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1 Introduction

"We are all social psychologists" declare Tajfel and Fraser (1978) and, by way of explanation, they offer one of the most complete definitions of the discipline. It is the study of "the various aspects of the interaction between individuals, between and within social groups, and between individuals and social systems, small or large, of which they are part" (Tajfel and Fraser 1978, p. 22). Similar in their interests and passions, what, above all, distinguishes a professional social psychologist from an "amateur" or naive one is the method, or rather methods, used. The former follows strict research rules and procedures which are logical and systematic, explicitly sets out the hypotheses and tries to support them with references to scholarly shared criteria. The latter worries much less about the logical consistency of his or her convictions, develops naive, often post hoc, theories to explain events – especially when faced with the unexpected – and, being closely tied to pre-existing ideas, tends to confirm the underlying bias in a kind of vicious circle. There is, however, a third category. Because of their mastery and competence in treating psychosocial phenomena, authors of literary texts emerge as bearers of a type of knowledge which is different both from that of the scientist and that of the "practical" person, busy getting on with everyday life. Psychologists tend to appreciate this ability and often refer to the richness and depth shown by poets and writers when considering the psychic and relational aspects of life, or the familiarity with which they approach such extreme themes as life, love and death.

The aim of the present paper is to seek possible links between social psychology and the literary treatment of social interaction, in the belief that social psychology and similar disciplines might gain useful insights from the analysis of literary texts as well as provide new ways to study the texts themselves. This is particularly the case if we take into account long term processes, i.e. an historical

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sources, and searching for the most suitable methodology. During this time, social psychology and social sciences have faced radical changes, encountering various shifts (cf. Flick 1998), some which sharply favor and support our perspective. Notwithstanding, research with literary works remains relatively rare, possibly a proof of awareness of the risks underlying the assumption of texts based in their construction on rules and designs defined by their own autonomy.

One of the first voices we found on our side was that of Moscovici (1986), who proposed the study of imaginary groups from the literary world as if they were real. His suggestion to rely on Gedankenexperimenten, to use Freud's terminology, is based on the idea that relationships, emotions and behavior described in fiction might prove useful in social psychological research in various ways. First, they might be taken at face value and read, as if they were data, through socio-psychological models. This would encounter the auspice of writers and historians of the Annales (cf. works by Duby, LeGoff) to involve social psychology in the study and understanding of narrative and history, replacing ad hoc theories by literary critics, historians, sociologists with social psychological theories which can explain relations, feelings, behavior depicted in literary works. Second, the implicit views or theories of literary authors might be taken into account as a source of theoretical thought (i.e. Literary sources might be fruitful at the generative level of theorizing). This does not mean to consider them in the same way scientific theories and artistic views: the latter offer content more than form, style that constitutes the mark of an author and makes the reader say: "This is Stendhal's or Balzac's world, Dickens' or Hemingway's" (p. 25); the researcher's task is to rationally reconstruct the artists' theories. Third, specific contributions by authors who use social psychological models as a starting point for their novels, or the reverse, might be considered, in a thought-provoking interplay between data and theory. Moscovici mentions, for instance, Canetti and Broch with their studies on the psychology of masses and leaders, but also cites Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant and Tolstoy for their extremely careful and refined contributions. The author himself re-read the pages in Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* dedicated to the Dreyfus affair, finding evidence and support to the theories of social recombination and of active minorities, which he was forming in those years, as well as interesting reflections on the phenomenon of social status and ostracism.

I would like to take Moscovici's reflections as a starting point to review some studies which use literature from a social psychological viewpoint and, more broadly, from perspectives linked to psychological inquiry. As is often the case, it is perhaps simpler to say what will not be treated: the psychology of the reader, and literature and psychoanalysis. Both these topics, however, are of great interest and will be left aside for reasons of space and coherence. Neither will we concern ourselves with cultural studies and psychohistory, although some contributions from these areas will be mentioned. This paper is divided into three parts.

particular attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the methods employed, with some general considerations on the use of literature in social psychology.

2 Literature versus Human and Social Sciences: Elective Affinities or Incompatibilities of Character?

2.1 *The Mind and its Metaphors*

Our work is concerned with certain aspects of the relationship between literature and human behavior. An interesting body of work from the field of literary studies which shares our aim is that of Michael S. Kearns (1987). His interest was in metaphors offered by eighteenth and nineteenth century literary writers and psychologists. The author defines his essay as "a study of the search for a language of the mind in the midst of changing concepts of the mind" (p. 3). He turns first to the philosophical-psychological language of the period and then to literary language in order to detect the significant metaphors and, particularly, the passage from a metaphor of mind-as-entity – with its key features of passivity, impressibility and extension – to a metaphor of mind as a living organism – as a sentient web in functional interaction with the surrounding environment.

