decreasing levels of ambivalence construct a self-perpetuating process of meaning construction. The person makes some meaning, which entails a tension between the present and future. He or she attempts to overcome that tension by arriving at a new meaning, only to recreate ambivalence anew. On the basis of ambivalence, the emergence of signs can be understood as occurring within a number of conditions.

#### **NULL CONDITION: NO SIGN**

The null condition within this model represents the set of circumstances in which the person does not experience tension as they are not engaged in meaning construction. That is, the person makes no attempt to organize his or her relation to the world using signs.

#### **ERRATIC MEANING MAKING: FRAGILE AND MEDIUM SIGNS**

As soon as any person begins to try to make sense of the environment using signs, he or she exits the

null condition and tension immediately appears. The person starts to experience ambivalence on the basis of the contrast between a sign's representational and presentational sense. In this condition, the ambivalence is of a mild to moderate level, and as the person continues to overcome these tensions, new meanings emerge in a relatively erratic basis. The person concludes that one idea may be appropriate and then this sense shifts as his or her life experience shifts and new meanings are made. This process of striving toward meaning is based on the opposition created by the person, and is the basis for further transformation. Of course, the meaning-making process can be extinguished if the person abandons his or her quest to figure something out—to organize his or her relation to the environment. In this case, there is a return to the null condition until the person re-engages in an attempt to create order.

In terms of the current emphasis on meaning making as partially an attempt to preadapt to what comes next, this kind of meaning making, and this level of ambivalence can be seen as ideal. This is because the signs emerging in this process allow the person to create order for himself or herself that guides action in the present, while still allowing for possible transformations and deviations from that path in the future, should they become necessary. The person in this condition is generally open to the uncertainty that lies in the future, while actively preparing for it. He or she does not try to deny that uncertainty.

## BIFURCATION OF TRAJECTORIES: CONSTRUCTION OF STRONG SIGN VERSUS LOSS OF SIGN

### Strong Signs

If ambivalence escalates beyond the moderate level to the point where it is at its maximum level, this can lead to the construction of a strong sign. *Strong signs* are inflexible compared to fragile or medium ones. They set out a particular relation to the environment that is rigid, and is not open to modification, even that environment may change. A common example of this kind of meaning making is when a person is prejudicial in their thinking, accepting only one—and usually negative—characterization of a race, culture, or ethnicity as correct, and refusing to entertain any other possibilities. In terms of the preadaptive function of meaning making, clearly strong signs function poorly, for in their rigid stipulation of a person's relation to the world, they do not allow for changes as the person's experience necessarily shifts. Meaning making in situations of maximum ambivalence is no longer erratically flowing along with the changing world, but is unrealistically fixed.

### *Intolerance of Ambiguity*

What occurs during the formation of a strong sign corresponds with a phenomenon expressed as *dichotomizing* (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949). In essence, when the experienced ambivalence—and the ambiguity it necessarily entails—becomes so strong that it is no longer tolerable, the person aims to create an artificial clarity. In essence, this involves reducing a dynamic and dialogical interaction to that which is monological. The process of this reduction is quite straightforward: first there is an attempt to split that which is ambiguous into two “pure” opposites. Then, there is an act of dichotomizing, during which those “opposites” are separated from one another, and where only one is accepted into the meaning-making process.

For example, an individual spying someone walking toward them late in the evening when it is dark may experience the ambivalence of whether this person is safe to interact with, or if they perhaps present a threat. To the extent that the ambivalence remains mild to moderate, the person may oscillate between different interpretations of the situation. However, at some moment that ambivalence may become strong, and the person—unable to tolerate the ambiguity of the situation—may (following Frenkel-Brunswik's logic) split the meaning of the

situation (e.g., there are “kind people” and “dangerous people”). Then, the individual may well monologize the meaning-making process, concluding that the person seen in the distance “must be out to get me” and rapidly flee the situation.

Such intolerance of ambiguity and the monologization of the otherwise dialogical meaning-making process it entails are not uncommon in situations where an individual feels threatened in some way (e.g., personally, psychologically, socially, etc.). That said, the monologization of the meaning-making process means such an individual may not necessarily adapt well to changes in his or her environment, as the otherwise semi-structured and open field of possibilities for the future has in essence been maximally restricted.

### Return to the Null Condition

There is another possible event that can occur when ambivalence reaches its strongest level. That is, the person feels so much tension that instead of using a strong sign, they literally abandon the meaning-making process in total, the sign disappears, returning the person to the null state. This is, in essence, an attempt to overcome high tension by disengaging in the meaning-making process altogether.

## Illustration

To better illustrate the above-described model, consider the following examples of meaning making given by a man we'll call Daniel<sup>1</sup>. The first example demonstrates the movement from moderate ambivalence to maximum ambivalence (and the accompanying intolerance), and then back down to mild ambivalence, and the erratic start and stop of meaning making that accompanies this level. The second example, by contrast, shows how maximum ambivalence can also lead to a return to the null condition, and an abandonment of the meaning-making process altogether.

### *Example 1: “The Children's Hospital”*

This first example draws from a narrative Daniel is telling about working as a volunteer at a hospital for children who are ill and underprivileged. As he begins to describe the situation, ambivalence is at a moderate level, and his meaning making moves in an erratic start-and-stop manner. He points out how many of these children have huge challenges, yet they reside in a facility that is ill-equipped to help them: “I worked with some kids who have such a struggle and they sit in this very small and

insignificant hospital.” He also notes a frustration that no one else is involved in helping the children, “I am the only volunteer.” To Daniel, these children, who rarely receive visits from their natal families, are suffering, and increased human interaction from volunteers would greatly reduce their suffering, providing some relief from their dreary days, and a basic sense of companionship.

As Daniel continues to recount and make sense out of his experience, he describes leaving the hospital one day, standing in the parking lot and looking out at the cars passing:

I wanted [after volunteering] to go out and stop every car that cost more than 50K and force ... them to sell it right there on the street and give all the money to the hospital. I thought ‘hmm, that’s not real charity ... that’s believing that I am somehow in charge of the world.’ I realized that, first off, people who want to spend that much money on a car, that’s their choice ... I can’t change that ... but what I can do is find more time ... to ... work at the hospital, which is my job ...

Looking in detail at this progression in light of the current model, it seems the moderate level of ambivalence Daniel had been feeling here reaches a maximum level:

WHAT IS: Looking out at the cars passing on the highway.

WHAT COULD BE: ‘I wanted [after volunteering] to go out and stop every car that cost more than 50K and force ... them to sell it right there on the street and give all the money to the hospital.’

Coinciding with this maximum level, Daniel’s meaning making reaches the point of monologicalization. For Daniel at this moment, it is as if the others passing by in their cars can only be understood as selfish and ignorant. So too, Daniel in this moment feels quite intolerant, and wants to take control of these individual’s lives.

The next lines of Daniel’s narrative show how quickly the level of ambivalence can fluctuate, given certain distancing strategies. Following this moment of maximum ambivalence and formation of a strong sign, Daniel reminds himself that he is not in control of the situation:

WHAT IS: Looking out at the cars passing on the highway.

WHAT COULD BE: ‘That’s not real charity ... that’s believing that I am somehow in charge of the world.’

In this moment of meaning making, Daniel allows uncertainty back into the meaning-making process, and on this basis, new ideas begin to emerge as the ambivalence drops. Daniel returns to a mild level of ambivalence, and the erratic stop-and-start nature of meaning construction continues:

WHAT IS: People can spend whatever amount of money they want on a car.

WHAT COULD BE: ‘The amount of money spent on a car is not up to me ...’

WHAT IS: ‘I can find more time to work at the hospital ...’

WHAT COULD BE: This is what I can do/control.

### ***Example 2: “The Grocery Store”***

This second example demonstrates how maximum ambivalence can lead to a return to the null condition. In it, Daniel is describing a recent exchange in a grocery store. The exchange involved a customer yelling at a store clerk because she could not understand the clerk’s accent. Again, Daniel’s meaning making begins with ambivalence at a moderate level, proceeding in a start-and-stop manner. He says, “There was a very angry woman in [the grocery store] this morning, screaming at the clerk in front of two of us, all because the clerk kept saying in Russian, ‘Please push yes’ and she couldn’t understand her.” He continues at the moderate level, saying that he himself and many of the others in line could understand the clerk: “The rest of us could understand her.”<sup>2</sup>

At this moment in his narrative, Daniel’s level of ambivalence appears to reach a maximum level, as he begins to form strong signs, depicting the woman categorically as a “tourist” and a “New York socialite.” He says, “The woman got nastier and nastier and nastier and she looked like a New York socialite. She had gold jewelry and a striped blouse and she just looked like a summer touristy person pushing her weight around ...”

Following this escalation, and the appearance of strong signs, instead of returning to moderate ambivalence as in the previous example, here Daniel instead returns to the null condition with the statement: “I just let it go.” In essence, seemingly within the ambivalence of the situation, Daniel opted to reduce tension by abandoning the meaning-making process.

### ***Fluctuations in Ambivalence***

In general, the ebb and flow of ambivalence drives the process of meaning construction. In these

two examples, one can understand the movement of meaning on the basis of tracking fluctuations in ambivalence. In the first example, ambivalence moves from moderate, to maximum, and then returns to a mild level. In the second, moderate ambivalence quickly becomes maximum, with a complete abandonment of meaning making, with a total reduction in ambivalence by the end.

Comparing these two examples, example one demonstrates well how a lower level of ambivalence can indeed allow one to better adapt to his or her environment in that it allows for flexibility. As Daniel's level of ambivalence reaches a maximum level, he becomes unable to adapt to his environment because he can only focus on the fact that the people around him are selfish and negligent to these children. It is not until the level of ambivalence is reduced that he is able to better adapt—coming up with the alternate ideas for ways that he can help children in the hospital.

That said, while Daniel's movement back to moderate ambivalence in example 1 shows the adaptive value of medium signs, the latter example also shows how in some moments abandonment of the meaning-making process may be the best way to avoid the rigidity entailed by the construction of strong signs. In some situations, there may be no way to distance from the situation in a manner that allows uncertainty to re-enter the meaning-making process. In this situation, the person faces the possibility of continuing in an unproductive fixated cycle of rigid meaning, or giving up entirely. It is likely that in some instances, a more adaptive solution is to simply do what Daniel does in this case, which is to abandon the meaning-making process for the time being.

## Conclusion

Ambivalence is a construct that has been used in many areas of psychology, however its value for understanding the process of semiotic emergence is only recently becoming clear. As humans make meaning, they are literally driven by overcoming the ambivalence between their present and future-oriented senses of a situation. In the process of overcoming ambivalence, one is led in various directions—either toward an erratic start-and-stop process of constructing fragile signs, in some cases to the construction of strong signs, or toward the abandonment of the meaning-making process altogether.

Indeed, the present model suggests that in general, development need not be understood as a

process that is only influenced by the past. Rather, as discussed here, the uncertainty of the future—as well as one's expectations about what might happen—are central aspects of the process of emergence. Conceptualizing development is a future-oriented phenomenon that is likely to bring new understandings to the field of cultural psychology, be these in the area of meaning making or otherwise.

## Future Directions

Emergent phenomena—such as the one discussed within this chapter—are inherently difficult to study. This is because inquiry of this nature requires explaining that which is not yet in existence using only two pieces of information: what is known, and what is expected (Valsiner, 2001, p. 53). Too often in psychology, researchers attempt to study emergent phenomena by way of methods that erase rather than maintain the time sequence of data, capturing only outcomes rather than the process of development, where emergence can be viewed as it happens. Development cannot be seen by looking at outcomes sequenced in time—even if those outcomes occur over a very short period of time, as occurs in time-series analysis. To document emergence, the researcher needs to gain access to the intermediary forms as transition occurs.

When considering the future research agendas then, it would appear important to ensure the use of methods that will allow the researcher to gain access to the process of transformation as it happens, and which allow those movements and shifts to be better understood. Possible methodological options for documenting emergence do exist, and herald back to the first portion of the twentieth century and the tradition of *Ganzheitspsychologie* (see Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2007). The method, which in English is often referred to as the “microgenetic method,” involves the investigation of emergence by treating forms themselves as merely boundary states, focusing instead on the intermediary forms. For example, instead of being interested in a series of outcomes  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$ , a microgenetic study is concerned with the progression from A-B and B-C, (e.g.  $A \rightarrow ab \rightarrow B$ , and  $B \rightarrow bc \rightarrow C$ ). Historically, the microgenetic method has been used to study the emergence of visual percepts (e.g., see Wohlfahrt, 1925/1932) and general meaning constructs (Werner, 1954). So too, more recently researchers have begun to reincorporate such methods into developmental study (Abbey & Diriwächter, 2008; Siegler, 1996).

It follows that future research would benefit from careful consideration of methods, and might find value in adopting a microgenetic approach. Of course research methodologies themselves change each time they are used, as influenced by the particular phenomenon on the one hand, and theory on the other (Branco & Valsiner, 1997). That said, careful attempts to track the processes of change, and to make visible the conditions within which particular shifts occur will benefit this area of study.

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# Guesses on the Future of Cultural Psychology: Past, Present, and Past

Aaro Toomela

## Abstract

In psychology today, three scientific approaches—three cultures—can be distinguished, each of them based on different epistemology: roots of the process-oriented science can be traced back to the Heraclitian philosophy; cause-effect science agrees with the Cartesian-Humean philosophy; and structural-systemic science, which in many respects is built on Aristotelian worldview. Science is an activity that aims at increasing knowledge and understanding of the world. In this chapter it is suggested that the three scientific approaches comprise a hierarchy in terms of explanatory power; process-oriented science represents scientifically the least effective way to understand the world and structural-systemic science is the most powerful. Cultural psychology of today is analyzed in the framework of the distinguished epistemologies and corresponding methodologies. It is shown that the process-oriented cultural psychology is represented, among others, by studies based on modern qualitative methodology; also several ideas from activity theory and indigenous cultural psychology belong here together with the principle of cultural relativism. Cause-effect science is represented by cross-cultural psychology, and partly by activity theory and indigenous cultural psychology, which are examples of mixed approaches. Finally, the structural-systemic approach was taken by almost abandoned today Vygotskian cultural-historical psychology elaborated by Luria. The near future of cultural psychology, I predict, will remain dominated by cause-effect science together with the process-oriented approach, which will strengthen its position a little. Nonscientific reasons why the most sophisticated structural-systemic approach will stay in the periphery of science are discussed. It is concluded that the future of cultural psychology, if it is to prosper as a science, lies in the past, not in the present.

**Keywords:** epistemology, culture of science, cultural psychology, hierarchy of scientific approaches

Cultural psychology aims at understanding properties of psyche that emerge in the interaction of an individual with his or her cultural environment. The overall state of cultural psychology today is confusing—instead of one psychology, fundamentally different cultural psychologies can be distinguished. This fact, in itself, does not imply any problem because the same phenomena can be studied and understood from different perspectives. In biology, for example, mechanisms of heredity can be understood by studying prevalence of certain diseases in families and also by studying genetic processes at

the molecular level of analysis. But it does not follow that all possible ways to study some phenomena are equally appropriate for science. Even more, it is important to realize that ideas about the world that is studied by sciences do not emerge only on the basis of studies of that world alone; scientific ideas include theories that are grounded on ideologies, which can be in direct contradiction with scientific observations.

For example, in the history of the biology of heredity in the Stalin-era Soviet Union, it was suggested that heredity is related not only to chromosomes

or genes, but equally to every particle of the body (Lysenko, 1948, 1952a). This idea did not emerge on the basis of empirical evidence but, in fact, despite an enormous amount of evidence that related heredity to chromosomes and not to other parts of the cells or the body. Even more, in the framework of this ideologically grounded theory, “empirical observations” were made of events that actually cannot happen; it was “discovered,” for example, that together with changes in the environmental conditions, one species can turn into another (Lysenko, 1952b) or that cells can emerge from substance with no cellular structure (Lysenko, 1952c). This theory—together with “empirical observations” that supported it—was rejected together with the rejection of Stalinist ideology under the pressure of theories that developed on the basis of empirical observations.

In cultural psychology, ideologically grounded directions can also be found; most notably in different qualitative approaches to culture, where political, social, moral, and ethical issues sometimes seem to define what is “right” and what is “wrong” in cultures and societies (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005c). So, there are reasons to look into cultural psychology and ask whether all approaches that can be identified there are equally scientifically acceptable.

For distinguishing approaches to cultural psychology, the appropriate ground must be chosen. Usually content of the theories—about culture and mind—is taken for this ground. And yet this line of thought would not go far enough. Science and its theories are not only about the phenomenon under study; science is, simultaneously, a way of thinking, methodology for developing understanding of the world (Toomela, 2010c). Theory as a whole always contains methodological and substantial parts. For this reason, in this chapter cultural psychology is analyzed from both substantive and methodological perspectives.

### **Universal Laws or Constant Change?**

There are different ways to study culture and its relation to psyche. Two approaches could be distinguished already in the beginning of scientific studies of culture. Edward B. Tylor (1871) suggested that in studies of human culture, thought, and action, general laws and principles can be discovered. According to him, in physics and biology “the unity of nature, the fixity of its laws, the definite sequence of cause and effect through which every fact depends on what has gone before it, and act upon what is to

come after it” (p. 2) is recognized. The same should be done in studies of culture:

... let us take this admitted existence of natural cause and effect as our standing-ground, and travel on it so far as it will bear us. It is on this same basis that physical science pursues, with ever-increasing success, its quest of laws of nature.

(p. 3)

There was also another view, criticized by Tylor. He suggested that many scholars deny the possibility to study general principles of human functioning and yet, in their research practices, accept the idea of causal relationships and general laws:

Now it appears that this view of human will and conduct, as subject to definite law, is indeed recognized and acted upon by the very people who oppose it when stated in the abstract as a general principle, and who then complain that it annihilates man’s free will, destroys his sense of personal responsibility, and degrades him to a soulless machine.

(p. 3)

Similar approaches can be found in modern cultural psychology. Three approaches to cultural psychology can be distinguished today. Two of them aim at knowing universal principles and one aims at knowing the particulars. One dominant direction of research—most notably (but not only) so-called cross-cultural psychology—studies psychic differences between people from different cultures; on the basis of such findings, ultimately, universal models of psychological processes and human behavior that can be applied to all people of all cultural backgrounds should be created (cf., e.g., Matsumoto, 2001a, 2001b). In this research tradition persons from different countries, ethnic groups, or from groups distinguished before the study according to some other attribute, are compared. Thousands of scientific papers in this research tradition have been published in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Research* and many other scientific publications.

The second—also universalist—approach to understanding culture and mind as a cultural phenomenon can be identified in the past. Vygotskian cultural-historical psychology, for example, aimed, similarly with cross-cultural psychology, at understanding general principles of culture-psyche relationships. At the same time, however, cultural-historical psychology focused on individuals. The cultural-historical approach, as will be shown in

more details below, is almost abandoned today. Even though there are many scholars who superficially seem to follow Vygotskian ideas (followers of the activity theory, for example), they ignore Vygotskian philosophical-methodological background and, consequently, distort the central ideas of this approach (Mahn, 2010; Toomela, 2000, 2008a; Veresov, 2010). It is exactly this largely ignored philosophical-methodological background that distinguishes two approaches that both aim at knowing universal laws and principles of culture-psyche relationships.

In the third research tradition, focus is on individuals and their ways of relating to their environments. In this tradition—or, more correctly, traditions related to terms such as *hermeneutics*, *post-structuralism*, *postmodernism*, *feminism*, and several others (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005c)—it is usually assumed that there is no correct and objective way to define groups or other universal attributes of people before the study. According to this collection of views, the world is characterized by constant change and consequently understanding emerges in the very process of inquiry; this understanding is ever-changing, subjective, blurry—there is no single “truth” but many partial truths. Numerous examples of inquiries of these research traditions can be found, among other sources, in journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Cultural Studies*, and *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

In sum, three approaches to cultural psychology can be distinguished on the basis of the general aims of researchers: two approaches—let us call them *universalist*—look for universal laws, and one—process-oriented—for understanding blurry and ever-changing cultural processes. I am going to show that scientifically fundamentally important consequences follow from this distinction.

### ***Hierarchy of Scientific Knowledge***

At this point, different directions for further analysis could be taken. These directions, as I am going to discuss next, are related to different levels of scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge is arranged into hierarchy of theories so that decisions made at a hierarchically lower level of analysis are grounded on the theoretical ideas of more general nature. Any lower-level theory, therefore, can be fully understood only in the frame of the higher-level theory. In modern science the highest, most general level is, as a rule, only implicit. For understanding the theoretical status of any field of

science, cultural psychology included, all levels of analysis must be made explicit. Next, four levels of scientific knowledge are distinguished.

The first and most specific level of analysis concerns actual research practices. In actual research practice, all theoretical notions must be operationalized—it must be decided how theory is “translated” into research methods. If, for example, culture is understood not as a fixed entity but as a phenomenon that is co-created by the researcher and the informant (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), then paper-and-pencil questionnaires with Likert-type answers are ruled out as research tools. Correspondingly, in order to understand different approaches to cultural psychology, research practices should be analyzed. However, these research practices cannot be understood without knowing the theoretical reasons that led to actual research practices; different operationalizations can follow from one and the same theoretical idea and superficially similar research activities may be based on fundamentally different theories. Therefore another, more general level of analysis must be taken.

The next level of knowledge is expressed in theoretical notions—this is the level of definitions. Conducting an analysis in this direction would take definitions of culture that underlie different approaches and analyze them. This direction, however, would miss very important aspects of the analyzed theories. For example, collecting all definitions of culture, either for each of the approaches separately or for all of them together, would allow us to categorize the definitions. This has been done before (e.g., Bauman, 1999; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), but with no considerable effect on the science of culture. It could not be otherwise—categorization of definitions always implies a choice of the dimensions that distinguish categories; consistent categorization should be based on the same ground. But, as it became evident above, incompatible approaches to cultural psychology can be distinguished; there is no common ground to categorize the definitions. The same definition in different approaches may mean entirely different things. So, it is not necessary to agree with Kroeber and Kluckhohn, who assumed that in science any classification is better than no classification. Classification based on misleading theory is misleading itself and not better but worse than no classification.

Particular definitions of culture in cultural psychologies are chosen on the basis of some implicit or explicit theory as a system of notions. Why a certain

definition is chosen, is justified by the theory about the studied phenomenon as a whole. Thus the third level of analysis would look for the reasons that guided identification of the phenomenon under study theoretically—it would be analyzed, what theory about the studied phenomenon grounded the choice of the definition.

This is not yet the most general level of scientific knowledge. The higher level was first distinguished in philosophy. Hegel (2005a), for example, made an interesting observation about unity of two kinds of thinking—about the phenomenon and about one’s own thought:

... knowledge thereby makes it clear that it has to do at least quite as essentially with its own self as with things. This twofold essentiality produces a certain hesitation as to whether what is essential and necessary for knowledge is also so in the case of the things.  
(p. 286)

Hegel was not the first philosopher to notice the importance of self-reflection in understanding the world. The idea that knowledge of the mind—soul—has a special place in the structure of knowledge as a whole can be found already in Aristotle’s works:

Holding as we do that, while knowledge of any kind is a thing to be honoured and prized, one kind of it may, either by reason of its great exactness or of a higher dignity and a greater wonderfulness in its objects, be more honourable and precious than another, on both accounts we should naturally be led to place in the front rank the study of the soul. The knowledge of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for the soul is in some sense the principle of the animal life.  
(Aristotle, 1941b, p. 535, Bk I, 402<sup>a</sup>)

This idea applies to scientific knowledge today no less than it did millennia ago. Scientific activity is based on a special kind of thinking where thought about the phenomenon to be understood through studies is co-coordinated with thought about one’s own processes of thinking (Toomela, 2010c): A scientist, while formulating a theory about something, must simultaneously check her own thinking by asking, for example, do the theoretical conclusions follow logically from the premises? If the rules of thought—logic—are not followed, the theory becomes scientifically unacceptable independently of its content.

Scientists make their choices on the basis of their own thought mechanisms; these mechanisms are applied in studying any aspect of the world. Therefore this is the most general level that guides theoretical decisions in sciences. The three approaches to cultural psychology I distinguished are based on different epistemologies, on the differences in defining what scientific knowledge is.

### ***What is Scientific Knowledge?***

In order to proceed, theory of scientific knowledge as such is needed. The question is: what is scientific knowledge? Aristotelian thought is helpful here too. According to him,

We suppose ourselves to possess unqualified scientific knowledge of a thing, as opposed to knowing it in the accidental way in which the sophist knows, when we think that we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and of no other, and, further, that the fact could not be other than it is.  
(Aristotle, 1941d, p. 111, Bk I, Ch. 1, 71<sup>b</sup>)

Here we see two important ideas. First, not all kinds of knowledge can be considered scientific. And second, scientific knowledge is knowledge of causes. Further, knowledge of causes is not simple, different kinds of causes must be distinguished and all of them must be known in order to have scientific knowledge:

We think we have scientific knowledge when we know the cause, and there are four causes: (1) the definable form, (2) an antecedent which necessitates a consequent, (3) the efficient cause, (4) the final cause.  
(Aristotle, 1941d, p. 170, Bk. II, Ch. 11, 94<sup>a</sup>)

Either explicitly or implicitly, all researchers would probably agree that they are looking for causes of studied phenomena. But disagreements become evident when theory of causality is analyzed—we find not one but many theories of causality. There are different kinds of causality and not all of them are equally taken into account in each particular theory of causality. A list of kinds of causes can be found in Chambers’ *Cyclopaedia* (Chambers, 1728a, 1728b). Under the entry “CAUSE” there is “First Cause” and “Second Cause” and many more. Under the “Causes in the School Philosophy,” there are: (1) Efficient causes; (2) Material causes; (3) Formal causes; (4) Final causes; and (5) Exemplary causes. In the other way, again, “Causes” are distinguished

into physical, natural, and moral. Or yet another way, “Causes” are considered as universal or particular; principal or instrumental; total or partial; univocal or equivocal, etc.

Scientific epistemology is not based only on the theory of causality. Another important distinction is made in terms of the degree of organization that is assumed to characterize the world. In the one end of this dimension it is assumed that there are universal laws and principles that characterize the world; in the other end of this dimension the world is seen as a series of unique events that cannot be explained by universal laws. The distinction between approaches to cultural psychology I made in the beginning of this chapter was made in this dimension. Yet, to understand fully epistemologies that underlie theories of cultural psychology, theories of causality must also be taken into account.

### ***Science Is a Cultural Phenomenon***

Epistemology is theory of knowledge; this theory guides decisions made in scientific activity. Science, would be classified as a cultural phenomenon by most cultural scientists. The concept of culture can be used in different senses—it can refer to hierarchy, where one culture is seen in some ways “better” or more advanced than the other; it can be used as a differential concept to account for the apparent differences between communities of people; and it can be used as a generic concept to refer to (usually human) universals (Bauman, 1999). The following description of the three epistemologies that can be distinguished in cultural science today should not be taken as something independent of cultural psychology—science of culture and culture studied by this science cannot be separated.

If three epistemologies can be distinguished, it follows, that three different cultures can be distinguished in the differential sense of the concept of culture. Furthermore, it turns out that not all epistemologies are equally appropriate for achieving the aim of science—to understand, to achieve scientific knowledge; thus culture in the hierarchical sense is also emerging in the following analysis. Finally, culture in the generic sense of the concept is also applicable to the question of epistemology; human knowledge-seeking without epistemology is not science by definition—existence of epistemology is a universal requirement for any science.

It is one of the most complex tasks of the science of culture to realize that science of culture is simultaneously science of cultural scientist. Without

realizing this important fact, cultural values, beliefs, irrational urges—many aspects of culture that should be extraneous to knowledge-seeking practices—may enter the structure of scientific thought and hinder the construction of scientific knowledge instead of helping to develop it.

### **Three Cultures of Science: Three Epistemologies**

We learn to know the world through observation. Observation is not a simple activity but a rather complex phenomenon that can be distinguished into kinds. I am going to discuss three epistemologies that can be recognized in psychology today. In several important respects similar epistemologies were described already by Hegel. He suggested that observation of the world has developed over several stages. First, *unreflective consciousness*, is characterized as follows:

The process [of observation] really takes place solely in the function of *describing*. The object as it is described has consequently lost interest; when one object is being described another must be taken in hand and ever sought, so as not to put a stop to the process of description. [...] There can never be an end to the material at the disposal of this restlessly active instinct. To find a new genus of distinctive significance, or even to discover a new planet, which although an individual entity yet possesses the nature of a universal, can only fall to the lot of those who are lucky enough. But the boundary line of what, like elephant, oak, gold, is markedly distinctive, the line of demarcation of what is genus and species, passes through many stages into the endless particularization of the chaos of plants and animals, kinds of rocks, or of metals, forms of earth, etc., etc., that only force and craft can bring to light.

(Hegel, 2005a, pp. 284–285)

So, observation can take a form of mere description where no clear boundaries or organization in the observed material can be defined. This form of observation goes on endlessly by extension and particularization.

Observation develops further and begins to look for laws:

Since the instinct of reason now arrives at the point of looking for the characteristic in the light of its true nature—that of essentially passing over into its opposite and not existing apart by itself and for its own sake—it seeks after the *Law* and the notion of

law. It seeks for them, moreover, as existing reality; but this feature of concrete reality will in point of fact disappear before reason, and the aspects of the law will become for it mere moments or abstractions.

(Hegel, 2005a, p. 288)

Laws that are discovered in this process of observation, however, give only a very limited and superficial understanding of the world:

But laws like these: animals belonging to the air are of the nature of birds, those belonging to water have the constitution of fish, animals in northernly latitudes have thick coats of hair, and so on—such laws exhibit a degree of poverty which does not do justice to the manifold variety of organic nature. Besides the fact that the free activity of organic nature can readily divest its forms of determinate characteristics like these, and everywhere presents of necessity exceptions to such laws or rules, as we might call them; the characterization of those very animals to which they do apply is so very superficial that even the necessity of the ‘laws’ can be nothing else but superficial too, and does not carry us further than what is implied in speaking of the ‘great influence’ of environment on the organism. And this does not tell us what properly is due to that influence and what is not.

(Hegel, 2005a, pp. 294–295)

At this stage of the development of observation, thus, universal laws are discovered. But these laws are just superficial descriptions with numerous exceptions and oversimplification of the observed phenomena; there is also no understanding why the observed universal regularities actually emerge.

The world is more complex than can be understood on the basis of observations of the nature and organic phenomena. Full understanding of the world is achieved when reason, the less developed form of mind, becomes spirit. Observation of the external world is that, which is available for reason; when the observer becomes self-conscious, the spirit emerges:

Reason is spirit, when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to the level of truth, and reason is *consciously* aware of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself.

(Hegel, 2005b, p. 457)

Putting purely speculative and philosophical aspects of this idea aside, Hegel’s idea can be interpreted as showing that the most developed form of knowledge is knowledge where the ideas about

observed phenomena of the external world become into unity with understanding oneself, with knowing the ways that the mind works.

The stages of the development of observation are hierarchically related to the understanding of the world. Hegel described several aspects of the world, which are hard or impossible to know by less developed forms of observation. For example, the idea of linear cause-effect relationships does not hold for many phenomena, such as the organic world:

[...] the organic is in point of fact just realized concrete purpose. For since *itself* maintains *itself* in relation to another, it is just that kind of natural existence in which nature reflects itself into the notion, and the moments of necessity separated out [by Understanding]—a cause and an effect, an active and a passive—are here brought together and combined into a single unity.

(Hegel, 2005a, p. 296)

Another aspect of the world that cannot be understood with less developed forms of observation is the relation of parts to whole. It cannot be understood that distinguishable parts have meaning only in the context of a whole, a whole that emerges in the process of relating parts:

In the systems constituting an embodied form (*Gestalt*) the organism is apprehended from the abstract side of lifeless physical existence; so taken, its moments are elements of a corpse and fall to be dealt with by anatomy; they do not appertain to knowledge and to the living organism. *Qua* parts of that sort they have really ceased to *be*, for they cease to be processes. [...] The actual expression of the whole, and the externalization of its moments, are really found only as a process and a movement, running throughout the various parts of the embodied organism [...] So that reality which anatomy finds cannot be taken for its real being, but only that reality as a process, a process in which alone even the anatomical parts have a significance.

(Hegel, 2005a, pp. 309–310)

Altogether, the idea that different epistemologies can be found in human knowledge seeking, is not new. It can be suggested that different epistemologies are just different but equally acceptable; Hegel’s ideas suggest, however, that some epistemologies may ground deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the world than others. This suggestion can be further supported by observation that the three kinds of observation distinguished by

Hegel, correspond well to the development of word meaning structure—the psychological construct that underlies the cultural development of both individuals and human societies (Vygotsky, 1960; Vygotsky & Luria, 1994; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). Particularly, throughout history the scientific thinking has developed from thinking in so-called everyday concepts to scientific concepts and from there to systemic concepts (Toomela, 2010c). This line of development is hierarchical—later stages allow not only to possess more knowledge but also to know qualitatively novel aspects of the world, aspects that are not available for thinking with less developed conceptual structures (*see also* Toomela, 2003a, 2003b). Therefore it becomes essential to analyze epistemologies that ground different approaches in psychology because some of them may turn out to be scientifically not sufficiently justified.

It is possible to distinguish three epistemologies that have grounded research in psychology in general (Toomela, 2009, 2010e) and therefore in cultural psychology in particular as well. Each of the epistemologies is rooted in a different philosophical tradition. There is *process-oriented epistemology*, closely related to Heraclitian thought; *Cartesian-Humean cause-effect epistemology*; and *structural-systemic epistemology*, which is connected to the philosophy of Aristotle. Next I will outline the basic principles of each of them. First Aristotelian structural-systemic epistemology is described as most sophisticated. The other two—Cartesian-Humean and Heraclitian—turn out to be fundamentally limited versions of it.

I am going to give brief description of each of the epistemologies according to six aspects. First, I describe theories of causality that underlie each of the epistemologies. Second, epistemologies differ in the ways that processes are understood in principle; views on the idea of process, dynamics, change, and becoming are described. Third, degree of universalism that is assumed to characterize the world by each of the epistemologies is provided. Fourth, both the particular theory of causality as well as assumptions about the degree of organization of the world are related to beliefs about whether the world is in principle knowable in all of its aspects or not. Fifth, I connect the philosophical roots of the epistemologies to their realizations in cultural psychology today. And finally, epistemologies are described in terms of methodology—each of the epistemologies grounds a different view on how, in principle, the world should be studied in order to know it.

## ***Aristotelian Structural-Systemic Epistemology***

### **THEORY OF CAUSALITY**

Aristotle distinguished four causes—today they are known as *material*, *formal*, *efficient*, and *final cause*, respectively—that all should be known in order to possess scientific knowledge:

In one sense, then, (1) that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists, is called ‘cause’, e.g. the bronze of the statue, the silver of the bowl, and the genera of which the bronze and the silver are species.

In another sense (2) the form or the archetype, i.e. the statement of the essence, and its genera, are called ‘causes’ (e.g., of the octave the relation of 2: 1, and generally number), and the parts in the definition.

Again (3) the primary source of the change or coming to rest; e.g., the man who gave advice is a cause, the father is cause of the child, and generally what makes of what is made and what causes change of what is changed.

Again (4) in the sense of end or ‘that for the sake of which’ a thing is done, e.g., health is the cause of walking about. (‘Why is he walking about?’ we say. ‘To be healthy’ and, having said that, we think we have assigned the cause).

[...] This then perhaps exhausts the number of ways in which the term ‘cause’ is used.

(Aristotle, 1941c, pp. 240–241, Bk. II, 194<sup>b</sup>)

I am going to show later that Aristotelian view on causality is remarkably similar to modern system theories. The following quote links his views to the modern ones more directly:

All the causes now mentioned fall under four senses [...] some are cause as the substratum (e.g., *the parts*), others as the essence (*the whole*, *the synthesis*, and the form). The semen, the physician, the adviser, and in general the agent, are all sources of change or of rest. The remainder are causes as the end [...]

(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 753, Bk. V, 1013<sup>b</sup>, emphasis added)

So, material cause is not just material, it is *parts*, formal cause is not just some form, it is *whole* and *synthesis*. Therefore we can suggest: description of causality involves the concept of a whole that is composed of parts in specific relationships (*synthesis*). This is a definition of the system: “A system can be defined as a set of elements standing in interrelations.” (von Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 55).

## VIEWS ON PROCESS

The idea of structure is often viewed as static; it is suggested, for example, that structural theories cannot explain developmental change (Smith & Thelen, 1993). In fact, static or a developmental perspective may characterize some modern scientific approaches, but structural view according to which parts can be distinguished in a whole, was dynamic in Aristotelian philosophy. Understanding that not only some aspects of the world, but the whole nature is dynamic in its essence pervaded all his thought:

From what has been said, then, it is plain that nature in the primary and strict sense is the essence of things which have in themselves, as such, a source of movement; for the matter is called the nature because it is qualified to receive this, and process of becoming and growing are called nature because they are movements proceeding from this. And nature in this sense is the source of the movement of natural objects, being present in them somehow, either potentially or in complete reality.  
(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 756, Bk. V, 1015<sup>a</sup>)

The idea of dynamics, change, becoming, was directly related to the four causes he distinguished:

[...] all causes are beginnings. [...] 'Cause' means (1) that from which, as immanent material, a thing comes into being, [...] (2) The form or pattern, i.e., the definition of the essence [...] (3) That from which the change or the resting from change first begins; [...] (4) The end, i.e., that for the sake of which a thing is; e.g., health is the cause of walking.  
(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 752, Bk. V, 1013<sup>a</sup>)

## DEGREE OF UNIVERSALISM OF THE WORLD

Aristotle assumed that limited number of laws determined the processes in the world:

It is clear then that our principles must be contraries. The next question is whether the principles are two or three or more in number. One they cannot be, for there cannot be one contrary. Nor can they be innumerable, because, if so, Being will not be knowable [...]  
(Aristotle, 1941c, p. 228, Bk. I, 189<sup>a</sup>)

So, the number of laws or principles that characterize nature cannot be one but also not infinitely many; the latter point he made clearer in this way:

But if the *kinds* of causes had been infinite in number, then also knowledge would have been

impossible; for we think we know, only when we have ascertained causes, but that which is infinite by addition cannot be gone through in a finite time.  
(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 715, Bk. II, 994<sup>b</sup>)

Thus, only one principle is not sufficient to explain the world that is more complex; but the number of principles cannot also be too large because in that case knowledge becomes impossible. Yet, it does not follow that Aristotle ignored the idea of uniqueness:

The universal is more knowable in the order of explanation, the particular in the order of sense: for explanation has to do with the universal, sense with the particular.  
(Aristotle, 1941c, p. 228, Bk. I, 189<sup>a</sup>)

He essentially suggested that unique is not explained—unique does not belong to scientific knowledge but rather to the world of senses. This idea fits well with Hegel's distinction of different kinds of observation, provided above: description of the sense-world has no limits, the number of different descriptions can be extended endlessly whereas the world for the more developed observation is that, which is explained with the help of universal laws and principles.

There is one important idea more in Aristotle's views on universality. According to him, the world of constant change characterizes foremost the world available for senses; the world beyond senses, however, has also stable characteristics. When criticizing the views of Heraclitus and his followers, especially Cratylus, who assumed that the world is characterized by constant change only, he suggested:

And again, it would be fair to criticize those who hold this view for asserting about the whole material universe what they saw only in a minority even of sensible things. For only that region of the sensible world which immediately surrounds us is always in the process of destruction and generation; but this is—so to speak—not even a fraction of the whole, so that it would have been juster to acquit this part of the world because of the other part, than to condemn the other because of this.  
(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 746, Bk. IV, 1010<sup>a</sup>)

It can be conjectured from the last quote that the superficial description of the sense-world that immediately surrounds us is not an appropriate way for gaining scientific knowledge, knowledge of universal principles—these principles characterize



especially the world beyond appearances. This idea leads us to the next issue—Aristotle’s views on whether the world can be known in principle.

#### KNOWABILITY

Indeed, we know the world through senses; if senses are deceptive, then perhaps scientific knowledge is not possible? Aristotle knew that the world of senses can be deceptive:

Regarding the nature of truth, we must maintain that not everything which appears is true; firstly, because even if sensation—at least of the object peculiar to the sense in question—is not false, still appearance is not the same as sensation.

(Aristotle, 1941a, p. 746, Bk. IV, 1010<sup>a</sup>)

Yet, at the same time he assumed that the principles of the world—universals that, according to himself, characterize especially the world beyond senses—can be known. There is no contradiction in Aristotle’s thinking; he did suggest the way how scientific knowledge can be obtained—this knowledge emerges when understanding of the sense-world is built not directly and only on the basis of what was perceived. Rather, as I also mentioned above, scientific knowledge emerges when a scientist coordinates knowledge about the observed world with knowledge about his or her own thinking; I bring the relevant quote again here:

The knowledge of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for the soul is in some sense the principle of the animal life.

(Aristotle, 1941b, p. 535, Bk. I, 402<sup>a</sup>)

#### MODERN VIEW

Aristotelian epistemology in its exact form is not followed in sciences today. Yet there is one group of approaches to sciences that share basic principles that Aristotle proposed. This group of approaches shares the view that understanding means description of the structure or system of the phenomenon under study. In psychology, structural view was common before World War II; it can be traced back to the beginnings of scientific psychology in the nineteenth century. Wundt, for example, suggested that attributes of psychical causality can be discovered by studying Psychological Elements, Psychological Compounds, Interconnections of Psychological Compounds, and Psychological Developments. Only on the basis of knowledge from studying the mentioned aspects of

mind, Psychological Causality and its laws can be formulated: “There is only *one* kind of causal explanation in psychology, and that is the derivation of more complex psychical processes from simpler ones.” (Wundt, 1897, p. 24).

Vygotsky, founder of the cultural-historical psychology, explicitly followed a similar approach to the study of culture and mind. According to him, in order to understand mental phenomena, it is necessary to describe: (1) The components they are made of; (2) the specific relationships between the components that comprise a whole or structure of the phenomenon; and (3) development, how the phenomenon emerges and changes in time (Vygotsky, 1994). With, perhaps, less emphasis on development than Vygotsky had, such structural understanding was shared by many scholars of that time (see for these views, e.g., Koffka, 1935; Köhler, 1959; Ladd, 1894; Titchener, 1898, 1899; Werner, 1948; Wertheimer, 1925). Later, the structural view was synthesized into so-called *systems view*, which shared with the structural view the idea that phenomena can be understood as systems (von Bertalanffy, 1968). These more recent views, however, rely excessively on mathematical analyses of variables instead of qualitative analyses of the structure of the studied phenomena *per se*. Recent developments in quantitative systems theories, by relying on quantitative methods of data interpretation, in principle rule out the possibility for understanding the qualitative nature of structures and therefore are by themselves essentially nonstructural (cf. Michell, 2010; Toomela, 2008c, 2009).

Theories in modern physics, chemistry, and biology are very often structural. All the chemical formulas describe structures—wholes composed from distinguishable elements or parts; biological theories of a gene and of a synapse are examples of structural theories as well. Thinking in modern medicine is structural-systemic also (Toomela, 2005). Altogether, structural-systemic understanding of the world is common; it was also common in psychology but, after World War II, structural-systemic worldview was replaced with another epistemology for no scientific reason (Toomela, 2007, 2008b; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010).

#### METHODOLOGY

Three central characteristics of the methodology of science based on structural-systemic epistemology can be identified. First, scholars of this kind of science—and in accordance with Aristotelian

epistemology—explicitly base their scientific activity into the philosophical-theoretical context of scientific thinking. Vygotsky, for example, relied heavily on the ideas of Hegel, Engels, Marx, and Spinoza. Doing this, he did not accept blindly the philosophical ideas proposed by others but rather developed them in accordance with the aims of science and its methodology (Mahn, 2010). It can be said that all eminent thinkers in psychology of the beginning of the twentieth century were not only educated in philosophy but took philosophical ideas critically, becoming philosophers of science by themselves (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Lamiell, 2010; Michell, 2010).