Kearns begins by stating that:

During the period from the seventeenth century until the second third of the nineteenth, the theory of the formation of ideas was based on relatively mechanical and automatic processes. Locke was regarded as essentially correct in tracing all ideas to sensations and therefore all knowledge ultimately to combinations of sense impressions. . . . (p. 49)

He then gives some representative samples of Locke's metaphors: Mind is "white paper, void of all characters"; our senses "convey into the mind" perceptions; the brain is "the mind's presence-room" (p. 48).

Writers' and theorists' ideas are analyzed, observing the mutual exchange and influence, which flows mainly from the former to the latter. Even in early works, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) in particular, Kearns identifies some innovative cues with respect to a metaphor of the mind-as-an-entity. However, there is never a substantial transformation of such a metaphor. It is in the works of Henry James and George Eliot that an explicit and structured metaphor of mind as-a-living-organism emerges, the same generative metaphor that William James was developing, implicitly, with his concept of the "stream of consciousness."

For example, in *Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James places his "heroine [Isabel] in a mindscape at a crucial moment of her life and returns to it several times to demonstrate the physical distance she travels during her story" (p. 185). Kearns extracts some examples from the novel, introducing them with brief summaries

tions any element that is not directly experienced" (p. 187). The author concludes: "[O]ne of my findings is that the language did not develop at the same rate in fiction and psychology; new metaphors are quite visible in novels by the middle of the seventeenth century but do not emerge in psychological works until later" (p. 16).

Conceived as a contribution to the history of literature, and, indirectly, to the history of psychology (a term which, as we saw, the author uses *ante litteram*, mainly with reference to philosophical-psychological thought), Kearns' analysis of "how the actual language used to talk about mind changed during these two centuries and how the changes correlate with change in the concept of mind" (p. 16) is pertinent to our theme in a number of ways. Kearns gives equal importance to scientific and literary writing and awards both the status of basic knowledge sources, embedded in their *zeitgeist*. He seems also to pick up and expand the third use suggested by Moscovici for literary works, searching for metaphors which then give rise to theories, not so much in the works of one author, as in that of several authors (sometimes closely connected) of the same cultural context, both in the literary and the "psychological" framework. His methods, however, are almost alien to mainstream social psychology. Admittedly, he has "aimed at a 'comprehensive humanistic study' whose goal is to illustrate the 'inevitable interaction between art and society'" (p. 18) and contrasts his study with others, "more impressionistically than empirically" (p. 16) based. However, he singles out parts of the text or summarizes the content in his search for examples, illustrations and confirmation for his thesis. In this way, Kearns provides us with an expert reading of the texts. However, researchers trained in the scientific or systematic method typical of the social psychological field would find much to object to in his research procedure.

2.2 Creativity and Mental Illness

An interdisciplinary team from Oxford combined psychological and literary analysis in an investigation about creativity and mental disease. The team consisted of Gordon Claridge, an academic and clinical psychologist; Ruth Pryor, a mediaevalist; and Gwen Watkins, a critic of Victorian literature. Together, they aimed to show the influence of creativity and psychosis in authors considered by critics and clinicians to be gifted artists as well as being mentally ill (at least at some time in their lives). According to Claridge et al. (1990), the mental processes underlying creativity and madness are basically similar, being characterized by a combination of a high of divergent or "overinclusive" thinking with a similarly high level of convergent thinking. Such a combination, probably due to an unusual form of communication between the cerebral hemispheres through the corpus callosum, would give rise to a particularly rich production of associations, sometimes difficult to formalize in abstract concepts. During a phase of illness, the

she would be able to contain it through a higher of intellectual control, more precisely, to filter it more functionally through cognitive processes driven by the right hemisphere.

The method adopted by Claridge et al. (1990) to support their thesis consists of examining the texts (mainly autobiographical) and the lives of ten writers from different historical periods (including Margery Temple, John Ruskin, and Virginia Woolf). To this end, they consider both original texts and biographies or collected letters, and extract information which tends to support and exemplify the hypothesized relationship between creativity and madness. For each writer a "case description" is then provided, guided by the application of a schedule for the diagnosis of affective and schizophrenic disorders (SADS-L), adopted by the psychiatric community (Endicott and Spitzer 1978) and slightly modified for use with archive data.