Vygotsky (1982) distinguished method of studies—the “technology” of experiment—from the methodology; method of cognition that determines the aim of a study, the place of a science and its nature. Both methods and methodology were explicitly developed by the structural-systemic scholars. Their methodology was based on the assumptions that the world is characterized by universal principles and that these principles are not directly observable but are knowable through scientific studies.

Second, methods of the structural-systemic science are qualitative. These methods, again in accordance with Aristotelian epistemology, differ substantially from the modern qualitative approaches to psychology and social sciences. The main difference lies in the understanding that mere observation allows description but not scientific knowledge in Aristotle’s sense of the concept. Scientific method must include experiments, artificial constraints on study situations purposefully introduced by researchers (Toomela, 2008b, 2009, 2010b, 2010e).

And third, structural-systemic epistemology directs scientific studies to identify parts of the whole, the specific relationships in which the parts are, and the process of the emergence of the whole from parts. Consequently the methods of this kind of science are constructive—there are two complementary ways to establish what the elements are. First, the hypothetical elements are put together in theoretically predicted relationships to see whether the expected whole emerges. Second, it is observed whether the whole changes in a theoretically predicted way when a specific part of it is removed or a relationship between parts is destroyed. This method is essentially experimental, but experiment aimed explicitly at identifying parts, relationships between parts, and properties of the whole that

emerge in the synthesis of parts. Such methods were extensively used in cultural and neuropsychological studies by Luria (cf. Luria, 1969, 1974; Luria & Yudovich, 1956).

### ***Cartesian-Humean Cause-Effect Epistemology***

Descartes and Hume understood causality in the same way—both of them agreed that the world beyond senses—appearances—is not knowable in principle and therefore the only kind of cause that can be known is that of the efficient cause.

#### **THEORY OF CAUSALITY**

Descartes’ understanding of causality is not entirely different, but is a fundamentally limited version of Aristotelian thought. According to Descartes, there are only efficient causes in the world. As he rejected the possibility for other causes, his understanding of the efficient cause was also different from Aristotelian:

I call ‘absolute’ whatever has within it the pure and simple nature in question; that is, whatever is viewed as being independent, a cause, simple, universal, single, equal, similar, straight, and other qualities of that sort. [...] The ‘relative,’ on the other hand, is what shares the same nature, or at least something of the same nature, in virtue of which we can relate it to the absolute and deduce it from the absolute in a definite series of steps. The concept of the ‘relative’ involves other terms besides, which I call ‘relations’: these include whatever is said to be dependent, an effect, composite, particular, many, unequal, dissimilar, oblique, etc. [...].

(Descartes, 1985d, p. 21)

So, *cause* is: independent, simple, universal, single, equal, similar, straight, etc. *Effect*, in turn, is: relative, dependent, composite, particular, many, unequal, dissimilar, oblique, etc. This description also gives us the idea about how the causes and effects are related: effects can be deduced from causes in a series of steps. The cause-effect relationship, therefore, is linear, no reciprocity is possible here.

A slightly different approach to causality, even though similar to Cartesian in looking for efficient causality only, was taken by Hume. According to him,

Similar objects are always conjoined with similar. Of this we have experience. Suitably to this experience, therefore, we may define a cause to be *an object*,

*followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second. Or in other words, where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.*

(Hume, 2000, pp. 145–146)

Altogether, this epistemology proposes that only efficient causes characterize the knowable world.

#### VIEWS ON PROCESS

Epistemology according to which there is only one kind of causality, that of the efficient cause, is also constrained in conceptualizing processes: process can be only the series of effects that follow from causes. According to Aristotelian view, all kinds of causes are beginnings, processes, and therefore different kinds of processes can be identified and studied in the structural-systemic epistemology. In cause-effect epistemology, there can be no explanation of emergence of new forms besides just the mere statement that the cause of the emergence of an effect was ... the cause. Descartes explicitly rejected Aristotelian views on becoming and change (cf. Descartes, 1985d). For Descartes, causes contained everything that was observed in the effects:

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect—that is, contains in itself more reality—cannot arise from what is less perfect. (Descartes, 1985b, p. 28)

As causes are more perfect than effects, effects contain nothing that is not already in their cause. Such a view leads to static understanding of the world. As causes possess everything that is observed in the effect, no novelty actually emerges in cause-effect relationships. There is, thus, no true becoming and change, only less perfect effects follow from more perfect causes. Also theories become very simple in this epistemology: if processes are just about cause-effect relationships, then theory becomes complete when the causes of effects are identified.

#### DEGREE OF UNIVERSALISM OF THE WORLD

In cause-effect epistemology, world is covered by universal principles. There are fewer laws than

events in the world because one cause can give many effects:

Besides, we find in the course of nature, that tho' the effects be many, the principles, from which they arise, are commonly but few and simple, and that 'tis the sign of an unskilful naturalist to have recourse to a different quality, in order to explain every different operation.

(Hume, 2000, p. 185)

Descartes, in fact, went even further by declaring that there is only one true cause:

First I tried to discover in general the principles or first causes of everything that exists or can exist in the world. To this end I considered nothing but God alone, who created the world

(Descartes, 1985a, pp. 143–144)

Thus, Cartesian-Humean cause-effect science assumes that world is organized according to general principles that are at the same time causes.

#### KNOWABILITY

In everyday life, we constantly take into account all four kinds of causes distinguished by Aristotle. We would not try to construct a bicycle from potatoes or make bread from stones. Such examples look almost ridiculous, but cause-effect epistemology in fact rejects knowledge of material causes—parts from which wholes are built. So, why did two brilliant philosophers reject all causes but efficient? Generally, the reason was the same—both of them assumed that knowledge about the world beyond appearances is not available for humans in principle. The justifications, though, were different.

Descartes suggested that world beyond appearances cannot be known:

However, although this method may enable us to understand how all the things in nature could have arisen, it should not therefore be inferred that they were in fact made in this way. Just as the same craftsman could make two clocks which tell the time equally well and look completely alike from the outside but have completely different assemblies of wheels inside, so the supreme craftsman of the real world could have produced all that we see in several different ways.

(Descartes, 1985c, p. 289)

This passage gives also a hint as to why Descartes accepted only efficient causality. He suggested that

all efficient causes eventually converge to one—God. God, according to him, is:

[...] infinite, eternal, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent [...] all the perfections which I could observe to be in God.

(*Descartes*, 1985a, p. 128)

If God is omnipotent then it follows logically that only efficient cause can ground epistemology; all other kinds of causes are essentially constraints on what can happen. The idea of material cause suggests that not everything can be built from a given material. Formal cause is similarly a constraint—the whole is what it is because of the parts it contains; it would be another whole if the parts were changed. Final cause, also, constrains possibilities of existence; final cause, according to Aristotle, is closely related to development, emergence of new forms—there are things that have in themselves the source of movement to become a new form; this is the nature of such things, final cause that directs the processes of emergence (cf. Aristotle, 1941a). But if God is omnipotent, there can be no constraints on his will. Therefore no cause that is essentially a constraint can exist; God has no constraints.

Hume also suggested that the world beyond appearances is not knowable:

It must certainly be allowed, that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets, and has afforded us only the knowledge of a few superficial qualities of objects; while she conceals from us those powers and principles, on which the influence of these objects entirely depends. [...] there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers. [...] the course of nature may change, and that an object, seemingly like those which we have experienced, may be attended with different or contrary effects.

(*Hume*, 1999, excerpts from pp. 113–115)

Logically, if only appearances can be known, it is not possible to know that which underlies them—the bread may look the same for us and yet may be composed from other parts (no material cause, thus, can be known); appearances can suddenly become into unexpected relationships, therefore also no final cause that should give certain unidirectionality to the series of events, can be known; also, the form itself may look one way to us but be essentially something different—no formal cause can be known as well.

But why is the world beyond appearances not knowable? It is not because there is God whose deeds cannot be understood by imperfect humans, as Descartes assumed; rather, limited knowability results logically from Hume's psychology. Hume thought that humans' thinking is based only on emergence of associations between observed events:

[...] principles of association [...] To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas, namely, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* in time or place, and *Cause or Effect*. [...] But the most usual species of connexion among the different events, which enter into any narrative composition, is that of cause and effect;

(*Hume*, 1999, pp. 101–103)

So, the only operation available for mind is to form associations between observed events as they appear to us. If this is the case then, indeed, other kinds of causes cannot be discovered because externally similar events may be based on different structures (i.e., on different material, formal, and final causes) and there is no way to distinguish internally different causes on the basis of associative thinking alone.

#### MODERN VIEWS

Aristotelian epistemology has developed into different structural-systemic epistemologies of today. Cartesian-Humean cause-effect epistemology— that can also be found in science today, especially in psychology and social sciences (Toomela, 2009)—has not changed considerably. Indeed, there is very little that can be different. If the basic idea is that causality means only efficient causality, then all the science has nothing else to do but to identify possible causes of possible effects, or just observe associations between events and call discovered associations that emerge more often than by chance, theories.

So in psychology today we learn that certain differences in aggressiveness can be caused by sex or gender; differences in human behavioral patterns are caused by differences in five factors of personality; success at work is caused by high intelligence; individualism, collectivism, masculinity or power distance is caused by culture, etc. Psychology has discovered thousands of such causal relationships; in all such cases the theoretical "explanation" for effects is that there exists a cause that was discovered by scientists. This is exactly what Humean science is doing:

'Tis evident, that all reasonings from causes or effects terminate in conclusions, concerning matter

of fact; that is, concerning the existence of objects or of their qualities.

(Hume, 2000, p. 65)

## METHODOLOGY

Cause-effect science is based on a coherent philosophical worldview. Yet, differently from the systemic-structural approach, in this worldview the epistemology is usually not discussed. This is a consequence of the worldview itself—for scientific knowledge it is sufficient to identify the causes, there is nothing more to discuss. So even if connection of the cause-effect science to its philosophical roots would be recognized, there is no urge to discuss other views or to question the epistemological ground of itself. This ground is just accepted.

In terms of methods, Cartesian-Humean science relies on quantitative procedures in the first place. This choice of methods can be directly connected to a Humean train of ideas:

‘Tis by habit we make the transition from cause to effect; and ‘tis from some present impression we borrow that vivacity, which we diffuse over the correlative idea. But when we have not observed a sufficient number of instances, to produce a strong habit; or when these instances are contrary to each other; or when the resemblance is not exact; or the present impression is faint and obscure; or the experience in some measure obliterated from the memory; or the connexion dependent on a long chain of objects; or the inference derived from general rules, and yet not conformable to them: In all these cases the evidence diminishes by the diminution of the force and intenseness of the idea. This therefore is the nature of the judgment and probability.

(Hume, 2000, p. 105)

Without knowing anything else but associations between events—on the basis of which efficient causality is discovered—then the only way to discover these causal relations is just to observe associations between events; the more there are observations, the better. It will also not be a problem if no perfect one-to-one correspondence can be found between causes and effects; any “statistically reliable” result is acceptable, the rest is just “measurement error”—error that can be attributed to kinds of causes that are not knowable for humans in principle.

Cause-effect science aims at discovering causes of effects. Experiments are used in this science occasionally for distinguishing between different

candidates for causes. This experimentalism, thus, is fundamentally different from structural-systemic constructive experiment; it is not the emergence or disappearance of the structure that is observed when hypothetical parts or their relationships are experimentally manipulated; cause-effect science experiment aims at establishing association between two events in a situation where, ideally, the supposed cause-event alone is manipulated.

## *Heraclitian Process-Oriented Epistemology*

Two epistemologies out of three that correspond to kinds of observation distinguished by Hegel have been described so far—structural-systemic self-reflective epistemology and cause-effect epistemology that aims at finding the laws, relationships between causes and effects. Hegel also distinguished simple and superficial description as a kind of observation. There is epistemology that corresponds to this kind of observation; I call it *process-oriented*. Philosophical roots of this epistemology can be traced back to Heraclitian philosophy. Even though only fragments from Heraclitus’ works have survived until today, these fragments together reveal quite a coherent worldview (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 2007). The fragments are hard to interpret for their original obscurity; the situation is further complicated by difficulties of translation of those fragments from Greek to English. In the following presentation I am going to use translations from different sources; the available more recent translations from Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (2007), and if not available there, from Freeman (1948). Diels-Kranz (DK) numbers are used to refer to relevant fragments.

## THEORY OF CAUSALITY

Heraclitus did not have theory of causality in the same sense that the later philosophers did—as much as can be decided on the basis of survived fragments, and also on the basis of Aristotle’s works, who summarized views on causality expressed before him. Yet, events in the world are related one to another. The world, according to Heraclitus, is constantly changing; this change is not completely random but follows certain basic principles. One form of the matter changes into another in a lawful way:

Fire lives the death of earth, and air lives the death of fire, water lives the death of air, earth that of water.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 30, DK22b76; see also fragments 31, 36, 90)

This process of change has three characteristics worthy of attention. First, there are no clear boundaries in the change of forms; opposites are related into continuous unity:

Things taken together are wholes and not wholes, something which is brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 190, DK22b10)

And what is in us is the same thing: living and dead, awake and sleeping, as well as young and old; for the latter (*of each pair of opposites*) having changed becomes the former, and this again having changed becomes the latter.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 30, DK22b88, *see also* 62, 126)

Second, from the opposites in their unity, novel forms may emerge:

That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 25, DK22b8, *see also* 51)

And third, the world is characterized by relativity—the same thing can have different meanings from different perspectives:

Sea is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 188, DK22b61, *see also* 9, 13, 37, 60)

Taken together, in Heraclitian worldview, the world is characterized by constant change in boundary-less—and therefore continuous—unity. In this unity of the world some things may continuously change into their opposites; in other cases opposites may form a harmonious unity; and sometimes the same is not the same, but different depending on the perspective—things are relative. Causality in this view, thus, should be characterized by multiple determinations of events because there are different sources of possible changes.

#### VIEWS ON PROCESS

Heraclitus is best known today for his emphasis on the processes of change in the universe:

Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow ... They scatter and ... gather ... come together and flow away ... approach and depart.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 195, DK22b12 and 91, *see also* 6, 49a)

The more common (Platonic, expanded by Aristotle and others) interpretation of Heraclitian thought would suggest that Heraclitus emphasizes the absolute continuity of change in everything. Yet this interpretation does not take into account that Heraclitus did not completely reject the idea of universal principles; on the contrary, he repeatedly emphasized the universal principle, *Logos*, which underlies continuous and constant change in the world (*see also* next subsection). Perhaps the more correct interpretation of the Heraclitian view on change is that the world as a whole might follow the universal principle, be stable as such and yet, its constituent parts are changing forever (Kirk et al., 2007).

#### DEGREE OF UNIVERSALISM OF THE WORLD

According to Heraclitus, there is *universal principle*—*Logos*—that underlies changes in the world:

Listening not to me but to the *Logos* it is wise to agree that all things are one.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 187, DK22b50; *see also* 1, 2, 72, 114)

This universal principle seems to be related to fire, the archetypal form of matter:

Thunderbolt steers all things

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 198, DK22b64; *see also* 30)

It is noteworthy that this universal principle, fire, is a form of matter that is in constant change. Change, thus, can be understood as universal principle.

Even though Heraclitus himself did not reject the idea of universal principle(s), his approach inevitably must lead to focusing on the individual, unique events in the world—despite his own words that called to follow the principles, the *Logos*. Followers of Heraclitus thought today may have not noticed at all his call to listening to the *Logos*, because Heraclitian thought was distorted already millennia ago—by Stoics and Sophists, especially Cratylus, whose thought has influenced Plato's and Aristotle's interpretation of Heraclitian philosophy (Kirk et al., 2007). Heraclitus, thus, is largely known today through the secondary sources where his views were distorted by overemphasizing his ideas about processes of change and by ignoring his understanding of universal principles that underlie the change. This could be the way how process-oriented epistemology found its roots in Heraclitian philosophy.

If one looks deeper into Heraclitus' philosophy, however, it can be seen that emphasis on change in

Heraclitus' philosophy actually is justified because this philosophy is fundamentally contradictory. There are five ideas in Heraclitus' thought that, together, must lead to overemphasis of change and underemphasis of Logos. First, as was discussed above, Heraclitus suggested repeatedly that the world is constantly changing and every moment is different from the previous—one cannot step twice into the same river. The universal Logos can be behind the entire world; but we live in the immediate world of constant change, where Logos is not obvious:

The real constitution [a thing's true constitution] is accustomed to hide itself.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 192, DK22b123)

If Logos is not obvious, it follows, second, that Logos must be hard to understand. Indeed, according to Heraclitus, it is hard to understand and accept universal principles; only an educated soul can get closer to it:

Evil witnesses are eyes and ears for men, if they have souls that do not understand their language.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 188, DK22b107, *see also* 1, 2, 17)

So, the majority of people cannot understand Logos; this understanding is not available to those with barbarian souls, souls that are not able to understand the language of senses.

So far, there is no contradiction yet—Logos is hard to understand, but not impossible. The following ideas, however, suggest that there is actually no way to know the Logos. The third reason for overemphasizing the change is that in the everyday world that surrounds us, there are no observable universal sources for different changes. There is the relevant fragment:

The wise is one thing, to be acquainted with true judgment, how all things are steered through all.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 202, DK22b41)

On the one hand, this fragment suggests that wisdom consists of understanding the Logos, the universal principle that underlies the change (*see* Kirk et al., 2007, for this interpretation). On the other hand, however, this fragment suggests that “all things are steered through all”—it can be conjectured that at least in our immediate world that surrounds us, everything can be related to everything. If so, then the universal principles cannot be discovered by observation of this immediate world because universal can be discovered only when some

things are *not* related. If every relationship is possible, there is no principle that could be discovered immediately around us. Heraclitus seems to support this interpretation by saying that even though the universal principle is operating everywhere, humans see the particulars:

God is day-night, winter-summer, war-peace, satiety-famine. But he changes like (fire) which when it mingles with the smoke of incense, is named according to each man's pleasure.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 29, DK22b67, *see also* 72)

Fourth, Heraclitus seems also to suggest that world, indeed, is not predictable; what happens every moment is not guided by universal principles but rather is like a child's play:

Time is a child playing a game of draughts; the kingship is in the hands of a child.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 28, DK22b52)

These two ideas—that everything is related to everything and that local changes in the world around us are not predictable—show that there is actually no way to know universals on the basis of observing the world around us. Heraclitus suggested—somehow consistently in his inconsistency—fifth, that the world is not fully knowable to humans (this issue is discussed in some more details in the next section).

Altogether, there is irresolvable contradiction in Heraclitian philosophy. On the one hand, there is universal principle, or principles, that underlie changes in the world. On the other hand, however, humans can perceive appearances and changes of appearances. From observation of the constantly and continuously changing unpredictable world with no clear boundaries—the world where everything is related to everything—it is not possible to conjecture these universal principles. It turns out that overemphasis of continuous and constant change in Heraclitian philosophy is not necessarily a distortion at all.

#### KNOWABILITY

Contrary to Aristotle and similarly with Hume and Descartes, Heraclitus suggested that the world is not fully knowable for humans; full understanding is accessible only for gods:

Human nature has no power of understanding; but the divine nature has it.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 30, DK22b78, *see also* 79, 83, 102)

It is not only the world around us that is not fully knowable; we are also not able to understand our own souls:

You would not find out the boundaries of soul, even by travelling along every path: so deep a measure does it have.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 203, DK22b45)

Knowledge should go beyond appearances:

The hidden harmony is stronger (*or*, ‘better’) than the visible.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 28, DK22b54)

but it is knowledge of appearances that we know and value:

The things of which there is seeing and hearing and perception, these do I prefer.

(Kirk et al., 2007, p. 188, DK22b55)

At the same time, however, appearances are deceptive:

Men are deceived over the recognition of visible things . . .

(Freeman, 1948, p. 28, DK22b56, *see also* 123)

Altogether, Heraclitian philosophy turns out to be internally contradictory again. Yet, the overall message that emerges is that the world beyond appearances cannot be understood by humans; there is hidden harmony in things, but it is not accessible for us mortals.

If the principles turn out to be hard to discover, or in fact impossible, as was discussed in the previous section, then what kind of knowledge is left over for humans? According to Hegel’s account of descriptive stage, discussed above, unreflective consciousness only describes appearances, this description continues endlessly because no universal conclusions emerge in this process. According to Heraclitus, knowing one’s own soul is not possible; therefore the “consciousness” is unreflective indeed. The only thing that can be done is to observe, to know many things:

Men who love wisdom must be inquirers into very many things

(Freeman, 1948, p. 27, DK22b35)

There is, however, no accumulation of knowledge; we can know many things and yet no true understanding—or very little—emerges from all this:

Much learning does not teach one to have intelligence . . .

(Freeman, 1948, p. 27, DK22b40)

Those who seek gold dig much earth and find little.

(Freeman, 1948, p. 26, DK22b22)

## MODERN VIEW

Heraclitian process-oriented worldview is very close, sometimes even looks identical, to epistemology that grounds modern qualitative approaches to research. It is important to mention here, that the following description applies to *modern* qualitative science, to the approach that emerged around the 1960s; there is another kind of qualitative approach—that which is used in structural-systemic science. This qualitative approach was common in psychology and social science in the beginning of the twentieth century. First the earlier qualitative approach was abandoned in North America; it survived in continental Europe until World War II and disappeared after that (Toomela, 2007; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010). Today the structural-systemic qualitative research has disappeared from mainstream psychology and other social sciences.

There are several characteristics that should characterize science grounded in Heraclitian epistemology. First, as no principles can really be discovered in observing the world, the process-oriented science must have loose identity and no clear methodological direction—there is just no way to demonstrate that one approach may be more appropriate for the aims of science than the other. This is the case with the modern qualitative approach—which actually is a loose collection of practically unrelated approaches:

The open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrellalike paradigm over the entire project. There are multiple interpretive projects [ . . . ]

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. xv)

The researcher as *bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. [ . . . ] As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 6)

It follows logically, second, that without rational ground for choosing between ways of knowing the world, the science should become just an increasing collection of almost unrelated pieces; modern



qualitative science—using the words of the scholars in this tradition—is just a big mess indeed:

We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common [...]  
(*Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005a, p. 26)

Next, Heraclitus suggested that the world of appearances—the only world available for us—is deceptive. This idea should lead to understanding that descriptions of the world can be interpreted in many different ways, it could even be suggested that descriptions are just constructions; perhaps descriptions are not really descriptions of the world but every description creates the world? Yes, indeed:

We have left the world of naive realism, knowing now that a text does not mirror the world, it creates the world. Further, there is no external world or final arbiter—lived experience, for example—against which a text can be judged.

(*Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005b, p. xiv; see also *Corbin & Strauss*, 2008; *Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke*, 2004a, for similar ideas)

Fourth, such science should aim at describing particulars, individuals—because there are no universals and principles to look for. Science grounded in Heraclitian epistemology must be descriptive in the Hegelian sense; and it is:

Critical realists reject a correspondence theory of truth. They believe that reality is arranged in levels and that scientific work must go beyond statements of regularity to analysis of the mechanisms, processes, and structures that account for the patterns that are observed.

Still, as postempirists, antifoundational, critical theorists, we reject much of what the critical realists advocate.

(*Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005a, p. 13)

and:

Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are committed to an emic, idiographic, case-based position that directs attention to the specifics of particular cases.

(*Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005a, p. 12)

Fifth, not only the way of scientific activity, but also the results of studies must be constantly questioned; in a boundaryless, continuously changing world there is no criterion for deciding which of the observations and following interpretations

is acceptable and which is not. Again, qualitative researchers reject the possibility for truth:

At some point we [qualitative researchers] ask, 'Did we get the story 'right'?', knowing that there are no 'right' stories, only multiple stories. Perhaps qualitative studies do not have endings, only questions.

(*Creswell*, 2007, pp. 44–45; see also *Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005a, and *Guba & Lincoln*, 2005, for similar ideas)

Altogether, there exists an approach to science that fits well to Heraclitian worldview; as the whole world, also one aspect of it—science—turns out to be characterized by constant and continuous change of boundaryless events flowing and flowing. This science can be shortly described in this way:

Upon those that step into the same science different and different discourses, texts, narratives and stories flow ... They scatter and ... gather ... come together and flow away ... approach and depart.

## METHODOLOGY

Similarly with Aristotelian structural-systemic approach, process-oriented epistemology is based on explicit philosophical-theoretical ground. This philosophical-theoretical ground, altogether, is different from Aristotelian in important respects. The fundamental difference lies in two assumptions about the world—degree of universality and knowability. For process-oriented epistemology, the world is a constantly and continuously changing, boundaryless individuality that is not knowable beyond appearances. These two assumptions, that ground process-oriented methodology, determine the choice of methods.

Superficially, modern qualitative approaches to science rely on a large variety of qualitative methods; among them: interviewing; direct observation; the analysis of artifacts, documents, and cultural records; the use of visual materials; and the use of personal experience (*Anfara & Mertz*, 2006; *Corbin & Strauss*, 2008; *Creswell*, 2007; *Denzin & Lincoln*, 2005c; *Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke*, 2004b; *Silverman*, 2007). Yet, all these methods are in a certain sense one and the same—there is no single method that would go beyond appearances. In order to discover whether different underlying causes are expressed in apparently similar events, experiments—constructive experiments as used in structural-systemic science—are necessary. Process-oriented science, however, does not even have clear concept of causality—if the concept emerges, it is efficient cause alone that

is taken into consideration. This efficient causality is, in addition, different from Cartesian-Humean epistemology—there, independent causes lead to effects. In process-oriented epistemology, different patterns of different causes may lead to superficially similar effects (House, 2005). This idea fits well with original Heraclitian idea, as was shown above. And yet—the same approach acknowledges that the causes can never be fully known.

Also, the only thing that is recognized is that the same causes do not always lead to similar effects—multiplicity of efficient causes is applied only in case of different appearances (*see again*, House, 2005). What is not recognized in process-oriented methodology is related to understanding of externally similar events; the idea that different causes may be responsible for them is not taken into account. This possibility cannot be incorporated into theories already for methodological reasons—observation of appearances does not give any reason to suspect that external similarity may hide different causes.

Third, process-oriented methodology—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—rejects experiments; the procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterized as inductive:

[...] The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer.

(Creswell, 2007, p. 19)

Obviously there is no way to conduct experiments in inductive studies because experiment requires deduction. The idea that modern qualitative research could be inductive is actually deeply contradictory—*induction* is passing from singular statements to universal statements. But process-oriented epistemology denies universal principles, universal statements. Therefore it is not inductive but rather, by its methodology and methods, just an endless collection of descriptions of appearances; descriptions that do not even allow any inductive generalization. And if inductive generalizations in some qualitative approaches would have been made, the fundamental problem would still remain—theories cannot be verified and for this reason inductive logic is not acceptable for science (Popper, 1994, 2002).

### Three Cultures of Cultural Psychology: Comparison

So far, three cultures of science—each based on a different epistemology and consequently aiming at

a different kind of knowledge—are distinguished. With this distinction, it becomes justified to apply a differential concept of culture to these three sciences. Perhaps just distinguishing three sciences could somehow be interesting by itself, but the value of distinctions in science—and knowledge in general—is in the potential consequences of the distinction. It is possible to go further than just to declare the existence of three kinds of science.

I suggest that hierarchical concept of culture should also be applied with respect to these three sciences. It is usually assumed that hierarchical notion of culture is value-saturated (e.g., Bauman, 1999). Value saturation, however, is not necessarily related to hierarchical concept of culture (cf. Toomela, 2003a). Hierarchy is always defined with respect to some mental frame. If this frame is value-laden, the hierarchical concept of culture defined with respect to that frame will be value-laden as well. But the world around us is filled with other kinds of hierarchies that are value-free—such hierarchies were well-known for philosophers a long time ago (cf. Aristotle, 1984). These hierarchies characterize the world at large as well as the world of language specifically: language contains much taxonomy, for example. The word “animal” by itself is not better or worse than “horse,” “dog,” “elephant” and many other words that refer to particular kinds of animals.

### *The Notion of Hierarchy*

So, the term “hierarchy” is polysemous; in order to know what is actually meant by the “hierarchical concept of culture” it is first necessary to make clear, what exactly is meant by hierarchy. The term “hierarchy” can be used in four different senses; there is order hierarchy, inclusion hierarchy, control hierarchy, and level hierarchy (Lane, 2006). *Order hierarchy* refers to an ordering induced by the values of a variable defined by some set of elements. *Inclusion hierarchy* refers to a recursive organization of entities; this kind of hierarchy, also called *nested hierarchy*, is the organizational scheme that underlies taxonomies where a hierarchically higher-level category contains several lower-level categories that, in turn, may be further divided into subcategories. *Control hierarchy* is the kind of hierarchy that refers to power and other socially valued kinds of relations—hierarchy in this sense is used for value-saturated cultural concepts. Finally, there is *level hierarchy*; this concept refers to structures where units at one, hierarchically lower level compose a

whole with emergent qualities at another, higher level of hierarchy.

Discovery of the level hierarchy contains scientific knowledge—if, for example, the three distinguished cultures of science turn out to be hierarchically ordered in terms of levels, then scientifically important consequences follow. Level hierarchy here would imply also certain control or value-laden meaning. Namely, if three sciences that are based on different epistemologies, are ordered into hierarchical levels, then the most complex science—that comprises the top level of hierarchy—must also be most valuable, most appropriate for achieving the goals of science.

How so? This conclusion follows logically from the idea that the aim of science is knowledge. Knowledge can be understood in quantitative and qualitative terms—there can be more knowledge of the same kind and there can be more knowledge about qualitatively different aspects of the studied phenomenon. Qualitatively more different kinds of knowledge always implies quantitatively more as well because qualitatively novel aspects can be further elaborated quantitatively; the more there are new kinds of knowledge distinguished by scientists, the more there are possibilities for quantitative increase. In this context, more is “better.” It is not only more that is important; history of science knows many situations where discoveries led to understanding what are *not* important or useful facts.

If three distinct sciences comprise hierarchical levels, then it must be so that every next level both includes the previous as part, and extends qualitatively the range of knowledge that is aimed at. In that case, the hierarchically highest level is also the “best” ground for science. This is exactly the case with the distinguished epistemologies.

Further analysis could continue from the epistemological level to any more specific level of scientific knowledge, distinguished above: research practices, theoretical notions (definitions), or theory as a system of notions. In the following I am mostly discussing the three sciences in terms of the most specific level of analysis—research practices—because the intermediate levels often contain theoretical statements that turn out to be empty slogans that are consistently ignored at the level of actual practices. If theoretical statements do not correspond to actual research methods—i.e., if methods do not allow achieving the results declared to be the aims at the theoretical level—then the actual content of the theories is not determined by the slogans

but by the content of the information gathered in actual studies.

### *Process-Oriented Science*

As I suggested above, process-oriented science relies on modern qualitative methodology and methods. Generally, this methodology is based on the assumption that the world is unity that is characterized by continuous and constant change—processes. Processes constitute either a boundary-less world or a world where boundaries are fuzzy, permeable. What can be studied in this world is particulars, individual cases only. Universal principles exist—the world is characterized by constant change, for example—but these universals do not emerge as results of observations of those individual cases but rather from philosophical speculations. The world in this epistemology is knowable only in the limits of appearances; observation of those appearances may lead to many equally acceptable truths.

Methods used in this approach are all qualitative—there are many of them, but none of the methods used allow experimentation. This is the main reason why modern qualitative methods cannot go beyond endless description of superficial observations; why the methods do not allow to distinguish between different causes that may underlie externally similar events. One of the main obstacles a scientist faces is that every event in the world is at any moment multiply determined. Different combinations of such multiple determinations may lead sometimes to externally identical events. Also, sometimes all observed things are affected by some universal factor and yet the pattern of determinations leads to differences in behavior of these things despite the universal effect of some principle on all of them. Altogether, a scientist must discover the causes in situations where externally similar behaviors may be based on different causes and externally different behaviors may still be affected by universal causes.

Only by artificially—experimentally—manipulating with those multiple causes, it becomes possible to identify which of the causes, or patterns of causes, leads to which of the observed behaviors. For example, by simply observing behavior of the bodies around us, we see that some fall, some float in the air and some even “go up.” In order to discover that all bodies around us—with no exception!—are affected by gravity, conditions must be created that do not naturally exist on Earth; a physicist has to create a vacuum and observe the behavior of bodies

in the vacuum in order to discover that externally different behaviors rely on certain universals and actual behavior is determined by other causes such as the density of the bodies. Further, then it can be discovered that there are different flying objects—balloons, birds, airplanes. By experimental manipulations it becomes evident that flying of birds and balloons are based on different causes. There is a reason why humans did not go to the Moon by propeller airplane even though this is a flying machine. Balloons would also be inappropriate. Altogether, there is myriad of examples around us to demonstrate that knowledge can and should go beyond appearances—and that for the development of such knowledge, experiments are absolutely necessary.

There are other reasons for rejecting process-oriented science as fundamentally limited. I would like to point to two reasons more—these reasons emerge already on epistemological ground and show that process-oriented epistemology is internally hopelessly contradictory. Both of these reasons for rejection of this epistemology were formulated already thousands of years ago—by critics of Heraclitian worldview. First, scholars of the modern qualitative approach sometimes explicitly declare that they do not study the world but the words about the world. For example, Corbin and Strauss (2008) give a list of assumptions that underlies their approach to qualitative research. The first of these assumptions is relevant here:

Assumption 1. The external world is a symbolic representation, a 'symbolic universe.'  
(p. 6)

Modern qualitative approach may declare that there is no external "objective" reality around us at all. In that case, indeed, the only things to study are symbols in our minds. The doubt in the existence of the external world is not uncommon in qualitative research texts; for example:

We have left the world of naive realism, knowing now that a text does not mirror the world, it creates the world. Further, there is no external world or final arbiter—lived experience, for example—against which a text can be judged.  
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. xiv)

If there would be really no objective external world, however, any study of it becomes meaningless because there would be nobody to tell the results of the studies. Those, who would listen, would also

be just symbolic constructs. And why to create symbolic constructs for other symbolic constructs?

Let us assume, however, that there is a universe external to the researcher. In that case the question emerges: what should be studied—the symbols or the world? We find the answer in Plato's *Cratylus*:

SOCRATES: But since there's civil war among names, with some claiming that they are like the truth and others claiming that *they* are, how then are we to judge between them, and what are we to start from? We can't start from other different names because there are none. No, it's clear we have to look for something other than names, something that will make plain to us without using names which of these two kinds of names are the true ones—that is to say, the ones that express the truth about the things that are. [...] it is far better to investigate them [the things that are] and learn about them through themselves than to do so through their names.

(Plato, 1997, p. 154, 438d and 439b)

Indeed, if contradictory or even mutually exclusive theories about the same phenomenon have been proposed, there must be a way to choose between them. Obviously the choice cannot be made on the basis of studying the theories as symbolic constructs; the world must be studied. Here modern qualitative researchers would perhaps object that there is no one truth, all truths are good. If so, then, again, there is no meaning in any study at all because what would be discovered would be just one more "truth" and one more and one more. All equally right. Such personal truths are not acceptable in science where knowledge is searched for. Knowledge always and by necessity contains exclusion of certain possibilities, otherwise everything could be everything else and no understanding would be possible. This leads us to the second fundamental flaw of process-oriented epistemology.

In consistently process-oriented epistemology, knowledge itself is impossible. This conclusion was made, again, by Plato. There are two reasons for this. First, knowledge must be about something, if this something changes into something else, then there is no knowledge about it anymore. If the world is changing *constantly*, then every next moment is new and there is nothing in the world about which it would be possible to know anything:

SOCRATES: Then again it can't even be known by anyone. For at the very instant the knower-to-be approaches, what he is approaching is becoming a

different thing, of a different character, so that he can't yet come to know either what sort of thing it is or what it is like—surely, no kind of knowledge is knowledge of what isn't in any way.

(Plato, 1997, p. 155, 439e-440a)

There is also a second reason to reject process-oriented methodology—knowledge itself cannot exist if everything is constantly changing:

SOCRATES: Indeed, it isn't even reasonable to say that there is such a thing as knowledge, Cratylus, if all things are passing on and none remain. For if that thing itself, knowledge, did not pass on from being knowledge, then knowledge would always remain, and there would *be* such a thing as knowledge. On the other hand, if the very form of knowledge passed on from being knowledge, the instant is passed on into a different form than that of knowledge, there would be no knowledge. And if it were always passing on, there would always be no knowledge.

(Plato, 1997, p. 155, 440a-b)

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF PROCESS-ORIENTED CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGIES

Altogether, there are epistemological, methodological, and methodical reasons to reject process-oriented science as a fundamentally limited and internally hopelessly contradictory approach to knowledge construction. Space limitations do not allow analyzing the whole cultural psychology today in order to know which of the approaches follow process-oriented epistemology. Another problem is that process orientation is sometimes mixed together with cause-effect science. So instead of discussing some clearly distinguishable approaches, I provide some more specific examples.

One characteristic of process orientation is rejection of clear boundaries between things and between processes. This principle applies also to definitions of studied phenomena. The result is that many qualitatively different phenomena are studied under the same name. There are many instances of such practices in cultural psychology. One question that researchers ask is does only “x” or also some “non-x” have this or that characteristic? One of such questions is: do animals other than humans also have culture? Culture is now attributed to primates (Whiten, 2000; Whiten et al., 1999), whales and dolphins (Whitehead, Rendell, Osborne, & Würsig, 2004), bowerbirds (Madden, 2008), and even insects (Coolen, Dangles, & Casas, 2005; Leadbeater & Chittka, 2007).

Since Tylor (1871), culture has been attributed by many scholars exclusively to man already by definition. The concept of culture must become fuzzy; its definition must change in the flow of studies in order to arrive to insect cultures. Culture in animals is often associated with social learning. But why reject these aspects of human life, that are specifically human? Science, for example. Philosophy. Arts. Formal institutions. What do we learn by discovering that in certain respects humans are similar to other creatures? Not very much beyond trivialities; already biology provides us numerous similarities among all forms of life. The category of “culture” has become fuzzy and, inevitably, no scientific knowledge can emerge in this way because in a boundary-less world we eventually learn that everything is the same. We arrive to Heraclitian Logos and together with it we have to admit that knowledge becomes impossible, as Plato demonstrated.

There are other examples in the field of cultural psychology where similar fuzziness is first introduced into the concept and then it is “discovered” that what was attributed to “x” can now be attributed to increasing range of “non-x’s.” Language is attributed to apes without realizing that definition of human language must include the functions for which language is used. Ape language is directive; orders are given there whereas humans from the very early stages of language learning begin to indicate, to share the focus of attention (Vauclair, 2003). For humans, language is a tool for thinking; semiotically mediated psychological processes emerge in humans (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930); so far there is no evidence that other species beside humans would develop semiotically mediated thought (Toomela, 2003a). Formal logic has been attributed to persons without formal education (Cole, 1996; Cole & Scribner, 1974) because the very same people who are not able to solve certain problems in the context of language alone are able to solve the “same” problems in the context of everyday activities. Formal logic has first turned into a not very formal and not very logic in the strict—Aristotelian—sense of the term and the result is that everybody, even pigeons are able to make formal logical operations, such as transitive inferences (cf. Higa & Staddon, 1993). Pigeons can discriminate between paintings by Monet and Picasso also (Watanabe, Sakamoto, & Wakita, 1995). It does not follow that pigeons “have” impressionistic art, or understanding of it. It only follows that pigeons can discriminate visual experiences; this is not a big discovery. The questions

whether somebody “has” or “does not have” some characteristic is not scientifically interesting to answer as such (*see also* Toomela, 2010a; Valsiner, 2003). Instead it should be asked whether externally similar behaviors truly emerge on the basis of similar causes—there is a lot of evidence to suggest that culture is a useful concept to be attributed only and exclusively to humans (Toomela, 2003a).

### CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Another idea in cultural studies that is grounded in process-oriented epistemology is that of cultural relativism. Boas suggested, “Civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Boas, 1887a, p. 589). The idea of cultural relativism is logically related to another concept, that of *ethnocentrism*, the view according to which “one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). According to the principle of *cultural relativism*, any culture cannot be understood from the position of another culture; consequently, cultures cannot be arranged into hierarchical order so that one culture is more developed or better than the other—because such a statement is possible only from the outsider’s viewpoint. Even more, the view that one culture is more developed or better than the other is by necessity ethnocentric, because the evaluation is given not by some machine but always by the representative of some culture—who, by definition, bases the evaluation not on personal and objective views but rather on views affected by his or her culture.

The majority of cultural psychologists today accept the idea of cultural relativism and therefore are against ethnocentrism; according to such a position, cultures are qualitatively different, but at the same level of development (e.g., Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Cole, 1996; Tulviste, 1988; van der Veer, 1996). I am going to suggest that the concept of cultural relativism is scientifically unacceptable for several reasons. It is unacceptable as principle *if*—as it is done today—it is used as undeniable law. In other words, the principle of cultural relativism is scientifically unacceptable if on the basis of it is decided that any scientific search for a hierarchy of cultures must be rejected *a priori*. There are several reasons why cultural relativism—as opposed to cultural hierarchy—cannot be taken for more than a theory or hypothesis.

First, cultural relativism as absolute principle is not scientifically defensible—in principle. The principle of cultural relativism implies that there are no—and can be no—dimensions according to which cultures could be hierarchically ordered. However, there is no scientific way to prove that something does not exist. Consequently, the idea of cultural relativism can be accepted as theory or hypothesis, but not as absolute principle. In principle a dimension may exist, according to which cultures can be arranged into a hierarchy.

Furthermore, cultural relativism calls for studies from the standpoint of the studied culture. In this way there will be no possibility even to discover universal principles—these can be discovered only when cultures are studied “from above”; it must be assumed first that cultures can be understood, at least in some aspects, by an outsider. The principle of cultural relativism rejects universals *a priori*; therefore, again, science based on such premises turns into a thing in itself that always finds what it looks for because it looks only where “support” for its theories can be found.

Third, in many applications, the concept of cultural relativism is not rational but value-saturated. The following quote is one of the many where the value saturation is obvious:

I do believe that Europe will evolve into a multiethnic and multicultural space, but in order to do so, masculinism, nationalism, and demented ethnocentrism have to be removed from the European mind-set, so as to stop constructing difference in terms of negative otherness.  
(Braidotti, 2000, p. 1062)

This quote demonstrates not only a passionate—and not necessarily rationally grounded—attitude toward the idea of ethnocentrism. This quote, curiously, demonstrates an ethnocentric viewpoint! Sumner (1906, *see* pp. 13–15) provided evidence that ethnocentrism was common among Tupis, Papuas on New Guinea, Mbayas of South America, Caribs, Kiowas, Lapps, Greenland Eskimos, Tunguses, Aivos, etc. Should we think that all of them were demented? Let us remind again: by definition, ethnocentrism is the view according to which “one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.” (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). There is a group of people who accept only one viewpoint—that of their own group—the viewpoint of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is, thus, also ethnocentric by undervaluing those

with ethnocentric views. I do not think calling ethnocentrism “bad” or “demented” and cultural relativism “good” or “nondemented” supports the development of science in any way.

I think the issue here is actually not about whether cultural relativism is one case of ethnocentric views or not—it is—but rather the question is: what is the basis of ethnocentric theories of any kind? Ethnocentric views based on opinions, values, feelings, should be rejected indeed—this is my own ethnocentric view. However, science is a quest for knowledge, for understanding the universe. *If* there are hierarchical phenomena in the world (culture, in our case), then science sooner or later either ceases to be a science and ignores facts; or accepts the facts and together with them the idea that cultures can be—on a certain rational ground—arranged into a hierarchical order.