Most of the analysis is based on biographical information provided by the writers themselves and their biographers. Literary works are also taken into account, sometimes excerpts are reported, but mostly summaries and comments are used. Here again, though, in a very different way from Kearns, we find a refined reading of the texts as well as an interpretation of them which gives support to the authors' thesis, i.e. the connection between creativity and mental illness. Literary material is selected in order to find signs of mental disorder, providing both examples and proof. In the preface, both literary critics express their gratitude to the psychologist, who "saved [them] from high-flying, always the occupational disease of the literary critic" (p. xi). However, the lack of explicit criteria for the analysis of the material makes the thesis less powerful.

Despite the authors' expressed intentions and probably due to the need to classify the writers in psychiatric terms as abnormal, their portraits sometimes end up being less than gratifying. The insane flux of images and thoughts in the writers' life becomes overwhelming, documented with various kinds of information of which literary texts are only a part, and as a reader I found myself wondering how people afflicted by such profound and frequent psychotic episodes could possibly have contributed works of value to the culture of their time. Yet, this aspect, which initially I felt was a weakness, might turn out to be a fine-honed tool for combating the "halo effect" which often extends an overall favorable judgment about an artistic work to its author.

2.3 Friendship Relationships

William K. Rawlins, a North American scholar working in the field of communication studies, makes use of fictional texts in his innovative study of friendship (Rawlins 1992). The author endorses a view stressing the basic principles in the communication of this relationship and discusses what he calls the contextual dialectics of a) private versus public, b) ideal versus real, and the interactional

cycle goes from childhood to late adulthood. He provides a comprehensive review of theoretical and empirical studies of friendship from a range of social disciplines and open-ended, in-depth interviews. Moreover, as the author openly declares:

Supplementing these interviews, my wife, Sandy, and myself assembled an extensive collection of fictional literature, that is, novels, plays and short stories, written for and about children, adolescents, and adults of all ages, depicting the interactions of friends in diverse circumstances. (p. 3)

In examining the situational, interactive, and dialectical nature of friendship, the author's aim is to provide a link between individualistic and social structural accounts of friendship as well as a bridge between empirical and fictional views of the relationship. As he states, he "want[s] to cultivate conversation and interplay among extant social scientific and humanistic research on friendship, people's verbal descriptions and the actual discourse of friends, fictional representations of person/writer/social investigator, and those of the reader" of his book, happily entitled *Friendship Matters*. "Accordingly" he "composed the work as a sequence of paired chapters" (p. 4) focusing each one on a particular stage of life. The initial chapter reviewed the social scientific research available, while a companion chapter illustrated the main points discussed "using the words of real participants and/or fictional excerpts" (p. 4). He interviewed over 100 participants, including adolescents, young, middle aged and older adults. The author points out that:

This method of presentation juxtaposes and compares the voices of lived experience and of literary depictions with the abstract, modal trends observed and reported in traditional social scientific analyses of friendship. The illustrative chapters seek to vivify and dramatize rather than verify concepts, and to connect them with actual persons' words and experiences, and imagined individuals' enactments of meaningful episodes. (p. 4)

These illustrations are provided by accounts or open-ended interviews and portrayals found in literature. Regarding the latter, the author sometimes speaks of a "typical predicament found in literature" (p. 79) in the chapter on adolescence, or of "fictional excerpts exemplify[ing] further specific predicaments" (p. 125) in the chapter on young adulthood. Concluding his study, Rawlins indicates the light and dark aspects of friendship and notes that "robust friendship is not merely a convenient technique for self-confirmation, but an exacting interpersonal relationship, a responsible co-ordination of actual and possible worlds" (p. 277). To develop his argument, he has "compared, contrasted, and synthesized insights from a variety of authors, ranging from everyday actors to professional social scientists and writers of 'fiction'" being:

convinced of the value of collecting and bringing to bear as diverse an array of cultural texts as possible when investigating the communicative construction of social lives and worlds. Certainly as we enact our relationships with others, the cultural resources and

The reason why I quoted Rawlins' justifications in full is that, although the author makes some points that are readily acceptable (the cultural origin, the communicative construction of social lives), the particular evidence he produces is more debatable. It may be true that "we use and continue to create whatever there is in the symbolic realm of human action," but it is also true that some voices are more authoritative than others. In particular, the fictional excerpts taken into account might not be so generative. Their selection, and this the author clearly admits, appears to be random. However, both the choice of texts and the selection of extracts are delicate steps in any study which makes use of fiction and literary texts.

In the research discussed so far, scholars of different disciplinary areas – English, Psychology, Literary Critics, Communication Studies – made use of literary texts in various ways: Some sought new ideas from art and science, others looked for evidence of a stream of thoughts and images common to creativity and madness; yet others were in search of examples of dialectical friendships. Coming back to Moscovici on the use of literature in social research, his third suggestion seems to have been taken up to some extent, the first has sometimes been considered and the second has remained basically untouched. Cross-cultural psychology and social psychology appear to have taken up these suggestions more systematically.

3 Literature and Cross-Cultural Psychology: Space and Time under Investigation

The use of literary texts as a source of data to test ideas and theories is not unusual in cross-cultural and historically-oriented research. There are a number of such studies aimed at illustrating and corroborating socio-psychological theories and models (cf. Contarello and Volpato 1991; Volpato and Contarello 1995). Harary (1963, 1966), for example, analyzed Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Murdoch's *The Severed Head* in order to explore, within them, the tendency towards balance in personal relationships as maintained in Fritz Heider's (1958) Balance theory. Similarly, Seymour Rosenberg analyzed Theodore Dreiser's *A Gallery of Women* using multidimensional scaling in order to detect Dreiser's implicit theory of personality (Rosenberg and Jones 1972). He also developed a method of analysis and a computer based algorithm (HICLAS) in order to study Thomas Wolf's personality as depicted in his autobiography (Rosenberg 1988) and has compared the use of personality and emotional terms in some U.S. and Hungarian novels to investigate possible personality and emotional differences linked to cultural variables (Rosenberg 1990, cf. also Rosenberg 1997). We might consider a few comparative examples of research at some length.

is the research on needs of achievement, power and affiliation initiated by McClelland (1961). Extending Max Weber's thesis linking Protestantism and the spirit of modern capitalism, McClelland hypothesized that this connection was mediated by two social psychological variables, namely early independence and mastery training by parents, and high achievement motivation in children, mainly sons. To test his hypothesis, the author examined various cultures and assessed motivational levels among them using material from a variety of sources. He analyzed folk tales in contemporary pre-literate cultures and children's stories in literate ones, chosen to represent "popular culture" (p. 71). The texts were analyzed to detect items regarding the need for achievement following a specific scoring system whose validity underwent many tests. The central link in McClelland's model – between high motivation and economic growth – was tested for ancient Greek culture using imaginative literature of authoritative writers of the time and for late Middle Ages and Baroque Spain, considering such masterpieces as *El Cid* and *Don Quixote*. The theory was also applied to English society from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century using texts of three different kinds: drama, accounts of sea voyages and street ballads, and to the United States from 1800 to 1950 sampling four American reading textbooks typical of each twenty-year period. On the basis of these and other sources, McClelland supported his thesis that there existed a causal link between exposition to "need for achievement" messages during childhood and entrepreneurial behavior in adulthood promoting economic well-being in society at large.

3.2 Social Behavior in Epic Works

Adamopoulos (1982) and Adamopoulos and Bontempo (1986) used literature to test Triandis' theory (1978), developed within the research paradigm of "subjective culture," according to which three basic dimensions – affect, status, and intimacy – underlie social behavior, but display specific modes and features in different times and places (Adamopoulos and Kashima 1999). The authors content-analyzed epic works from different historical periods (*The Iliad*, *Beowulf* and *The Red Badge of Courage* in the first paper, *The Odyssey* and *La Chanson de Roland* in the second), selecting the role-couples portrayed in the texts and coding the instances of behavioral units encountered. Their method consists of selecting the role-couples portrayed in the texts (e.g., Greek king – Trojan king, Olympian king – Trojan king, Greek king – Greek leader in *The Iliad* or soldier – soldier, officer – soldier, friend – friend in *The Red Badge of Courage*) and coding the instances of behavioral units encountered. They defined social behavior as "a situation in which a person does something to or with another person" (p. 159). Applying factor analysis to the matrix of social behavior, the authors found substantial support for Triandis' theory. They also observed that the intimacy dimension was of minor importance in the earlier works, probably – in the

motivated the behavior of ancient Greek heroes like Achilles or Odysseus, at least as we glean that behavior from the Homeric epics, was inseparable from their role as kings in charge of their households, their extended families, and their property – in other words, their superordinate status-vis a vis their fellow human beings" (Adamopoulos 2002, p. 4).