Fourth, cultural relativism should also be rejected on epistemological and methodological grounds. The direction where to look for these problems is also indicated in Braidotti’s (2000) article. Her quote, provided above, ended one section in the article; the next section begins with the sentence, “The only constant in today’s world is change” (p. 13). This is the basic idea of process-oriented epistemology.

The relationship between Heraclitian epistemology and the concept of cultural relativism is too complex to analyze in necessary details in this chapter. Therefore I indicate only the epistemological and methodological problems inherent to this view already in Boas’ approach. The epistemological and methodological ground of the hypothesis of cultural relativism has not changed since his time and therefore applies today as well. So, Boas suggested that culture is characterized by constant change:

All cultural forms rather appear in a constant state of flux and subject to fundamental modifications.  
(Boas, 1920, p. 315)

From the analysis of Heraclitian epistemology, it must follow that it is not universals but particulars that comprise the knowledge that is looked for. Indeed, according to Boas, knowledge of universal principles does not ground explanation; explanation is in the description of particulars. This understanding is expressed in his opposition of two branches of sciences:

[...] the former trying to deduce laws from phenomena, the latter having for its aim a description and explanation of phenomena.  
(Boas, 1887a, p. 588)

It must follow that the focus of studies must be description of individuals, not universals and principles. So it is: “In ethnology all is individuality” (Boas, 1887a, p. 589), and “... the object of study is the individual, not abstractions from the individual under observation” (Boas, 1887b, p. 485).

Further, rejection of universal principles in Heraclitian epistemology is related to understanding that there is no clear causal structure of the world, including that of culture; rather, the culture should be characterized by an unclear and very complex causal net. Boas’ view on causality corresponded well to process-oriented science. First of all, causes are not directly observable; externally similar events can be based on internally different causes: unlike causes produce like effects (Boas, 1887a, 1887b). These unlike causes are complex:

[...] the development of similar ethnological phenomena from unlike causes is far more probable, and due to the intricacy of the acting causes.  
(Boas, 1887b, p. 485)

Also, there is no clear boundary between causes and effects; causes become effects and vice versa:

[...] in historical happenings we are compelled to consider every phenomenon not only as effect but also as cause.  
(Boas, 1920, pp. 315–316)

If causal structure of the world is so complex, then the methodology, in order to capture such complexity must follow certain principles. In Heraclitian epistemology, there is no link to arrive at universal principles on the basis of observations of everyday life. Therefore methodology of studies should be fully inductive; and it was for Boas (cf. Boas, 1887a). Also, observations should take into account a huge number of facts. Boas, indeed, suggested:

We have to study each ethnological specimen individually in its history and in its medium [...]. By regarding a simple implement outside of its surroundings, outside of other inventions of the people to whom it belongs, and outside of other phenomena affecting that people and its productions, we cannot understand its meaning.  
(Boas, 1887b, p. 485)

Study of *each* ethnological specimen in its history, medium, surroundings, other inventions, and other phenomena affecting people is an endless task.

Finally, despite recognition that externally similar events may originate from different causes, the study methods in process-oriented science are based only on observations of appearances. In works of Boas, expectedly, we find numerous lists of descriptions of appearances; the idea that culture is only about appearances is reflected already in Boas' definition of culture, where we find only external aspects of human behavior, reactions and activities:

Culture may be defined as the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behavior of the individuals [...]

(Boas, 1938, p. 159)

Altogether, Boas epistemology and methodology correspond outstandingly well to Heraclitian process-oriented science. In this science, there are also universal principles—cultural relativism, for example—but these principles do not follow from facts but actually precede them. Such science can create only endlessly many descriptions of appearances but no principles follow from the observations. Boas himself thought that the approach to science he supported—an approach that was followed mostly by American anthropologists of his time—aimed also at answering general questions. European scholars of his time—who were more oriented toward structural-systemic science instead of the Boasian process-oriented approach—recognized the infertility of such descriptive work already a long time ago.

It may seem to the distant observer that American students are engaged in a mass of detailed investigations without much bearing upon the solution of the ultimate problems of a philosophic history of human civilization. I think this interpretation of the American attitude would be unjust because the ultimate questions are as near to our hearts as they are to those of other scholars, only we do not hope to be able to solve an intricate historical problem by a formula.

(Boas, 1920, p. 314)

Time has shown that the European perception of Boas' work was more accurate than his own understanding of it. Boasians may have had general questions near their hearts, but epistemological and, following from it, methodological limitations did not—and do not—allow answering those questions. Process-oriented science cannot discover universal principles or answer universal questions—these principles and questions are rejected *a priori* epistemologically and

methodologically even though they may exist in rhetoric of the theories of this science. In the case of cultural relativism, studies should aim at finding the universals rather than finding particulars—if the idea of universals is denied, then looking for possibilities to reject the theory, to falsify it in a Popperian sense, is scientifically more fruitful than an endless collection of descriptions of particulars.

Many more examples of process-oriented sciences could be provided. For example, certain principles followed in modern activity theory are rooted also in process-oriented epistemology (cf. Toomela, 2000, 2008a). Focus in this approach is not on structures but on processes; consequently activities are studied without taking into account characteristics of individuals—as elements of a structure of the activity. In this way, boundaries between categories—of an individual and culture, for example—also become fuzzy or disappear altogether. Activity theory is also characterized by the tendency for description that leads to fragmentation of the studies; the holistic nature of the mind is sometimes declared to be important but in actual research practices this universal principle is ignored. Indigenous psychologies' approach with its emphasis on the study of individuals in specific cultural contexts by scholars in that context corresponds methodologically also to process-oriented science (cf. Kim, 2001; Kim, Park, & Park, 2000). The list of examples could be continued but I think it is not necessary. Important is the principle—when process-oriented science grounded in Heraclitian epistemology is recognized in some approach to the study of culture, the weakness of the respective approach can be recognized as well.

### **Cause-Effect Science**

Cause-effect science aims at discovering universal causes for many effects; when the universal cause-effect relationship has been found, this relationship is called “principle” or “law.” Laws are found by studying covariations between events; these events are not distinguished according to the causes on the basis of which they emerge but only on the basis of superficial similarities, on the basis of appearances. For example, answers on a Likert scale on any item are treated as “the same” when different individuals have chosen the same number on the scale independently of the reasons why actual choices have been made; answers on the intelligence test are correct or incorrect independently of causes that led to the answer; generally—if similar “effects” follow similar



“causes” more often than by chance, cause-effect relationship is suggested.

A majority of cause-effect science relies on quantitative methodology where events are encoded as variables that are subsequently entered into some data-analysis procedure, such as analysis of variance, correlation, factor analysis, logistic regression, structural equation modeling, etc., etc. It does not follow, however, that cause-effect science can be only based on quantitative methodology. Cause-effect science is science where discovery of continuous—linear or nonlinear—cause-effect relationships is aimed at; it is any science where efficient causes, but not other kinds of causes, are looked for.

Cause-effect science is hierarchically—in the sense of level hierarchy—a more developed version of process-oriented science. As a developed version, it contains principles of process-oriented science that are modified together with the emergence of a new whole, that of cause-effect epistemology. Similarly with process-oriented science, cause-effect science relies on study of appearances. Descriptions of appearances, however, are not the aim of science in itself any more. Now it is assumed that some observations are scientific and others are not; the difference is in strict procedures that are applied in distinguishing between observations—only observations that reveal laws or principles are accepted as scientific, other observations lose their scientific significance. This is a qualitative change in scientific thought—change that adds novel ways to understand the world.

Superficially—this position is stressed from the perspective of the process-oriented approach—cause-effect science only loses information, it abstracts principles and laws from the endlessly rich world and therefore knowledge becomes “poor.” In fact, the opposite is true—laws and universals allow understanding more. There are two reasons why it is so. First, the world around us can be described in endlessly many ways—endlessly in the literal sense of the word. If science would stay in the stage of process-oriented epistemology, it would always be possible to find different descriptions even of the same events; and for sure, if there are no other descriptions at the moment, they can be created instantly. In this world, any statement can be opposed with the principle—“but it can be otherwise.” In the world that would be completely open for descriptions and interpretations, in the world where there are no universals, rules, laws, not only thinking, but life itself would be impossible: All forms of life

survive despite changes in the environmental conditions only because change of conditions can be predicted; prediction is possible only if changes in the environment repeat, if they follow certain “laws” or repetition (Anokhin, 1978; Toomela, 2010a).

Second, cause-effect science does *not* suggest that the world cannot be described in endlessly many ways. It also does *not* suggest that the world is ruled only by the discovered laws and principles. Rather, it suggests that knowing principles and laws is a special kind of knowledge—scientific knowledge—which can be achieved only by scientific procedures. These scientific procedures are not confined to maximally passive observations but rather are based on active participation of the researchers in the study; experiment becomes an important tool for attaining knowledge. Using these scientific methods, a new *kind* of knowledge is achieved, a qualitatively novel kind is added to the pool of knowledge—that of laws and principles. These laws and principles, thus, are “more” because that kind cannot be achieved by process-oriented science. Principles and laws are more, not less knowledge.

Yet, cause-effect science is still limited; it does not allow achieving different kinds of knowledge about universals. Shortly, the fundamental limitation of the cause-effect science is that this science studies efficient causes that affect things or phenomena, but it does not study, what the thing or phenomenon is. The problem is that in a given chain of events, always not one but many covariations between some characteristics of the events can be discovered. There is no scientific methodology that would allow distinguishing between cause-effect laws themselves. Let us take a simple example. The number of causes why a watch can break is not limited; it can break because of falling, becoming wet, too hot, too cold, becoming too old, etc. It is noteworthy that these efficient causes can be recognized far beyond the level of chance—with very high statistical reliability—and yet there would be no understanding whatsoever achieved as to what the watch is. Knowledge of such causes of breakage allows making many practical decisions; but it is not possible to fix the watch after it broke. A watchmaker does not have to know any of the efficient causes of breakage in order to fix the watch. So it turns out that cause-effect science is doomed to look endlessly for new and new covariations between characteristics of events. In this process, the things and phenomena that are studied are not understood by themselves; only laws of relationships between events are established. The reasons for

this limitation are discussed further in the section on the structural-systemic science, below.

### SOME EXAMPLES OF CAUSE-EFFECT CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGIES

#### *Cross-Cultural Psychology*

Perhaps the most dominant cause-effect cultural psychology today is that of cross-cultural psychology. This approach corresponds in its methods as well as epistemology fully to the Cartesian-Humean cause-effect science. It may seem that different sciences can be distinguished in cross-cultural psychology. For example, it has been suggested that three general orientations can be found there: *absolutism* that assumes that psychological phenomena are qualitatively the same in all cultures; *relativism* that assumes that all human behavior is culturally patterned; and *universalism*, according to which basic psychological processes are common to all members of the species but culture influences the particular ways these basic processes are expressed in behavior (Berry et al., 2002). Epistemologically and methodically, relativists sometimes follow the process-oriented worldview, as it was discussed above. Yet, in the context of the cross-cultural psychology, all three viewpoints share the same ground—any science that relies on quantitative methodology, which is the most common way of doing cross-cultural psychology—is cause-effect science. So, relativism as a branch of cross-cultural psychology should be distinguished from the relativism of the process-oriented methodology. In the former case, relativism aims at discovering universal causes and cause-effect relationships within what is called “culture” whereas the same aim characterizes absolutists and universalists at the level of many cultures. The distinctive characteristic of each of the approaches, thus, is just the level of analysis where cause-effect epistemology and corresponding methods are applied.

Cause-effect epistemology is reflected very explicitly in cross-cultural psychology. This epistemology is expressed, for example, in the vocabulary used in the theories. The following examples are from Berry with co-authors (2002). We find there linear relationships: “the *sequence* of ecology—culture—behavior came to be part of thinking about how to account for psychological similarities and differences around the world” (pp. 11–12, emphasis added). So, sequence helps to understand the *how* of something, cultural differences in this case. There are not just sequences but sequences of *influences*: “population-level *variables* . . . conceived as *influencing* the

individual outcomes” (p. 12, emphasis added). Here we find not only cause-effect relationships but also an understanding that it is variables that influence something; quantitative methodology is expressed in this vocabulary. True, in the same chapter it is also possible to find the idea of feedback; human beings are not only influenced by their environments, they also influence their environments: “individuals influencing their ecological and sociopolitical contexts” (p. 12). This “feedback” circle of environment → individual → environment relationships is called, following Boesch and Eckensberger, “*dialectical*” by the authors. The proposition that there is something dialectical in this chain of linear influences is not correct; or it is a fundamentally oversimplified version of dialectics. Because in dialectical relationships, a whole with entirely novel qualities emerges in the interaction of the things (cf. Engels, 1987; Hegel, 1969). In this oversimplified dialectics, novelty emerges as a linear consequence of the “cause”—individuals change because of their environments and environments change because of individuals. No hierarchical synthesis and novel level whole is defined in this chain of linear events. The whole and only business of cross-cultural psychology is finding cause-effect relationships.

#### *Dominant Value Systems*

Another set of examples of cause-effect epistemology can be found in the treatment of so-popular-today cultural “dominant value systems.” According to Hofstede (2001), his book “identifies five main dimensions along which dominant value systems in the more than 50 countries can be ordered and that affect human thinking, feeling, and acting, as well as organizations and institutions, in predictable ways” (p. xix). This one sentence expresses almost the whole essence of cause-effect science—there are causes that *affect*, the whole business has been to *identify* these causes; it becomes possible to *predict* events; quantity underlies the idea that countries can be *ordered* (variables used in quantitative data-analysis are created on the basis of this idea); and all the theory is based on appearances, *countries* are distinguished according to these dominant value systems. In which way country of origin becomes equivalent to culture of origin is a mystery. In fact, there would be no need to open this book in order to discover cause-effect science in it; the title of the book is *Culture’s consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*.

And what are the results of studies in cross-cultural psychology? Overall, a myriad of correlations between events has been described. Hofstede distinguished five dimensions of value systems: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation. One of these dimensions, that of individualism-collectivism, became an extremely popular subject of studies after the publication of the first edition of the *Culture's Consequences* in 1980. Thousands of articles have been published on it (as of April 24, 2010, there were 3,585 articles related to the keyword "individualism" in the PsycINFO database and 4,601 in the Web of Science). In these studies, the variable of individualism has been correlated with almost everything that came to the minds of the researchers; just to name a few: personality, partner support, maternal attachment, suicide, mate choice, occupational plans, work values, peer support, internet self-efficacy, leadership perceptions, cooperation, perspective taking, empathy, family-based HIV prevention, academic achievement, etc., etc. Altogether, the results of all these studies can be summarized shortly with Hegel's words: the "'great influence' of environment on the organism" (2005a, p. 295) has been discovered. Nothing less ... and nothing more.

Recently, it seems, scholars begin to realize that adding another construct to the list of correlates of individualism-collectivism is not very interesting. Quite in line with the cause-effect scientific ground, instead of summarizing all the findings in one great theoretical framework ... new dimensions have been recently proposed; in the future these can also be correlated with everything; so religion, socioeconomic status, and region within a country (Cohen, 2009) can be new candidates for the next several thousands of studies. Sure, there are many other dimensions according to which "great influence" of the culture on the individual can be discovered; but all this does not help to answer the question, what culture *is*; we only learn that there is something that *does* something, i.e., that *causes* something. I think science can give more.

#### *Activity Theory and Other Mixtures of Process-Oriented and Cause-Effect Sciences*

Cross-cultural psychology is not the only example of cause-effect sciences in cultural psychology of today. Another example of cause-effect science is that based on the activity theory. According to

*activity theory*, the emergence and development of the mind is determined by the activity that an animal or a human being is involved in (A. N. Leontiev, 1981). That view has been adopted by several modern scholars who claim, for example, that "the way of thinking is determined by the kind of activity" (Tulviste, 1988, *see also* Cole, 1996, for an analogous approach and Toomela, 2000, 2008a, for critique of the activity theory).

One idea is worthy of attention here. When discussing the limitations of the process-oriented approach, I suggested that activity theory contains principles that are akin to process-oriented epistemology. I also suggested that relativist cultural psychology in general can exist in process-oriented and cause-effect forms. Indigenous cultural psychology could also be an example of such science. Essentially I suggest that in some cases mixtures of process-oriented and cause-effect science can be found in cultural psychology. Recently, more and more often such mixtures are suggested to solve the shortcomings of quantitative (i.e., cause-effect) and modern qualitative (i.e., process-oriented) approaches (e.g., Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008). So, finding of such epistemological and methodological mixtures is not surprising.

Yet, there are reasons to suggest that such mixtures do not solve the most fundamental difficulties of these two sciences. Limitations of each of the sciences could be solved if there are no fundamental limitations inherent to both of them. But there is a shared fundamental limitation that neither of the approaches is able to overcome: both of them are limited to interpretation of appearances. Modern qualitative methods do not use experiments at all; therefore the whole science is limited to theories about appearances. Cause-effect science accepts and uses experiments. But these experiments are used only for establishing which of the possible candidates the "true" cause is and which is not. In the beginning of this section (*cause-effect science*) more reasons were provided why cause-effect experiments have a limited value: externally similar results emerge on the basis of many different causes (a watch breaks because of falling, getting wet, etc.). Experiment may rule out certain hypothetical causes, but experiment in cause-effect science does not provide information about what the studied thing or phenomenon *is*; different things may look similar, cause-effect science cannot distinguish them any more than process-oriented science. Another *kind* of experiment, in fact another

*kind* of science is needed to overcome the limits of appearances.

### ***Structural-Systemic Science***

Structural-systemic science aims at knowledge about different kinds of causes; in addition to efficient cause, material cause (i.e., parts), formal cause (i.e., emergent whole) and final cause (which determines the direction of development) are looked for. Epistemology of this science does not correspond fully to its philosophical roots formulated in Aristotelian philosophy; structural-systemic science formulates its aims in terms of two central notions: structure and development. This science is fully aware of its philosophical-epistemological ground and is ready to modify it, if it is discovered that the epistemology does not correspond any more to observed facts. Structural-systemic science assumes that there are universal principles in the world, and that the world can be understood beyond appearances so that not only relationships between events can be understood but also what the things under study are. Aims of structural-systemic science are achieved by qualitative methods that, in the course of the development of knowledge, lead to constructive experiments, experiments where it is attempted to create the phenomenon or thing on the basis of the theory about what the thing is—what are its parts in which specific relationships.

Structural-systemic science is clearly hierarchically more developed and yet continuous to the cause-effect science: it accepts efficient causes as part of scientific knowledge, but adds to this kind other qualitatively novel kinds of knowledge, which were not searched for by hierarchically less developed cause-effect and process-oriented sciences. Similarly with both less developed sciences, structural-systemic science relies on descriptions of observations—obviously there is no other source of knowledge about the universe around us but that which is based on information that emerges in the sensory systems. Cause-effect science provides to this new science understanding of the value of artificially created situations in understanding the world. But the meaning of artificial situations is interpreted differently in the structural-systemic context. First, it is understood that different wholes emerge from the same parts in qualitatively different relationships. Therefore the quantitative methodology is rejected because it takes into account only quantitative covariative relationships between events. Second, it is understood that not events

but parts and kinds of their relationships must be manipulated in experiments; so the essence of the artificial study situation is also fundamentally different. In constructive experiments, it is not sufficient to manipulate with one variable so that everything else is kept constant. Rather, it is understood that manipulation must concern, one-by-one, *all* elements and *all* specific relationships between them that are predicted by the theory.

Here lies also the power of constructive experiments: they do not go on endlessly. In the case of cause-effect science, new causes of externally similar events can always be discovered—because causes in this epistemology are external to the studied phenomenon itself. So everything that may come into relationship with the studied structure becomes a cause, because properties of things change and novel “effect” emerges in every case, a thing comes into relationship with another thing. In structural-systemic science the external is not under study, but the thing itself. It is assumed—this assumption is well-grounded by achievements of physics, chemistry, and biology—that more than one but still a limited number of different kinds of structures may underlie externally similar phenomena. So there is a limit to scientific inquiry; this limit is determined by the structural varieties of the world, by what the things are. Anything can be affected by an endless number of other things that are external to it; but nothing externally similar can be built in endlessly many ways—otherwise not only knowledge but life would be impossible. This is because without constraints on structures—on causes that underlie the appearances—the world would be unpredictable.

Altogether, structural-systemic science is grounded on the most developed epistemology and methodology. It contains principles that allow selecting from scientific descriptions those that contain scientific knowledge, knowledge of causes of things and events. I think there are strong arguments to reject both process-oriented and cause-effect sciences as less developed and therefore also less powerful forms of science. Such rejection, of course, must be based on careful analysis of arguments provided for or against one or the other epistemology. There is also no *a priori* way to decide that no more developed science than structural-systemic can exist; perhaps it will be formulated in the future. Perhaps it is already formulated but not known to the author of this chapter. Yet, in the limits of knowledge that underlie the arguments provided above, structural-systemic science should be preferred to the other two.

## AN EXAMPLE OF STRUCTURAL-SYSTEMIC CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Structural-systemic science is uncommon in today's cultural psychology. The best examples of it can be found in history. There is increasing evidence to suggest that pre-World War II continental European psychology was epistemologically, methodologically, and theoretically far ahead of the modern mainstream psychology (Toomela, 2007, 2010d; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010). History, thus, can be a valuable source for looking for future trends of cultural psychology.

The most consistent structural-systemic approach to the study of the mind was taken by Vygotsky and a limited number of his followers. Vygotsky's name is well-known today, but for concepts and ideas that have very little in common with his original approach. Now Vygotsky is often seen as a child psychologist who investigated cognitive development in the framework of mother-child interactions. He was not any of them; he was no child psychologist, he did not study only cognitive development, and he never studied mother-child interactions—Vygotsky was first of all a theoretical psychologist (Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000). Indeed, his explicit aim was unifying theory of psyche rather than understanding of some local psychological phenomena (Vygotsky, 1982). Today, many of Vygotsky's ideas have been distorted beyond recognition (Mahn, 2010; Veresov, 2010). Most certainly he was not the founder of the activity theory—the true founder of activity theory was A. N. Leontiev. Curiously, A. N. Leontiev with the creation of the activity theory departed from Vygotsky's theory in the early 1930s but returned in many aspects back to Vygotskian ideas in the end of his career (A. A. Leontiev, 1990). Modern activity theory is fundamentally different from Vygotskian cultural-historical psychology (Toomela, 2000, 2008a; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). The only consistent follower of cultural-historical psychology, who is relatively well-known today, was Alexander Luria.

As with the other two cultures of science—process-oriented and cause-effect—structural-systemic science relies on certain methodological principles that distinguish it from the others. Vygotsky did not use quantitative data-analysis methods; his approach was qualitative. It can be said that quantitative methodology was developed mostly after his death and perhaps he could not use all the wonderful quantitative data-analysis techniques available to researchers today. However, Luria, who had the opportunity

to adopt these methods also did not do it; he relied on qualitative methods as well. So, already in this respect, cultural-historical psychology must be distinguished from the modern mainstream (cultural) psychology—i.e., cause-effect science—which mostly relies on quantitative methodology.

The Vygotskian approach must also be distinguished from process-oriented sciences: cultural-historical psychology explicitly aims at understanding universal structural-systemic principles and methodologically relies heavily on experiments and artificially created study situations. Overall, I think, Vygotsky's approach was characterized by the following methods used for the theory development: (1) descriptive observations of appearances with subsequent analysis of them in terms of universal principles; (2) observations in artificially constrained situations; (3) "cause-effect" experiments for identifying efficient causes with the analysis of the results of these experiments in structural-systemic framework; and (4) constructive experiments. These methods were not used in a certain order but as complementary parts of the whole methodology. This methodology was also not a chaotic mix of arbitrarily applied methods that characterizes modern qualitative approaches (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005c). Rather, all methods were chosen or constructed on theoretical grounds with a clear understanding as to what the researcher wants to know through the methods used and how the particular method corresponds to the questions asked as well as to the theory of the studied phenomenon. I provide a few examples about Vygotsky's methods.

(1) *Descriptive observations.* Vygotsky used many observations made by other researchers as well as by him. When discussing the characteristics of "primitives," he, for example, described the symbols used by Dakotas: a feather with a hole showed that the owner of it killed an enemy; a feather with an end cut off demonstrated that the owner cut the throat of an enemy, etc. (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). All such descriptive observations were incorporated into a clear theoretical framework.

(2) *Observations in artificially constrained situations.* The classical example of this method is the method of investigating the formation of concepts (Vygotsky, 1996). In this method, the subject is presented with a set of objects that have one or more features in common—color, shape, height, and/or base surface. Each of the objects has a name—a nonsense word—written on their underside. A number of objects are placed in front of the subject

in a disorganized fashion. Then the subject is shown a name under one of the objects and he is asked to find other objects with the same name under it. The investigator observes all the choices made by the subject as well as the order of choices. This method is not scientific experiment in the common sense of the word; it is not used for distinguishing between competing theories or testing hypotheses. The method was first used for discovering patterns in behavior. In natural conditions, choices among alternatives can be based on an unknown number of characteristics. In this method, basis of choices was artificially constrained to color, shape, height, and base surface. Analysis of the observations was eventually formulated in the frame of the developmental theory of concepts.

(3) *“Cause-effect” experiments.* Structural-systemic science does not reject the idea of efficient causes but rather interprets efficient causes in the context of the whole—the structural theory of causality. An example of this kind of experiment used by Vygotsky is the method of double-stimulation (e.g., Vygotsky, 1983). In that group of methods, participants are first presented with some task, such as answering questions with a restriction that certain words or phrases are forbidden to be used. Then the whole procedure is repeated so that auxiliary means—color cards, for example—are introduced into the situation. By using those means, Vygotsky suggested, participants mediated psychical operations so that it helped to fixate attention at the correct forms of answers and avoid forbidden ones.

In these experiments, it was not the whole structure of mind that was studied element-by-element and relationship-by-relationship. Rather, one—“efficient”—cause was chosen and it was tested whether this cause, if introduced into the structure of the task, leads to theoretically predicted changes in the test performance. For cultural-historical psychology, however, this kind of experiment was not the last step in the theory building.

(4) *Constructive experiments.* Vygotsky himself did not use constructive experiments extensively. The full power of them was utilized by Luria and his disciples in neuropsychological rehabilitation (Luria, 1948; Tsvetkova, 1985). In this approach, first, the structure of mental processes of healthy persons is theoretically formulated. In the case of localized brain damage, next, the person is thoroughly investigated in order to establish which particular cognitive components of the mental structures are damaged and which components survived. Then, on

the basis of this diagnostic investigation, the neuropsychologist answers the question, what components in which relationships would theoretically ground the same function that is lost? And then the plan of educational activities is created for the patient. In the process of guided learning—neuropsychological rehabilitation is essentially a set of directed educational activities—it is not the “old” structure of the function that is restored but rather an entirely new functional system is constructed so that a whole function emerges that is externally similar to the lost function but internally relies on a different structure. Remarkable success of Vygotskian-Lurian theory of neuropsychological rehabilitation not only corroborated the theory of psyche but also provided ground for further development of the theory.

Taken together, structural-systemic science, so rare today, has demonstrated considerable theoretical sophistication and remarkable applied utility that far exceeds accomplishments of modern process-oriented and cause-effect sciences. Structural-systemic science relies on all basic kinds of methods, from descriptive observations as the most primitive sources of scientific knowledge to most powerful constructive experiments where the studied phenomenon is actually recreated on the theoretical basis. The latter method is available neither to process-oriented nor to cause-effect sciences, which both are unable to provide knowledge about what a studied thing is—what is its structure. Cultural psychology today has made a qualitative leap back from its structural-systemic ground to epistemologically and methodologically fundamentally limited process-oriented and cause-effect sciences. It is not the first time in the history of human culture that future direction can be found in the past and not in the elaboration and extension of the present.

### **Future Directions of Cultural Psychology**

I think there is sufficient ground to distinguish three cultures of science—process-oriented, cause-effect, and structural-systemic. Furthermore, the first of them is epistemologically and methodologically the least developed, the least appropriate for achieving the aims of science—knowledge; and the last is the most developed. I am convinced that both the theoretical reasons I provided, as well as the list of examples described, can be extended considerably to support these propositions. It would seem natural now to suggest that the future of cultural psychology lies in the structural-systemic science. History of human culture in general, as well as

history of psychology in particular provides, sadly, many examples that fit too well with the expression that was born in the end of the Soviet Union: We wanted as better but it came out as usual! (*My hoteli kak luchshe, a poluchilos' kak vseгда*).

Cause-effect science and structural-systemic science could be clearly distinguished already a long time ago—the former dominated in North America and the latter in continental Europe before World War II. Goodwin Watson, one of the founders and the first president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues described eight major trends that characterized continental European psychology (Watson, 1934). These trends were essentially descriptions of the structural-systemic science. Watson ended his article with the prediction:

The eight major trends previously noted continue. German psychology is still more thoughtful, more qualitative, more subjective, more concerned with wholes, more insistent on understanding the particular case, more apt to make typological and characterological studies, more interested in achieving insight, more concerned with schools and systems. Although many brilliant psychologists have left voluntarily or been forced to leave, this cultural tradition is likely to continue for many years. (p. 771)

... but “it came out as usual.” Cause-effect science became dominant after World War II and, a few decades later, even less developed process-oriented psychology entered the field and occupied the place of structural-systemic psychology. It is a separate issue why it happened. For sure, there were no scientific reasons to abandon structural-systemic principles (Toomela, 2010d; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010).

So, in predicting the future of cultural psychology, I will not suggest that structural-systemic science will take its leading position soon. Eventually, it should happen and cause-effect science will give way to structural-systemic as it has done in physics, chemistry, and biology. I hope. But it is very unlikely that this change is going to take place in any near future. Already Kuhn observed that paradigms are hard to change (Kuhn, 1970). There are reasons to suggest that the forces that will eventually lead to the development of cultural psychology back to the future cannot be found inside of the process-oriented or cause-effect sciences. Because both of them rely on epistemology that fundamentally restricts self-development, these

epistemologies are not able to transcend their own limitations.

Perhaps the most fundamental limitation of the both process-oriented and cause-effect sciences is that there is no possibility to receive negative scientific feedback in either of them. In process-oriented science, the number of ways how anything can be described is not limited. Any description is as good as the other and therefore this science cannot discover any obstacle on its way. In knowledge, however, if anything goes then nothing is worthy.

Cause-effect science has limitations on the kinds of knowledge—only universal cause-effect relationships are scientific knowledge. Yet, there still is no constraint on the number of cause-effect relationships that can be discovered. This time the problem lies in the object of studies—it is not the thing or phenomenon itself, but the efficient causes that are extraneous to it. Again, the number of possible other things that can interact with the thing under study is in principle not limited. Therefore it is always possible to discover another efficient cause, and another, and another. Cause-effect science, therefore, also cannot have negative feedback that would reveal the fundamental limitations of this science. True, differently from process-oriented science, local negative feedback is possible here: hypotheses about causes may in experiments turn out to be wrong. But after such local drawbacks, another candidate for a cause can always be discovered. Overall, the cause-effect science has no internal information about limits of itself.

The situation is different with structural-systemic science. Both local and general kinds of negative feedback are possible here. Every time a researcher does not succeed with incorporating any of the four kinds of information—from descriptive observations, observations in artificially constrained situations, cause-effect experiments, or constructive experiments—into a theory about the phenomenon, local negative feedback is received. If such negative feedback continues to accumulate in fields that study qualitatively different things and phenomena, sooner or later problems at the higher level of scientific knowledge, up to the epistemological level, can be discovered. Out of the three sciences outlined in this chapter, only the structural-systemic has deeply reorganized its epistemology; theory of structures is not a replica of Aristotelian causality whereas in the other two sciences no significant changes have been introduced into the Heraclitian and Cartesian-Humean epistemologies, respectively.

Furthermore, it is not only lack of negative feedback that holds the development of science back and keeps the less developed forms of it alive. The epistemological ground of the less developed sciences protects also against invasion of more developed principles into it. So, process-oriented science may acknowledge the achievements of cause-effect science—but only as one kind of description that is in addition, according to them, poor. The idea of a continuously changing, boundaryless world rejects the idea of universals *a priori*. Therefore any information that could show the value of knowledge about universals is rejected as well.

Cause-effect science essentially denies the possibility to know the world beyond appearances—today this principle is usually accepted without the researchers realizing it; it can be discovered easily, however, by analyzing the actual research methods applied in this science. Here, again, possibility to know the thing under study, and not only efficient causes of external influences on it, is rejected *a priori*. Therefore any structural-systemic knowledge simply does not make sense for cause-effect science. In the best case, achievements of the structural-systemic science are translated into the primitive language of efficient causes without even noticing that the whole essence of the theories has been fundamentally distorted in this process. Many examples of such translations can be found; achievements of the structural-systemic scientists, such as Kurt Koffka, Kurt Lewin, Wolfgang Köhler, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, among many others would provide a very long list of them. So, from the perspective of the cause-effect science, nothing novel has been created by structuralists, because the novelty is first removed, and after that it is declared that what was found is all the same cause-effect science.

Cultural psychology of today is not going to change soon—because it is heavily dominated by the cause-effect science, the science that is in principle not able to discover its own limits. This domination goes far beyond directly scientific issues—here the cultural nature of the distinguished sciences comes into the foreground. In this context, I think, it is sufficient to look into the brilliant analysis of the socially constructed nature of the science of psychology by Kurt Danziger (1990). He demonstrated that science is not a tale of Sleeping Beauty; there are no princes—investigators who would awake the sleeping objects of inquiry and turn them into psychological knowledge by the magic kiss of research.

According to Danziger, science is not only about the ideas discovered or constructed in the process of studies. Results of scientific activity are, first of all, constructed on certain epistemological and methodological grounds. Personal limitations of researchers are determinants here. But a new discovery or idea is far from sufficient for the development of scientific knowledge. Next, the results of scientific activities must be accepted by other researchers in the research community. We saw above, that structural-systemic knowledge cannot be accepted by cause-effect science in principle. Even that would not hinder the development of the more developed forms of science—the whole history of science is in a certain sense creation of new scientific knowledge by individuals who proposed ideas that contradicted those of the mainstream of that time; in fact these ideas often contradicted the ideas of everybody else in the human society. The fundamental problem lies in the third—wider—aspect of the context where science is embedded, “*professional environment*” in Danziger’s terms. Scientists do not live outside of the world; they are human beings who have needs; including the most basic needs. If the results of the more developed science are not accepted as scientific knowledge, the professional environment rejects this science—there will be no research support, no positions available in the professional institutions, no external consumers of knowledge products and skills—no way to be a scientist.

Here may also lay the hope for structural-systemic science—many decisions about the future of science are made not by other scientists but are grounded in politics and economy. If the structural-systemic science learns to sell itself, it has some hope. There may be some more hope. Perhaps some members of the research community become just bored from endlessly increasing the list of either superficial descriptions of appearances or efficient causes and take a more challenging task—they can accept the possibility that, as scientists, they can be wrong not only locally but also in principle. Structural-systemic science offers this challenge together with ways how to proceed when fundamental epistemological problems have been discovered—a better epistemology can be formulated in that case.

Altogether, as history of human thought has demonstrated repeatedly, all ways are open for us. In the near future, most likely the cause-effect science remains in the dominant position because for outsiders it looks more scientific than mere description that everybody can do. As cause-effect science



has some relatively obvious limitations, process-oriented science has also some hope to strengthen its positions. If not otherwise, there is a possibility to create hybrids of the two and declare that such hybrids solve the problems inherent to one or the other taken separately.

These scenarios would be basically versions of the general historical trend: past-present-present-present-present-present. I hope researchers become bored from their endless tasks and turn to structural-systemic science. This historical trend is described by the sequence past-present-past, or, in the longer historical perspective, past-present-future-present-(past) future. There are good teachers to discover; in the era of printing and the Internet, it will not matter so much that these teachers died some time ago. We still can take lessons from them.

Finally, as (I hope) a structural-systemic scientist, I must admit that I can be fundamentally wrong. Perhaps there is another way to the future; perhaps some past-present-future direction is also possible. Anyway, there are reasons to be curious about the future of (cultural) psychology. Even if the “present” continues, it will be interesting to study the causes of this rigidity of the human mind.

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# Culture in Constructive Remembering

Brady Wagoner

## Abstract

The present chapter explores novel ways of thinking about what it means to remember and how precisely culture is involved in this process. Since Plato, the dominant metaphor for conceptualizing memory has been that of a spatial “storage.” In contrast to this, Frederic Bartlett advanced an alternative temporal metaphor of remembering as “construction.” If we push his metaphor further—with the help of cultural psychology—then we can say memory construction is done by agents using cultural “tools” such as language and narrative. In this chapter, Bartlett’s theory is contextualized, elucidated, critiqued, and developed with the help of a number of other thinkers. The ultimate aim of the chapter is to go beyond Bartlett and arrive at a thoroughgoing culturally inclusive psychological theory of remembering. Although Bartlett clearly situated remembering within a social process, he did not provide a social mechanism through which acts of remembering become possible. By contrast, Mead, Halbwachs, and Vygotsky have argued that remembering becomes possible through signs or symbols that experientially carry us outside of our embodied first-person perspective into the perspectives of social others. The activity of remembering is itself a process of dynamically integrating suggestions from self and others. The tension between perspectives is what drives the process of remembering and ensures its creativity and constructiveness.

**Keywords:** Memory, construction, Bartlett, metaphor, schema, signs, narrative, tension, agency

## Introduction

I would have you imagine that there exists in the mind of man a block of wax . . . When we wish to remember anything we have seen, or heard, or thought in our own minds, we hold the wax to the perceptions or thoughts, and in that material receive the impression of them as from the seal of a ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains.

—Plato, *Theatetus*, pp. 191D–191E

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of

organized past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or language form.

—F.C. Bartlett, 1932, p. 213

The above quotations describe two radically different ways of thinking about what it means to remember: in the first, memory is understood as a spatial storage of sensory impressions, whereas in the second it is a wholly constructive activity involving imagination, feeling, and a synthesis of past experiences. For most of psychology’s short history, it has tended toward the first perspective. This is unfortunate because it is only the second perspective that provides us with an adequate starting point to bring

culture into the process of remembering. To be fully consistent, from a constructivist perspective, means taking mind out of the head and situating it in the unfolding interaction between an organism and its social and physical environment. In so doing, we can begin to conceptualize the ways in which past experience is agentially accessed, formed, and transformed through social cultural means, in interaction with actual or internalized others.

The argument of the present chapter can be put bluntly: Rather than simply cuing something internal, social others and cultural tools participate in and constitute the very process of remembering by providing the cultural framework or scaffold through which memories are constructed. To argue this thesis, the present chapter first examines some of the conceptual problems encountered by storage theories of memory by way of a historical and conceptual analysis of memory metaphors. It then goes on to explore Bartlett's alternative theory of remembering and how it can be developed to give the social and the cultural a central place in the process. To this end, a number of classic and contemporary sources are borrowed from, including the following: George Herbert Mead's theory of the social act is used explain how it is possible get out of our selves in remembering and to begin to theorize the perspectival dimensions of remembering; Maurice Halbwachs's theory of the "collective memory" helps to contextualize remembering at the societal level, in the projects of different social groups; and Vygotsky and recent work in cultural psychology then provide a means of giving agency back to the remembering individual—and analyzing the role of various cultural resources in remembering—while at the same time situating individuals and resources in the broader social cultural world to which they belong.

### **Bringing metaphors of memory to life**

All knowledge is ultimately rooted in metaphorical (or analogical) modes of perception and thought.

Thus, metaphor necessarily plays a fundamental role in psychology, as in any other domain.

—Leary, 1990, p. 2

Metaphors involve a dynamic "interaction" (Black, 1962) or "schematizing" (Werner & Kaplan, 1963) between the *object* in question and the metaphorical *vehicle* used to describe it. In other words, the object is constructed in terms of the vehicle. For example, in the metaphor "argument is war," the aggressive and oppositional aspects of

"argument" are foregrounded whereas others are hidden. Using an alternative metaphor, such as "argument is dance," new properties of the object can be seen (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In science the constructive nature of metaphor can be highly "generative" of new ways of thinking about and exploring a scientific object (Danziger, 1990a)—take, for example, Niels Bohr's revolutionary idea that the structure of the atom might resemble the solar system. At the same time, however, metaphors can impede scientific advancement when we forget that the way we describe our object is metaphorical and begin to believe in its literal truth. Theorists call this a *dead metaphor* as opposed to a *living metaphor*, which has the potential to revive our creative capacity for seeing the world anew by allowing us to take a new perspective on an object (Ricoeur, 1977; see also Burke, 1935, on "perspective by incongruity").

The idea that the memory is a place in the mind/brain, where experiences are *stored*, has become a dead metaphor and as such creates obstacles for thinking about memory differently. In this section, I will bring metaphors of memory back to *life* by investigating their historical origins and analyzing what is revealed and hidden with the description of memory as storage. This will then open up the possibility of developing fruitful alternative metaphors of memory that explore aspects of memory concealed by the storage metaphor. To accomplish the task of historically analyzing the metaphors of memory, I will draw principally on the work of Danziger (2001, 2002, 2008), Draaisma (2000), and Roediger (1980).

### ***Memory As Social Agent***

The storage metaphor of memory dates back to ancient Greek society. It was Plato who first made memory the property of individuals by positing a space in our minds—"a gift from the god Mnemosyne"—where memories are kept (see above quotation). Before Plato, in the age of Homer and Hesiod, the word "memory" (*mnēmē*) and its derivatives were probably only used in the context of oral performance of epic poetry or delivering a speech at a banquet—the Goddess Mnemosyne was also said to have invented language and words. The incredible feats of memory required for the performance of epic poems (which sometimes lasted several days) were not believed to come from something *inside* the performer but rather from the goddess Mnemosyne or her daughters, the muses,



**Figure 49.1** A Greek mosaic of Mnemosyne inspiring a speaker at a banquet.

who inspired the performer (see Fig. 49.1). Thus, memory here is a social relation. Moreover, concern over strict accuracy is hardly relevant in this context of memory—no single written record even exists to compare with the performer’s version. Rather, the performer learns the story by listening to other performers and creatively adapts it in the context it is told. In these circumstances, variations of the “same” story proliferate. This pre-Platonic notion of remembering clearly fits a *cultural* and *constructive* conception of remembering with its emphasis on *activity* (rather than “the memory” as a *substance* in the head), the commemorative function of remembering, the guidance of social others (in this case divine beings), and the imaginative adjustment of the material to social context.

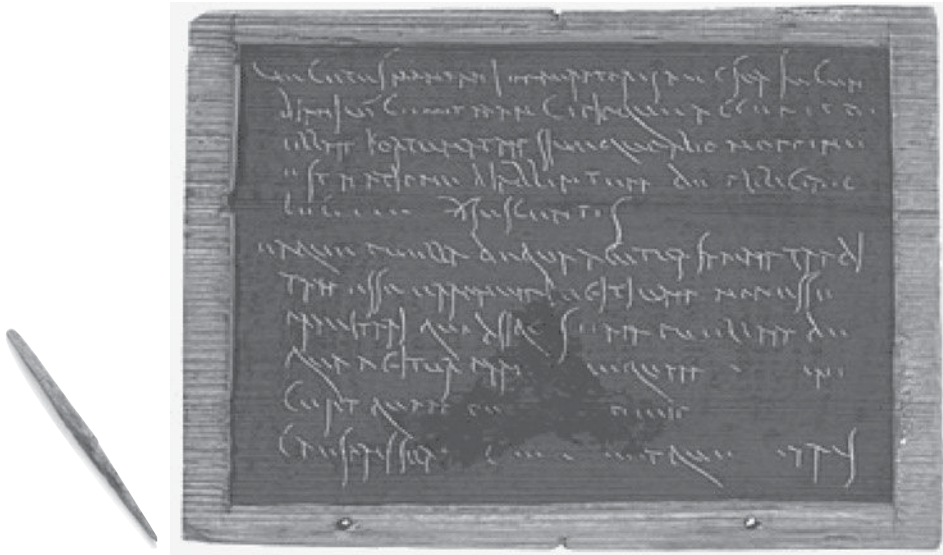
It is interesting to note that anthropologists and historians have noted similar conceptions of memory as a social relation in their research sites. For example, Vitebsky (1993) has characterized dead ancestors among the Sora in India as “Memories.” For the Sora, the deceased are not simply understood as attachments in time past; rather, they are active in the present and are attributed the power of pulling the living into death. Even more, Sora may have memories of the deceased’s death as experienced by the deceased. The deceased (active Memory) must be negotiated and appeased for the living to continue on with their life. Here memory is personified and given agency (cf. Valsiner’s analysis of play in an article titled “I create you to control me”—Valsiner, 1999). This conceptualization of memory of the dead as an active negotiation can be found in Medieval Europe as well. Its disappearance

is a result of the German reformation (Koslofsky, 2002). The Medieval Christians believed that most souls went to purgatory and were in continual need of the living. This changed with Luther, who argued that souls “sleep” until judgment day. The dead’s symbolic change of place coincided with the physical dislocation: Congested cemeteries in city centers were becoming public health hazards and were thus banished from the city limits. Interestingly, the psychological effect of this was not at first the disappearance of the dead from the lives of the living but, rather, that they were transformed from benign to malignant beings. In all these cases, memory is conceptualized as an active being outside the head.

### *The Inscription Metaphor*

#### PLATO’S METAPHORS

Plato’s originality was in making memories the properties of individuals—who have good or bad memory depending on the quality of their wax—and by generalizing this concept of memory to other contexts in which something previously learned is consciously brought to bear on the present. His use of writing as a metaphor for this process was not accidental: Just as the idea of divine inspiration was borrowed from the social practices of the day, so, too, was Plato influenced by the newly emerging social practice of writing, with which he would have become acquainted through his schooling. This is an early case of what Gigerenzer (1991) calls the *tools-to-theories heuristic*. Plato’s particular choice of wax tablets (see Fig. 49.2) for his metaphorical source is interesting in that they were not used for purposes of long-term storage. Wax tablets were useful because



**Figure 49.2** Wax tablet and stylus used in ancient Greece for writing

they could be easily erased so that the surface could be reused—thus, their function was for relatively short-term purposes, such as school exercises, notes, and memos. Marking a tablet was a simple means of *reminding* oneself of something, in the same way we write to-do lists today. For Plato, *reminding* was to be distinguished from *remembrance* or *recollection* (*anamnēsis*)—that is, recovering the knowledge of the Ideal Forms, already possessed at birth. In fact, implicit in his account of “remembrance” is a social metaphor, Socrates the “midwife” of Truth. For example, in the *Meno*, Socrates guides a slave boy to discover (or, in Plato’s terms, “to remember”) complex mathematical Truths through the social facilitation of dialogue. Thus, Plato also provides us with a theory of remembering with some similarity to the social perspective mentioned earlier.

The metaphor of writing was just one *possible* description of memory for Plato. For example, in the *Theatetus*, Plato also described memory as an aviary to explore the distinction between *possessing* and *having* knowledge. Birds in one’s aviary are *possessed*, but one has to hold them in one’s hand to *have* them. This is still a spatial storage metaphor of memory but it differs from an inscription metaphor in that it captures the feeling of *searching* for something (i.e., struggling to grab the right bird from the aviary) when we remember rather than *reading* from a stationary tablet. Plato’s diverse descriptions of memory are explorations of the phenomena, all of which conceive memory differently than his

contemporaries. As such, they are very much still *living metaphors*. In time, however, what was an innovative new perspective on memory became the only possible way of conceiving the phenomena—that is, a *dead metaphor*. In Aristotle, Plato’s metaphor of a wax tablet is already given a literal physical interpretation. Aristotle defined memory as “the having of an image regarded as a *copy* of that which it is an image” (Aristotle quoted in Casey, 2000, p. 14, my emphasis). Images are said to enter through the senses and are then imprinted on the physical body as a material trace in the same way a ring is imprinted on a wax tablet. This literal interpretation of inscription was retained through the Middle Ages, where advice was given to improve one’s retention of material by warming the back of one’s head!

#### **PERSISTENCE OF THE INSCRIPTION METAPHOR**

Memory as inscription (whether it is on wax tablets, parchment, paper, phonographs, or magnetic tape) has been by far the most common metaphor of memory in Western civilization. Part of the reason for this is the ubiquity of using marks as reminders. From pre-historic times, humans have been making marks on surfaces, in the form of images or symbols, as a kind of mnemonic device (see Donald, 1991). This practice reached a new level with the development of writing, which has held a central place in Western civilization since Plato. The other reason



for the dominance of inscription as a metaphor is the flexibility of the metaphor itself. Inscriptions or traces can be conceived quite literally as physiological changes made to the body or more figuratively as a symbolic representation of the thing to be remembered, such as words. This latter conception makes it possible to consider abstract drawings, written words, grooves in a record, digital code, and so forth as representations of the object to be remembered. The ancient *Art of Memory* (Yates, 1966), held in high regard until the sixteenth century, develops alongside this metaphor. In the “method of loci” technique developed by the Greeks and Romans, a person memorizes the layout of some building, street, or other well-lit geographical entity and then puts symbolic images, representing items to be remembered, in the discrete *loci* of the space. When the person needs to retrieve the information stored there, he or she walks in the space and decodes the images. Thus, wax tablets are substituted for imagined places as the surface on which the person inscribes.

In psychology, early advocates of the discipline, such as Wundt and Herbart, explicitly rejected memory as a scientific category because it was hopelessly tainted with commonsense ideas. Their vision for psychology as a discipline aimed at general knowledge construction, however, was abandoned for one that was closer to commonsense, and as such could easily be applied to different social institutions (see Danziger, 2001). In contrast, Ebbinghaus’s (1885/1913) explicit investigation of the “Memory” (the title of his book—the first of its kind in experimental psychology) was quickly appropriated by emerging educational institutions, because it was seen to offer advice for teaching children. Ebbinghaus (1885/1913) memorized lists of non-sense syllables (literally “meaningless” stimuli composed of a consonant, vowel, and consonant—for example PEV) and then tested himself to see the rate they were forgotten (“the curve of forgetting”), how well they were remembered as a function of their position in the list (“the serial position effect”), how much time it took to relearn them after they had been forgotten (“saving”), and so forth. Indeed, this study did share something in common with the rote learning of lists done in formal schooling. Ebbinghaus’s use of non-sense syllables was likely motivated by his use of the inscription metaphor of memory, which he explicitly used to conceptualize his results:

These relations [experimental results] can be described figuratively by speaking of the series as being more or less deeply engraved in some mental

substratum. To carry out this figure: as the number of repetitions increases, the series are engraved more and more deeply and indelibly; if the number of repetitions is small, the inscription is but surface deep and only fleeting glimpses of the tracery can be caught; with a somewhat greater number the inscription can, for a time at least, be read at will; as the number of repetitions is still further increased, the deeply cut picture of the series fades out only after ever longer intervals.

(1885/1913, pp. 52–53)

How does this persistent metaphor of inscription construct memory as an object? In other words, what does it reveal and conceal? Danziger (2002) points out how inscription carries with it three fundamental assumptions about memory:

1. Three distinct phases: The use of writing as an external memory technology requires three distinct activities separated in time: *Writing*, *storage*, and *reading*. Contemporary psychology has replaced wax tablets with a computer disk but the three distinct phases remain and are now called “encoding,” “storage,” and “retrieval.” Randall (2007) has recently suggested replacing the computer metaphor of memory and its three phases with a “compost metaphor,” which has the “organic” and inter-related activities of *laying it on*, *breaking it down*, *stirring it up*, and *mixing it in*.

2. The individuated trace: Writing leaves a trace that is distinct from other traces. This assumption is reinforced in the contemporary psychology laboratory by using material that can be easily itemized and counted, such as non-sense syllables and word lists (Mori, 2010). The individuated trace hides that memories often blur together into a generalized image. Also, remembering is often incorporated into one’s whole body and performed in context (Connerton, 1989).

3. The decontextualized text: Writing is a particular genre of communication very different from external or inner speech (Vygotsky, 1986), in that the text retains its form and meaning irrespective of the social context. Everyday conversational remembering, in contrast to writing, is highly dependent on context (Middleton & Edwards, 1990).

One additional assumption, related to the other three, should also be introduced here:

1. Spatializing memory: Writing implies a space or place upon which it is done (see also

the *Art of Memory*—Yates, 1966). That place has generally been located “in the heads” of individuals. Alternatively, remembering might be thought of *temporally*. This requires us to attend to remembering as an unfolding process, situated in the interaction between organism and its environment, its past and its present. This is one of Bartlett’s (1932) key ideas to which I will return in the next section.

### ***Towards Alternative Metaphors***

It would be too simplistic to say that the various *storage* metaphors of memory are “untrue.” Each does reveal something about the phenomenon and may lead to some practical use—for example, the development of the *method of loci* (Yates, 1966) or improved methods for rote learning in schools. But every metaphor also conceals something: in this case the temporal, cultural, contextual, and constructive nature of remembering is hidden from view. It is disadvantageous to the advancement of science to forget the constructed nature of scientific objects and believe these objects simply *are* the metaphorical description we give them—this is especially true in the social sciences. By examining the metaphors of memory above, we are now in a better position to develop new ways of thinking about remembering with the use of alternative *living* metaphors. In what follows, I will examine Bartlett’s alternative to the storage conception of memory and further develop it with the help of a number of other theories.

### **Situating remembering: from storage to action**

I have never regarded memory as a faculty, as a reaction narrowed and ringed around, containing all its peculiarities and all explanations within itself. I have regarded it rather as one achievement in the line of the ceaseless struggle to master and enjoy a world full of variety and rapid change.

—Bartlett, 1932, p. 314

### ***Bartlett’s Experimental Program***

Bartlett’s approach to remembering was developed in direct opposition to the storage conception. In the first chapter of *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (1932), titled “Experiment in Psychology,” he criticizes the inadequacy of Ebbinghaus’ (1885/1913) non-sense syllable method to the phenomena of memory and mind more generally. Bartlett argued that (1) it is impossible to fully remove meaning from stimuli

that require a human response; (2) attempting to do so creates wholly artificial conditions with little generalizability to everyday life; and (3) this method ignores equal, if not more important, aspects of remembering, such as meaning, imagination, and emotion.

In contradistinction, Bartlett described remembering as an “effort after meaning” and advanced an experimental program to study it as such, using complex stories and images, with an analytic focus on understanding holistic human responses as they are related to an individual’s personal and social history. Bartlett is most famous for his *repeated reproduction* experiment in which a single subject reproduces a Native American folktale called *War of the Ghosts* at increasing time delays (e.g., after 20 minutes, a week, a year). The foreign story comes to look more English: “hunting seals” changes to “fishing,” supernatural elements are rationalized away, and the whole narrative structure is transformed. In conversation with his subjects, he found they would link the unfamiliar story to something familiar to them: one of his subjects commented that the story was “like I read as a child.”

Bartlett also used other methods for studying remembering. In the *method of serial reproduction*, a subject’s reproduction is shown to another subject to be reproduced at a delay, which is then shown to yet another subject, and so on. Then there is the *method of description* where a subject describes a set of images after a time delay. And finally the *method of picture writing* involves a subject memorizing pictures corresponding to words; at a later time the experimenter calls out words for which the subject is to write the corresponding pictures. A number of methods were also used in *Remembering* to explore “perceiving and imagining,” highlighting the fact that Bartlett did not see these as unrelated processes. In all these experiments, Bartlett found subjects’ interests, affects, ideals, and previous experience played a central role in how stimuli were perceived, imagined, and remembered.

### ***Bartlett’s Theoretical Assumptions***

Bartlett’s research program was guided by a number of distinctive assumptions about the mind:

1. The multiple bases of cognition: Bartlett recognized the importance of the social, the psychological, and the biological bases of cognition and attempted to bring them together in his theorizing (see Saito, 1996, 2000). His work clearly

reveals the impact of contemporary developments in anthropology, psychology, and neurology. He attempted an integration of these ideas that brings together the biological-functional and the socio-cultural features of mind.

2. Mind as active process: Bartlett consistently used the gerund form of mental verbs to emphasize ongoing psychological processes over static things—for example, the title of his book is *Remembering* rather than the *Memory*. Furthermore, he described all well-developed psychological processes as involving an “effort after meaning” (cf. Ganzheitspsychologie’s notion of “striving for the whole”—Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008). In other words, the mind does not mechanically respond to inputs like a machine, but rather it has purposes in the world, it strives to construct an intelligible world in which to act by “connecting something given with something other than itself” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 227).

3. The unity of mind: The mind operates as a whole, not as a number of separate faculties. Therefore, it is unfeasible to make sharp distinctions between perceiving, recognizing, remembering, imagining, and thinking (see Edwards & Middleton, 1987). They are all manifestations of a unitary mind and as such differ in *degree* but not *kind*. For example, imagining is freer and involves multiple settings, whereas remembering is focused more on a single setting, although Bartlett’s experiments clearly show other settings do play a significant part in remembering. This idea of mind’s unity is also central to “organismic” theories, such as those of Goldstein, Werner, and Whitehead.

4. Feeling and attitude: An “attitude” said Bartlett (1932, p. 191) “has to be treated as belonging to ‘the whole’ subject, or organism.” It is an organism’s holistic “felt” way of relating to the world through which different parts come into focus. Elsewhere, Bartlett (1925, p. 17) said feelings arise “whenever . . . a response is held up, obstructed in some way, or [ . . . ] the cognitive material involved in the making of a response is blurred, vague or indefinite.” In other words, when one’s habitual activity is interrupted, a feeling or attitude provides a quick means of reorientation to the world (cf. Rosenthal, 2004). Higher psychological responses (i.e., responses involving consciousness) are said to begin with an attitude turned to the past, a point I will elaborate on below.

When we apply this general framework to the phenomenon of remembering, the question of accuracy of memories is subordinated to the question of

how an organism uses its past in its ongoing transactions with the environment. From this “functionalist” perspective, remembering many details with strict accuracy may actually be dysfunctional. In his study of the mnemonist Shereshevsky, Luria (1987) told us that Shereshevsky’s memory for details was limitless; however, rather than benefiting him, it interfered with his ability to generalize from the particulars (see also below). His life was simply a vast collection of details without integration, and as such the job of a professional mnemonist was all that really suited him. By contrast, normally functioning individuals remember the *gist* of an event together with a few outstanding details. This provides the individual with a past that can be flexibly used to deal with an uncertain and changing environment.

### *The Concept of Schema*

#### BARTLETT’S FORMULATION

To theorize this process of flexibly using past to adapt to the present environment and prepare for the future, Bartlett developed the concept of “schema,” which he explicitly borrowed from the Cambridge neurologist Henry Head. Head (1920) provided examples of brain-damaged patients who have lost the ability to coordinate one movement with the next:

Let him close his eyes and let the hand be picked up and the hand and arm moved. He may be able to localise the spot touched on the skin surface perfectly well, but he refers it to the position in which the hand was, because *he has entirely lost the capacity to relate serial movements.*

—Bartlett, 1932, p. 199, my emphasis

This striking case of schematic breakdown makes clear that localizing a sensation in space requires fitting it to the past and present combination of sensations of one’s entire body. If one’s corporeal schema is severed, then there is no way of coordinating sensations in time and space; thus, they take on this strange isolated character in experience.

A schema here is an indivisible series of temporally organized body postures, such as climbing the stairs or making a stroke in tennis. At a more psychological level, an example of a “low-level schema” would be recalling a phone number: the stream of numbers comes to us as a temporal flow. The same numbers could not be remembered in reverse order in the same way.

Bartlett generalized the concept of schema (from its corporeal origins) to apply to any “well-developed

organic response,” including “visual, auditory, various types of cutaneous impulses and the like, at a relatively low level; all the experiences connected by a common interest: in sport, in literature, history, art, science, philosophy and so on, on a higher level” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 201). He said that he preferred the terms “active developing patterns” and “organized settings” to “schemata” but continued to use the latter nonetheless.

Whatever name is given to the concept, the general idea is that any present response is possible because it becomes part of an organized set of past reactions, which are “actively doing something all the time” (p. 201). In other words, any reaction utilizes existing schema but at the same time further develops them, in a fashion analogous to Piaget’s notions of assimilation and accommodation. Thus, an action has a dual existence, being generated out of both an organism’s past and the demands of its present situation. The past is carried forward *en masse* and flexibly adapted to the novel features of the present situation.

#### RE-APPROPRIATIONS OF SCHEMA: COGNITIVE AND DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Psychologists since Bartlett have interpreted the schema concept in a number of ways. On the one hand, this is the result of Bartlett’s variable use of the concept (Norway, 1940), a problem that often occurs when thinkers use highly technical terms (Billig, 2011). On the other hand, the various interpretations of “schema” is an outcome of the constructive assimilation of knowledge (as it moves from one social group to another) that Bartlett (1923, 1926, 1928, 1932) himself theorized (for a history of appropriations of Bartlett’s ideas, see Johnston, 2001).

Cognitive psychology has mostly taken “schema” to mean a generic knowledge structure where experiences are stored, thus assimilating Bartlett’s novel metaphor of memory to the familiar storage metaphor. This conception is apparent in Mandler and Johnson’s (1977) notion of “story schema,” a universal and abstract story “grammar” that selects which discrete parts of a story are memorable and forgettable. These psychologists have moved beyond a simple storage metaphor to a hierarchically organized model, but this model still *spatializes* memory and locates it in the head (Roediger, 1980). As such, this conception does not incorporate Bartlett’s (1932) key insight that psychological activities are *temporally* organized into a continuous stream of serial movements in context. A second problem is

that Mandler and Johnson (1977) assume “story schema” is the same for anyone in any society and at any historical time period. Thus, they also ignore Bartlett’s interest in linking schema to the customs, traditions, and values of *specific* social groups, a point I will further elaborate on below in the section “The Social Context of Remembering.”

At the other extreme of interpretation is discursive psychology’s understanding of schema as discourse conventions—they point out Bartlett’s preferred term was *organized setting*. Their analysis becomes one of comparing differences in discourse between one social context and another, rather than between a stimulus and a subject’s later memory of it (Middleton & Edwards, 1990).

Discursive psychology analyzes precisely what cognitive psychologists have ignored (i.e., social context) and understandably so, because the discursive approach challenges the wider validity of processes observed in an experimental context. Middleton and Edwards (1990), for example, compare the differences in conversationally remembering a film as part of an experiment and post-experiment, by leaving the tape recorder running after the “experiment” finishes. They find that in the experiment, subjects focused on sequentially ordering and connecting events, whereas post-experiment, the focus shifted to evaluations of the film and emotional reactions to it. Istomina (1975) also found that creating an experimental task resembling a meaningful activity in children’s lives greatly improved their memory for lists of words when compared to standard “neutral” experimental tests (see also Mistry et al., 2001). Thus, there is no way to divorce psychological processes from the context in which they occur: Experiments are themselves a particular context, which like all contexts shape the psychological processes embedded within them.

Discursive psychology significantly develops the social contextual strand of Bartlett’s schema concept—by carefully comparing discourse conventions between specific contexts—but the approach also leaves aside another important characteristic of schema—namely, that “memory is *personal* [...] because the mechanism of adult human memory demands an organization of ‘schema’ depending upon an interplay of appetites, instincts, interests and ideas peculiar to any given subject” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 213, my emphasis). In discursive psychology, the personal and experiential qualities of a memory (marked as belonging to *my* past) is

irrelevant insofar as it does not contribute to the collective project of remembering.

### MORI'S RE-EMBODIMENT OF SCHEMA

Mori's (2008, 2009, 2010) innovative interpretation of Bartlett's schema concept takes a middle road between cognitive and discourse approaches by acknowledging that remembering occurs in social context, usually in discourse, while at the same time focusing on the personal dimensions of remembering in his analysis. To do this, Mori has created an experiment in which subjects *navigate* around a university campus and a month later *exchange* their experience with another subject who navigated a different university. Thus, each subject has knowledge of two university navigations—one direct and the other indirect. Two weeks after the *exchange*, subjects are *interrogated* about what happened during the navigations by a third subject who believes the subject navigated both universities. This is followed by two additional *interrogation* sessions taking place at 2-week intervals—an adaptation of Bartlett's (1932) method of repeated reproduction. It is important to note that Mori's experimental set-up does not attempt to separate psychological processes from context but instead tries to *model* the social context of being interrogated or giving testimony in court.

In his analysis, Mori (2008) has compared a subject's narrative for the direct and indirect experience of navigation to discover their different "organization of schema" for each experience. He finds that the narrative of direct experience of an environmental navigation takes the form of what he calls "agent-alteration"—that is, referring to agents of action (self and other) alternatively, such as "I did ... then **he** did ... so **I** did." This parallels the alternating action between agent and environment that Gibson (1979/1986) called "perception-action cycles." In the narrative form of indirect experience, by contrast, "agent-succession" dominates, whereby the agent is referred to successively—for example, "I did ... then **I** did ..." These same differences in narrative form were also found in the testimony of a murder defendant regarding different memories (Hara et al., 1997), thus suggesting Mori (2008) has successfully *modeled* the context of an interrogation in his experiment. Mori (2008) has also identified four other differences in narrative form, of which I will only briefly mention two: multiple descriptions have been given to an object and it has been unstably named in the narrative of the direct

experience, whereas poor descriptions of the object and a single name were given in the narrative of the indirect experience.

The *temporal* and *contextual* nature of Mori's schema concept needs to be stressed here, for it clearly develops these features of Bartlett's (1932) concept. In remembering, we, in a sense, re-experience the temporal unfolding of cyclical contact with the environment, although we also change the experience in the process of doing so—Mori (2008) has pointed out that in the repeated reproduction of the direct and indirect experiences, the differences between them gradually disappear. Memories are not localized in the head but, rather, in time and place: The past time of an experience becomes embedded in present time of remembering it, and in both past and present temporalities the person finds themselves in contact with an environment. Mori (2008, p. 313) has made this general point about a memory's temporality and contextuality eloquently:

Pre-modern people asked why things burnt. Their answer was that they had phlogiston (burnable stuff) in them. Psychologists once asked why we remember our past and answered that we had engram (memory trace) in us. They were both mistaken. People now know burning is one type of oxidation. So what is remembering? It is an emergent activity (often communicative) that is restricted by both rememberers' duration of experience and the present situation in which it is performed.

### *Bergson's Distinction*

Bergson (1911) made a similar claim long ago when he argued that because the brain was necessary for actualizing memories does not mean that memories reside in the brain. Similarly, bicycle's chain is essential to its motion but we would not say that the motion resides in the chain but, rather, in the whole system in which the chain is a part. It has already been argued above that thinking of memories as stored in a spatial location is misleading. Rather, we might say memories are to be located in *my* personal past and the places I have been. This is why Bergson (1911) made a fundamental distinction between perception and memory. He admitted perception involves memory but said that it does so only to interpret what is present, and as such differs only in *degree* from matter. By contrast, memory is always distinctly *of the past* and thus differs in *kind* from perception.

Most of psychology, in contrast to this distinction, has inherited an empiricist's conception of perception and memory, whereby perception is reduced to the effect of static and isolated impressions on the sense organs, which in turn create a representation in the theater of the mind. Memories are then simply a dulled form of the perception. Ecological theories of perception, such as Gibson's (1979/1986), argue that perception is better described as an unfolding activity that holistically weaves together past and present as subject acts on the world than as sensations passively impressed on the mind. In this framework, individual perception does not, on its own, provide discrete units of experience that can be stored away as isolated traces to be remembered later; rather, it shows a "duration" of experience, which is only differentiated into memorable objects and localized in experience with the help of social means (Halbwachs, 1925). It is to this process of self-reflection and the social differentiation of experience that we turn.

### Remembering as "turning around on one's own schema"

When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself. The plant or the lower animal reacts to its environment, but there is no experience of a self.

—Mead, 1934, p. 195

The schema concept by itself did not yet explain, for Bartlett, what is involved in remembering as an "emergent" human activity; rather, it explained how the past manifests itself in an individual's non-reflective engagement with the world. To locate specific information about the past, "the organism has somehow to acquire the capacity to turn around upon its own 'schemata' and construct them afresh" (Bartlett, 1932, p. 206). In other words, it must become "self-reflexive." In doing so, the organism ruptures its seamless flow of activity in the world by evoking schemata that are not present, thus stimulating action outside of the particular parameters of the here-and-now situation. When this happens, schemata become "not merely something that works the organism, but something that the organism can work" (p. 208). This is the point at which consciousness arises and the environment becomes dual: Past and present differentiate such that the organism can now use the specific settings of its past to control itself in the here-and-now so as to prepare for an imagined future. In Bartlett's words,

past schemata are made the "objects of his reaction" in the present (p. 202). Let us look more closely at exactly what is involved in remembering as a self-reflective process.

### *The Process of Reconstruction*

Bartlett (1932) says that remembering begins by setting up an *attitude* (i.e., a holistic feeling orientation), such as "doubt, hesitation, surprise, astonishment, confidence, dislike, repulsion" (pp. 206–207), toward an object or event. One way of setting up an attitude is by naming an object—for example, in Bartlett's experiments using the Native American story *War of the Ghosts*, one subject began by saying, "[It's not English," and another, "like I read as a child." When we remember, we turn our "attitude towards the massed effects of past reactions [i.e., schema]" (p. 208), and proceed to construct a memory of the object or event "largely on the basis of this attitude, and its general effect is the justification of the attitude" (p. 207). In other words, we first get a general *impression* of the material that guides us in reconstructing the probable details.

Rather than a smoothly flowing process, like the operation of schema in habits, remembering as a self-reflective process is hesitant and jerky: The person begins to remember, reaches a point of ambiguity and says to oneself, "This must have gone there." In these moments of ambiguity, individuals may choose from a variety of schemata to fill in gaps in memory. It should be noted here that "construction" and "distortion" are not synonymous; construction is a fundamental process of remembering that can lead to both accurate and distorted memories.

### THE FUNCTION OF IMAGES

In moments of ambiguity, *images* often also arise to provide a quick solution for action. Bartlett's *schema* concept is used to explain the *generalization* and *homogenization* of experience that occurs in remembering. By contrast, images *particularize* remembering by generating a *plethora* of details. They do this by "picking bits out of schemata" (p. 219) and thus break apart the seamless flow of schema, giving self-reflexive remembering its jerky character.

Images can also aid in the formation of attitudes—for example, an image might spontaneously come to mind when asked to recall a story, which in turn can be used to set up an attitude to the schema from which the image comes. Bartlett has told us how only one subject remembered the two town names from the Native American story *War of the*

*Ghosts*. This imagery enables her to set up an attitude toward the story as a whole so that she can proceed to reconstruct the story. Images are then used as navigation points in the reconstructive process.

At first sight, the image concept seems to sneak in a storage theory of memory through the back door. The difference is that in Bartlett's theory, images are actively constructed based on an organism's interests and emotions and change according to them. Also, images have to be understood as functioning to facilitate an organism's action: Bartlett (1925) said images arise out of cross-streams of two dominant conflicting tendencies to action as a way of enabling a quick unambiguous response in the face of uncertainty.

Bartlett (1916b, 1932) has distinguished two kinds of images—"visual" and "vocal." Both serve the same function of breaking schemata, but their character differs in many respects. First, visualization is said to carry certainty with it, whereas vocalization is accompanied by doubt. This is the case because of visual images' vivid, rich, and exciting expression in consciousness. Because of these characteristics, when a subject is torn between a visual and vocal memory of an object, they will choose the former. Second, vocalization is a direct expression of meanings, whereas meanings have to be developed out of visualization. Therefore, remembering through visualizing appears "jerky" in comparison with vocalizing. Bartlett also commented that subjects tend to prefer the use of one of these modes in their engagement with his experimental tasks, which he can say because he used some of the same subjects in multiple experiments.

#### **SHERESHEVSKY'S MEMORY: A COUNTER-EXAMPLE?**

As further illustration of this process, consider the abnormal case of Shereshevsky, in which no reconstructive process seemed to occur. Luria (1987) has told us the reason for Shereshevsky's near flawless memory for details was his vivid mental imagery and extreme synaesthesia, where stimulation of one sensory pathway simultaneously leads to the automatic experience in another. Consider his description of the experience of remembering:

I recognize a word not only by the images it evokes but by a whole complex of feelings that the image arouses. It's hard to express . . . it's not a matter of vision or hearing, but some overall sense I get. Usually I experience a word's taste and weight, and I don't have to make an effort to remember it—the

word seems to recall itself. But it is difficult to describe. What I sense is something oily slipping through my hand . . . or I'm aware of a slight tickling in my left hand caused by a mass of tiny, lightweight points. When that happens, I simply remember, without having to make the attempt.

(1968, p. 28)

Shereshevsky formed detailed and enduring mental *images* of the material to be remembered. He also set up an *attitude* toward the material, although for him it is much more than a general impression, as it is for most of us; rather, it was a complex code for details. This enabled him to effortlessly remember some material in its entirety and rigorously check the veracity of his recall against the whole-body feeling that the object had created for him. If any details were different in recall, then he would immediately sense it. His eidetic-synaesthesia was an extreme form of abilities we all have (i.e., we all use attitudes and images in remembering); however, because these worked so flawlessly for him, schematization never got off the ground.

#### **A THEORY IN DEVELOPMENT**

Bartlett's (1932, Chapter 10) "theory of remembering" is highly phenomenological and does not provide a precise mechanism for how we escape our embodied action in the here and now—that is, how to "turn around on one's own schema." In two places in *Remembering*, Bartlett explicitly stated, "I wish I knew how it was done" (pp. 206, 209) and in an unpublished paper, written at the end of his life, he defended the phrase "turning around on one's own schemata" as simply a "description" of what he found, rather than an "explanation" of the process (see Bartlett, 2008, pp. 4–9). This gap in his theory is one reason why the concept of schema was rejected by Bartlett's students (e.g., Oldfield & Zangwill, 1943). In one place in *Remembering*, Bartlett did locate the origins of this process in complexities of human social life where "the 'schema' determined reactions of one organism are repeatedly checked, as well as constantly facilitated, by those of others" (Bartlett, 1932, p. 206), but this idea remains undeveloped. An explanation of how "turning around on one's own schema" is possible requires the theoretical support of the pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead.

#### ***Becoming Other to Ones Self***

Mead (1934) argued that we are able to self-reflect because we can take the attitudes of others toward

our Self. This process is made possible through symbols and position exchange. Self emerges out of a naturalistic process of social interaction. A child becomes reflexive (i.e., they can turn around on his or her own schema) when he or she is able to take the perspective of another toward him or her self. This develops out of the participation in institutionalized “social acts” (i.e., acts directed at others), through stable social positions (in reality, play, or imagination), such as buying and selling, giving and receiving, hiding and seeking, talking and listening, teaching and learning, and so forth. In so doing, the child simultaneously embodies divergent perspectives (or “attitudes”) for the same social act.

These divergent perspectives (e.g., buying and selling) are paired through the “vocal gesture,” which is heard from both sides of a social act. A gesture becomes “significant” (i.e., a symbol) when the gesture-maker takes the attitude of the other in the social act toward himself or herself, thus becoming both subject and object in experience. They know how the other will respond to the gesture because they have been in that social position before. When this communication is turned inward, it becomes inner thought, and externally paired social positions become the architecture of the self (Gillespie, 2006). Reflection is a process of taking up these different social perspectives toward one’s self—that is, becoming other to self. This is possible because the significant gesture is able to experientially transport us from one perspective to another.

#### FIELD AND OBSERVER PERSPECTIVES

Mead’s theory can help explain a number of observations about remembering that have been explored by cognitive psychology. First, at least since Freud (1899), it has been recognized that when remembering we can find ourselves in either first- or third-person perspectives. These two perspectives have come to be known as “field” and “observer” memories, respectively (see Nigro & Neisser, 1983; Robinson & Swanson, 1993). Remembering often involves moving between the two perspectives. This would be expected if Mead were right that the symbol allows us to experientially move from one perspective to another, opposite perspective.

The tendency in this research has been to take the presence of an observer as a sign of false memories; however, the two perspectives could also be seen as signs of different strategies of remembering. Movement from first- to third-person perspective

may be a change from embodied to increasingly distanced and language-mediated strategies.

We know from our own experience that an action physically perceived from the first-person “field” perspective is often elaborated in remembering as if we witnessed it from the perspective of others. I also found this happening in the reverse direction in a conversational repeated reproduction experiment I did using Bartlett’s *War of the Ghosts* story. From subject’s gestures, it was possible to see their taking on the protagonist’s position in the story when remembering it—for example, “crouching” down when the protagonists hide behind a log. Putting oneself in the first-person perspective in remembering a story could be seen as a strategy of encoding a memory into one’s body. To my knowledge, no one has systematically explored this phenomenon.

Relating this work to Mori’s (2008) experiment described above, we would likely find the more an experience is narrated, the more likely we will experience it from an “observer” perspective and, as Mori (2008) found, the more the memory will take on a conventional form. In Mead’s (1934) language, subjects increasingly take the perspective of a “generalized other” (i.e., the perspective of a whole social group) toward their memory, whereas the first-person experiential qualities of making contact with an environment become less prominent.

In sum, Mead’s theory situates the perspectival dynamics of mind and memory transformations within a broader social process, whereas it remains largely “in the head” in cognitive psychology’s formulation, although in a more active form for this theory than traditional storage theories of memory.

#### METAMEMORY: OBSERVING AND CONTROLLING REMEMBERING

Cognitive psychology has developed the notion of “metamemory,” which Flavell and Wellman (1977, p. 4) originally defined as “[An] individual’s knowledge of and awareness of memory, or of anything pertinent to information storage and retrieval ... [For example,] a person has metamemory if he knows that some things are easier to remember than others, is aware that one item is on the verge of recall, while another is wholly irretrievable at present.” This conception posits two levels to remembering (the “object level” and “meta-level”), which are related through “monitoring” (where information from the object level is observed by the meta-level) and “controlling” (where meta-level directs information flow at the object level).



For example, telling research participants that they will be asked some misleading questions about their memories neutralizes the memory “distortion” affects made famous by Loftus’s (1975) automobile accident experiment, where she suggested that there was a broken light at the scene (there was not) and found subjects mistakenly remembered the broken light. Of course, these suggestions are entirely probable. Yet, neutralization of the suggestion has still occurred if subjects have been told they were asked misleading questions some time after they were asked (Blank, 1998, 2009). This suggests we are not the memory dopes suggestibility research often makes us out to be. Instead, we agentically use various social influences in controlling our own remembering: Subjects actively appropriate misleading questions, which in turn shape their memories in a particular direction. These tools of remembering can easily be abandoned or blocked by the subject if he or she is given reason to mistrust them.

Instead of considering social suggestions as simply potentially distorting influences, they need to be reconceived as providing the framework for remembering to happen in the first place. When others are not present, we still *self-suggest* to remember, taking the perspectives of internalized others toward our Self. Suggestions become layered in the process of remembering, some blocking the influence of other suggestions whereas some are supporting (Valsiner, 2001). Thus, we need to move away from the notion that the social simply corrupts individual rationality and adopt the more “social” social psychological perspective, in which the individual only becomes rational through social interaction, as Mead’s theory would have it. To do this, we will now look more closely at the social embeddedness of remembering.

### The social context of remembering

It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.

—Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38

Bartlett was well-aware that his experiments were only “social” in a limited sense. They did not, for example, explore how the presence of social others might shape remembering. What they did do was to powerfully show that a group’s norms, customs, values, and beliefs had a directive influence on an individual’s remembering, even outside of the direct presence of the group. In this respect, he was clearly

working within a more “social” social psychological perspective, in which new properties emerged from interaction in groups that could not be predicted from the psychology of individuals (*see* Greenwood, 2004). Bartlett (1932, p.254) said:

We may ... legitimately speak of customs, traditions, institutions, technical secrets, formulated and unformulated ideals and numerous other facts which are literally properties of groups, as the direct determinates of social action ... They are correctly regarded as group properties, because they come into being only as the group is formed, and if the group disintegrates they pass away.

Analysis, therefore, requires exploring the relationship between individuals’ acts of remembering and their history in various social groups. This is one reason why Bartlett thought that individual reactions (even in controlled experiments) had to always be interpreted in light of their history. Although Bartlett utilized a more open interpretive method of analysis in the laboratory, experimentation itself limited possibilities for exploring the place of the social in remembering by setting a restricting social context of remembering where subjects tended to focus on details and less on meaning. In 1929, however, an opportunity presented itself to collect field data in Swaziland, South Africa. It is from these field notes that he goes on to more explicitly address the question of social influences on remembering.

### Social Groups and Social Schema

Commonsense still leads people to talk as if a person’s memory was good or bad in itself rather than good or bad at remembering a particular kind of material. Plato had also said that an individual’s memory was good or bad memory—in the sense of retaining information—depending on the quality of his or her “block of wax” (i.e., memory faculty). In contrast to this, Bartlett (1932, 2008) thought his experiments and fieldwork made clear that *memory is domain specific and socialized by the group*. Contemporary studies on memory expertise (e.g., on chess players and waiters) seem to also conclude that impressive memory abilities result from skills to meaningfully organize information in a particular content domain (*see* Ericsson et al., 2000, for a review). Interaction in groups guides individuals to selectively attend to and meaningfully elaborate on some material. Let us consider more closely how Bartlett theorized this process.

Bartlett notes that social groups develop “preferred persistent tendencies” or “social schemas,” which set up a structure through which members orient to the world, selecting what aspects are memorable and forgettable. For example, he asked a Swaziland herdsman for “a list of the cattle bought by his employer the year previously, together with whatever detail he cared to give” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 249). The herdsman had merely overheard the transaction a year earlier and had nothing to gain from it. However, cattle dealings were an important social activity within this community; as such, it was not unexpected that the herdsman would remember the transaction with incredible detail, making only two “trifling errors.” The opposite will occur (i.e., radical reconstruction of the material) when the material to be remembered comes from outside the social group—for example, a foreign folktale or picture. In this case, the material will be significantly transformed through assimilation, simplification, and constructive elaboration into a familiar cultural form. Bartlett (1932) called this process *conventionalization*.

#### CONVENTIONALIZATION

A powerful example of conventionalization comes from the anthropologist Nadel, who was directly influenced by Bartlett. Nadel (1937) was doing fieldwork in Northern Nigeria on the Nupe tribe but also had contact with the Yoruba tribe. Although the two groups lived in the same material environment and had similar levels of technology, they developed entirely different, almost antagonistic, cultures. For example, whereas the Yoruba had a rationalized hierarchy of deities each with their specific function and power, the Nupe believed in an abstract and impersonal power. Similarly, the Nupe had ornamental decorative art, whereas the Yoruba focused principally on the human figure. In short, Yoruba culture tended to involve integrated and concrete meanings, whereas Nupe culture focused on abstract unconnected details. Nadel saw an opportunity to test Bartlett’s ideas about group influences on recall and constructed a story to give to children from both groups. He hypothesized that children would transform the story in the direction of their group’s preferred persistent tendencies. Indeed, he found that the Nupe children tended to loosely fill in details that were inessential to the narrative progress. By contrast, Yoruba children changed the story toward logical coherence of narrative structure by adding rational links between events.

In both Bartlett’s and Nadel’s research there is a focus on *specific* social groups, the cultural conventions particular to them, and their influence on the thought processes of individuals. Bartlett also explored the influence of social schema particular to the context of World War I, when many of his experiments were carried out. For example, he described how, when one of his subjects—who lived among people who were constantly talking about and expecting air raids—was presented with a pointing hand, he said immediately that he had seen an anti-aircraft gun firing at a plane (Bartlett, 1932, p. 244). In his serial reproduction experiment, Bartlett noted how the excuse given by one of the young men for not going to battle, in the *War of the Ghost* story, was changed to “elderly relatives ‘would grieve terribly’ if he did not return” (p. 129). New social schemas can thus emerge under certain social conditions. Bartlett also saw this happening with a group’s folklore, which for him was a primary means of discovering a group’s preferred persistent tendencies. For example, the Swazis, who had been subjugated by the Zulu, developed a narrative whereby a stronger figure (e.g., a lion) was tricked by a weaker but clever figure (e.g., the weasel) (p. 260).

#### *Social Frameworks of Memory*

In formulating his social psychological theory of remembering, Bartlett drew on the ideas of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, although with some reservations. Halbwachs followed his mentor Durkheim in arguing that memory only becomes possible out of participation in a collective. However, rather than abstractly theorizing about “society” as Durkheim did, Halbwachs preferred to discuss concrete social groups, such as family, religious, and class groups. In belonging to various social groups, an individual takes part in different “social frameworks” through which his or her experience takes shape, becomes memorable, and can later be retrieved.

#### WHAT ARE SOCIAL FRAMEWORKS?

A social framework is essentially a series of condensed images of the past and a structure to order and give them meaning. For example, families often express a moral quality inherent in their group with pronouncements like, “in our family we have long life spans,” “we are proud,” or “we do not strive to get rich.” A family’s collective memories will tend to center on vivid images that concretely express an abstract evaluation of a group and its members;

stories are told of individuals that seem to sum up their character as defined by the group. The very names of our family members are surrounded by a certain aura and set of associations, long after our family members pass away. Halbwachs was clear that the group does not need to be physically present for it to exert its influence, because the person carries the group's perspective within him or herself.

Our memories remain collective . . . and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone. Other men need not be physically present, since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons.

—Halbwachs, 1980, p. 23

In addition to vivid images, language is a primary mechanism by which individual experience is linked to these social frameworks. Through naming and categorizing experience, social frameworks enable the differentiation of individual experience into meaningful social forms. In language the individual takes the perspective of the group toward his or her own experience (cf. “taking the perspective of the other”—Mead, 1934). Even in dreams, the most private of experiences, an individual still uses language (and with it social frameworks) to comprehend the fragmentary images that incoherently succeed one another. The irrational and unordered consciousness found in dream also demonstrates what happens to memory when social frameworks are only minimally active. Halbwachs also critiqued experimental psychologists' assumption that they were studying an individual mental faculty when they conducted research on memory in a “neutral” laboratory. Again, in using language, subjects necessarily place themselves in social frameworks. The illusion (for both laypeople and psychologists alike) that memories originate purely in the individual consciousness comes from the fact that individuals belong to multiple social frameworks, which contrast and reinforce each other in such a way that they create a unique perspective in the individual but still an irreducibly social one.

#### **SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM OR PSYCHOSOCIAL TENSION?**

Halbwachs's concept of social framework is close to Moscovici's (2000, 2008) concept of “social representation,” which is unsurprising given their shared Durkheimian ancestry. Both concepts point to a group's particular commonsense mentality by which

it understands the world and itself. Additionally, both theorists situate individual minds at the intersection of different groups' ways of thinking. However, in Moscovici's theory, it is very clear that there is a dynamic and generative tension between individuals and social groups: group ideas must always be mediated by individual consciousness. There is some disagreement regarding whether Halbwachs took a strong Durkheimian approach in regarding collective memories as over and above individuals, determining their thought processes. Bartlett devoted Chapter 18 of *Remembering* to explicating and critiquing Halbwachs for saying that the group itself has a mind that remembers. In this account, the individual becomes a kind of automaton of the group's will. By contrast, Bartlett (1932) was explicit in saying that remembering occurs *in* the group, not *by* the group. Whether Halbwachs was actually making this claim that groups themselves remember is debatable, although it is certainly the case that Halbwachs overemphasized the collective nature of social consciousness at the expense of the actual thought processes of individuals.

More recently, Middleton and Brown (2005) have suggested that in fact Halbwachs was closer to Moscovici's position of there being a dynamic and productive tension between individuality (itself a product of sociality) and society. For one, individuals are continually moving between different frameworks, positioning and repositioning themselves within these frameworks. Reavey and Brown (2009) have theorized, in an article analyzing memories of sexual abuse, that the process of remembering is itself driven by attempts to resolve discrepancies of meaning, for example, between individual and collective points of view. Victims' therapists tell them that they were helpless children without any agency in the events. But the victims themselves continually reconstruct the events around points of potential agency. It is these kinds of ambiguities that keep the memories alive. Each act of remembering temporally stabilizes the memory, but the tension between personal experience and a group's social framework ensures continual reconstruction of the memories by individuals.

#### ***Summary of Social Theories of Remembering***

Bartlett's, Mead's, and Halbwachs's theories converge on the idea that an individual's remembering needs to be understood in relation to the social groups to which he or she belongs and the position

he or she occupies in those groups. Bartlett, however, did not provide a clear mechanism to connect interactions in social groups with an individual's ability to turn around on his or her self. His concept of schema includes both the somatic self (i.e., the purely embodied engagement with the world) as well as the reflective self, without clearly differentiating the two. Mead and Halbwachs, by contrast, argued that to turn around on one's self, one has to take the perspective of social others—thus, the reflective self is inherently a social self for them. Bartlett did recognize the primacy of the social in remembering but did not adequately theorize the social mechanism in the psychological act of remembering. In the next section, we will look more closely at the social genesis of mind and explore the concept of tension as the driver of remembering.

### **Mediated memory: from knots to narrative** *Vygotsky's Dramaturgical Metaphor of Mind and Memory*

[E]very function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category. This pertains equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, to the formation of concepts, and to the development of will.

—Vygotsky, 1987, p. 145

This quotation from Vygotsky is well-known to cultural psychologists, although probably more from the 1978 translation *Mind in Society*. It is certainly true that Vygotsky was making the claim that higher psychological processes have social origins (similarly to Mead) as most neo-Vygotskians have emphasized; however, exactly how this occurs has been largely lost in translation. Not everything that appears on the social plane is *internalized*, nor is the psychological plane simply a reproduction of the social plane. How then can we conceptualize the movement between the two?

Vygotsky was developing a dramaturgical metaphor for the development of mind, in which drama appears on two *planes* (external and internal) but only one *stage*. Veresov (2010) points out that the word “category” (appearing twice in the above quotation) had a definite meaning for Vygotsky. In pre-revolutionary Russian theatre criticism, it meant a “dramatic event, collision of characters on stage.”

A dramatic tension first is experienced externally between actors and second is re-experienced as a dramatic event within an actor. A good example of this is having a heated argument with someone. Zeigarnik (1967) has shown that unfinished tasks (where tension remains as in an open argument) are better remembered than finished tasks. When the argument is later recollected, it is not merely replayed but, rather, the tension is generative of new interpretations and responses. Furthermore, the other actor is evoked and made a participant in our inner drama. In this way, the internal drama *is* a social relation; the other is always implicated in higher psychological functioning.

“Tension” is a polysemic word, giving rise to a number of variants, such as “at-tention,” “in-tension,” and “con-tention.” All these words express a general sense of being pulled in opposing directions—in these cases, the pull comes from social others. For example, in attention my gaze is pulled to something pointed out by an actual or internalized other (Abbey, 2012). Tension between actors generates “signs,” which may later be reconstructed and used when tension arises on the psychological plane. Vygotsky's most famous example is pointing, which begins as the child's failed attempt to reach an object. When the adult interprets the gesture as meaning the child wants the object and brings it to them, the child learns to act out this gesture on stage with and for the adult to make them fetch the object. In re-orienting the gesture from the object to the adult, it changes from *reaching* to *pointing* and becomes meaningful and, as such, a sign. To complete the story, the child might later use the pointing gesture in private to control their own activity—for example, to focus their attention on a particular object.

### **SELF-REGULATION THROUGH SIGNS**

Meaning construction is essential to this process of sign mediation. Vygotsky and Luria (1930) used the example of tying knots on a rope—a memory technique that was widespread in many preliterate societies. Making a knot on a rope to remember something gives the knot *meaning* (e.g., that someone owes me a sheep). Meaning transforms the knot from a neutral object into a sign. Paralleling Marx's description of a tool as a device to control and master nature, Vygotsky describes the sign as a special kind of psychological tool used to control and master oneself. This is possible because the sign has

“reverse action”—it acts back on its creator. Thus, in constructing a “sign,” we come to control ourselves from the outside. We use signs when we write notes to ourselves in our planner, put an image of a pig on our refrigerator to remind ourselves of our plans to lose weight, or bring back objects from a vacation to remember the trip. At the societal level, we build monuments, designate important days in the year, and tell special stories about the community to bring the past into the present. Vygotsky (1931, p. 86) puts it eloquently,

The very essence of human memory is that human beings actively remember with the help of signs. It is a general truth that the special character of human behaviour is that human beings actively manipulate their relation to the environment, and through the environment they change their own behaviour, subjugating it to their control. As one psychologist has said [Dewey], the very essence of civilization consists in the fact that we deliberately build monuments so as not to forget. In the knotted handkerchief and the monument we see the most profound, most characteristic and most important feature, which distinguishes human from animal memory.

—quoted from *Bakhurst*, 1990, p. 210

Signs are constructed in situations of tensions and in turn extend natural abilities to overcome the problem encountered—thus, with signs we operate in a *zone of proximal development*. Naturally we can remember seven plus-or-minus two pieces of information at a given time (Miller, 1956); however, with the aid of simple memory technologies, such as “chunking” information into meaningful units, the number can be vastly increased. In fact, the practice of organizing a book into chapters, sections, and paragraphs (as in the present book) is an external memory technology developed in Middle Ages to aid memory (Danziger, 2008). Thus, a purely “natural” process of evolution or biological maturation is insufficient to explain the impressive advances in memory ability in human history and ontogeny; Vygotsky thought we would instead have to look further to the socially constructed “technologies” of memory found in societies around the world. Knots on a rope, monuments, notes in one’s planner, and souvenirs from a vacation are all technologies of memory, but perhaps the most fundamental of these is language and narrative, to which we now turn.

## *Remembering through Language and Narrative*

### CHILDREN’S EMERGING MEMORY ABILITIES

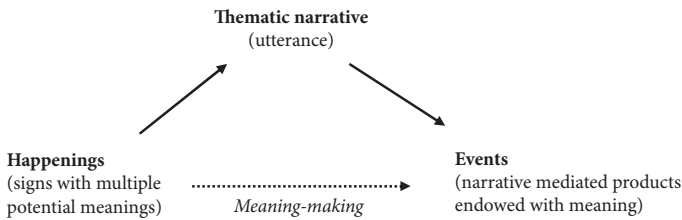
Contemporary studies of children’s emerging memory abilities have emphasized the importance of language and narrative in remembering (e.g., Nelson & Fivush, 2004a, 2004b). In early conversations about past events, children contribute only a few brief and fragmentary details. Children of 2 years begin to remember events that occurred weeks or maybe even months ago, but they still lack the language tenses and temporal markers to effectively organize their experiences in time—for example, “yesterday” and “tomorrow” may be used for any day that is not today (Harner, 1982). Rather, they rely on adults to supply most of the content and to order it into a coherent narrative.

Thus, research on the development of children’s memory indicates that the very ability to remember depends on cultural tools or signs, such as language and narrative. As Vygotsky’s theory would have predicted, the adult first asks questions and makes suggestions to the child to stimulate his or her remembering and provides a conventional narrative structure to organize experience in such a way that it can be communicated (cf. Halbwachs’ “social frameworks”). Later the child uses the same kinds of questioning and narrative structure to stimulate his or her own remembering and organize his or her own experience.

Interestingly, research on children’s development of memory abilities has tended to focus on suggestion as a positive factor, in contrast to the negative significance it has in eyewitness testimony research (see “Metamemory” section above). For example, one of the most commonly talked about distinctions in this developmental literature is between “low” and “high” parental elaborations (usually maternal) in talking about the past, the latter being correlated with a positive outcome such as greater recall by children later (e.g., see Reese et al., 1993). Thus, we are left with a contradiction: Suggestion is both a requirement of memory but tends to lead to “distortion,” at least as it has been set up by experimental psychologists.

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES

For narrative construction to occur, there must be a tension or problem. A canonical *script* as described by Shank and Abelson (1977)—such as the expected series of events involved in going



**Figure 49.3** Narrative construction of events. From Bresc6, 2008, p. 7

to a restaurant—does not constitute a narrative. Such events are “pointless” rather than storylike (Bruner, 1991). But if the waiter brought a cooked cat (“the chef’s special”) out on a plate, this would provide the necessary “breach” or “violation” of normative expectations for narrative construction. In Bruner’s (1991, p. 11) words, “narratives require such scripts as necessary background, but they do not constitute narrativity itself.” Thus, unlike Bartlett’s concept of schema, there is a clear difference between habitual action and narrative mediation. Narrative is a reflexive “effort after meaning” (Bartlett, 1932) in a situation of ambiguity and tension caused by unmet expectations; it is an attempt to bring the unexpected into a familiar social framework (Fig. 49.3). As such, the concept of “narrative” overlaps with Mead’s “generalized other,” Halbwachs’s “social frameworks,” and Bartlett’s “social schemas” and “conventionalization” discussed above. To quote Bruner:

[Narrative] is a precondition for our collective life in culture. I doubt such collective life would be possible if it was not for our human capacity to organize and communicate experience in narrative form. For it is the conventionalization of narrative that converts individual experience into collective coin which can be circulated, as it were, on a base wider than a merely interpersonal one. Being able to read another’s mind need no longer depend on sharing a narrow ecological or interpersonal niche but, rather, on a common fund of myth, folktale, “common sense.” [...] story is the coin and currency of culture. (2002, p. 16)

The advantage of using the concept of “narrative” is that it can easily be conceptualized as a psychological tool agentially used by someone in remembering. Not everyone will use the tool in the same way or with the same level of mastery. Furthermore, its developmental history can be explored through the contexts in which it is internalized—for example, narrative patterns of dialogue are first seen between parent and child; later the child is able to use those

patterns instantaneously without adult aid or direct awareness.

Wertsch (2002) provides an excellent example of using the concept of “narrative” in research on collective remembering. He makes a distinction between “specific narratives” (involving particular people, places, and actions) and “schematic narrative templates” (which are the general frameworks from which specific narratives are constructed). The latter concept is explicitly developed from Bartlett’s notions of “schema” and “an effort after meaning.” In Wertsch’s (2002) research, he has found that Russians tell their history within the schematic narrative template of “triumph-over-alien-forces”—that is, an outside aggressor leads to internal crisis, which is only overcome by the heroism of the Russian people. This narrative template is unwittingly applied to historical events as different as the 1918–1920 Russian civil war and World War II. Moreover, its use by Russians can be traced back to Soviet-sponsored schooling, where history textbooks all told a similar story. In short, the narrative template “triumph-over-alien-forces” is the tool by which Russians make sense of themselves and their history. It is the mechanism of commonsense agentially used (sometimes even with irony) by those who went through the Russian education system.

### *The Social and Psychological Mediation of Remembering: An Illustrative Example*

Sign mediation occurs on both social and psychological levels. Others influence us through suggestions, but those influences can be blocked, changed, or elaborated on at the next moment by another suggestion from another or our self. The concept of sign mediation directs us to explore the actual process of remembering, where different social and psychological suggestions are layered together, and various tools and strategies of remembering come into play. Bartlett convincingly demonstrated that remembering is constructive and that it makes use of cultural resources but did not systematically explore the concrete process of remembering; rather,

his focus was on the outcomes of that process. We only know, for example, *that* “conventionalization” occurs, not precisely *how* it occurs.

To overcome this methodological neglect of Bartlett’s approach, I turned his method of repeated reproduction into a conversation task. In speaking aloud to another, we simultaneously stimulate our own thinking in hearing ourselves speak; thinking comes into being through speaking (Mead, 1934). This provides an opportunity to access some (although not all) spontaneous processes of remembering in conversation.

As with Bartlett’s experimental set-up, subjects read the *War of the Ghosts* story and waited 15 minutes before reproducing it. In the reproduce phase, however, subjects were instructed to discuss and write down the story they had read earlier. The following excerpt, from the end of a pair’s first reproduction, highlights several processes of mediation, as well as the dynamic interplay between schemas and imagery in reconstruction that Bartlett theorized (*see* the section “The Reconstructive Process” above):

**The original story:**

... He told it all, and then he became quiet. When the sun rose he fell down. Something black came out of his mouth ...

**Conversation reproduction:**

Bill: He told his story and then became quiet. Right?

And then the sun sets [0.5] or something

Henry: Well, he goes to sleep

Bill: It didn’t say anything about sleep. In the morning he stood up and died

Henry: Woke up and died

Bill: All right, so he became quite after telling the story. Ahh, a photographic memory would be awesome right now. Ok now we’re to the point where he woke up. Did they say he woke up?

Henry: I don’t think he stood up

Bill: I thought he

Henry: I don’t think he stood up. I think he did wake up

Bill: Ok, so he woke up (writes). Something black

Henry: came out of his mouth ...

**Written reproduction:**

... He said many villagers on his own side had been killed, and although he had been hit he wasn’t sick. He went to sleep. In the morning he woke up, something black came out of his mouth ...

The excerpt begins with Bill reaching a point of ambiguity and tension in remembering the story.

At a schematic level, he knows that something to do with the *day–night cycle* comes next, and he has some imagery of up–down movement, but forming the fog of memory will require a constructive effort. The ambiguity of his memory is recognized in Bill’s meta-memory comment, “a photographic memory would be awesome right now.”

Bill first makes a suggestion of what might be in the memory gap (“the sun sets”) but at the next moment puts his own suggestion in question with the tagline “or something.” This cycle of suggestion and its evaluation (either intra- or interpersonally) was a frequently observed strategy in my sample of 10 pairs. With it, subjects essentially turn recall into recognition, a fill-in-the-blank test to multiple choice test. Recognition is easier than recall; thus, if one has a general sense of the content of what is missing, constraining the possibilities (in this case, something at the intersection of the *day–night cycle*), it can be a very powerful strategy to extend one’s memory capacities.

Suggestions of what might be in the gap multiply on the interpersonal level. Henry suggests that “he goes to sleep,” but Bill immediately rejects this and instead suggests “he stood up.” This is again rejected and replaced with “he woke up” by Henry. “He woke up” is therefore co-constructed through dynamic interchange. A suggestion does not lead to the passive adoption of another’s memory (as it is often conceptualized in suggestibility research), but rather the perspective of the other’s utterance is used as a dialogical counterpoint to construct a new response, adopting some aspects and rejecting others. In other places in their conversation, a similar co-constructive process leads to accurate memory of the original: For example, “hunting” → “looking for seals” → “hunting seals.”

Bill and Henry form a coherence account of the story by using cultural resources, such as social conventions surrounding night and day (people sleep at night and wake up in the morning) and the metaphorical language utilizing the up–down dichotomy (e.g., people wake up and fall asleep). These cultural resources lead them to conventionalize the story—that is, they transform it in the direction of a familiar cultural framework. Their solution that the protagonist woke up is entirely plausible event for this part of the story. We can see from this example how natural memory capabilities could be *extended* through cultural resources if more familiar cultural material were used, in which case construction would likely lead to a close approximation of the original.

The operation of narrative mediation in this example can be seen in Bill and Henry's use of temporal markers ("sun sets" and "morning") and rational links between events (e.g., he must have gone to sleep before waking up) to temporally organize their account. In other places in my data set, I also found subjects using "schematic narrative templates" (Wertsch, 2002): Three of the ten pairs in my sample came up with the idea that the protagonist of the story was himself a ghost. Nowhere in Bartlett's data does this addition appear, nor do replications of his work using *War of the Ghosts* mention it. Why would this idea come up persistently now? A number of recent Hollywood movies have developed a schematic narrative template with a surprise ending whereby we find out the main character is a ghost, although we thought he was a living person in communication with ghosts throughout the film (e.g., *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*). Without being aware of it, subjects seem to be drawing on this schematic narrative template to help them make sense of the strange story and remember it. In the process, they end up transforming it.

### **Conclusion: the construction metaphor**

In this chapter I have moved away from the notion that "the memory" is a faculty that stores sensory impressions. The storage metaphor of memory focuses on "memories" as individuated asocial traces, spatially located in the heads of individuals. As an alternative approach, I have developed Bartlett's metaphor of remembering as the activity of construction. From this perspective, the temporal nature of remembering comes into focus—that is, memories in the process of being "built." Extending this metaphor, we ask what "tools" are used by an agent to perform this activity: the tools of remembering *are* social relations, broadly conceived as anything that belongs, or has at one time belonged, to the intermental plan of activity—thus, they are inherently linked to communication, culture, and society. Using these social tools, we escape our confinement in the here-and-now situation by experientially moving outside of our embodied first-person perspective into the perspectives of social others. In this way, we learn to extend our natural capacities of memory and to experience and recollect the world through meaningful social forms, such as language and narrative. Thus, metaphor (in the broad sense of the word, inclusive of language and narrative) is involved in both the construction of memories and the construction of theories of memory!

### **Future directions: methodology in the making**

Pushing the metaphor of "construction" further, we can say that there is a direct relationship between the tools used in remembering and the form in which a memory is constructed. Just as the ancient Egyptians could not build higher than the pyramids with the technologies of their day, so, too, are memories constrained and enabled by the tools we use to build them. One avenue for future research will be to explore the power of various social tools to shape memories in different directions. This will be broader than characterizing tools and techniques of remembering as promoters of accuracy or distortion, as is currently done. It is widely recognized by contemporary memory researchers that memory is functional; yet, the methodological focus continues to be on demonstrating memory errors, pointing out the "sins of memory" (Schacter, 2001). Instead, the analytic focus should be on different *directions* of qualitative change, as in Bartlett's, Mori's, and Nadel's research. To study qualitative changes, quantitative analysis can be used, but it will have to do more than simply count how much is remembered or distorted for different experimental or nominal groups.

In exploring directions of change, we will need to understand variability of memories between different members of the same social group. Variability can be seen in the memories themselves and the tools and strategies used to construct memories. Similar tools and strategies can lead to different memories (on the dimensions of veracity, experiential qualities, content, etc.); likewise, similar memories can be arrived at through different tools and strategies. Although individuals might share a common framework and thus also tools and strategies of remembering, it is individuals as agents that construct memories. Again, there is a discrepancy between cognitive psychology's theoretical assumption that the mind is active and the neo-behavioral methodology of showing how various independent variables *cause* effects registered by dependent variables. To truly study the active mind, we need to study it in action, in the concrete process of remembering, rather than simply the outcomes of that process. Classic research paradigms like Loftus's suggestibility research might be transformed into process-oriented microgenetic experiments (Wagoner, 2009) to study remembering *in vivo*, as I have done with Bartlett's method of repeated reproduction (*see above*).



Finally, it has been argued that remembering is not a context-free faculty or skill but, rather, a social and culturally embedded activity. Discursive psychologists have made important initial steps in analyzing how social contexts shape remembering; however, much still needs to be done. For example, we know very little about how various forms of social relationships put different constructive constraints on remembering. From his field observations in Swaziland, Bartlett (1932) theorized that in relations of subordination, remembering would take a more reproductive form, whereas remembering among equals would generate more constructiveness. These power dynamics are essential to everyday remembering; just consider how remembering occurring between patient and therapist, friends, a police interrogator and suspect, a parent and child, an employer and employee, a teacher and student, or among members of different social groups. A systematic investigation into different forms of social relations (e.g., power symmetries and asymmetries) on the process of construction awaits future research.

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## How Can We Study Interactions Mediated by Money as a Cultural Tool: From the Perspectives of “Cultural Psychology of Differences” as a Dialogical Method

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### Abstract

Money is usually seen to be exchanged with anything that has an equivalent exchange value in the society in which a market economy prevails. When we define economic activity in the broadest sense, money is one specific form of the medium that mediates between people. In this chapter, we will discuss the role of money from the viewpoint of cultural psychology. At first, after briefly reviewing the previous research on the psychology of economic activity, we will show money and possessions are embedded in human relationships and their meanings are not separable from them. The meaning of “my belongings,” for example, “this money (or possession) is ‘mine’” is not determined based on the simple and dichotomous distinction between mine and others, and the possibility (and/or the impossibility) of the transfer of them is decided under the control of social norms that are held in common within a group of people. Second, we will explain how such norms are realized on the basis of our methodology—which we call that of cultural psychology of differences. Thirdly, we will give an overview of our Pocket Money Project, where we have analyzed the relationship between money and children of the four East Asian countries: Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam. While this project is a case study conducted based on our methodology, the readers will know how the structures of norms, which make the economic activity possible, are different between different cultural groups, and how we can recognize them.

**Keywords:** pocket money, economic activity, East Asian countries, money as a cultural tool, cultural psychology of differences, dialogical research method, expanded mediational structure (EMS)

Money is usually seen to be exchanged with anything that has an equivalent exchange value in a market-economy society, and is seen to play a role as a neutral measure that makes it possible to transfer any goods between people. There exists economic activity in market economies at the global level, which deviates from the principle of equivalent exchange—such as financial assistance from a developed country to a developing country. And a market economy in itself is possible only on the basis of natural environment outside of the market. We define economic activity in the broadest sense, such that it not only means the exchange of useful

resources between people based on the market rules, but also is the transfer of resources from people to people in general, including unidirectional donation and exploitation of them. Then money is one specific form of the medium that mediates between people. In this chapter, we will discuss the role of money in the broadest sense from the viewpoint of cultural psychology.

At first, we will briefly review the previous research on the psychology of economic activity, where we will show money and possessions are not only treated unidimensionally and metrically on the basis of the exchange value but they are embedded

in the human relationships and their meanings are intertwined with them. The meaning of “my belongings,” for example, “this money (or possession) is ‘mine’” is not determined based on the simple and dichotomous distinction between mine and other’s, and the possibility (and/or the impossibility) of the transfer of them is decided under the control of social norms, which are held in common within a group of people. Second, we will explain how such norms are realized (or more precisely, seem to be realized with regulatory force from the viewpoint of people in the group), and how researchers extract and objectify them from a layperson’s daily life. The methodology we propose here we call “*cultural psychology of differences*,” with which we try to explain how culture and cultural differences emerge and are recognized by people. And third, we will show the outline of our Pocket Money Project, where we have analyzed the relationship between money and children of the four East Asian countries: Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam. While this project is a case study conducted based on our methodology, the readers will know how the structures of norms, which make the economic activity in the broadest sense possible, are different between different cultural groups, and how we can recognize them.

### **Money, Possessions, and Active Agents in Cultural-Historical Perspectives** *Active Agents of Economic Activity*

In the neoclassical economics, people have traditionally been seen as homo economicus who take actions for maximizing utility, and each individual selectively acts rationally based on the subjective value criteria, which are expressed by his or her preference. It has been criticized, sometimes poking fun at the unreality of its premise.

The hedonistic conception of man is that of a lightning calculator of pleasures and pains who oscillates like a homogeneous globule of desire for happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area, but leave him intact. He has neither antecedent nor consequent. He is an isolated definitive human datum, in stable equilibrium except for the buffets of the impinging forces that displace him in one direction or another. Self-imposed in elemental space, he spins symmetrically around his own spiritual axis until the parallelogram of forces bears down upon him, whereupon he follows the line of the resultant. When the force of the impact is spent, he comes to rest, a self-contained globule of desire as before (Vebren, 1898, pp. 389–390).

Recent research on experimental economics has shown that people who are active agents of economic activity are not ahistorical rational utility maximizers, such as calculating machines, but are cultural-historical subjects who pay close attention to the intention of others and take actions based on, or influenced by, the background cultural norms (e.g., Camerer, 2003). People’s recognition of the fairness of the distribution of reward has been tested by using the *ultimatum game*. In the ultimatum game, one of the two participants, a proposer, is given a fund and is instructed to distribute it to the other participant, a responder. The responder decides to accept or reject the offer from the proposer. If the responder accepts the proposal, both participants can get the reward based on the proposer’s offer, and if the responder rejects the offer, both cannot get the reward. If the participants are both rational and selfish homo economicus, it is reasonable that the responder should accept any proposal above zero and the proposer will offer the least amount to the responder. However, empirical data significantly differ from this theoretical prediction. Meta-analysis by Oosterbeek, Sloof, and van de Kuilen (2003) showed that on average, the proposer offers 40% of pie and the responder rejects 16% of the proposals. Henrich et al. (2004) tested the ultimatum game, the dictator game, and the voluntary public goods game with people from 15 ethnic minority groups in the world. Results revealed that there exist bigger differences between groups than the differences shown between developed countries. People’s economic behavior is influenced by the institution and beliefs about the benefit of cooperative behavior within the groups (*for more historical analysis of cultural difference of markets, see Abelshauser, 2005*).

### **Money and Possessions**

Zelizer (1989), following Simmel, summarizes features of market money and sorts these out into the following five characteristics: (1) it is described only by economic terminology, (2) it is qualitatively homogeneous, (3) it is completely secular, neutral, and anomic, (4) it commercializes everything, and (5) it automatically implements those aforementioned. However, money and possessions bear polysemy, which cannot be described only by a one-dimensional value structure. In our lives, we find many things hold subjective values and those values differ from market values they have. Memory-laden objects including gifts, family photographs, souvenirs and mementos, heirlooms, antiques, and

monuments are typical examples (e.g., Belk, 1991). We can find numerous examples that indicate that possessions carry subjectively important meanings for individuals. For the aged, roles are given to possessions in providing control and mastery, moderating emotions, cultivating the self, symbolizing ties with others, constituting a concrete history of one's past (Kemptner, 1991), and particular importance is attached to symbolic items such as photographs and keepsakes (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). On the other hand, we feel strong pressure and recognize it as a threat to ourselves when we lose our possessions. Goffman (1961) shows those who are hospitalized or institutionalized in prison remarkably lose the sense of self when their possessions are expropriated. Additionally, loss of possessions resulting from theft or disaster accompanies a strong sense of loss and depressing feeling (Belk, 1988). After all, as James and Simmel point out, those of mine (possessions) are extensions of self (extended self) as well:

... a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes, and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions.  
(James, 1890, pp. 291–292)

... material property is, so to speak, an extension of the ego, and any interference with our property is, for this reason, felt to be a violation of the person.  
(Simmel, 1950, p. 322)

In the case of children, their structures of self and their ways of perceiving their possessions as their extensions differ from those of adults (Furnham & Jones, 1987; Yamamoto, 1991; Yamamoto & Pian, 1996). When elementary-school children are asked if their parents can control their possessions, children in lower grades tend to give more positive replies. This tendency is found regardless if they live in European countries such as England (Furnham & Jones, 1987), or in Asian countries such as Japan (Yamamoto, 1991) and China (Yamamoto & Pian, 1996). Additionally, children in higher grades tend to reply that they have discretion to determine who can use their belongings, though they have ambiguous feelings of the ownership of money given by parents. This tendency also can be found in both Europe and Asia. Age-derived characteristics indicate some common denominators in respective

cultures. However, what is more important is that the structure of self, interpersonal relationship, and its structure have culture-specific characteristics and thus cognition of “mine” greatly varies, as discussed later.

Although people have the strong notion that money is free from specific human relationships and abstract, they keep away from using it in some cases. A typical example is money as a gift (Pieters & Robben, 1992). In the case of a gift, a sender gives an item for which the sender made efforts in making or selecting it, and a receiver accepts it. In the specific relationship between a sender and a receiver, a gift exists as a symbol that represents a specific effort (or goodwill) of a specific person. For the sender and the receiver, the value of the gift does not represent the practical value based on its usefulness, which means even trivial knickknacks can be important gifts (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Money transposes the value built on a specific individual relation and/or experience like this onto the criteria used for all other items and grades such values—therefore, money is shield. So far—considering the subject and the object, which are both parts of economic activity, we argued that a subject in an economic activity should be understood not only as homo economicus who performs abstract and rational economic activity independent of the context of particular interpersonal relationship, but also as a subject who performs cooperative activity with others. We also argued about the importance attached to possessions' subjective value and their nature of being extensions of self as economic activity objects, and about the unique nature of money, which mediates exchange as an economic tool, especially when it emerges as a gift in a particular human relationship. It is clear that mere observation or analysis of economic activities of equivalent exchange is not sufficient to comprehensively grasp human economic phenomenon from the viewpoint of cultural psychology. We have to find the viewpoint that helps us comprehend general human economic activity, including the one prevailed with market economy as one special configuration of such activity. We will explain the reason from the following three viewpoints.

First, equivalent exchange is always derivative and subsequent in general economic activity in terms of human history development from phylogenetic and ontogenetic viewpoints. Equivalent exchange is only one of many various forms of

communication to exchange resources, and it cannot be seen as general economic activity. Second, in the modern society prevailed by a market economy where equivalent exchange is positioned to initiate entire social production and consumption, some activity performed by a subject that exists out of the market, such as a family and a government, always exists. Market activity is established out of market economy on the basis of the human relation, which is established on a framework different from the one of market economy, such as the relationship in family and with friends. And it is supported by the natural environment, which makes the production of goods possible. As indicated by the case where economic activity causes external diseconomy to the trading activity in the market, additional consideration to the human economic activity is needed. It is performed only in natural environments, and economic activity in the market is established only when it is supported externally. Thus, market economy merely is a part of establishing varieties of human relationships under the whole of all economic activity. Third, economic activity in the market itself is culturally diversified with strong regional characteristics, and a theory that gives no consideration to such diversity obviously covers only a narrow range. We have to grasp economic activity, which is resource-mediated communication among people and includes market economic activity, as being an essentially cultural activity.

### **Cultural Psychology of Differences and Economic Activity**

Next, we shall explain our viewpoints when analyzing human *resource-mediated communication*, in other words, economic activity as cultural activity in nature. We use the term “cultural,” focusing on the following two points and propose the argument with those points in view. The first is, as so far discussed in cultural psychology and expressed by Vygotsky’s triangle, that the human mind has mediational structure comprised of historically and socially established media and the structure is to be the human nature when compared with other species. It is obvious that people can perform the activity of exchanging gifts or money only with this mediational structure. Second, as so far discussed in cross-cultural psychology and indigenous psychology, mediational structure represents not only human characteristics in general but also the uniqueness of a specific group of people. The phenomenon where an identical market economy system develops with

different cultural characteristics among countries and regions can be discussed only when this viewpoint is considered.

In the cultural psychology of differences that we propose, we conceptualize the minimum unit for human behavior analysis using the schematic concept of Expanded Mediational Structure (EMS) as the minimum unit (Yamamoto & Takahashi 2007). With the concept of EMS, we do not argue assuming a subject out of relations or a group beyond a subject. Rather, we view that a relational structure, wherein interacting subjects take normatively mediated actions for objects that mediate interactions, is established each time in a gestalt manner by the subjects’ practical actions. Likewise, in this argument, we consider that those interacting subjects, in addition to the norms that represent communality characteristics (which represent the quality of relationship with others) beyond those individual subjects, emerge each time in the relational structure, and thus analyze the emergence of a sociocultural phenomenon from the viewpoint of a “relationally emerging individual.” (Yamamoto, 2011) Using the notion of *communality*, we intend to refer to the nature of something that appears to be shared with other people or within a community. As we shall explain later, a group functionally substantializes itself in such relation while signs and tools assume ontological positions in an intersubjective structure of mutual understanding.

We will explain basic viewpoints of our cultural psychology of differences and rationally marshal the meanings of cultural research for researchers, including us, who cannot break loose from their own presence as cultural existence, but, nevertheless, while the study itself carrying cultural characteristics as their essential nature.

### ***EMS as a Basic Unit of Normative Interaction***

Behavior and recognition at a phylogenetically or ontogenetically rudimentary stage—which is established with a relatively simple contextual structure—change as such behavior and recognition develop or evolve into the one based on more complex element-to-element relationships. As just described, when several elements emerge in a gestalt structure, we here describe it, generally using the expression “individual elements are ‘mediationally’ established.” For example, when a certain human behavior is established under influence of others, we can say “the human behaves, mediated by others.”

Also, when a subject emerges as taking a certain role in the subject's relation with others, it can be said the subject "is mediated by others and emerges as a subject with specific role." (*For understanding the philosophically extended notion of role, which might reconstruct our viewpoint, see Hiromatsu, 1996.*)

EMS is the concept to refer to a general mediational structure found in our phylogenetically created sociocultural practice. For now, we explain what the concept of EMS implies in an orderly manner, starting from the active-passive duality of human basic nature, which makes interactions possible.

Human beings differ from any material substance in terms of an object because it emerges as an active object for the party who sees him or her as a person. Moreover, the important point in establishing interactions is that a person has both active and passive natures. A person's action to the other is established only when the person actively works on the other and the other receives it passively. When subjects sustain interactions, such active-passive relations are linked. More specifically, when A actively acts on B, B is passively affected by the action of A. Then, in turn, B becomes an active subject and acts on A, thus A is passively affected by this action of B. Like this, actions are linked, and, in each case, a subject which emerges as an active subject is mediated by the other who actively acts on the subject. We call this *subject-mediated behavior* (SMB).

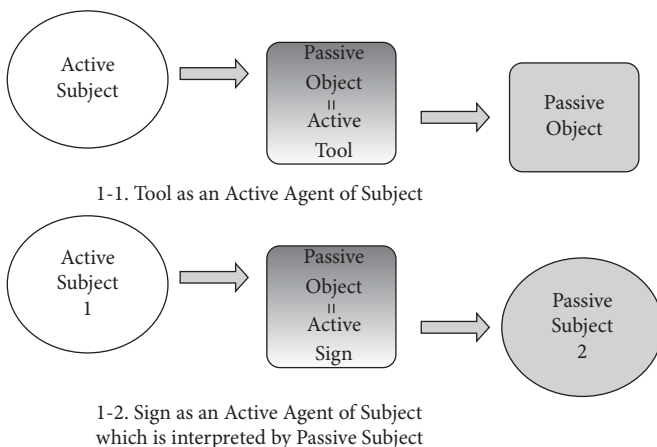
This active-passive duality is the basic nature of interacting subjects, and its prototype can be found in the situations where active nature and passive nature are integrated, in a figure-ground reversal manner, just like "see = seen," and "hold = held." Interactions are established when subjects with

such duality differentiate between a subject with an active aspect and a subject with a passive aspect while mutually changing their mutual aspects (so-called *role exchange*) in turns.

When a subject's active behavior is established, incorporating a certain physical object (*object-mediated behavior*; OMB), the object becomes a "tool," which works on a different passive object as extension of the subject (Figure 50.1). Also, when the passive subject understands it, the physical object emerges not as a mere substance but as a "sign," which expresses some sort of intention of the active subject (*see Figs. 50.1 and 50.2*).

When subjects' interactions are mediated by the signs established in the aforementioned way, a subject's behavior in this scheme is based on interpretation of the other's intention infused into the behavior mediated by an object, which is a sign as well (OMB) and, thus, such behavior becomes an SMB as the response to this OMB. Any kind of communication, which is a chain of interactions mediated by an object such as language or a substance, is based on the structure of dual-mediated behavior (DMB) where SMB and OMB are combined as seen in Figure 50.2 (Yamamoto, 1997).

The meaning infused into an object as a sign or implied by the sign cannot be determined merely by the physical nature of the object, it also determined by the subjective structure of meanings which has been discussed as the matter of arbitrariness in signifiant-signifie relation of signs. A normative structure—such as syntax and semantics, which constrains the ways to interpret a sign—becomes necessary. In addition, a behavior as a response to an action of the other is selected out of almost infinite,



**Figure 50.1** Tool and sign as agents. (a) Tool as an active agent of the subject; (b) Sign as an active agent of the subject which is interpreted by passive subject.

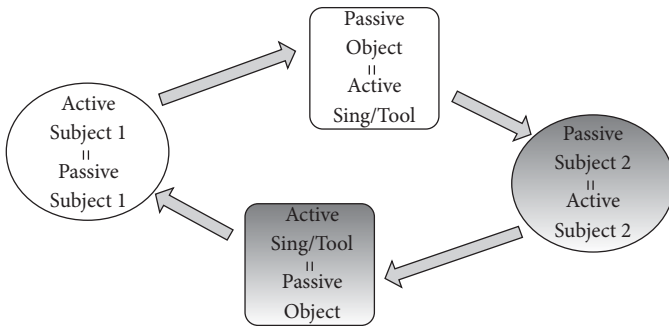


Figure 50.2 Dual mediated behavior.

numerous alternatives under normative constraints (Yamamoto, 2000). In linked interactions, normative elements, which set bounds to both interpretation of signs and selection of behaviors, mediate mutual relations.

In summary, stable and sustained interactions have the structure where OMB of subjects produce meaningful SMB mediated by the normative elements shared among the subjects, which brings us the concept of the EMS (see Fig. 50.3).

Subjects' interactions using money as a tool are obviously included in this structure as a part of human sociocultural interactions. Money as a physical object emerges between subjects as an object with social meaning. A subject's action of giving (or not giving) it to the other indicates the intention of the subject, which results in a trading activity in a certain condition. Mediated by normative constraints when selecting a behavior like "what and how to buy (or not to buy)," the trading activity becomes possible under the constraints of the norms that determine the activity as deviation or obedience.

As we shall specifically illustrate later, cultural characteristics that emerge from economic behavior and relation including the pocket money phenomenon do not emerge in the formal structure of behavior of exchanging equivalents in the market. Rather, they emerge as group-specific constraints (a structure of meaning), which are different from those of other groups when qualitatively selecting interactions, such as what specifically can be an object in exchange, how the exchange process should be, and if it should be market exchange or gift exchange. When regarding money as being mediated by a cultural norm, money functions not only as an economic tool for equivalent exchange in the market but also as a culture tool to build the human relationship with cultural significance (Yamamoto & Takahashi, 2007).

Therefore, we describe how culture emerges within specific interactions with others using the concept of EMS, and explain how we can understand practices of researchers who recognize culture, and how we can underpin our methodology based on such understanding.

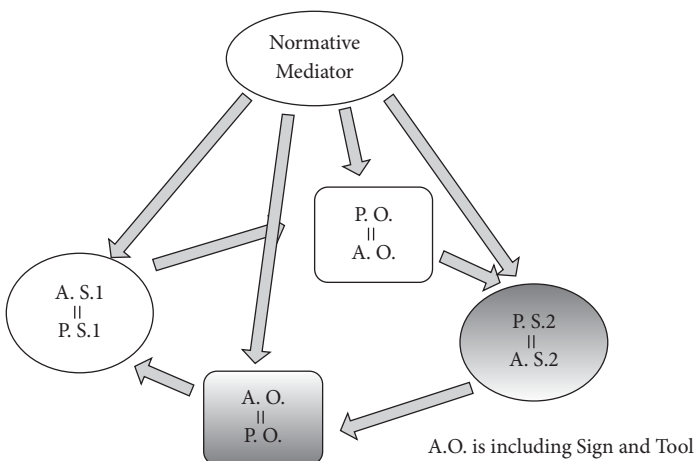


Figure 50.3 Expanded Mediation Structure (EMS).



## *Emergence of Culture*

We are able to differentiate two kinds of notion of culture. The first is the notion that is typical to Vygotskian theory. It has emphasized universal character of the human mind, which essentially differs from the other animals. We already have schematized such universal mediational character of human practice with our concept of EMS. The second is the notion that is typical to cross-cultural psychology. It has emphasized the differences among social groups. To understand the character that is specific to a certain culture (A), it is necessary to compare it with the other culture (not A), so that the understanding of culture A is established solely with the contrast of the other culture. We can say the understanding of culture A is mediated by the other culture. We claim that to understand the dynamism of culture is possible only under the condition that we consider the two levels of mediational structures simultaneously. Based on the first level, we are able to act culturally only as the human mind, which has mediational structure and based on the second level we are able to appear as cultural agents only when the character of us are understood with the contrast of or as mediated by other types of cultural agents. Human understandings of culture are established as such intersubjective and communal recognitions that have mediational structure in its nature, which enable us to realize the cultural group as a substantialized one through a dynamic interaction process. Based on those dynamics of culture, we become able to analyze the dynamic process of cultural phenomena, including cultural conflicts that appear at the same time both as interindividual and intergroup interactions. Here we illustrate the second aspects of the culture with the concept of EMS.

Culture, which is specific to a certain group, is found in the realm of physical objects as products with a typical style among the group members. It emerges in a subject's socio-psychological aspect as a typical action and/or a typical mental pattern among the group members. In either case, the following three requirements are satisfied in common:

First, regardless of a physical object, an action or mental act, it emerges as result of a subject's intentional activity.

Second, it does not only emerge as a result of one individual's intentional activity but emerges as the one shared among people.

Third, it emerges as the one that is shared not with people in general but with the people who

belong to a specific group, but is not shared with people of different groups.

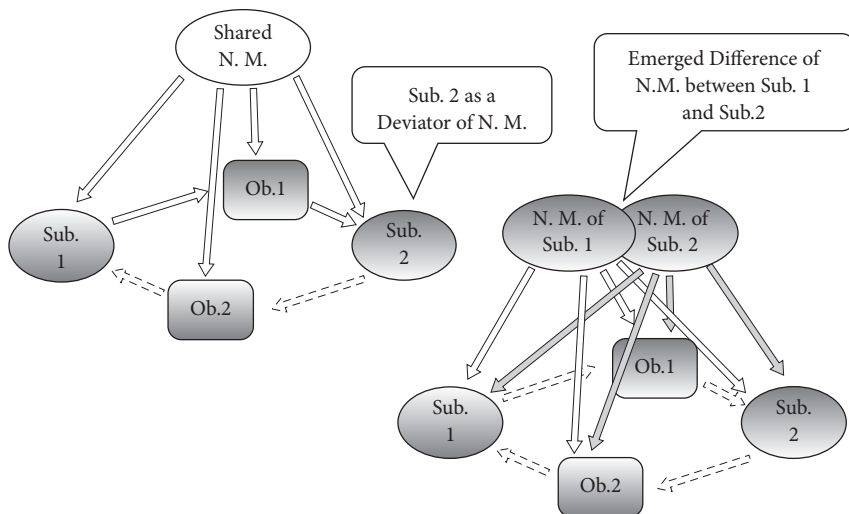
In this way, regardless of culture found in an object or culture found in a subject's activity, it is natural to assume some kind of group as the substantial agent behind the cultural phenomena that is seen as responsible for the culture. Nevertheless, in our cultural psychology of differences, for the purpose of avoiding the aporia resulting from the individual-group dualism, we do not assume a substantially fixed individual or group, but view emergence and function of culture from the standpoint of a relationally emerging individual. Moreover, we grasp action of cultural research as isomorphic meta-culture practice.

Following this logic, it can be concluded that culture emerges from moment to moment as "difference in normative mediator" (Yamamoto, 2011) in specific and concrete interactions and determines a configuration of interactions while functionally substantializing a group, which we shall explain later. Cultural research becomes one of meta-recognition practices around such functional substantialization. Both processes can be schematized for explanation, using the concept of EMS.

First, we will explain how culture emerges in our daily life practices. Most of our daily interactions are established without any particular awareness of the norms that attach meanings to each other's actions and objects. However, for some reason, when interactions do not go well, a person tries to find a cause of failure and consciously adjusts the relation with intent to restore smooth interactions. At that time, what matters in the interactions is the normative mediator, specifically speaking—what is the appropriate action and the appropriate interpretation of the situation? Failed interaction raises our awareness of normatively mediated relation and prods us to tune such interactions.

Roughly speaking, the cause of interaction failure can have possibly two directionally different attributes. One attribute is deviation by the person and/or the other from the person's own norm that the person becomes conscious of and absolutizes (*see* Fig. 50.4, left side). In this case, the subject emerges as a deviator. The norm is recognized as the common constraint that both of the interacting subjects should follow, and the attempt is made to adjust the relation somehow by correcting the element, which is regarded as having deviated from the norm.

However, when the person becomes conscious of the norm, the norm is never recognized as the one



**Figure 50.4** Two types of attribution of failed interactions.

specific to individual culture. It emerges merely as “the obligatory norm a person should follow.” The interacting parties share the same norm and implicitly accept each other as the one who lives on the basis of the same communality, and the cause of failure is attributed to the individual who disturbs the normative relation.

The other attribute is the case where the cause of failure is attributed to difference in the normative mediator (*see* Fig. 50.4, right side). Both subjects recognize their own behaviors as the ones in accordance with the norm and insist the other subject’s behavior deviates from the norm. Thus, the difference in fundamental understanding between both parties becomes obvious. The failed interacting party emerges as the other who has a different normative mediator or different communality. Therefore, the cause of interaction failure cannot be attributed to an individual but to a group beyond the individual. This is where a cultural group with different communality emerges.

The important point here is that we regard behaviors of individual subjects as emergence of certain communality even though specific interactions of individuals are practically an issue. In this case, behind an individual before us, we foresee the presence of a group of people who share communality with the individual. “I” emerge not as an individual but as a member of a group, “us,” and you emerge not as an individual but as a member of a group, “you” (Oh, Sato, Takahashi, Yamamoto, Takeo, & Pian, 2008). One’s own normative consciousness,

which was regarded as “being natural” without any assumption up to that moment, is relativized. Thus the normative mediator is regarded as the one which “we” unconsciously shared in our own daily life practices and emerges as the cultural norm that supports “our” communality different from “yours.”

Culture emerges before us, taking a concrete form. But this does not mean that a human group with certain concrete extension exists at first and then the culture is recognized as some nature of the existing group. Instead, based on the fact that a particular behavior of an individual subject before us emerges with communality, a group to which the communality belongs is conceived, and then, the deductive recognition initiated from the group is established to explain the individual before us. For this reason, a cultural group is, at any time, constructed and reified virtually and socially from particular interactions.

### ***Substantive Nature of the Normative Mediator and Culture***

As described above, a norm emerges as something relative and arbitrary, not as something absolute. However, we should not consider the norm to be a mere unsubstantial fiction, because, as long as a subject tries to interact smoothly with the other, it becomes inevitable to generate normative mediators somehow with the other as necessary, and the subject has to follow the norm in order not to deteriorate the subject’s social practice. In order to establish a certain social practice and participate in the social

practice, the subject has no alternative but to follow the norm on which the practice is based. Therefore, any subject within a social practice cannot escape from some sort of normativity based on such practice in principle, and, in that context, the normativity emerges as an absolute substance, takes objective character on it, and defines the subject's practice intersubjectively. We will describe the structure like this: a norm functionally substantializes itself.

Likewise, our research object, money, is also substantialized functionally in social practice. Money here does not mean money as material such as metal, paper, or electronic information, but as a tool that people use as a medium to establish a social practice. Money, which is a mere substance as material, establishes a social practice including exchange of goods only when meaning is found beyond its function as material. As far as being involved in such a social practice, money is functionally substantialized with a meaning as such, incorporating economical normative nature.

As described above, when the subject's norm encounters a different norm, the subject's own norm emerges as a cultural norm in the contradistinctive relation to the different communality that the different norm has. A subject who established such culture recognition may force the subject himself or herself, and the other, to follow the norm or constrain recognition and actions of the subject, and the other, under the name of the cultural group. The forcing subject emerges not as an individual but as an agent that personifies the will of the group. At that time, before the subject, culture emerges with a socially binding force beyond the specific forcing individual. In this way, culture without physical reality emerges before a subject involved in a social practice as the one with transcendental power that controls the subject and is functionally substantialized as if it were an externally existing physical substance. (Of course, this logic is generally applicable to the functional substantialization of any social group.)

As described so far, in our cultural psychology of differences, we understand an ontological position of culture, underpinning the intersubjective practical recognition of the communality. A subject finds it in a series of practical interactions with the other as a communality difference between them, and such finding again defines the direction of the subject's behavior to be cultural. Unsurprisingly, cultural characteristics of money are found in such a communality difference.

As you see, our cultural psychology of differences does not reduce culture to an individual that exists out of relation or to a group that is regarded as existing substantially beyond individuals. Rather, it understands culture from the viewpoint of a relationally emerging individual with communality beyond individuals with intent to avoid the aporia of the individual-group dualism, which traps culture research. When looking at culture from a third-party viewpoint, culture is the recognition that is configured and changes each time in accordance with the context of practice. From that aspect, culture is relative. But, culture emerges with absolute substantive nature before a subject within the context of the practice. Through understanding of such a situation, cultural psychology of differences affirmatively accepts that culture includes the contradiction between fiction and reality in nature.

From this viewpoint, the following example, which appears to be an incomprehensible contradiction when viewing culture as a single-objective substance, can be seen and accepted as very natural phenomena that reflect the essential character of culture. When an American sees the Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji-Temple) in Japan, the American may see oriental Buddhist culture, while a person from Japan may naturally view that as Kitayama culture, a culture in a medieval age, or as the fusion of Japanese aristocratic culture, warrior or Samurai culture, and Zen culture. However, either view can be correct. Similarly, an identical phenomenon may emerge as different cultures, depending on subjects who recognize communality (different people see different cultures), which is one of the essential characteristics of culture. In addition to that, even for an identical subject, the phenomenon may emerge as different culture, depending on the contexts in which the subject finds the phenomenon (the subject sees different cultures at different times), which is also an essential characteristic of culture.

Moreover, as it is impossible to completely define a group of those who carry one specific culture, a substantially fixed group as the subject carrying culture cannot be externally predetermined. For example, it is impossible to completely define when Chinese Han culture started, from which region to which region Han culture exists, and who carries Han culture. The extension of a culture is completely vague in terms of time, space, and members and always changes (Fei, 1989), which is also an essential characteristic of culture. On the other hand, for example, even when the extension

is defined using administrative classification such as those who are registered as “Han people,” practices and languages among those registered people are extremely diverse in fact. Likewise, even when Han culture is described following certain criteria, numerous exceptions need to be added to such a description. As those examples indicate, the inside of a cultural group, which is seemingly fixed and defined by an external standard, always varies and changes—which is also an essential characteristic of culture.

We believe culture can be analyzed without impairing its dynamism only when we consider that culture is functionally substantialized all the time as necessary, keeping such contradictions as its essential elements, instead of identifying culture with a substantial group that is predefined and fixed by certain criteria.

### ***Cultural Psychology of Differences as Meta-Culture Recognition Practice***

When we understand culture without assuming a culture as fixed substance which always emerges as being identical and as objective substance which always seen as being the same object by anyone and when we recognize culture to be functionally substantialized with the power to control and define the direction of a subject’s recognition and social practice, what does our action of studying individual cultures as concrete objects mean? What differs between such actions of a researcher’s and a layperson’s culture recognition in our daily lives?

First, what we should affirm is that there is no fundamental structural difference when culture emerges before us in daily life or before researchers. In other words, even when a researcher objectifies culture viewing from the sidelines, culture emerges as a result of recognized communality difference between the researcher and the other, which relies on the context. The researcher who recognizes “different culture” in such a way starts to study culture as an object.

This remains the same in principle when the researcher’s own culture is studied as an object. For example, when a Korean researcher becomes aware of the researcher’s own culture, the researcher finds the culture as something specific to Korean and different from Japanese and Chinese culture. In such a way, an encounter with the communality different from the researcher’s own communality brings the viewpoint of objectifying his or her own culture, thus the researcher studies his or her own culture

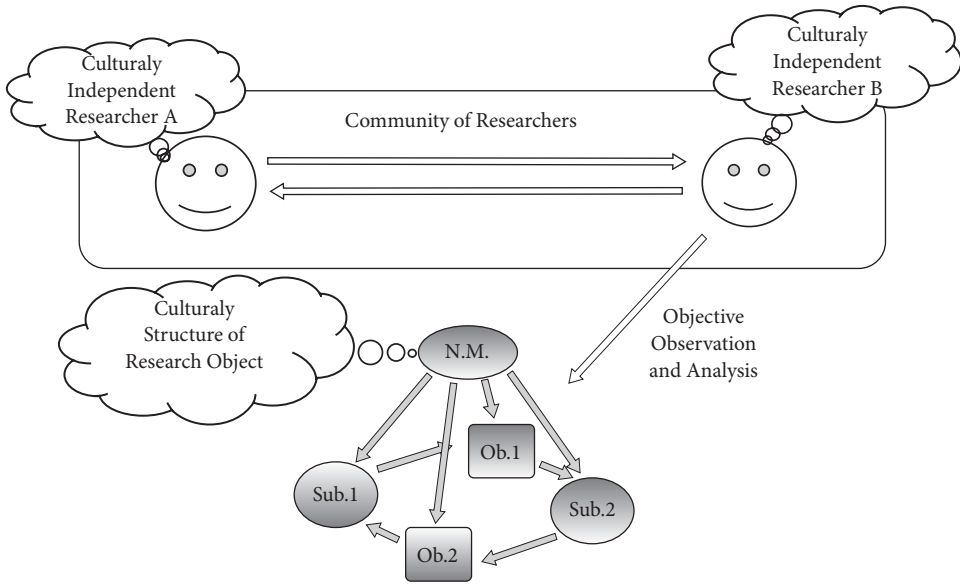
as the alienated or objectified own communality. Culture, whether one’s own or other culture, is mediated by different culture, objectified, recognized, and substantialized.

Second, what we should affirm is that, critical and qualitative difference exists between recognizing one’s own culture and recognizing other culture. Based on the communality of our daily life, we recognize others’ communality as a gap or difference resulted from deviation from our communality and reaffirm our communality mediated by others’ communality. Therefore, ethnocentric understanding of other culture is unavoidable fate when establishing culture recognition.

On that basis, researchers seem to adopt two extreme standpoints for the purpose of overcoming this ethnocentrism issue. The first standpoint is that a researcher steps aside from meaning (or manners of interpretations, hereinafter, interpretations/meanings) the researcher possesses as a person living in a culture and analyzes from the “universal viewpoint” as a researcher, the structure established in people’s interactions and recognition without being realized by themselves, and tries to describe the structural difference among different cultures (see Fig. 50.5). However, from the standpoint of cultural psychology of differences, the following should be reserved regarding “universality” there.

This is assumed not to be influenced by the researcher’s particular cultural characteristics but to be something sharable among researchers beyond cultural characteristic differences, thus creating a community of researchers, which is separated from the world of daily life. In that sense, this is the “universality” with special communality, which enables research practice and enables their community. That is not shared necessarily with those who live in the meanings of the daily life. This does not directly help researchers establish the communality with those who live in daily life, either. Researchers’ communality qualitatively differs from that of those who live in the world of daily life. Naturally, from the viewpoint of cultural psychology of differences, research practices of pursuing such “universality” and communality itself are understood as one attributive culture; therefore, some transcendental peculiar privilege cannot be accepted without question of the practice of such culture recognition.

Another standpoint is that of a researcher who is deeply involved in the daily life practice of a person who lives in a different culture, and who participates in the world of practice for the purpose of



**Figure 50.5** Objective research of culture.

being ideally on the same level with the member of the culture in terms of understanding the emerging manner of interpretations/meanings of daily life. In order to overcome ethnocentrism, a researcher keeps him or herself away from the ethnocentric viewpoint to the utmost extent and gets deeply involved in the cultural practices of others instead of establishing universality aside from the viewpoint of those who live daily lives.

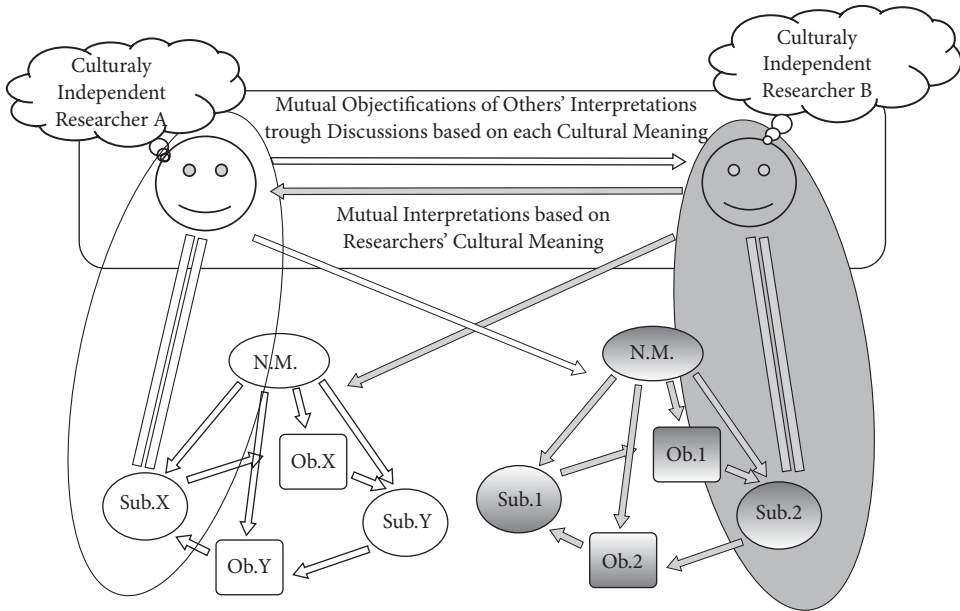
The most ideal style of the research like this would be for a researcher to study the culture the researcher belongs to (indigenous psychology). However, as described earlier, a researcher who performs participant observation can be a researcher in comparison with those who live daily life because of the fact that the researcher can look at the culture from the outsider viewpoint, find difference between cultures and objectify the culture. And, it is communality difference that makes interpretations/meanings of daily life into something “cultural.”

Based on those understandings, cultural psychology of differences adopts the third way. That is researchers, who have different cultural characteristics and acknowledge their ethnocentric understanding of others as being unavoidable, mutually analyze their interpretations/meanings of daily life, and discuss the analysis (see Fig. 50.6).

Similarly with laypeople who live daily lives, researcher A tries to understand the meaning implied by the action of the other by his or her understanding

of meaning (“ $\alpha$ ”) that he or she generates in his or her daily life as a person A. Understandably, the other, B, lives in different communality and thus researcher A fails to understand B’s interpretations/meanings of daily life activities (“ $\beta$ ”) based on A’s understanding of meaning (“ $\alpha$ ”). Therefore, A’s interpretation (“ $\alpha$ ”) occasionally becomes something completely strange or unacceptable for B. This is where B, as a researcher instead of a person who lives daily life, points out the problem about “ $\alpha$ ” and conversely analyzes “ $\alpha$ ” to bring forward B’s understanding of “ $\alpha$ ” to researcher A. Obviously, B’s understanding of “ $\alpha$ ” sometimes turns out to be an inappropriate understanding for researcher A and prods researcher A to argue from researcher A’s viewpoint as a person who lives daily life.

When using the EMS schematic, this process can be explained as follows. Researcher A and researcher B exchange their understandings of interpretations/meanings,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , as objects and thus their communication is established. For researcher A to establish the communication where researcher A’s understanding of the meanings of objects is shared, researcher A uses the normative mediator that A has as a person who lives daily life. However, A’s such understanding fails to be shared with researcher B and the communication fails. Viewing from the opposite side, B’s normative mediator is not shared with researcher A. Under such a circumstance, the natures of their own normative mediators, of which



**Figure 50.6** Dialogical structure of cultural psychology of differences.

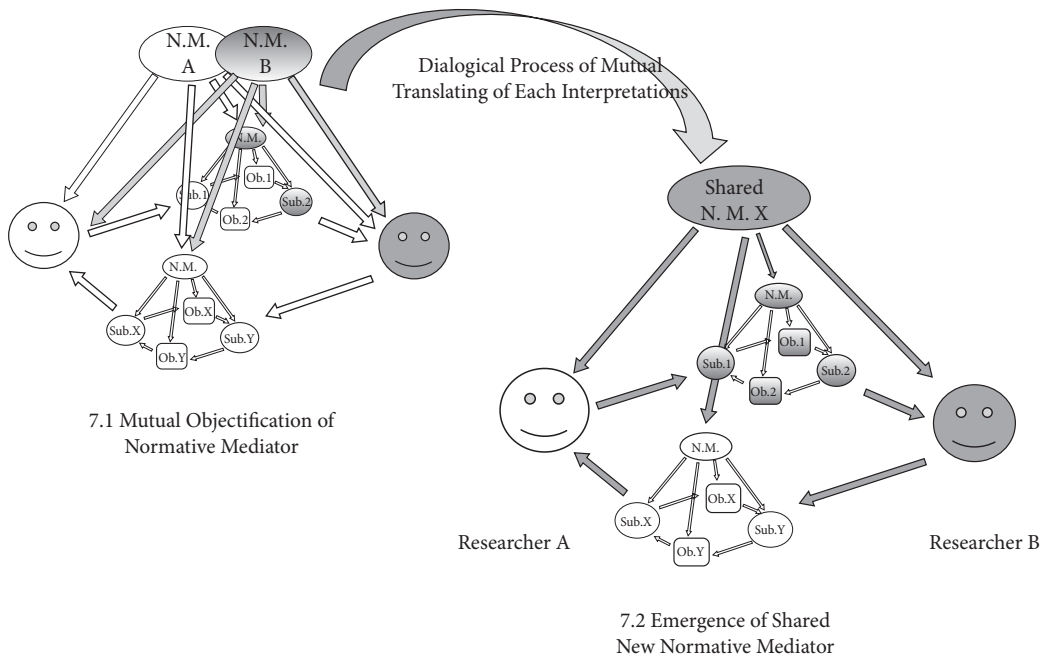
they were not conscious, raise their awareness separately, and such difference emerges as the object for intentional adjustment (see Fig. 50.7a).

Here, cultural psychology of differences does not set the direction toward the task of discovering an abstract general structure out of the semantic worlds of those parties. It paves the way so that those parties can objectify such difference based on their understandings of meanings and attain common understanding of meaning at a meta-level. This process can be compared to language translation where the other's understanding of meaning is translated and understood through a translator's own understanding of meaning. As in the case with language translation, both parties never agree perfectly, but, they can have commonality to the extent that they can communicate. At that time, researchers A and B in the communication surrounding their interpretations/meanings of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  create the meta-level common interpretations/meanings, X, and reposition their interpretations/meanings  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  in X for sharing. This can be regarded as the establishment of new normative mediator X (see Fig. 50.7b).

What researchers do here is not to objectively perform descriptive analysis of the object from the outside of interpretations/meanings in daily life. The following explanation will help you understand the difference easily. In the case of a conventional objective analysis, correctness of the analysis is urged regardless of what a person who lives daily life

subjectively thinks or denies regarding the analysis. Whereas, in the case of an analysis in cultural psychology of differences, we pursue intersubjective agreement of data interpretation among persons who have culturally different background including both researchers and research objects (or researchers who have the same background with them). For this purpose, we, as researchers, ask persons who live daily life as research objects (or ask researchers who have such a background), "Do you also agree with our understanding or interpretation of meaning about your behaviors?" and entrust the persons with the judgment on success or failure of the understanding. If we are not able to reach agreement, then the interpretation have to be modified. By establishing such a mutual relationship, cultural psychology of differences is established. In that sense, the methodology of cultural psychology of differences is dialectical in nature, providing grounds for validity of understanding in relation with others. That is a kind of communication system for mutual understanding based on difference between parties and the tool for dialectical culture practice to generate new meta-communality in such dialectical relation.

Here, we should point out one important point. As described so far, when researchers who have their unique cultural characteristics establish a scheme where those researchers build up meta-understanding of each other's culture on their own cultural characteristics, this newly established



**Figure 50.7** Dialogical process of cultural psychology of differences. (a) mutual objectification of normative mediator; (b) Emergence of new shared normative mediator.

scheme for understanding (EMS) naturally relies on the context comprised of the combination of those individual researchers. Therefore, even when the generality beyond researchers' ethnocentric viewpoints is obtained in this scheme, the generality preliminarily cannot claim the generality out of the context. Whether or not the established scheme for understanding can be shared with a third researcher who has a different cultural background can be verified only in dialectical relationship with the new researcher. If the scheme cannot be shared, researchers, including the third researcher, need to undergo the same process to find another scheme for common understanding at a meta-level. In this way, without assuming God-like fair and universal generality, we incrementally generalize based on specific and concrete contexts. We call such research methodology "concrete generalization."

### ***Cultural Psychology of Differences and Cultural Characteristics of Economic Activity***

In order to analyze economic phenomena from the viewpoint of cultural psychology, we believe it is crucial to consider people's economic activity as a part of general communication activity that mediates resources extensively including gift exchange. In

addition to that, it should be critical to understand money not only as a mere economic tool because of its function as an equivalent exchange media, a mark of value and a means for storing value, but also as a cultural tool that helps us create our own world of daily life, forming human ties. When viewing in that way, establishment and development of a market economy itself is a cultural phenomenon in its nature, which provides us with clues to cultural-psychology-based analyses on the phenomenon where market-economic activities in different countries and regions still show strong specific features of their societies in spite of expansion of globalism.

In this section, we explain how to concretely understand cultural characteristics of economic activity from the viewpoint of cultural psychology of differences, which grasps human sociocultural practices using the conceptual tool, EMS.

Economic activity emerges as something cultural when economic interactions that a subject has smoothly developed with one party cause failure with another party and the difference between communalities underlying their economic interactions—not the deviational behavior of the subject or the other party—emerges as the cause of the failure. For example, human-relationship-oriented trading, importance placed on stable trading, trading that is not

necessarily contractual, slow and opaque decision-making, and tough demands for quality and delivery are described as specific features of Japanese economic interaction, which are different from those in Europe and America (Economic Planning Agency of Japan, 1986), and frequently cause conflict. This situation has been treated as difference in the normative mediator in EMS. At that time, it can be found that the economic activity in the market, which initially appears to be neutral action, is actually mediated by a cultural norm.

There are three solutions for failure. The first one is to cancel economic interactions and return to the prefailure state. The second one is to place one of two (or more) conflicting normative mediators in a more powerful position than the other normative mediator so that the other one will follow. The third solution is to look for ways to create meta-normative mediators, which adjust both parties through understanding of their conflicting normative mediators. In cultural psychology of differences designed to develop the recognition of cultural characteristics that dialectically overcome ethnocentrism, the way to understand cultural characteristics of economy is the development of the third process.

Moreover, as is clear from the gestalt nature of EMS, the cultural characteristics emerging in a subject's economic activity represent not only the normative mediator's cultural characteristics that determine the activity but also the cultural characteristics of the subject who participates in the activity, as well as the cultural characteristics of the meaning that the exchanged objects have. Therefore when cultural psychology of differences analyzes economic activity as an object, it handles the issue considering a subject, an object and a norm are to be interrelated as a whole.

From now, we introduce a series of our studies about children and money that we continuously conducted in Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam as an analysis example from the viewpoint on economic activity in a broad sense. Findings in those studies were cultural characteristics that constrain and define the direction when using money, the learning process of mastering pocket money (allowance), which is the cultural tool with such cultural characteristics, an aspect of the formation process, namely, cultural development process of a subject who masters pocket money as a cultural tool, and the process of dialectical practice where we, researchers, find out such cultural characteristics. Through them, we learn how involved

cultural characteristics are in the formation of our economic activity.

The marks used in the following analysis, such as "Japan," "China," "Korea," and "Vietnam," may appear to be presented as if certain substantial groups were fixed and conceived beforehand. However, as is evident from the discussion so far, those are merely the specific-context-dependent, contradistinctive structures that emerged in our comparative examination in which we dialogically and mutually examined limited data among our researcher group and tried to find the scheme for unifying and grasping the examination results.

While Japan and Korea are usually seen as ethnically homogeneous nations, China and Vietnam contain a wide variety of ethnic groups, and the data are from only few cities for each country like Osaka, Tokyo, and Gunma in Japan, Beijing, Shanghai, and Yanji in China, Seoul and Cheju in Korea, and Hanoi in Vietnam, etc. Therefore it should also be noted that characteristics of the countries with quotation marks do not reflect ethnic diversities and regional differences of these countries. In addition to that, the researchers conduct the research not as culturally independent psychologists but as those who have their own identities about the nationalities, so the discussion about the interpretation of data is inevitably framed consciously and/or unconsciously with them.

Then, we do not objectively present some universal structure of an object beyond that. It is not something arbitrary that can be described in various ways, but emerges as a kind of necessary image in the context of the dialogic examination process. Considering that, we insist that those structures themselves indicate one process in dialogue and one stage in such process, and thus essentially cannot be separated from the context of our cultural research as a consistently dynamic process in nature.

### **Outline of the Pocket Money Project**

In this project, researchers from four countries in East Asia, which are Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam, collaborated and pursued research on children's relationships with money in each country, combining various methods. The methods we adopted are roughly categorized into three types: (1) researchers from each country visit households in their counterparts' home countries and interviewed parents and children; (2) researchers observed children shopping at supermarkets, mom-and-pop candy stores, stationary stores, and bookstores and



interviewed them; (3) researchers conducted questionnaire surveys on students in the 5th grade, the 8th grade, and the 11th grade in each country, to ask questions about how they get and use pocket money, right and wrong judgment on and tolerance toward use, and the impact of money on their parent-child relationship and friendships.

We call the methodology on which this project is based “cultural psychology of differences,” whose rational details were explained earlier. Cultural psychology of differences can be summarized as follows. When we study culture, we study it assuming that researchers cannot study certain specific culture from an objective position in terms of epistemology or methodology. And, understanding the culture involves mutual activities where researcher a (= concurrently, a member of culture A) tries to understand the practice implemented by a member of different culture B (layperson) meanwhile researcher b (= concurrently, a member of culture B) tries to understand the cultural practice implemented by the member of culture A. Cultural psychology of differences is to pursue research practice with this perspective. This project was designed to pursue this, not between two parties, but among participants from different countries. The aforementioned four countries were selected because they satisfied linguistic requirements (researchers from two countries can communicate at least among them using the researchers’ own or their counterparts’ native language) and geographical requirements (project members can observe and participate in interviews and discuss with researchers) for implementing such research practice, and thus researchers from those four countries participated in this project.

When comparing cultures, discussions were based on Asia-versus-West-like dichotomy represented by independent versus interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and collectivism versus individualism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Nevertheless, cultural psychology of differences regards the way to recognize cultural “difference” as an issue. In that sense, any comparison is not an issue as long as the comparison is made among different cultural groups. Moreover, from the epistemological viewpoint, the same difference between any given two groups can be found (Watanabe, 1969, Ugly Duckling Theorem). From that aspect, there is no reason to think cultural psychology of differences overrides other comparisons when comparing somewhere in Asia with somewhere in Europe or America.

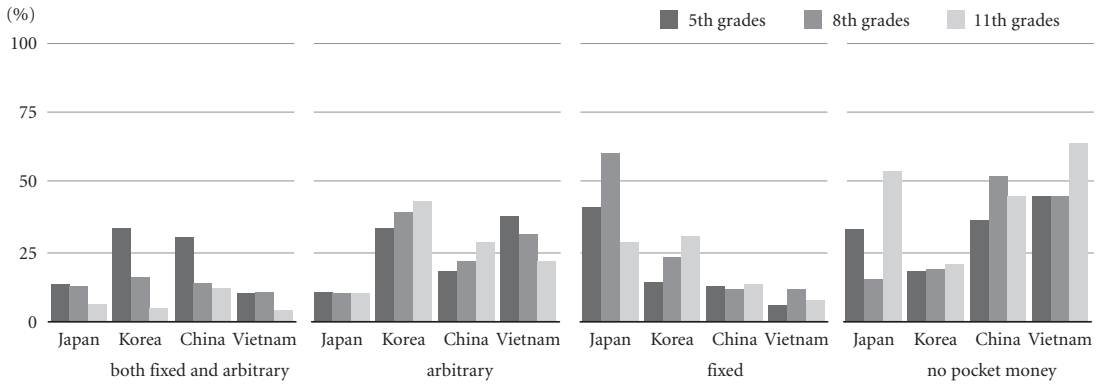
Research practiced in cultural psychology aims not to create a static difference inventory. Rather, a researcher who is also a member of a certain culture comes across and is surprised at daily life practice (cultural practice) of a member of the other culture, and the researcher, in turn, reflects on the researcher’s own daily life practice to deepen mutual understanding and empathy. In this way, the other culture emerges dynamically and emotionally, and theorizing this process is what cultural psychology addresses as the issue. Implementing practice to understand different culture in such a way will prescribe a practical solution for members from the countries, which have historically had a strained relationship, to understand mutually through conflicts and surprises.

In the following section, we will first discuss cultural difference in the parent-child relationship mediated by money. Then, we analyze the normative structure concerning use of money. Ultimately, through the analysis on how such structure emerges before the researchers who study cultural psychology, you will clearly understand that cultural psychology about economic relationship (in short, money) inevitably requires the methodology, which we call “cultural psychology of differences.”

### ***Cultural Difference in Parent-Child Relationship Mediated by Money***

#### **JAPAN**

We shall start with a very simple question: “How do children receive money from their parents?” Many Japanese children respond that they receive fixed amounts of money at fixed intervals when compared with children in other three countries (see Fig. 50.8). In interviews, not only children but also parents responded, “I do not give money to my child in that way at present, but intend to do so when my child becomes slightly older,” or “I tried to give money in such a way, but my child failed to manage it well, therefore I think it is too early for my child.” As those responses indicate, giving a fixed amount of money at a fixed interval is considered to be favorable and giving money in such a way as a child grows older is regarded as a favorable change. In addition, many distinctly responded that the money given to a child was thereafter the child’s own money. Figure 50.9 shows the responses made to the statement, “A parent does not have to return the money he or she borrows from me.” Similarly, many children in Japan gave affirmative answers to the statement, “A parent should keep word in any



**Figure 50.8** The ways children get pocket money in the four countries.

circumstance when he or she promises to give me pocket money,” while support to the statement, “Pocket money is given by my parent, therefore, it is my parent’s,” was considerably low.

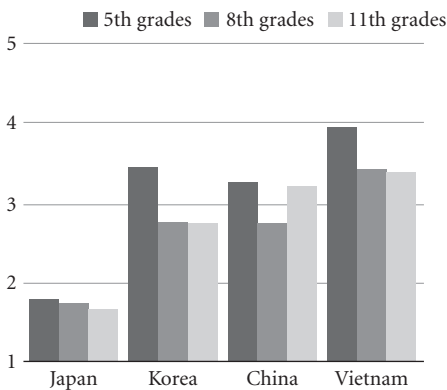
Concerning the question of who will pay money when children buy books and snacks, responses made by children in Japan roughly fell into four categories. The first one is for the items that parents pay for regardless of age of their children. Payments for study books, transportation expenses, school fees, and foodstuff for home consumption are included. The second category is for the items that children did not use their money for when they were in primary school but start to pay for themselves as they grow; for example, buying friends a meal and gambling with friends. This indicates children expand their own worlds out of control of their parents. The remaining two other categories share similarity with

each other. Those are for the items that parents paid for before and children pay now by themselves. This indicates responsibility of using money shifts from parents to children, and payments for various items, such as toys, CDs, clothes, and movies, are included in those categories. The way to obtain goods changes as children grow, and children in Japan change their use of pocket money they receive from their parents at their own discretion.

When summarizing those results (and their specific features become distinctive when compared with the results obtained in the other three countries, which we shall explain later), it can be interpreted that money-mediated relationships of children in Japan with their parents is influenced by the goal to be “independent” from adults so that parents accept children’s territories and respect such territories as the children’s right, which both parents and children should protect. However, such “independence” is only in the Japanese context and is not common among other three countries.

#### KOREA

Children in Korea irregularly receive unfixed amounts of pocket money in general (see Fig. 50.8). What was extremely different from Japanese children were their responses to the questions concerning money interchange of children with their parents. Concerning the statement, “I can demand money of my parent when money is insufficient to buy what I want,” children in Korea made more affirmative responses than children in Japan, and the statement, “It is not good for a parent to borrow money from his or her child when he or she does not have small change,” had the lowest support in Korea among the four countries.



**Figure 50.9** The average answer to the item “Repayment not wanted from parents” in the four countries; 1=totally against; 2=somewhat against; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat in favor; 5=totally in favor.

Concerning the items classified by who pays to buy them, they basically fell into the categories similarly with those in Japan. The first one is for the items for which parents pay regardless of age of their children, such as tuitions. The second category is items for which children did not use their money when they were in primary school but start to pay for by themselves as they grow, for example, buying friends a meal and gambling with friends. The third category is items for which parents paid before but now children pay by themselves. Between Korean and Japanese, some fell into different categories, but, except for some minor but seemingly important differences, they shared the same pattern. This indicates children expand their own worlds out of control of their parents. However, the last category was unique to Korea. This category includes items for which parents paid when children were in primary school and children receive money on as-needed basis when they are in high school (10th to 12th grades), including expenses at amusement parks and expenses to buy their clothes.

As indicated by the second and third categories, when children in Korea grow, they create their own living world out of their parents' control as children in Japan do. However, their way of receiving and using pocket money and attitudes toward money interchange between children and parents differ from those in Japan. In Korea, money is flexibly interchanged between children and parents through negotiation as seen in the cases where children demand it from parents when children need money and children accommodate parents with money when parents need money. Such flexible money interchange between parents and children can be said to be the "independence," or mutual dependence, which is specific to children in Korea and is different from that in Japan.

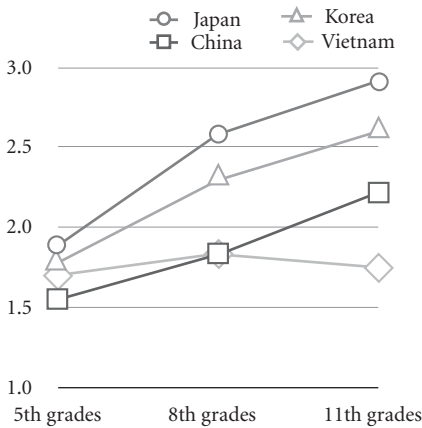
#### VIETNAM

In the case of children in Vietnam, many do not receive pocket money in the first place, and money does not penetrate into children's lives as it does in Japan and Korea (*see* Fig. 50.8). Even in interviews, children said they would buy snacks using money intended for breakfast or the change they got when they ran errands. Their attitudes toward money considerably differed from those of children in Japan. In all countries, when children receive large amounts of money, like New Year's pocket money, many parents manage such money. In the case of children in Vietnam, children sometimes ask parents to keep

their money, for example, "If I keep it, I may lose it or use it for something bad, so I trust my parents with the money." They are also negative toward receiving pocket money as compensation for doing their household chores. They said, "As everybody does household chores, receiving pocket money by doing them is bad," or "(Doing household chores is) something like duties. My parents gave birth to me and raise me, so, helping is them is natural."

Responses made in Korea and Japan to the questions and statements concerning money interchange between parents and children were contradistinctive, but, those in Vietnam and Japan were poles apart in a different sense. Many responded affirmatively to "A parent does not have to return the money he or she borrows from me" (*see* Fig. 50.9), while few gave affirmative answers to "A parent should keep their word in any circumstance when he or she promises to give me pocket money," which is opposite in Japan. Responses to "I can demand money of my parent when money is insufficient to buy what I want" were affirmative as seen in Korea, but, what it means in Vietnam is different from what it means in Korea. In Korea, responses are made in the context that money interchange with parents can be flexible. However, in Vietnam, there is no strained relationship related to the "my-money-versus-my parents'-money" mentality. Rather, money is the parents' own, therefore, children can be given money from parents only when necessary.

Compared with other countries, children in Vietnam have fewer opportunities to get money and use it. In addition, they are very cautious about money. On that basis, they tend to judge their given money as belonging to their parents. When children are asked if they can use money for their own pleasures such as buying CDs and their clothes, more and more children in the other three countries judge they can do so as they grow older. We consider this to reflect expanding children's living world of independence from their parents. However, in Vietnam, such tolerance does not rise as children grow older (*see* Fig. 50.10). This can be explained by the aforementioned reason. Children's paying for school fees and daily necessities and foodstuff for home consumption using their own money is not evaluated positively in Japan, and in particular, children's paying school fees using their money is evaluated negatively (regarded as being not good). However, in Vietnam, it is evaluated positively as a good deed. As observed so far, in Japan, children's territories are to be protected instead, and those that



**Figure 50.10** Average answer to the items related to “play” in the four countries; 1=not permitted; 2=must receive parent’s or guardian’s permission; 3=freely permitted.

go beyond those territories (school fees and food-stuff for household consumption are out of those territories) are not desirable. In Vietnam, money is basically possessed by parents and under parents’ control, therefore, using money for family or parents’ benefit is a good deed.

**CHINA**

As in the case with Vietnam, many children in China do not receive pocket money (see Fig. 50.8). Also, children in China respond negatively to the statement, “I can demand money of my parent when money is insufficient to buy what I want.” Also, what was shared in interviews indicated a strained parent-child relationship with strong love. The following is the interview we had when we asked a respondent which would be better: to use money and buy what the respondent wanted or to save money.

Child: I think it’s better to buy a thing.  
 Child: When I buy a thing, it’s my own, but, when I save money, my mother uses it in case of necessity.  
 Questioner: Your mother uses your money in some cases. Does it happen to you quite often?  
 Child: Yes, it does.  
 Questioner: At that time, will your mother pay you back?  
 Child: No.  
 Questioner: Yanjin (pseudonym), do you want her to return it to you?  
 Child: I want.

A different child answered that the child was sometimes asked by the parents to buy daily

necessities using the child’s money. The parents answered they made the child use the child’s money in that way because it was not good for a child to have a lot of money, and the child replied it should be natural because it was the parents’ money. Different from Japan, where parents consider their children’s feelings and rights in advance, parents in China use their children’s money half-forcibly, regarding it as parents’ money, and parents in many cases directly express their feelings such as love and anger. For example, in an interview, parents who said they did not control their child’s use of money and left money to the child’s discretion remembered an event when the child used a lot of money for play although the child should have saved it. The parent could not control the anger and continued to talk about that without giving the interviewer any chances to interrupt. In that sense, questionnaire responses of children in China and Vietnam show a similar tendency. However, different from the cases of the children in Vietnam for whom money is clearly possessed by parents, children in China face their parents’ strong emotions and, in ways commensurate with that, money mediates the parent-child relationship.

In this way, when observing a normative structure which exists in each country through comparison, we find an identical behavior (or a response to an identical question) may have different meanings among different countries. Thinking of the children in Japan that “parents should repay when parents use children’s money” is considered to be immature reaction, which proves the child’s inflexibility, in the Korean context. And it is considered to be deviation from the norm that my money is parents’ own according to the Vietnamese context. On the other hand, in the Japanese context, negative responses to this statement are supposed to be an immature reaction that fails to separate children’s territories from those of parents. Likewise, even when the same responses are made, they are made occasionally because of different reasons in different cultural contexts. Parents’ using their children’s money is not unreasonable, because money is initially the parents’ own in Vietnam, money is to be interchanged between parents and children in Korea, and children have no choice but to accept it because of the power relationship between parents and children in China.

In the research practice of cultural psychology of differences, researchers who live in their own cultures mutually try to understand meanings of

behaviors in different cultures (norms that govern behavior) while reflecting upon their own culture of understanding. Descriptions in this section are normative structures in different cultures that were extracted as the result of such practice. Then, how do those different normative structures emerge before researchers in the research practice? In order to simplify, we shall take ratings regarding treating friends (ogori, which means to purchase something, usually foods or snacks for friends) and Dutch treat in Japan and Korea as an example of contradistinctive behavior found in two countries for detailed analysis.

***Treating a Friend (Ogori) in Korea and Dutch Treat in Japan: When Norms Emerge***  
**STATICALLY EMERGING CONTRADISTINCTIVE STRUCTURE**

Children in Korea and Japan rated different items, such as snacks, books, deposits, and contribution to a church, by whether or not using money for them is right/wrong, or acceptable. When cluster analysis was carried for each country by pattern commonality (change of right/wrong evaluation and tolerance levels in accordance with average age), three distinctly common groups were extracted. One commonality is that items are classified into three groups of high, medium, and low in terms of both right/wrong evaluation and tolerance levels. Another commonality is that tolerance levels for all items become higher as age increases in each country. The items that belong to the highly valued group are nearly common between Korea and Japan: Items for which using money is supposed to be socially desirable such as contribution, savings, gifts for family members, stationary, and study books, are included in this group. Remarkable difference was found in the group for which both right/wrong evaluation and tolerance levels were low. Gambling belongs in this group both in Korea and Japan. In addition to that, in Japan, items like school fees, buying friends snacks and meals, and lending a friend money are included in this group. On the other hand, those items belong to the medium group in Korea. This indicates the contradistinctive structure between Japan, which is negative to directly paying money for friends such as ogori, and Korea, which is not very negative to money-mediated friendship.

Korea and Japan show significant difference in response to the questions and statements that directly refer to friendship concerning money. As the result of factor analysis on questions and statements, two

factors were extracted. One of them is included in the statements such as, "Treating or being treated is not good," and "Borrowing even small amount of money from a friend causes trouble to the friend." The statements and questions that include this factor consistently obtained high scores (support) among children in Japan. Another factor included in the statements such as, "I do not hesitate to lend my friend money when the friend is in trouble," and "Buying my friends snacks is more fun than having them alone." Different from Japan, children in Korea consistently show high support to the statements and questions that included this factor.

Interviews in Japan and Korea also disclose the contradistinctive structure concerning money-mediated friendship like "negative" Japan versus "supportive" Korea. Examples of children in Korea: "An extremely big amount becomes burden, but, a small amount is acceptable (8th grade, female)"; "When I buy for a friend, the friend will buy for me next time, and when I don't have money, a friend buys for me, which is good (4th grade, male)"; "Treating each other is good. Paying only for myself appears to be unkind (8th grade, female)"; and "It does not become [a] burden (11th grade, female)." On the other hand, examples of children in Japan are as follows: "Buying snacks is bad, because it's [a] waste of my money I saved very hard. (3rd grade, female)"; "Bad, because it's money my father worked [for] and earned (3rd grade, female)"; and "(Treating is) not good, I think it's not good. Don't you think being equal is better? (11th grade, female)."

Nevertheless, we should be careful when viewing such contradistinctive structure statically. Even in Korea, some made negative remarks about treating. Likewise, in Japan, some children made affirmative remarks about treating. Korea: "It depends on a person. Some don't [mind] being treated, and some others want to pay for themselves (9th grade, male)." Japan: "Buying snacks for friends is acceptable (2nd grade, male)"; and "We buy snacks for friends, exchange candies, [buying] snacks is not bad (3rd grade, female)." In fact, even in Japan, when we observed children shop at mom-and-pop candy stores and supermarkets, we occasionally saw that a child bought snacks to share with friends.

Observation Example 1: At the big supermarket, 6<sup>th</sup>-grade boys A and B. At 5:00 p.m., they came into the store. They were glancing at cartoons, but did not seem to look for any specific book, just looking at books. After that, they went to the sweets corner at

the 1st floor, and A chose two candies and paid at the checking counter. He gave one to B, and then, while sucking the candies, they went upstairs looking at toys at the 2nd floor.

The first issue is why we find a static contradistinctive structure in daily life practices, which are actually incoherent or contradictory and include various elements. The second issue is how such contradistinctive structure is related to daily life practices. The third issue is the ontological position that the found contradistinctive structure assumes. We shall analyze our research practice to respond to those issues.

### EMERGENCE OF A NORMATIVE STRUCTURE

Japanese researchers who live in the Japanese culture read interviews held in Korea, and raised simple questions when discussing with Korean researchers: “When you treat someone, the person would feel obligated to treat back. Don’t you think you put a burden upon the person?”; “In Japan, we do treat, but, it is because of hierarchical relationship, which means we would not treat in the case of equal relationship”; and “Well, a parent gives pocket money to his or her child, so, using that money for someone else is very bad, isn’t it?” Those simple questions strongly frustrated Korean researchers who affirmatively repeat treating in their practical lives: “If I eat alone even though the other does not, why do you think it can be equal?”; “I will buy when I have money, and my friends buy for me when I don’t have money. But, such friendship does not imply any hierarchy”; “Pocket money is used not only for myself but also for others”; and “Parents discipline their children to eat with their friends when they are together.” Even in the discussions among researchers, a paired contradistinctive structure emerges disclosing the conflict between “us” (Korean researchers) who affirmatively support treating and “you” (Japanese researchers) who deny treating.

Such paired structure emerges steadily even in interviews.

Japanese researcher: Which happens more often, treating each other or splitting a bill?

Korean child: Splitting a bill happens more, and it seldom happens that someone pays all.

Japanese researcher: Ah? It has long been in that way?

Child: As I’m a student, I don’t have a lot of money, I put my money together to pay for myself.

Japanese researcher: When going Dutch, in that case, in Japan, each pays for what each ate, but, which case do you mean, do you mean dividing all equally?

Child: No, that is not the case, add all, calculate the total, and split.

Japanese researcher: After all, you split it. As was expected. What Dutch treat means slightly differs.

Korean researcher: Different.

Japanese researcher: Dutch treat is slightly different.

Korean researcher: Different.

Interviewer: Ah, then, well, treating is not very good?

Child: Well, I do not feel it’s not good. I treat when necessary.

Interviewer: A-ha, when it is necessary. I see. So, it does not mean it is not good.

Through interviews with Korean children, researchers from Japan heard those children give answers that indicated that “going Dutch” was different from that in Japan and they did not regard treating as being not good. Thus, the researchers “discovered” differences. To verify, they repeatedly asked children questions and found such differences to be consistent.

In a different interview, a mother who initially pointed out danger of treating referring to juvenile delinquent problems, talked about her own treating experience and, while we interviewed her on negative valuation in Japan, she finally supported treating, with some conditions like “If that is a small amount,” or “If she or he is a good friend,” mentioning “If going Dutch all the time, I feel it selfish.”

For children, it should be an unprecedented and very strange experience to talk with a stranger from a foreign country and be asked questions. In addition, the stranger asks questions about the child’s common practices, which the child usually implements but has never subjectively thought about before the questions were asked. Feeling embarrassed, the child recalls the child’s own usual behaviors and answers, finding reasons for those behaviors. This is the typical interview we had. In our interviews, we asked children what children would think about opinions in Japan (in a different country) that treating others is not good because pocket money is for themselves, and that treating is not good because treating others will make others (who were treated) feel obligated. With those questions, the child recognizes that the behavior the child and other friends unconsciously implement is regarded as being negative, and the child and parents who are interviewed start to talk

about the logic of “their behaviors” systematically as culture beyond individuals like “I” and “myself.”

Treating is not unique only to Korea. Many in Korea also say treating is perceived as a big burden in daily life and many usually go Dutch. On the other hand, when observing children in Japan, it is not very rare to encounter situations where they treat their friends. In an interview, in addition to the voice of an interviewer as an individual, the other (as nature) beyond an individual emerges before a child and a parent. Here the interviewer appears to them not as a neutral researcher, but as a “member” of Japan who represents Japanese culture. Voices of the interviewees in Korea included personal voices by which each individual interviewee talked about personal experience. Nevertheless, those voices also included the voices to advocate their “correctness beyond individuals” in opposition to others, which they explored and found through the interviews with Japanese as others. During the interviews, the voices to tell the reality and the voices to tell the philosophy and culture exist concurrently. In that sense, the voices of interviewed children and parents themselves become polyphonic.

### Summary

Our pocket money research disclosed the following three points. The first is that money is not merely a simple tool for exchange in the frame of market economy but also serves as a tool to mediate human relationships in different cultures and those norms mediate its use as such a tool. The second point is that norm structures differ among cultures and an identical behavior has different meanings. When a norm structure in a certain culture is identified, the meaning of the behavior also becomes clear. However, the third important point is that this structure does not exist as a consistent preference in a cultural group but emerges dynamically in research processes, which we can perceive only when it is crystallized and becomes static. Cultural psychology of differences does not aim to extract such crystallized “culture (cultural difference)” as substance but intends to demonstrate the possibility of “understanding” (different) culture through analyses including those on the crystallization process and develop the prescription for that. This is not to know crystallized “culture.” But, it is to know the crystallization process, which deepens the insight about “understanding” of (different) culture and shows the practical way to “understand.”

### Future Directions

In this chapter, based on the theoretical perspectives of cultural psychology of differences and our empirical data, we proposed that money as a basic tool supporting economic activity in the market is not a mere tool for exchanging goods, but a cultural tool for connecting people, which should be understood from a broader theoretical framework. Economic activity is one of actual examples of human communication in general, represented as EMS, which includes multilayered mediational relationships in it. The medium of economic activity not only has characteristics as a tool, but also is a possession of agent of the activity and has appeared for him/her as a resource having its own value for controlling. Money, in the context of the individual concrete human relationship, appears as having different norms in different social groups. Culture, then, appears as differences of mediational characteristics of norms, and such differences are generated, realized, and functioned each time when communication between people in different social groups is performed. Our project, whose objective is to shed light on the cultural meaning of people’s practices around money, becomes possible as the meta-dialogical practice between researchers, who themselves have different communality.

Economic activities of human beings have much broader characteristics than we have discussed. We, cultural psychologists, are standing just at the start line of the frontier of this new research horizon. Here, we will propose only a few points of future directions of the research from our theoretical viewpoint. First, we need to theoretically establish the basic characteristics of money as a culturally universal economic tool on the grounds of cultural psychology. There appears to be a deep conflict between money as a universal tool and money that has specific meaning in specific cultures, when a global market economy quickly spread into a society. Next, we need to analyze multifaceted and multilayered relationships of economic activities from the perspective of EMS. Economic activities in the market, from the direct exchange between people to government’s economic policy making and global companies’ economic activity, are developed simultaneously, or in other words multilayered structure of the economic communication in the market is becoming. Whereas EMS presented in this chapter mainly focused on the relationships between individuals, it builds networks and/or hierarchical structure of socioeconomic systems. And third,

cultural psychology of differences will propose a theoretical framework to educational practices for understanding different cultures and ameliorating conflicts between them in the global market. Present-day globalization is not the process toward the monotonous stable economic system, but the process of continuous networking between active agents of a variety of cultures, while they repeatedly meet and part with high fluidity across the border. Understanding other cultures is not to make static inventory of differences between other cultures and his/her own, but to experience instability of his/her own seemingly stable communality and to generate new communality, i.e., normative mediation, with people of other cultures each time. Our research is in itself a part of meta-dialogical activity trying to reconstruct researchers' culturalities or communalities, and has a role to create dialogues between people in different cultures and a new communality.

## Acknowledgments

Our project was supported by Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research of JSPS. The members were Ito Tetsuji (Ibaraki University, Japan), Kim Soon-Ja, Choi Soon-Ja (Daejin University, Korea), Zhou Nianli (Huadong Normal University, China), Wo Jianzhong (Beijing Normal University, China), Phan Thi Mai Huong, Nguyen Thi Hoa (Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam), and the authors of this chapter. And the cooperators include Zhang Yingmin, Watanabe Tadaharu (Beijing Normal University), Kominato Mai (Tanaka Institute for Educational Research, Japan), Li Changhan (Yanji International School of Technology, China), Lee Yung-Woon (Korea), Hyun Jung-Hwan (Seoul Theological University, Korea), and many other people.

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# The Authentic Culture of Living Well: Pathways to Psychological Well-Being

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## Abstract

This chapter deals with cultural construction of life courses—in illness and in health. Patients—or people who have fallen ill, in general—are usually treated by the health-care institutions as “vehicles of disease” as they are assigned new social roles in the medical setting. The inner world of patients has been respectfully disregarded as residual features of no central importance. Even as two disciplines—medical sociology and qualitative nursing research—have recently tried to transform the situation, their way of understanding patients’ narratives and meaning making processes should be of enlightening value for the medical profession. Assuming a process-oriented research standpoint that takes the notion of time seriously is imperative for such efforts. Since the social power of the medical profession intrinsically controls the patients’ lives—in or out of medical settings—a new type of qualitative research on illness and wellness as built from the viewpoint of patients is needed. Both micro-ethnography and a qualitative approach in cultural psychology are promising and useful approaches for applying to this new mission. Thick description of one’s daily life is needed and it might be called “life ethnography.” Theoretically the notions derived from Trajectory and Equifinality Model (TEM) such as zone of finality and multifinality are useful to understand the personal-cultural construction of the feeling of being (and staying) alive—and well.

**Keywords:** Trajectory and Equifinality Model (TEM), promoter sign, future perspective, life with illness, multifinality

A key axiom in medical anthropology is the dichotomy between two aspects of sickness: disease and illness. Disease refers to a malfunctioning of biological and/or psychological processes, while the term illness refers to the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease.

(Kleinman, 1980, p. 72).

Open-ended plasticity occurs when organisms respond to new stimuli by constructing new adaptive developmental paths or trajectories

(Ginsburg & Jablonka, 2007, p. 221)

For a long time, it has been thought that the idea of culture is the one that relates a person with a

specific location—country, community, or the like. The uses of the term in history of anthropology reinforced that idea. However, cultural psychology—building on the centrality of the notion of signs as emphasized by Charles S. Peirce, which is also traceable in the work of Lev Vygotsky—has the possibility of offering a theoretical base that allows us to think about culture without being “caught” in any particular place. Valsiner (2001, p. 32) insisted that “culture belongs to person,” since culture is functioning within the intrapsychological systems of each person. And it is through signs that culture acts as the mediator within a person.

In this chapter we look at sickness experience as cultural organizers of human lives. As the quotation indicates at the top of this chapter, Kleinman (1980) insisted that two aspects of sickness should be differentiated: disease and illness. Then we take the notion of illness more seriously than one of disease. Earlier Eisenberg (1977) pointed out this discrepancy between illness and disease. He said that patients suffer *illnesses*; doctors diagnose and treat *diseases*. And also he said that illnesses are experiences of discontinuities in states of being and perceived role performances. Diseases, in the scientific paradigm of modern medicine, are abnormalities in the function and/or structure of body organs and systems. And the patient represents and implies a person being patient from the medical doctor's viewpoint.

We aim to invalidate the notion of *the patient* as "person who must be patient"—and follow all the orders of the medical system. Instead, we focus on the person's "*life with illness (LWI)*"—it is a life with extra difficulties (introduced by the disease)—yet it is a person's life filled with all the ordinary pleasures and disappointments. We all know illnesses are experiences of discontinuities in states of being and perceived role performances (Eisenberg, 1977). Even so, a person should not be called as "patient=suffering person." S/he lives with illness. *Life with illness* is one of the forms of human life. And it leads to the construction of its own peculiar kind of culture.

### **How Trajectory Equifinality Model (TEM) deals with Life with Illness (LWI)**

The Trajectory Equifinality Model (Valsiner & Sato, 2006; Sato et al., 2007, 2009) provides a good frame for understanding ruptures and reconstructions in personal culture under the conditions of sudden pathogenesis. TEM is the method to describe persons' life courses within irreversible time. The term *equifinality* is widely known because of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who is the founder of General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Equifinality is the principle that in open systems a given end state can be reached by many potential means. It emphasizes that the same end state may be achieved through many different means, paths, and trajectories. Variability of trajectories means richness of life. So the very first place of the conceptual adventure, equifinality and the trajectories that converge upon it are highly intertwined with

each other. Bertalanffy preferred equifinality better than "goal," equifinality isn't the dead-end-like goal point.

The reason why TEM is suitable for describing LWI is because TEM has incorporated the notion of a *polarized equifinality point*—an imaginary complementary class of usual and/or singular events that might exist—in contrast to the equifinality point that represents healthy life. Both the equifinality point and the polarized equifinality point are devices for relativizing the value system in existence. The polarized equifinality point is the place in irreversible time at which the personal culture of the person with illness becomes transformed into a new form. Here one can observe a new value system in its cultural emergence. That can happen in many ways—multifinality is useful for describing the person whose experience leads to new culture and new aims in life.

In medical sociology there exist investigations of patients' lives from the perspective against an official medical system. The study of chronic illness trajectory model by Corbin and Strauss (1991) is one of such studies. However studies from medical settings easily confound the patients' perspectives and the perspective of the medical system that is controlling patients' lives. The orientation of illness trajectory then should be criticized from the describing of the lives of people with illness. TEM is recognized as a promising method for the illness trajectory framework.

We propose the importance of the microgenetic approach especially in describing the life of patients or persons who are ill; in general, psychological research on human beings as medical patients has been rising since the latter half of twentieth century. At first, medical sociology and the studies of nursing became focused on research of social "deficits" of the patients (Parsons, 1951a). Then, patients from non-middle-class backgrounds did not fit well into the social regime of medical settings, and that misfit needed to be studied. Ethnography emerges as a useful resource because the mission of ethnography is to depict culture.

### **Illness Trajectory Framework from Nursing Research and Medical Sociology *Historical Context of Ethnography: The Archeology of Anthropologies***

Ethnography is defined as the art and science of describing a group or culture (Fetterman, 2008).

This term also refers to qualitative methodology or reports to describe a behavior pattern of the people through fieldwork (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993). Ethnography originated from early (cultural) anthropology and spread to other social sciences. Each discipline has its own way of studying diverse customs, so the deliverables are widely variable in the same “ethnography.” For example, micro-ethnography is commonly-used type of ethnography in psychology. Micro-ethnography is the study of narrowly defined cultural groupings such as a school classroom. Micro-ethnography is suitable for the study of “Life with illness,” especially the refractory and/or progressing disease.

To understand the features of micro-ethnography, let us start with looking back at the history of the anthropologies. This chapter gives weight to ethnography as methodology and explains how it is used in psychology today. Ethnography originated from early (cultural) anthropology, more properly from Bronislaw Malinowski’s work in the 1920s (e.g., Malinowski, 1922). He was also the pioneer of “empirical” fieldwork—and he also worked in the field—where he developed currently accepted anthropological research methods (such as participant observation). The term “*empirical*” implies another kind of anthropological research. Though now the anthropologist seems to be a fieldworker, as a person who actually goes to his research field, the typical anthropologist before Malinowski was not. This old type of anthropology could be called “*armchair anthropology*.” Armchair anthropologists depended on speculative discussion and got the data for their research from others who actually visited a field—usually places far away from their academic homes. The problem is, of course, all of their discoveries could easily become products of fantasy. Fieldwork, and ethnography as its product, got a foothold because they were expected to be a method to describe human life and behavior more directly.

The political aspect of anthropology cannot be ignored when we look back at its history. A number of anthropologists in the past worked as a part of a national strategy because ethnography was useful for understanding the culture of the people in their colony. This colonial anthropology aimed to make their colonial occupation easier and firmer by collecting the information about the different cultures through the European ways of seeing. Actually, the early “positive” anthropology transformed from armchair anthropology with using the real observation of the field, however the aim of anthropology

could not be transformed. This academic program should obey the interest of government and follow the mission to know the “native” of conquests/colonial lands (see Kuklick, 1991). The cooperation among government and anthropologists became pronounced in war time, especially during World War II (WWII). The study by Ruth Benedict is one of the notable examples. In her book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, as a cultural anthropological study, she showed indigenous features of Japan (Benedict, 1946). Although the book was published after WWII, the content was based on her war-time research. To understand the culture of Japan was considered to attribute to a strong position of control after the war.

New uses of ethnography are being adapted in urban sociology (see Kharlamov, 2011). Fieldwork and ethnography already attracted another discipline of social science in the 1920s. Sociologists in the United States applied those methods for exploring their interests. The so-called “Chicago school” tried to study a different culture within their own country. For example, Cressey (1932) described the social world of dancers and guests in the ballroom, and Whyte (1943) proposed the collision of local and total society as a cause of delinquency through observing various groups and communities in a slum district of Boston that was mostly inhabited by immigrants from Italy. Urban sociologists transformed the meanings of the term “ethno” from ethnic group in another country into some group who have different cultures in the same area (country). Subjects of research also could be varied.

“Anthropology of science” provides a unique example. Bruno Latour took a laboratory as his research field. A laboratory is not only the place of production of scientific knowledge but also the community in which scientists practice their daily works in a unique manner. In *Laboratory Life* (Latour & Woolgar, 1979) and *Science in Action* (Latour, 1987), he studied how the scientific truth was made, focusing on the process and network. One of the most important keys to this process is to grasp the local practice as it proceeds with time and build upon social relationships. Today, it is not enough to know about an unprecedented field. We may apply these perspectives to another more significant issue.

### ***Life Ethnography***

Recently, the subfield of life ethnography has emerged as a type of ethnographic research to describe the lives of people. People, especially those

who have incurable and progressive diseases, face continuous transformation of their symptoms and body. Life ethnography should not eliminate time, because the disease process is an ongoing and never-stopping experience.

The key points of life ethnography can be summarized into following points:

1. **Description of the system** of “life with illness”; patients live with various factors affecting their lives including caregivers, technology, institutions and so on. They also each have a historical and cultural background. Each researcher may take different methods to write a life ethnography, but it is important to understand the life of a patient within their network.

2. **Understanding each case** through exhaustive fieldwork.

3. **Notion of time and the emergence of signs of guidance**—e.g., “the aim of life.” Ethnography is to discover how people create signs that make them behave in various ways.

Mundane (daily) diaries and medical documentation are useful for understanding “time-full” process. The new possibility of bridging between medicine and psychology has just emerged. Life ethnography of refractory and/or progressive disease brings us the new exciting challenge. That is the dynamism under the maintenance process with the immobile body.

Although each discipline, including psychology, has different rules for describing a phenomenon with ethnography, the following points are shared in common:

1. Understanding human behavior including the context of his/her living through fieldwork.

2. Multi-method: participant observation, interview (both dialogue and group), document study and so on.

3. Generating hypothesis that is suited for explaining the phenomenon systematically through gradual focusing.

The unit of description—how and what should be described—differs between disciplines. There are a few exceptions to these methodological trends, but to summarize: anthropologists focus the structure of relative, ritual, customs, and so on; sociologists place more importance on institution; psychologists place a special emphasis on behavior, speech, and interaction of the people. This type of ethnography is called “micro-ethnography” because it is a

method for disclosing microgenetic behaviors and psychological processes.

The term “*microgenetic*”—originating in Heinz Werner’s version of rendering the notion of *Aktualgenese*—is important for describing human behavior within a specific time and space, or *chronotope*. According to Bakhtin’s conception, the *chronotope* refers to the interconnectedness of time and space in literature. The word “chronotope” literally means “time space” and is defined by Bakhtin (1984) as the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. Today, this notion is applied to narrative analysis. Life ethnography and narrative analysis of the life with illness become important promising areas in cultural psychology. Because we can understand that a disease experience is not only a biological/physiological event but is a socioculturally constructed event.

Life ethnography fits well with medical anthropology. Medical anthropology focused on the social processes and cultural representations of health, illness, and the nursing or care practices. Alan Young showed how the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was made into a disorder (Young, 1995). Disorder tends to be attributed to personal problems, but it cannot be constructed without medical and political background. Arthur Kleinman showed how the experience of chronic patients could be transformed, focusing on their narrative (Kleinman, 1988). Symptoms of chronic disease are not experienced as pure medical meaning, but experienced as a bio-psycho-social meaning. And illness is not simply a personal experience; it is transactional, communicative, and profoundly social. But again, we use “life ethnography” for emphasizing “life of person with illness” not of a patient in a medical setting.

### *Illness Trajectory Model*

Life of patients and/or developmental process of patients rarely gain a primary focus in psychology. Mental illness is an exception, because this is the main target of clinical and/or abnormal psychology. This is a clear gap in our knowledge—lives of patients should be treated from a psychological perspective. We have developed the new framework for it—the look at persons’ construction of their future life pathways based on reconstructing the past. Anselm Strauss and his colleagues started studying chronic illness in patients as early as 1960. Following intensive work, they focused on the conceptualization of managing and shaping the course

of an illness (Phipps et al., 2003). Furthermore, Corbin and Strauss (1991) developed a chronic disease trajectory framework following over 30 years of research on a variety of chronic illnesses. Because their model/framework is grounded on the research and practice of nursing, this is welcomed by nursing care models of different chronic diseases such as cancer, trauma, diabetes, mellitus, and stroke, among others (Kabinga & Banda, 2008). Corbin and Strauss's chronic illness trajectory model prescribes that the life course of chronic patients should be divided eight phases (they later added one more phase). Specific nursing management steps are invented for each phase. Illness, instead of disease, implies that lives of patients are embedded in social, cultural, and family context.

Although the phases from the chronic illness trajectory model are static and useful for nursing management, they are not useful for the lives of patients. Burton (2000) summarized the eight phases (instead of nine) of the illness trajectory framework:

The first stage in a trajectory (pre-trajectory) occurs before the onset of symptoms, and consequently before a formal diagnosis is made. This emphasizes the importance of illness prevention within a framework for managing chronic health problems. When signs and symptoms appear (trajectory onset), these can pose a significant threat to the physical, social or psychological integrity of an individual (crisis phase). The onset of symptoms may precipitate a period of illness that requires active intervention, usually in an in-patient setting, to prevent the worsening of symptoms, or the prevention of complications associated with the effects of the illness (acute phase). Where intervention is effective, a period of stability may be reached which will require varying degrees of intervention to maintain individual health (stable phase). An individual will, however, experience challenges to their recovery either directly or indirectly associated with their illness which require a reappraisal and adaptation of interventions, usually without admission to a hospital setting, to promote coping and stability (unstable phase). Responses to these challenges to recovery will at some point, however, be unsuccessful, and the patient's recovery may deteriorate (downward phase) to such a point that the patient may be terminally ill (dying phase).  
(Burton, 2000)

Corbin and Strauss's trajectory framework sets the illness trajectory up as a series of phases. Trajectory phasing represents the many different changes in status a

chronic condition can undergo during that course (Corbin & Strauss, 1988, p. 16). Phases are not simple time durations. They depend mainly on physical symptoms. A bio-psycho-social model of disease is not disregarded, but symptom-oriented phasing is necessary for the medical setting. Their framework as a grounded theory was developed from an extensive research program on *dying*, and was refined in studies that included a range of settings and patient groups (Corbin & Strauss 1992; emphasis added).

The aim of medicine is to save lives—which really means overcoming disease until the moment of death. So the value systems of patients' lives are embedded in a simple and/or uni-dimensional medical meaning system. This is inevitable. So if we want to think of the "life itself" of a patient, we need to think about the life trajectories that are far from the medical setting. The word "life" is not an antonym of the word "death." It implies daily activity (everyday life) and course of individual (life course, lifelong development).

When a patient goes to the doctor, he/she is seen not as a person who needs help with his or her health, but as a person who has an affected area to be treated. Even worse, he/she is seen as a potential component for the medical factory! Here Bakhtin's notion of *addressivity* (Moro, 2004) provides us the analyzing viewpoint in the microgenetic level. Sometimes modern professionals, including medicine, lose the addressivity of his/her profession. Medical professionals tend to deal with a patient as a part of an ill body rather than as a human being.

A patient is treated as an anonymous body by medical professions, i.e., medical techniques direct to an faceless body. These states may be the lack of *addressivity* (Bakhtin, 1986). It is also a trait of the outlook of modern human beings. If the (dialogical) act doesn't conclude without the addressee, the act of the medical-care personnel doesn't conclude. Moreover, the problems are acute—the patient cannot reply to the medical discourse. The lack of dialogue will bring patients the feeling of imperfection and the duty of "concentrating on treatment." However, the person tends to live with the expected prospects, and the person cannot help thinking about the thing after treatment. If the present medical-care personnel are busy, it seems possible to adopt a system including a support person such as a Child Life Specialist (CLS). A CLS is a pediatric health-care professional who works with patients, their families and others involved in the child's care in order to help them manage stress and understand

medical and various procedures (Armstrong-Dailey & Zarbock, 2001). CLSs are trained professionals with expertise in helping children and their families overcome life's most challenging events. They focus on the psycho-social development of children, and encourage effective coping strategies for children and their families under stress (Swanson, 2005). For a productive research orientation, different perspective is needed. For a productive research orientation, we need to focus on the living process of patients rather than the dying process of patients. Here, we rename the living process "life trajectory."

### **Life Trajectories for the Person with Illness**

Life trajectory approach, not illness trajectory approach, focuses on each illness person's life—not the process for dying. It's a thick description for the lived life of a person with an illness. Depicting dynamics of living may lead to understanding the thickness of life. Pursuing life trajectories depends on the new methodology of Trajectory and Equifinality Model (TEM; Valsiner & Sato, 2006; Sato et al., 2007; Sato et al., 2009). In the case of uses of TEM, researchers focus on subjectively important events of the person and treat those as the equifinality points (EFPs). The history of TEM is interdependent on the development of the notion of Historically Structured Sampling (HSS; Valsiner & Sato, 2006) the function of which is to replace the standard random sampling techniques for systems that do not satisfy the axiom of independence of its elements. All human systems consist of non-independent parts and cannot be "randomly" sampled. From the viewpoint of sampling philosophy and technique, the procedure of HSS consists of "equifinality sampling" i.e., the equifinality point in which researchers have an interest is the experience to focus on.

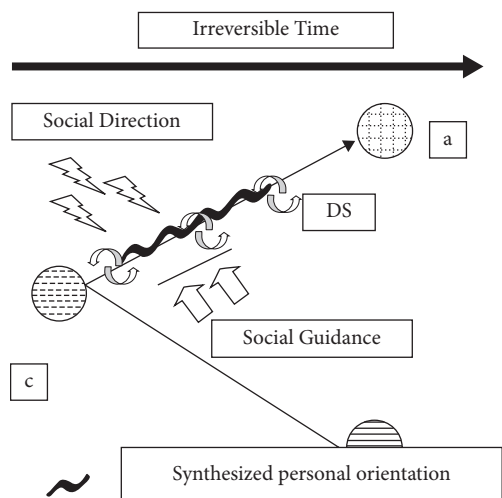
Sato et al. (2007) emphasized that equifinality does not imply sameness—which is an impossible condition in any historical system. And the more important thing is setting the polarized equifinality point in TEM. Since equifinality point depends on the researcher's focus and/or research questions, EFP only shows one aspect of phenomena. We need to show some kind of complement set of EFPs. So we set up polarized EFP (PEFP) for neutralizing the implicit value system of researchers. PEFP makes researchers notice the possibility of invisible trajectories. Since the setting of PEFP might be regarded as the pluralizing of the finality points, it implies the multifinality of the life. TEM has focused the

trajectory in the past for equifinality point, but now, the description of future perspectives of each person is regarded as a new practical issue of TEM.

TEM has been developing for a few years quickly and the notion of multifinality is the promising brand new idea to depict the uncertainty of ongoing life within time.

*Bifurcation point* is the location on a trajectory when and where new direction emerges. Bifurcation point (BFP) is a point that has alternative options of where to go. What would happen at the BFP?

According to Sato and Valsiner (2010), we can see in Figure 51.1 the two opposite powers that conflict between social direction and social guidance. Each person is supposed to have his/her original orientation to EFP. It is called "*Synthesized Personal Orientation*" (SPO) and SPO reflects the fluctuated orientation and open-systemic nature of a human being within irreversible time (Sato, Hidaka, & Fukuda, 2009). A person proceeds with one's orientation as an open system (which means orientation is not internally derived) and struggles to realize his/her own orientation against the social directions (SDs) with support of social guidance (SG) supplied by the intimate social relationships. The focus on social direction derives from Valsiner's (2001) idea and it should be defined as some kinds of sociological cultural power. It might be said to include "common sense," tradition, social norm, and social pressure. On the other hand SG is the power of defense against the social direction. SG is the power supplied from the intimate persons such as a family,



**Figure 51.1** The making of the future: BFP as the point of transformation and blooming time (Sato & Valsiner, 2010)

friends, teachers, and others. Simply speaking, SD is defined as the power of inhibition to go to EFP, and SG is defined as the power of promotion to go to EFP.

**Lessons from Life of Intractable and/or Chronic Disease and Notion of Finality: Uncertainty and Genesis of Multifinality**  
*The Patients' Life of Intractable and/or Chronic Disease*

Akasaka (2009) examined how people with chronic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) live with their illness and describe their experience of pain. IBD is a group of inflammatory conditions of the colon and small intestine. And it is an illness of uncertain etiology. Six patients with IBD were interviewed regarding their medical history and experience of illness. From their descriptions, four steps in the process of coming to terms with their illness were identified: “confusion; fear of change,” “seeking an explanation and encountering a diagnosis,” “uncertainty; seeking future,” and “reconstructing meaning.” Because the IBD is an illness of uncertain etiology, the third phase of “uncertainty” has a double meaning. These are uncertainty of cause and uncertainty of prognosis. And patients tend to illusorily correlate the hypothesized cause and their worsening symptoms.

Nishida (2010) examined communication deficiencies and misunderstandings between care receivers and caregivers through one in-depth case study. In this case, the care receiver suffered from a severe progressive disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS) and lived in a single household. The study finds the following problems in the patient’s situation:

1) caregiving services were subdivided among a number of separate subgroups by provider and this grouping seems to be lack of organization from the receiver’s position;

2) though the patient had difficulty in self-determination as his disease progressed, nobody played a coordinating role in providing care. Both patients and caregivers struggle with oppression, but avoid straightforward communication—because patients need the care to live and caregivers need to keep their jobs.

Hidaka (2010) has engaged in life ethnography work with the ALS patients. He says that it’s important for patients not only to respond to a life-threatening condition, but also to express their experiences and get involved in patients’ advocacy activity. Some

patients have used them to write a book or report for telling their experience to the society. Capacity of patients’ communication has been developed based on new computer technologies.

However, there are problems for continuous use of assistive technology. A research showed one-third of assistive technology is abandoned within 3 months because of the lack of effective supporter(s). On the other hand, in a few exceptional cases, a few patients have been using assistive technology continuously with a supporter. Hidaka (2010) reported one person with ALS using his cheek for communication at home with 24-hour-a-day care. This person should stay in bed during the whole day with a respirator, but he can enjoy using a computer for writing and communicating others. His activity is supported by many people around him. These include family members, medical and co-medical staff, and the peer supporter. The peer supporter is a person with the same disease (in this case, ALS) and has a specialized skill (in this case, computer technology). The peer supporter knows both disease and technology, so he can deliver necessary and sufficient support for the person with the illness in bed during the whole day. In this case, the person with severe ALS got ALS a long time ago and now he has finality that was never construed before his pathogenesis.

***Frame of Transition Process of Pathogenesis of Intractable and/or Chronic Disease***

These are three examples of uncertainty in the life with illness. And uncertainty is the important feature of the transition process of becoming patients. We can identify the frames of transition as follows. Frame is the key concept, which is derived from Fogel’s (2006) work on dynamical system approach. Salgado and Gonçalves (2010) insist that frame is not a static concept but runs in sequence.

The frames from the perspective of life ethnography and life trajectory approach are below. Here we use the term “frame” to focus on the meaning-making process of a person with illness.

**Table 51.1 Frame of transition process of pathogenesis of intractable and/or chronic disease**

Singular finality
Evaporation of finality = Uncertainty
Zone of finality
Multifinality

Finality is the key concept of Trajectory and Equifinality Model (Valsiner & Sato, 2006; Sato et al., 2007; Sato et al., 2009). Before getting an illness, a person has the singular finality of a healthy (and usually means normal) person, which is unique to each person. Each person could have their own finality respectively. But if person got an illness, the finality he/she has had is usually under crisis. The finality evaporates and uncertainty emerges.

From the theoretical demand of TEM, a singular finality should be relativized by another complementary finality, i.e., polarized EFP. For the TEM, the polarized EFP (PEFP) should be set so that the model might avoid evaluating the life course by a dominated single voice. Being affected by intractable and/or chronic disease is a moment when a previously formed finality (for healthy person) should evaporate. Then a PEFP should replace the EFP, but it's difficult. Because not only EFP but also PEFP has been set for the healthy person. PEFP is not a second-best finality for new patients. So both EFP and PEFP vanish simultaneously. Then uncertainty emerges.

Uncertainty is the period during which patients are in most unstable condition. For considering aspects of uncertainty, Hermans's theory of dialogical self in globalization era is useful. In the context of globalization, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) referred to the notion of uncertainty. They define the experience of "uncertainty" as a condition where different authors ascribe alternative meanings. So a more detailed description is required. They see the experience of uncertainty as composed of four aspects: (a) complexity, referring to a great number of parts that have a large variety of relations; (b) ambiguity, referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one part is determined by the flux and variation of the other parts; (c) deficit knowledge, referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that can resolve the contradictions between the parts; and (d) unpredictability, implying a lack of control of future developments.

The experience of uncertainty characterizes a situation of multi-voicedness (complexity) that does not allow a fixation of meaning (ambiguity). Positioning as a healthy person is at stake and an "I-as-patient" position is not easily formed. Some kind of multi-voicedness emerges. Not a voiceless but a multi-voice situation creates uncertainty.

Some persons in uncertainty may hear no voice and need a voice from others. Others may hear a lot of voices from others and be confused about which voice is adequate.

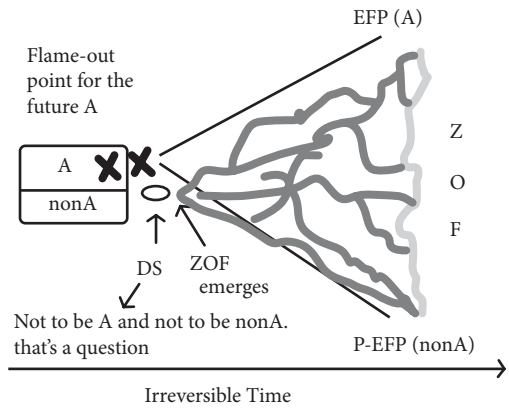


Figure 51.2 Zone of finality

Struggling with such a vague situation, a "new" patient begins to accept the condition. And a position of "I-as-patient" is added to the repertory. After an uncertainty period, a new finality should be formed but it might be ambiguous. The zone of finality (ZOF) appears. (See Fig. 51.2.)

Under a "usual" life, each individual has his/her own aim. It depends on the value system of healthy people. And equifinality point of an ex-healthy person should disappear when he/she gets severely sick. And a new equifinality point cannot emerge soon after such a rupture. He/she tends to lose desire to achieve the original aim and sometimes a person loses the aim of life (some might choose to die). So when a flame-out or wreck experience evaporates the EFP, an alternative finality should emerge. But it's difficult to clarify this second-best finality, so the finality should be ambiguous and form the zone of finality. Here we use "zone" instead of "point."

Then the role of dialogical self is important. The person who is suffering should ask oneself (self-dialectically), "So what is the next aim? Which way should I take?" Even though one cannot answer this question, one should begin to start new journeys. Even a next finality is neither clear nor discrete.

### Quality of Life and Beyond On Measurement of "Quality of Life"

Quality of life (QoL) is one of the well-known concepts in psychology and related areas. There are so many measurement scales of QoL now. We wonder whether *quantitative* measurement of *quality* of life is possible. It's an ironic contradiction. In the measurement of quality of life, the QoL of refractory and/or progressive diseases seems to be evaluated as low and valueless, because their sickness gets worse and—such



development means an increase in hopelessness. For example, the patients with ALS disease gradually get worse—in the end they cannot move any muscle. Persons who gradually lose their muscular power should stay in bed all day and cannot move by themselves. Yet some patients can establish contact with friends and family by using Internet technology (IT). They manage to control IT devices with the muscles they can use. One person uses cheek muscles for controlling a computer. Another uses left-foot muscles. Then can write books, paint, and so on. They are enjoying their lives in their own way.

Given this reality, any score of an activities of daily living (ADL) questionnaire misleads us to estimate the quality of life to be low specifically when the score is regarded as the index of improvement. Barthel Index (BI) is a scale used to measure performance in basic activities of daily living. ADL scales focus upon a range of mobility, and self-care tasks, and ignore issues such as pain, emotions, and social functioning (Fayers & Machin, 2007). BI consists of many daily living activities. In one example of feeding, the standard is below. BI is evaluated by using in Japanese medical situations:

- 10 = independent,
- 5 = partial help with eating or needs help cutting,
- 0 = unable.

So—if the person can't spread butter, the evaluator gives him 5 points to indicate the need for "help with eating." Spreading butter is the anchor to rate the level of feeding activity. Here we must note that even if spreading the butter might guarantee a good level of ADL, a person who cannot spread the butter should not be regarded as low ADL. But is this right? The item of ADL only reflects the viewpoint of medical professions.

Let us consider the functional independence measure (FIM) (Keith, Granger, Hamilton, & Sherwin, 1987). The FIM measures 18 items over six different domains by a 7-point scale: (a) self-care, (b) sphincter control, (c) mobility, (d) locomotion, (e) communication, and (f) social cognition. These items are construed from the viewpoint of medical professions, not from the patients' viewpoints. And more importantly (that means worse), scores on such items are difficult to change with the patients' situations.

### ***Equifinality for the Person with Chronic Disease and/or Progressive Disease***

What's the equifinality for the person with chronic disease and/or progressive disease? Parsons

(1951b) proposed the *sick role concept*. The *sick role concept* consisted of four main principles:

1. The sick person is not at fault for being sick;
2. The sick person is excused from usual (everyday) responsibilities;
3. The sick person must get well as soon as possible;
4. The sick person must seek professional help.

"Being sick" is not simply a "state of fact" or "condition" (Parsons, 1951b). The sick person is exempt from normal social roles. He/she should try to get well and also has to say "push myself to the max." Maxim one, first, is the institutionalized definition that the sick person cannot be expected, by "pulling himself together," to get well by an act of decision or will. In this sense also, he is exempted from responsibility, as he is in a condition that must be "taken care of." Maxim two, the second closely related aspect, is the exemption from normal social role responsibilities (p. 437). Maxim three is the definition of the state of being ill as itself undesirable with its obligation to want to "get well." And Maxim four seems reasonable, but let us not forget that any imbecilic act is prohibited and supervised by people surrounding the patient.

One criticism of Parsons's sick role is that there are limits to its application. It is good for a person with an acute disease but not for a person with a chronic disease (such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and arthritis). How do we think about the patients with refractory and/or progressive diseases? Is there no hope? Parson's sick role is not cut out for the patients with refractory and/or progressive diseases. Patients really want to "get well" as Parson's maxim three says, but maxim four never will be completed. On maxim two, they don't make themselves be exempt from mundane social roles, instead, taking normal social roles such as being a father or mother and using it as motivation for struggling with their difficulties. As Parson's four principles of sick roll indicate, the life should totally change compared with before being sick. Patients' aims and finality should be transformed. Usually, a healthy person has his/her finality from the healthy person's viewpoint. Being healthy and free of illness is one of the popular wishes for a "normal" person. Being healthy is so ordinary to many people, it's difficult for healthy people that health status is not permanent. And they often have anxiety, complaint, and other negative feelings to pursue their wishes and dreams. Based on the health state, many people struggle to live. And

the premise (i.e., healthy state) is never doubted. Getting a disease is a very big rupture and it deconstructs all aspects of life without disease. Singular finality decays and uncertainty emerges.

Here let's consider disease as an adorable dimple. The noun *patient* is a denominative noun. This noun comes from the adjective word, "patient." Disease could be regarded as some positive feature like dimples on one's cheeks. Being sick is not a role but an "individual characteristic" or "personal quality." Not "disease" itself, but "life" with disease should be regarded as respectable. Even though the concept of QoL has gradually been accepted as an important therapeutic goal for chronic diseases in the most recent two decades, there is some confusion in the procedures to measure QoL and the aim to measure QoL.

Measurement of QoL has been developed by psychometrician, so quantification is regarded as an important principle. And quantification leads us to focus on the "objective" aspect of life experience of patients. If QoL of patients' life should be grasped from their subjective sphere, then we would need another kind of methodology.

### ***The Person as a Co-Investigator in Research***

George A. Kelly published *The Psychology of Personal Construct* in 1955. He assumed the human is a scientist. That means people seek to make sense of the world as we experience it by building and testing hypotheses about "how the world works." Then each person creates and maintains an individual way of interpreting the world. He called this individual frame of interpretation a personal construct. The personal construct system made by this empirical process was called a personality (Kelly, 1955). Inspired by the scientific exploration of Kelly's work, Hermans and Bonarius (1991) regarded the participants in psychology studies as "co-investigators." This means that the subject/participant should also be allowed to take a much more active role in psychological research. Between investigator and participant of intersubjective communication constructs of interaction, such a process of interaction should not be understood as the communication of the professional and the layperson (i.e., patient). This intersubjective interaction should be regarded as the coalition of two different kinds of the professionals; the researcher has specific knowledge, and the researchee is also a specialist who knows the special condition of his/her own self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The Schedule for the Evaluation Individual QoL (SEIQoL; O'Boyle et al., 1991; O'Boyle et al.,

1992) which is one of the methods of measuring QoL, might be also influenced by Kelly's position. The SEIQoL is designed to measure three elements of QoL: (1) those aspects of life a person considers crucial to his/her QoL, which are elicited by means of a structured interview, (2) current functioning satisfaction with each aspect, (3) the relative importance of each aspect of QoL, which is measured by deriving the weight the person assigns to each in judging overall QoL (O'Boyle, 1994). Actually, the investigator asks the question of participants, "What are the important 5 domains for your QoL?" in the administration manual (O'Boyle, et al., 1995). The especially important one is the process where five QoL domains are nominated. When this measurement is carried out as Hermans and his colleagues say, the intersubjective conversation is composed between the patient and the investigator of the patient's QoL domains. The patient can nominate any situation as the content of own QoL-related item. The situation inevitably includes his/her value system, beliefs. And the item is useful for the investigator to understand that patient. Because the nominated item reflects the aspects of the patient's self. If "Health," "Family," and "The relationship with medical staff" are called QoL items, they reflect the patient's value system. In other words, the patient conveys individual QoL to the investigator, from the specialist of his/her own life. Then, the investigator could learn about patient through using SEIQoL (i.e., patient's illness, ordinary experience, and individual situation) from their narratives and dialogical conversation are not only good for measuring individual QoL but also knowing the individual meaning system. In addition, when the patient can't list five domains, the investigator gives examples from his/her experience and an existing domain's list. Just then, the patient becomes an investigator who researches for the domain that relates to individual QoL within him- or herself. The investigator will help to expand choices of the patient's QoL domains as a co-investigator, not for study but for the patient.

### **Theoretical Implications**

#### ***Epigenesis is Not Necessary for Multifinality***

Waddington (1956) had an interest in explanation of the linking of genetic and environmental factors in development. In Waddington's own words,

One can make a mental picture ... of development of a particular part of an egg as a ball running down a valley. It will, of course, tend to run down to the bottom of the valley, and if something temporarily pushes it up to one side, it will again have a tendency

to run down to the bottom and finally finish up in its normal place. If one thinks of all the different parts of the egg, developing into wings, eyes, legs, and so on, one would have to represent the whole system by a series of different valleys, all starting out from the fertilized egg but gradually diverging and finishing up at a number of different adult organs (Waddington, 1966, p. 49).

Waddington's landscape (Fig. 51.3) implicitly links to the increasing entropy. But in a human's life, some kinds of conversions appear. This is what we call equifinality points. Multifinality is not what Waddington suggested. His model's main character is a solid ball, which is a closed system. It never interacts with the surrounding field and never has the future perspective. The open systemic nature of human is disregarded in Waddington's theories.

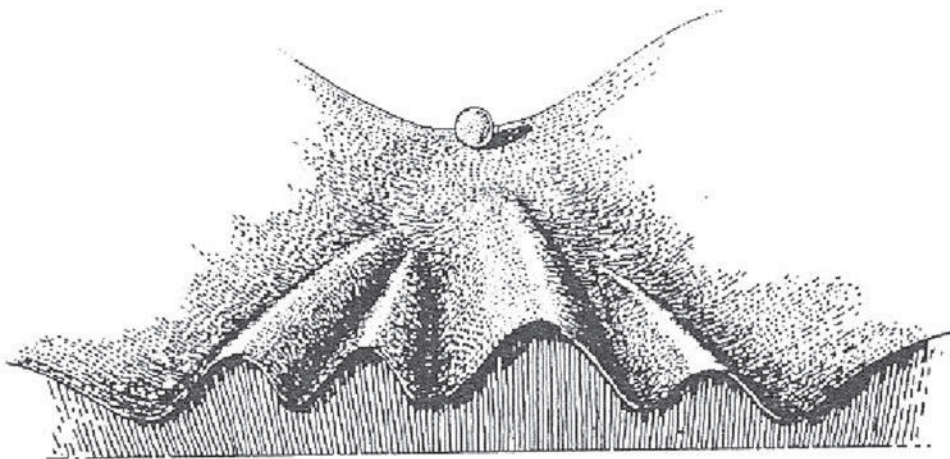
### ***Multifinality from the Perspective of Life with Illness***

The notion of equifinality originates in Driesch's biological work. Driesch performed a series of experiments intervening with sea urchin cells during division and causing them to fragment. Instead of forming a partial embryo, Driesch found that the cells formed an entire one. Here the same final state may be reached from the different initial conditions and from different ways. This is what Bertalanffy (1968) called equifinality. Despite Driesch's vitalist general philosophy, von Bertalanffy built his organismic perspective on the basis of the multi-linear developmental model along similar directions (Fig. 51.4).

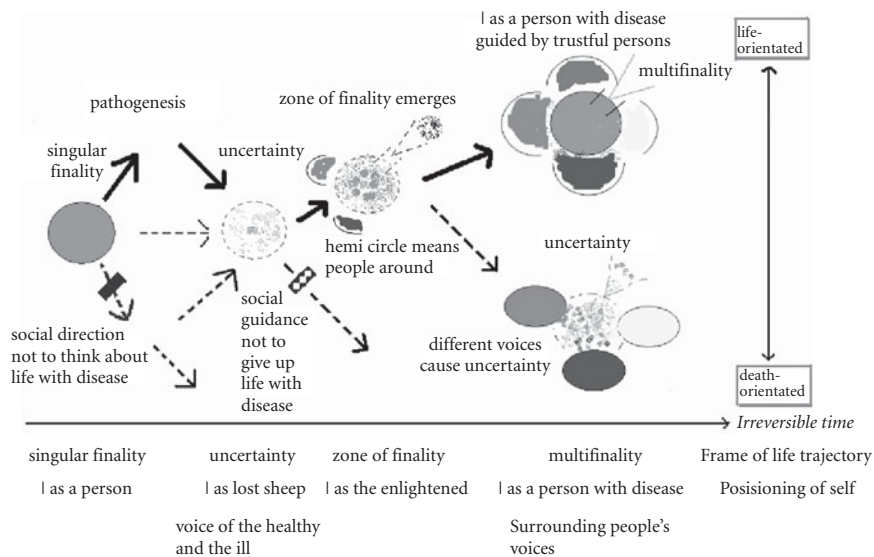
Life is ruptured when a person gets a disease. *Singular finality* is decayed and uncertainty

emerges. Overcoming one's disease is the new aim and medical professions assist patients. It fits to treatable diseases. If patients recover fully, this story is not so bad. But, what if it is an intractable and/or chronic disease? From the viewpoint of patients, unclear prognosis image is formed (*zone of finality*), but this vague finality is repressed by clear finality derived from medical professions. Dominant messages from medical professions should be transformed into alternative messages from the perspective persons with disease. Some research on intractable disease patients has pointed out that uncertainty is the key notion of the state. In general, the well-planned equifinality point "A" disappears, then uncertainty emerges. The future is not clear. First, there is no voice to hear, then voices from medical professionals come next. Finally, many voices appear and make the person confused. Uncertainty reflects a complex process. However, the single finality from one voice is dangerous for the patients. Although multi-voiced situations make patients confused, some other finalities should emerge. *Multifinality* is the notion for opposing the dominant story from the medical profession only. Multifinality ensures an atmosphere in which patients in the uncertain situation can select freely patients' own ways of living. Multifinality in one's own historical trajectory should not measure the variable in a person but should understand the whole person with illness.

The notion of multifinality in this paper has two interwoven connotations. For understanding "QUALITY" of "LIFE" (Caution, it is not the abbreviation of QoL) with severe disease, we



**Figure 51.3** Waddington's "Epigenetic landscape" (Waddington, 1966, p. 49)



**Figure 51.4** Hypothetical trajectories of intractable disease persons.

should distinguish different types of multifinality. Deconstructing the singular finality of the healthy person and reconstructing finality is a kind of multifinality. And constructing and differentiating the finality as a person with illness is another one. And an item-generating system for QoL such as SEIQoL is needed. In usual quantitative scales on QoL, items on the scales are provided from medical profession's perspective.

### ***Multifinality as a Spatial Extension of Finality***

TEM is a new methodology derived from such a demand that is embedded in the context of ethnography. TEM has been developing for a few years quickly and the notion of multifinality is the brand new idea to depict the uncertainty of ongoing life. Social sciences, including psychology, benefit from utilizing the notion of multifinality because this can depict the emergence process of future perspective in the living. It's especially useful for treating the dynamic of living with disease. Parsons (1951) proposed the sick role concept. "Being sick" is not simply a "state of fact" or "condition" (Parsons, 1951b). The sick person is exempt from normal social roles. Lacking a role means losing the guides from the world. An uncertain future emerges and then DS occurs. Self struggles to encounter the promoter sign, which leads the sick person to certain future. Thick description of the lived life might be achieved by TEM with some notions such as Hermans's dialogical self and positioning. Dialogical self is

the spatial extension of self. And Hermans clearly looked at the era of globalization. Researching the diversity of finality all over the world is a challenging task for cultural psychology. Hermans (2008) suggested that extension of the self in space leads to the study of the dialogical self as the interface of globalization and localization. TEM doesn't actually have the spatial viewpoint, but TEM can be applied to understand the different models of the sign in various cultures. The notion of multifinality brings us, especially people living and struggling with disease, such a new journey.

The restriction of activity resulting from illness causes the low QoL of patients and creation of alternatives leads to higher QoL of patients. The Schedule for the Evaluation Individual QoL (SEIQoL) stands on a constructive approach and is a tool for understanding the patient's QoL from the patient's perspective. Patients can decide their important domains for a custom-made QoL score. Constructing multiple QoL domains is really promising support for the patient. Family, medical professionals, and other people around the patient should bear such important task. TEM, from the perspective of time, and SEIQoL, from the perspective of place are both necessary for understanding the daily life of persons with disease. And the notion of multifinality bridges the time and place. The living experience of persons with illness should be understood from the perspective of chronotope and it means cultural psychology must open the door to new research and a new practice paradigm.

## Concluding Remarks

In cultural psychology, that general mechanism is found in the functioning of signs (semiotic mediation) (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007, preface). Culture can be seen as a systemic organizer of the psychological systems of individual persons—culture “belongs to” the person. Again, culture “belongs to” each individual person. It is irrelevant that the persons “belong to” culture, ethnic group, or country, since culture is functioning within the intrapsychological systems of each person. Here culture is applied to an each subgroup of human being.

The person with a disease must be regarded as “having their own culture.” Such a view brings the authenticity to the so-called “patients.” In this chapter, we focused on the culture and/or meaning making of a person with illness. We proposed not to use the word “patient” because this is too often a medicalized word. This is because cultural psychology aims to describe the living person’s life.

Social sciences, including psychology, benefit from utilizing the notion of multifinality, which makes it possible to depict the emergence process of future perspective in the living. TEM is the new methodology that is embedded in the context of ethnography. TEM has been developing for a few years quickly and the notion of dialogical self from Hermans makes it possible to understand the moment a healthy person confronts getting an illness. We should treat patients’ lives within irreversible time from the ill perspective.

## Future Directions

In this chapter, we proposed to focus on *life with illness* (instead of *patients’ lives*) as one of the forms of human life. And this leads to the construction of its own peculiar kind of culture. From the viewpoint of cultural psychology derived from the “sign” psychology of Vygotsky, culture is not necessary to hold the notion of actual time and actual place. The person is influenced by multiple signs of many “cultures.” So we should focus the person to know culture within the person. *Life with illness* prepares to open the door to turn to a brand new form of cultural psychology. And its main premise is, “culture within person, not person within culture.”

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## Psychology Courting Culture: Future Directions and Their Implications

Jaan Valsiner

### Abstract

Eleven propositions for future development of culture in psychology are outlined, based on the 51 contributions to this handbook:

- (1) History of psychology includes valuable resources for innovation in psychology in general and cultural psychology in particular;
- (2) cultural psychology can assume no single cultural system as normative;
- (3) cultural psychology needs to construct culture-inclusive research methodology that is free from the sociopolitical constraints of the “quantification imperative”;
- (4) cultural psychology needs close conceptual links with contemporary biological sciences—especially developmental biology;
- (5) cultural psychology shares conceptual concerns with other social sciences—anthropology, archaeology, urban sociology—and benefits from its unity with those;
- (6) cultural psychology studies structured oppositions that give rise to new cultural forms through human actions;
- (7) the future of cultural psychology should include studies of fixed-feature objects;
- (8) cultural psychology investigates regulatory processes of nonlinear kinds (in contrast with assuming models of linear causality);
- (9) cultural psychology creates data from various sources: cultural processes and products;
- (10) cultural psychology needs to elaborate the notion of participation that stands at the intersection of person and society, and
- (11) cultural psychology needs to develop a meta-reflexive stand in the form of cultural psychology of social sciences.

The macrosocial context of globalization works in favor of the integration of culture in psychology since the worldwide encounters of persons of varied backgrounds render mutual understanding necessary. Such understanding is possible on the basis of the know-how of cultural psychology.

**Keywords:** future, culture, psychology, methodology, globalization

Science is totally opposed to opinions, not just in principle but equally in its need to come to full fruition. If it happens to justify opinion on a particular point, it is for reason other than those that are the basis of opinion: opinion's right is therefore always to be wrong. Opinion *thinks* badly; it does not think but instead *translates* needs into knowledge. **By referring to objects in terms of their use, it prevents itself from knowing them.**

—*Bachelard*, 2002/1938, p. 25, boldface added

Culture is the source of both knowledge and opinions—and our task in this final chapter is to keep the science of cultural psychology from being hijacked by the latter. For example—an opinion that “culture matters for psychology” does not help us to specify how that—whatever is considered culture—enters into the actual interplay of psychological functions. In this sense, social sciences create their own impasses by relabeling “person is individual” into “person is social,” or “thought” into “cognition.” The relabeling entails opinions—shared or contested in scholars’ discourses. These disputes may be lively, and leave the impression of creativity. Yet in reality they are mute—they block inquiry by insisting that the new “black-box explanation” they insist upon, is in itself an explanation. For example, statements “*X is caused by culture*”—often made in counter-argument to “*X is caused by genes*”—are both statements of opinions that block, rather than enable, further inquiry. The opinion is the final station of the moving train of thought.

The mechanism of such end of inquiry is simple. It operates by the economic feature of the common sense. When one creates a label—a nominal cause—the focus of the discourse is removed from *how can we discover the ways in which complex processes work into the processes work* by way of *X that causes them*. The attribution of a category membership becomes a declared cause—or at least one that becomes interpreted as if it were a cause. As the attributions are often generic and operate at the level of general perspectives, such discourse becomes precisely the arena of expressions of opinions that Gaston Bachelard so vehemently dismissed back in 1938. Such opinions neither open a new field for inquiry, nor contribute to solutions to old problems.

There are other epistemological obstacles to solving the question of how culture exists in the *psyche* as well. In our common sense we are used to operating with mutually exclusive notions. The best example comes from the ever-recurrent efforts to explain human psyche through attributions to either of two general categories—the *nature* (genes, etc.) or the *nurture* (the upbringing, social conditions, etc.). Different researchers take positions in favor of one versus the other—or sometimes even talking of *interaction between* both—yet these opinions explain nothing and are not generative for future research. For example, child psychology is filled with such disputes. At times attributability of causality goes to the “inborn”—at other time to “the acquired”. Such flip-flopping between attributions of causality

for development is no solution. Thus “either-or” issue has been overcome in contemporary epigenetics since the 1960s. It is only when the general categories offered for the field are left without causal insertions—such as the history of the notion of the self in immunology (Löwy, 1992)—that their generative role for actual innovative inquiry can proceed.

### **Future Perspectives Elaborated: Eleven Propositions**

This handbook has systematically included the view of the future as a regular theme in all of the chapters—and the editorial goal of mine here is to arrive at a kind of meta-synthesis of all the promises that thinking about culture has for psychology. In other terms—how could this “third coming”<sup>1</sup> of culture into psychology become successful in terms of revamping the science, rather than being a passing fashion.

How did culture re-emerge in contemporary psychology over the recent decades? Its first appearance took the form of honoring the traditions of psychology that treated culture—like gender, socioeconomic status, or school grade—as a variable. This led to the establishment of the cross-cultural psychology research community since the 1960s where culture operated as an index variable, making comparisons between different “cultural groups” possible. Such comparisons have prepared the ground for the “unpacking” of the notion of culture as it operates within each person. While cross-cultural psychology is a part of differential psychology (established as a part of psychology by William Stern in 1911), the up-and-coming (by the 1990s) cultural psychology belongs to general psychology. The transition from the differential to general psychology’s view on culture is evident in the central web resource of cross-cultural psychology (<http://orpc.iaccp.org/>, established by Walter Lonner and currently edited by Wolfgang Friedlmeier). The goal of cultural psychology is to explain the ways in which human cultural constructions—rituals, stereotypes, meanings, etc.—organize and direct human acting, feeling, and thinking in different social contexts (Cole, 1996).

I have repeatedly pointed out elsewhere (Valsiner, 1997, 2000, 2007, 2009a, 2009b) that the key to longevity of culture in psychology is the development of new methodology that is *culture-inclusive* (Valsiner, 1989). Of course the two ways in which culture is represented in our times—as a *container* and as a *tool* (see Figure 1 in Introduction to this Handbook)—renders that notion of culture



inclusivity into a realm where choices need to be made about these representations. Looking through the chapters in this handbook, I was pleased to see that the “container” image of culture is gradually vanishing. We still may observe authors using it as a kind of shorthand (“*in* this culture X, phenomenon A has been found, but not *in* culture Y”) but it is not a relevant part of theorizing. Instead, our discourses are moving to statements like “*through* cultural resources P and Q, phenomenon A can be observed by some persons in society X, at times.” The work on culture as a semiotic and symbolic resource (Zittoun, 2012) and in movement of human beings (Beckstead, 2012; Gillespie, 2006, 2010, Gillespie et al., 2012; Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012) illustrates this movement of our ideas toward their future.

So—we can outline the ways in which the culture as a psychological tool enters into our suggestions for future directions. Such suggestions for future directions are themselves opinions of the authors—yet these are opinions informed by the work covered in their chapters. As such, they can be viewed as germinal states of new directions—or at least that is my opinion! Looking through all the chapters in the handbook, it seems a set of “families of directions” emerge from our collective discourse. These can be formulated as a set of propositions.

***Proposition 1: History of Psychology is Not an Enemy of Innovation for Cultural Psychology***

A number of authors (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 2012, E. Boesch, 2012, Diriwächter, 2012, Jahoda, 2012, Magnus & Kull, 2012) emphasize the need to learn from the history of the sciences—psychology, language sciences, sociology, anthropology, biology—to find ways how our contemporary and future cultural psychology could productively proceed—or at the least avoid conceptual dead-end alleys that other disciplines have been caught in, in their pasts. This entails a **constructive look at history of science**—one that is often rejected in many sciences. Here our taking the constructive look allows us to see how scientific progress in a field is not merely the change from one positively flavored fashion to another (e.g., from “behaviorism” to “cognitivism” in psychology) as if that guarantees progress in knowledge. Rather, we can look at productive “upstarts”—such as *Völkerpsychologie* (Diriwächter, 2012), the differentiation and integration theory of Heinz Werner (Valsiner, 2005), the *Umwelt* theory of Jakob von Uexküll (Magnus & Kull, 2012),

William Stern’s personology (Lamiell, 2003), or Lev Vygotsky’s and Jean Piaget’s basic ideas (van der Veer, 2012, van Oers, 2012) as fruitful sources for further theoretical constructions. History becomes a tool for the further—cultural—construction of the field of cultural psychology. As a result, we find out that culture and mind are not different from one another—but facets of the same whole (Jahoda, 2012). So, the question is: how do they work together within the same whole—in the activities of an intentional person who lives in the present while anticipating the future?

***Proposition 2: Cultural Psychology Can Assume No Single Cultural System as Normative***

Both cultural anthropology and cultural perspectives in psychology were historically born in the European contexts, and could be seen as bearing the marks of sciences built on the needs of nineteenth-century expansion of colonial spheres of influence in the world. By the twenty-first century, that social process has changed—first ending the colonial dominance in the twentieth century, and currently entering into the new predicament of globalization with all its socio-economically positive and negative implications. Hence cultural psychology today—and in the future—cannot treat any cultural condition in any country now (e.g., the United States or European Union today) or in history (e.g., the ways thinking and cultural practices were organized in Ancient Greek *polises*) as normative. Cross-societal comparisons—like “the Americans are more X than the Japanese” that abound in cross-cultural psychology—are therefore indeterminate and difficult to interpret. It is usually the case that one of such comparison partners is set as a norm—and the other(s) treated as deviation(s). If “the American child” (a nonexistent abstraction across the wide range of Amerindian-Black-Hispanic-White and across the “welfare” to “CEO bonus-receiving” conditions) is said to be given one’s own bedroom after getting home from the maternity hospital, then the comparison with “the Japanese child” (another nonexistent abstraction glossing over similar heterogeneity in Japan—Lebra, 2004) who is said to be sleeping together with some other family member all through the childhood years—carries implicit normativity. “The American child” is seen as such—the norm—and “the Japanese child” becomes considered as at least an exotic different case or sometimes assumed to be even “problematic”—an “aberration”. The

reality may be precisely the opposite. A historical focus on family lives over centuries would make the “Japanese pattern” the norm for most of the World, and the environment of “the American child” a case of aberration—that could be labeled as “deprivation” (of close contact), “abandonment” (even if only for nighttime), or even “abuse”! It is easy to see how such wordplay changes the social positioning of the user of the language terms (Harré, 2012).

The relativity of such opinionated labels should make their nonsolid nature clear. It has implications for our science. The future of cultural psychology cannot be built on such imports of silent normative assumptions—in either direction. Thus, a mere reversal of the normative claim—considering joint sleeping a universal norm and treating “the American child” as a “night-time tactilely and emotionally deprived” case would amount to mere reversal of the location of the implicit norm. Instead, the future of cultural psychology entails transcending such remnants of the “we” *versus* “the exotic others” contrasts, and looks at the shared general backgrounds (e.g., functions of sleeping) and their multiple cultural forms in different societies, and at the variation within any society. This focus on overcoming implicit normativity in cultural psychology has been the trigger for the emergence of the “indigenous psychologies” movement in the second half of the twentieth century (Chakkarath, 2005).

The “indigenization” of psychology is inherently ambivalent. It emerges in the context of Occidental misrepresentation of the Orient (Chakkarath, 2010) that is imbued by prejudices. While initially being demonstrations of the sophisticated nature of local cultural systems, the tradition of “indigenous psychologies” raises the constructive issue for the future: How can indigenous psychologists find a common definition of their discipline and their relationship to other culture-sensitive psychologies, including cultural psychology? Furthermore, psychological methodology can profit from indigenous psychologies’ know-how (Chakkarath, 2012)—yet it needs to be charted out how that know-how could constructively revamp psychology’s methodology (Branco & Valsiner, 1997). What emerges is the call for developing methodology to look and self-hybridizing persons in the contexts of heterotopias (Kharlamov, 2012). We are all “indigenous”—confronted by the expectations to develop into another state, while retaining our “original identity.” The fitting example is that of an “ancient souvenir” seller at the entrance to a tourist site (Schmid, 2008; van der Spek, 2008),

or the selling of “Hispanic foods” in a separate aisle in a regular North American supermarket. All of psychology is indigenous—Germany, where psychology emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, could be viewed as a discipline growing out of the customs and representations of an indigenous society. It was a society unified by language, yet disunited by the political-administrative orders of around 1,500 different aristocratic enclaves. It was further disunited—already in the sixteenth century—by the North/South separation of the Protestant and Catholic areas. For all intents and purposes “Germany” at the time was a heterogeneous social conglomerate within which psychology emerged through its own indigenous German language terms (e.g., *Geist*, *Seele*) that up to now have no fitting translations.

Furthermore—being indigenous means being on one’s road to transcend that state—develop. All persons—and their social contexts—are constantly undergoing development, and to capture “the true state” of a person—or of a society—is an impasse for a social science. In the globalizing world, people are constantly relocating themselves and their minds. They, allow their minds to be exposed to TV dramas and Twitter messages, and embrace all new technological innovations with fascination. Following this, scholars in their analyses escape binary oppositions between “culture-as-it-was” and “culture-as-it-is-becoming”—in society (Rasmussen, 2012) or within the mind (Valsiner, 2007). Cultures are always in the process of development. Turning to different indigenous psychologies for discovering the range of various concepts can bypass the cultural blinders of one society’s heritage.

***Proposition 3: Cultural Psychology Needs to Construct Culture-Inclusive Research Methodology that Is Free from the Sociopolitical Constraints of the “Quantification Imperative”***

This is possibly the central proposition on which the survival and future development of cultural psychology depends (Toomela, 2012; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010; Valsiner, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). How can scholars in their analyses, escape circular arguments concerning individual/culture/collectivities and local/universal processes—the question raised by Rasmussen (2012) is being answered by Toomela (2012) in the theoretical realm. Traditional models of linear causality do not fit for complex cultural phenomena (Beckstead et al., 2009).

It is precisely here where history of the sciences provides us insights of why our contemporary science has reached a plateau, and how some of the customs of psychology are social rather than epistemological constructions (Cowles & Davis, 1982; Danziger, 1990, 1997). The General Linear Model and its causality image (A causes B) that stands behind the turning of methods (such as analysis of variance into theories (Gigerenzer, 1993). Turning any method—quantitative or qualitative—into a theory is an inductive move that puts into place of the theory all the initial assumptions of the method (Gigerenzer & Sturm, 2007). New methodology of cultural psychology is necessarily a process-based synthetic direction in methods construction. It involves units of analysis that are not numbers, but process structures (Valsiner et al., 2009).

The root metaphor of the question of units in psychology has been the contrast between water (H<sub>2</sub>O) and its components (oxygen and hydrogen)—used in making the point of the primacy of the Gestalt over its constituents widely in the late nineteenth to early twentieth-century thought. The properties of water are not reducible to those of either hydrogen or oxygen—water may put out a fire, while the constituents of it burn or enhance burning. Hence the whole—a water molecule—is more than a mere “sum” of its parts. Furthermore, it is universal—the chemical structure of water remains the same independent of whatever biological system (e.g., human body, cellular structure of a plant) or geological formation (e.g., an ocean, or in a water bottle) in which it exists. Lev Vygotsky expressed the general idea of what a unit of analysis needs to be like in psychology:

Psychology, as it desires to study complex wholes ... needs to change the methods of analysis into elements by the analytic method that reveals the parts of the unit [literally: breaks the whole into linked units—*metod ... analiza, ... razchleniyushhego na edinitsy*]. It has to find the further undividable, surviving features that are characteristic of the given whole as a unity—**units within which in mutually opposing ways these features are represented** [Russian: *edinitsy, v kotorykh v protivopolozhnom vide predstavleny eti svoistva*].<sup>2</sup> (Vygotsky, 1999, p. 13)

Vygotsky’s notion of units fits into the general structure—emphasizing the unity of parts and focusing on their relationship. Yet it is easy to see how Vygotsky’s dialectical units—into opposing

parts of the whole—goes beyond the water analogy. Water does not recreate itself into new form—while human cultural processes do. The adequacy of the quantification of such processes needs to be examined every time the researcher opts for the use of quantitative methods.

***Proposition 4: Cultural Psychology Needs Close Conceptual Links with Contemporary Biological Sciences***

Keller (2012) emphasized the need for developing an integrated concept of culture and biology, and Christophe Boesch (2012) provided an example of where culture and biology meet in the study of primate culture. Theoretically such unification would emerge from contemporary epigenetic thought (Tavory, Jablonka, & Ginsburg, 2012) and has already been elaborated for developmental science (Gottlieb, 1997). Return to the history of the studies of the meaningful organism-centered relations with the environment (the *Umwelt*—see Chang, 2009, Magnus & Kull, 2012) allows cultural psychology to overcome the use of exclusive categorizations (such as “individualism” *versus* “collectivism”—Sinha & Tripathi, 1994) and to treat the opposites as mutually intertwining functional parts of the whole system. Such a move entails abandoning the strategy of defining citizens of a country as “a cultural group” (Keller, 2012)—as the imprecision of notions like “*the American* [meaning U.S.] culture” or “*the Indian culture*” is counterproductive to our development of knowledge. Such homogenizing any heterogeneous conglomerate of many cultural practices—which are constantly undergoing transformation—through the use of country labels to specify “a culture” is a conceptual impasse (Chaudhary, 2004; Chakkarath, 2012). Contemporary cultural anthropological studies share that concern leading to seeing culture (and society) in terms of fluid, dynamic, and relational notions (Rasmussen, 2012). A similar direction can be observed in developmental psychology (Keller, Poortinga, & Schölermerich, 2002).

***Proposition 5: Cultural Psychology Shares Conceptual Concerns with Other Social Sciences and Benefits from Its Unity with Those***

The need for such interdisciplinary synthesis results from the realities of twenty-first-century living—rather than from the various tendencies of social policies of the disciplines involved. As

Rasmussen (2012) emphasizes, culture and society and the persons comprising them can no longer be reduced to clear-cut, essentialized entities, and their localities are no longer always literal, geographical, or neatly bounded. This claim gets further support from the unification of theoretical realms of archaeology (Gonzalez-Ruibal, 2012), educational (Daniels, 2012) and urban sociology (Kharlamov, 2012). Human beings live in places—they modify space by way of cultural construction of its meanings. Their intentional actions (E. Boesch, 2012; Eckensberger 2012) lead to the creation of symbolically encoded spaces that have been studied by geographers, sociologists, and environmental psychologists—yet with no direct focus on their cultural organization. Cultural psychology can become the field that unites the variable perspectives from these disciplines. The movement in cross-cultural psychology toward including culture as a concept—rather than a variable—is a promising step in that direction (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). This movement specifies how cross-cultural psychology in its focus on comparisons of groups from different societies (“cultures”) is striving to set up an explanatory toolbox for making sense of complex and varied human phenomena.

**Proposition 6: Cultural Psychology Studies Oppositions (Gegenstand)**

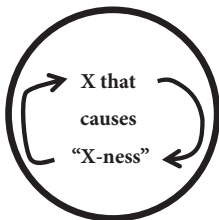
It is time for psychology at large—and cultural psychology in particular—to return to the study of tension-filled oppositions that generate novelty. This means a careful reconsideration of the history

of dialectical philosophies of Fichte, Hegel, and their later nineteenth-century followers, whose role in the history of psychology is mostly overlooked in the twentieth century (Valsiner, 2012). That ignoring has its sociopolitical roots and can hence be explained—yet the restoration of inquiry of social sciences in directions that include observations of unity of opposites in one whole is a valuable new direction. It has already happened in one area of psychology—the investigations of the Dialogical Self (Hermans & Gieser, 2012) and in positioning theory (Harré, 2012). The tradition of looking at multivocality of the mind (Brockmeier, 2010; Wertsch, 1991, 1995, 2002) and history (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009) have set the stage for further work in this direction.

Return to the focus on the oppositions—the *Gegenstand*—entails a move away from an essentialistic view of phenomena (see Fig. 52.1A) to that of a relational and oppositional one (see Fig. 52.1B).

Most of psychology has been hostage to explanation of psychological phenomena that are categorized together (e.g., examples of avoiding entering into social encounters in public settings, classified together as “being shy,” i.e., X-ness  $\rightarrow$  X in Fig. 52.1A) by an essence projected into the human psyche as if it were a cause (“shyness” as a personality trait is assumed to explain “being shy” phenomena). In contrast, the *Gegenstand* view (see Fig. 52.1B) considers “X-ness” (“shyness”) to emerge from the tension that results from goals-oriented movement and the “barriers of resistance” to such movement (see Stephenson, 2005,

1.A. The projection of causes



1.B. Analysis of oppositions



“x-ness” emerges from the tension between the goal-directed movement (arrow) acting upon resisting barrier, resulting in tension

**Figures 52.1A and 52.1B** From essentialist concepts to *Gegenstand* tensions. 52.1A: The projection of causes; 52.1B: Analysis of oppositions.

p. 565, on Goethe's focus on sensuous experiencing; see also Ingold, 2004, on feet as culture-creating tools). *Gegenstand* is a structured opposition that triggers tension—and the latter can lead to various states—*status quo* of the tension, overcoming of the tension, or abandoning of the movement. The barriers that set the stage for tensions in the human case are conditions of culturally structured environments. The analogy with biology brings us to emphasize the processes on borders—membranes—as Marsico and Iannaccone (2012) amply demonstrate (also see Marsico, Komatsu, & Iannaccone, 2012). Methodologically, that perspective entails the study of human actions in relation to culturally meaningful internalized (“Girls are not good at mathematics.”) or externally presented (“Smoking kills!”) signs in the human life-worlds.

What would be the impact of the *Gegenstand* view for the future of psychology is that the axiom becomes accepted: psychological processes are inherently dialectical (Verhofstaat-Denève, Adrianssens, Braet et al., 2000). It would refocus the discipline from its current efforts to empirically prove that commonsense notions of the human psyche are true (Smedslund, 1995, 2009) and move toward the systemic and dynamic look at the actual flow of the psychological functions. Cultural tools and meanings operate upon tension-filled oppositions creating possibilities for the emergence of ever-new oppositions—while overcoming the present ones. That would make human developmental psychology possible (Valsiner & Connolly, 2003), and would provide further impetus to the study of how various kinds of risks (Heyman, 2012) are constantly constructed and reconstructed in human social activities. Return to the new uses of hermeneutics (e.g., Kirschner & Martin, 2010) promises innovation in the understanding of the dynamic complexity of the cultural psyche.

***Proposition 7: Cultural Psychology Includes the Study of Fixed-Feature Objects***

There is much to gain from joint work with archaeology where the objects found from different historical periods are carriers of cultural meanings. Gonzalez-Ruibal (2012) emphasizes the future study of interactions between human psychological processes and material culture beyond cognitive technologies and explicit symbolical objects. Psychologists interested in material culture have often focused on explicit cognitive or mnemonic technologies and artifacts—maps, computers, GPS,

compasses. Yet many other types of cultural objects are involved in both social and spatial orientation and are, therefore, worth of study by psychologists. In fact, other categories of cultural objects, such as houses or cars have been taken into account by cultural psychologists in their recent work. Their point in common is that they are artifacts explicitly inscribed with meaning. These may be buildings—or ruins that result of devastation after natural catastrophes (Groh, Kempe, & Mauelshagen, 2003) or wars.

The focus of cultural psychology is on people openly making statements with objects. Cultural psychologists can expand their research and include things that do not seem too relevant or meaningful at first sight, things that are overlooked or taken for granted by human actors. A number of contributions to this handbook (Beckstead, 2012; Kharlamov, 2012; Yamamoto et al., 2012) lead us in this direction. The result is recognition that these seemingly simple objects are representing culturally structured everyday life activities that are overdetermined by meaning complexes. The redundancy of cultural regulation leads to the construction of simple objects—ranging from chastity belts to cooking utensils, wedding rings, and cars. As Gonzalez-Ruibal (2012) points out, cars have to be explored in relation to urban space and houses, but also in relation to late-modern technologies of the self. Cars for many are extensions of their self—so are cellular phones or earrings. Real things also have to be confronted with virtual things and with the products of the cultural and moral imagination. How does such imagination lead to new cultural objects? The creation of Facebook is an example worth cultural-psychological study—in unison with disposable baby diapers, war memorials, and of the history of iconoclasm (Besançon, 2000; von Grunebaum, 1962).

***Proposition 8: Cultural Psychology Creates Data from Various Sources: Cultural Processes and Products***

The product/process distinction is important; some data sources provide evidence only of products (e.g., archeological finds from centuries or millennia ago)—others, only immediate and transitory (e.g., objects become transformed into something called *garbage* when put into ordinary looking boxes or sacks called *garbage bags*). These cultural products are generated by their corresponding processes—which give meaning to the products.

Most of the data psychology that has accumulated are product-type data—questionnaire answers, Likert scale marks on paper and on computer screen, etc. These data usually reflect opinions of the respondents, rather than the processes that lead to the expression of such opinions. The latter are similar to the temporality of the garbage—they can be changed, reformulated, and in all cases they retain their essential structure. Thus, an empty bottle thrown into a garbage can has similar temporal nature to a French person making an off-hand comment “Sarkozy is a Nazi” in a Paris café. That is an opinion—a forceful one—yet its (or its contraries’) value for the social sciences is negligible. In cultural psychology we need empirical data that may begin from the static picture of an opinion—but proceed to the analysis of how such opinions are generated (Salvatore, 2012). The processes of creating utterances are our focus of attention (Haye & Larain, 2011).

Psychology also abandons its data—the accumulated raw data, once analyzed, are usually thrown away (or shredded—another cultural task of maintaining secrecy that has created new tools). This is in dramatic contrast with paleoanthropologists who would carefully preserve every little bit of an excavated *Homo habilis* skeleton. Imagine Louis Leakey—after a discovery of a fossil bone and its careful description—throwing it out as it is no longer necessary. That would be considered—at least in scientific circles—a crime against humanity (and against its history). Yet in psychology such destruction of raw data has been rampant. Psychology does not possess common reference phenomena, and rarely reuses data from different historical periods. An example of how such use could benefit cultural psychology is given by Watzlawick and Valsiner (2012).

Furthermore, cultural psychology can benefit from treating new objects as data. Mass communication messages—TV “soap operas” or popular magazines for women, bike enthusiasts, or content lists of chemicals on water bottles—are all potential data sources. Literature—in the form of fiction, poetry, “self-help” books, or travel accounts—is a fertile resource for cultural psychology (Ionin, 2004; Valsiner, 2009d). The use of mass communication messages is particularly crucial since these messages play key roles in the guidance of human cultural regulation of their everyday conduct (Puche, 2012). This intersects directly with the social limits that have emerged and set upon contemporary inquiries

in the social sciences—although interviewing a living person about her suicide plans may require multiple approvals from “human ethics” watchdog institutions, pondering about the depths of the human psyche through reading and interpreting the characters created by Leo Tolstoy, Erich Maria Remarque or Orhan Pamouk are free of such constraints. It is rather unnecessary to recode the identity of Anna Karenina as “participant number 007” or “Olga K,<sup>34</sup>” and ask her to sign a consent form that promises referral to psychological counseling services should our interpretations of her suicidal ideations be traumatic for her. Aside from this obvious benefit to use classic literature as psychological data there are conceptual advantages that warrant the inclusion of literature as a data source for cultural psychology (Valsiner, 2009d).

***Proposition 9: Cultural Psychology Investigates Regulatory Processes of Nonlinear Kinds (in Contrast with Assuming Models of Linear Causality)***

Similarly to biological sciences (Tavory et al., 2012), cultural psychology’s explanatory models are of a cyclical nature involving the central notion of regulation by some part of the system of other parts. The move into the realm of regulatory models for cultural psychology entails careful look at the mutual feed-forward relations between parts of the system, and their hierarchical regulation. Culture amplifies interindividual variability (Maruyama, 1963, 1995) and through that makes empirical evidence always new in its forms.

New sources of empirical evidence for cultural psychology require new ways of looking at the creation of “the data.” The narrative direction in cultural psychology works at the intersection of “small” and “big” stories (Bamberg, 2006) where a tension can be observed. Breakthroughs in the look at higher-order psychological functions—such as moral feelings linked with divinities (Haidt, 2008; Jensen, 2010)—exemplify the reality of the study of cultural means that function in their hierarchical order.

The *hierarchy of levels* of organization is an inevitable given for all cultural psychology. If the systemic perspective is taken seriously, it necessarily entails at least two hierarchical and unilaterally nested levels—the whole and its parts. The latter are by definition at a level lower than the whole to which they belong. A special case in this move is the focus—brought to our future directions by Rasmussen (2012)—on how can the culture

concept be reformulated to encompass virtual aspects of human life? Psychology so far has paid little attention to anything that is absent from the observable phenomena—in the field or in the laboratory. Yet the inclusion of culture in psychology makes it imperative to include the virtual side of the regulatory system in our picture. While getting a glimpse of food, I, for some reason—not visible—look for a fork or for chopsticks—rather than using the hand. The part of the cultural regulation system that guides me—irrational (from immediate observer's point of view)—acts invisible, yet crucial.

***Proposition 10: Cultural Psychology Needs to Elaborate the Notion of Participation***

*Participation* is a general concept that has haunted the social sciences ever since Lucien Levy-Bruhl's query into Bororo self-identity as *anaras* (red parrots). Here the notion is given in its abstract form. Contemporary efforts to bring culture to psychology deal with the notion of participation in its concrete sense—persons' taking part in the activities of the community. Barbara Rogoff's notion of *participatory appropriation* entails acceptance of transformation of cultural forms into novel states (both by persons and by groups). The notion of *guided participation* refers to how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity, in the process of becoming prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities. This is a process of becoming, rather than acquisition. It may be abstracted in terms of action spheres (Joerchel, 2012) that focus on the human activities in between persons. Likewise, one can look at such spheres at the border of the past and the future (*see* the TEM model, Sato et al., 2007, 2012).

The active person participates through individual activity (Rogoff, 1992, 2003). López, Najafi, Rogoff, and Arauz (2012) provide further elaboration on how participation could be considered. Yet participation is constrained—directed by the social institutions that set up its expected (and required) forms, and rule out others (Chaudhary, 2012). Participation in social roles—such as gender (Madureira, 2012) or military roles (Hale, 2008)—entails coordination of persons' subjective inventions of themselves with social rules set up for regulating precisely these subjectivities. The discovered differences in reasoning styles between geographical areas (Nisbett, 2003) are likely to be explained by different forms of participation processes in intersubjective encounters (Komatsu, 2010). Charting

out different forms of participation—structured by social goals and the dialogical relation between rights and duties (Moghaddam et al., 2012) would make the notion of participation well-situated in its varied contexts.

***Proposition 11: Cultural Psychology Needs Self-Reflexivity—Emergence of the Cultural Psychology of the Social Sciences***

Psychology traditionally has had limited self-reflexivity on its own role as a science in varied contexts of societies. Cultural psychology cannot be blind to its own embeddedness in the varied social conditions where its know-how may be exploited—or just used—by various macrosocial institutions (Ratner, 2012). This is particularly crucial in the twenty-first century with all the ambivalence of globalizing processes moving around the world as voraciously as hurricanes.

There are a number of descriptions of how science is done (Knorr Cetina, 1999). The academic world has changed in the direction of increased dependency of science upon administrators—or large research teams. The move of knowledge construction refocusing from individuals to research teams leads to social distribution of the areas of acquired competence between researchers. Yet the ideas are created by a mind—who certainly is embedded in a social relationship network—which may provide the root for the idea. Thus, paradoxically, in our era where patenting of inventions becomes extended to intellectual properties, the very ownership of these seems to vanish into the intragroup relationships within increasingly large research teams.

**THE SOCIOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

It would be naïve for a new branch of a discipline—cultural psychology—to ignore the sociopolitical constraints that govern the whole knowledge construction enterprise in the social sciences. Contemporary sciences are governed by institutionalized social power relations—that are exemplified by the conditions of getting and retaining academic jobs, research funding, access to social capital construction, and so on. The major journals of psychology that are far from the globalizing process still remain controlled by researchers from primarily one country. According to Arnett (2008, p. 607) in six major North American psychology journals (owned by the American Psychological Association the editorial boards consisted of 82% scholars located in the United States (range of variability 75% to

100%). This is in complete reverse contrast with the leading journal of cultural psychology—*Culture & Psychology* where the World’s academic community is appropriately represented (only 21.5% North American). Emergence of new serial publications all over the world is an example of internationalization of the discipline and diffusion of the monopoly of social power of publications.

Under such conditions of institutionalized collaboration, it is the cultural and social psychology of research teams that emerges as a critically relevant topic for investigation in itself. International collaboration brings about a new form of sudden contact (Moghaddam, 2006) between psychologists. That contact brings issues of teamwork into focus. It also leads to radical rethinking of the nature of “the other”—one’s research collaborator from a far-away country and very different local context where realities of what “I” consider to be “research” may have very different meanings. In that context, the ways in which the persons who are studied by psychologists—at times called “observers,” then “subjects,” and now “research participants” (Bibace, et al., 2009)—become relevant far beyond the question of “politically correct” language use in a scholarly publication. However, the data accumulated in contemporary psychology do not reflect such sudden contacts—they mostly come from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) people who are emulated by the North American college students (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). This indicates a major gap in psychology’s knowledge base that cultural psychology can help to fill.

### **Conclusion: How Can Future Directions Become Present Realities?**

Cultural psychology is growing. It is by now a truly international field of scholarship, and its interdisciplinary exploration is on the rise as well. However, there are continuing concerns about the future well-being of this developing scholarly enterprise. It has taken a long time for the field to overcome the lures of deconstructionism and move into a constructionist mode. Most of the heated discussions in psychology are about positioning—who is “right,” who is “wrong,” and where am I in relation with them? Surely little new can emerge from such realignment within the social field. There are many oversights that need to be dealt with—how to fit empirical methods to phenomena and theories? How to re-think interviews, focus groups,

experiments, questionnaires, etc. along the lines of the open-systemic and meanings-focused axioms of cultural psychology?

Most importantly: *cultural psychology needs to work out and formalize the ways in which its methods can be adequately generated.* Without such a connecting link between cultural meta-level perspectives and theories and phenomenologically sensitive empirical research tactics, all the creative efforts to study culture’s role in the psychological functions is likely to fail. Psychology at large needs to return to the task to construct general theoretical frameworks of sufficient abstractness to fit in any sociocultural context. Psychology has been close to the common language depictions of its phenomena—which gives us some consolation of being in touch with these phenomena, but makes generalizations difficult. Probably new terminology is needed. Chemistry went through such a move from common language terminology to abstract formalization from the 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century (Klein, 2004). Psychology started off in a similar direction only in the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g., James Mark Baldwin’s effort to create a developmental logic—Valsiner, 2009c)—and became caught in the web of inductive operationalism. Furthermore, as history proceeded over the course of decades, the discipline became sidetracked by the move of its center from Europe to North America, and the avalanche of local applied needs. Science—like all developing phenomena—moves ahead through cycles of improvement and regressions. The contemporary return to culture in psychology can participate in its own development—or its demise.

### **Notes**

1. After *Völkerpsychologie* in the 1860s to the 1920s and “culture and personality” tradition in the 1950s.
2. It is important to note that the intricate link with the dialectical dynamicity of the units—which is present in the Russian original—is lost in English translation, which briefly stated only the main point in a summarizing fashion: “*Psychology, which aims at a study of complex holistic systems, must replace the method of analysis into elements with the method of analysis into units*” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 5). Yet it remains unclear in the English translation what kinds of units are to be constructed—those that entail oppositional relationships between parts—while in the Russian original it is made evident.
3. Like Freud created “Anna O.” out of Bertha Bettelheim.

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