3.3 Emotion Terms in the Bible

Mayer (1994) turned to the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Bible, which span roughly twelve centuries, in order to explore the different uses of terms referring to emotion. His research is more exploratory than theoretical, and aims to test, on the one hand, the presence of terms linked to basic emotions, especially in the earlier books, and, on the other, changes in the use of those terms which might reflect an improvement in emotional experience over time. The author proceeds by classifying emotion terms into emotion categories suggested, in part, by the literature on emotions. Both his hypotheses are supported by the empirical analysis of the texts and a comparison with the Roman Canon Old Testament. He concludes that emotions experienced may have been fairly stable over time, with references to happiness increasing over the twelve-century period.

McClelland, Adamopoulos and Mayer proceed to detect the frequency with which "social motives", "social behaviors" or "emotional terms" are encountered in the sources they analyzed and justify the choice of their archive material by stressing the profound cultural significance that folk, epic and biblical sources played in their own times. McClelland (1961), in particular, pays a great deal of attention to the criteria for selecting literary material for this kind of research. Above all, to minimize stylistic factors, a wide range of writers, writing for different purposes, should be used. But the writers' popularity should be beyond question to ensure the importance of the work in any given culture. As regards choice of texts, cross-cultural research, for its own part, lays down clear guidelines for the selection of archive material, the basic criteria being relevance, availability and popularity (Brislin 1980). Thus, texts suitable for examination in the social psychological domain will be those which have left a mark on their culture, are easily retrievable and widely read. Other important choices concern methodology. Often, as we have seen, the studies which turn to systematic analysis make use of content analysis, checked for reliability, and are followed by various multivariate analyses: MDS (Rosenberg and Jones 1972), factor analysis (Adamopoulos 1982; Adamopoulos and Bontempo 1986), specially designed structural analysis (Rosenberg 1988). However, these are counterbalanced by some shortcomings. Chiefly, the fact that quantitative methods in general tend to translate vast amounts of knowledge into oversimplified structures, thus undermining the potential for interpretation.

In social psychology, as previously mentioned, the use of literary texts is less common. However, the discipline is typified by a variety of approaches, some of which may usefully employ literary material. The following section examines how such texts may be used in different approaches: cognitive, discursive, socio-constructionist, and socio-constructivist.

4.1 Cognitive Psychology and Texts: A Communicative Theory of Emotions in Search of *Verstehen*

Oatley (1992), with Johnson-Laird, puts forward a pluralist analysis of emotions and an integrative theory derived from cognitive science. He turns to literary texts to illustrate certain aspects and literary extracts are chosen carefully although in an admittedly "patchy" (p. 7) way. The author discusses at length the relationship between cognitive psychology and literature and is very explicit as regards their mutual roles. Oatley and Johnson-Laird's (1987) communicative theory of emotions states that emotions function to help humans construct new parts of their own cognitive system, mainly signaling conflicts of goals and disjunctions of personal or mutual plans. This theory was created within a scientific framework, by considering emotional events, describing them with reliable quantitative measures and framing theoretical indications in order to draw valid inferences regarding the events themselves (cf. p. 414). But Oatley emphasizes that it is only through experience that we may cover a fourth and fundamental aspect of understanding emotions – *Verstehen* or imaginative "reliving" – and this is provided masterfully in good art. In the author's view, all four elements are needed for a full understanding, which makes the role of literature fundamental.

Oatley's method for analyzing literary texts is based on two criteria, similar to those used in history or literary criticism for inferring intention and conflict in narratives: the criteria of consensual understanding and that of consistency. In this vein, the analysis of texts, a kind of literary criticism, runs parallel to previous more scientifically-oriented research. But while the author often distinguishes between the rules of natural and human science, or between causal and narrative accounts, he also emphasizes the similarities between psychoanalytic and computational understanding of narratives, and stresses the special potential of (cognitive) psychology to combine usefulness and insight. It would appear that "literature offers an emotional version of a laboratory" (p. 357) and, together, they may mutually contribute to a fuller understanding of emotion and of their communicative function both within and between individuals. The method chosen by the author to analyze literary texts owes a lot, however, to human sciences and makes little attempt to intertwine humanistic and scientific knowledge. It is almost as if the author had decided to take time off from the "harsh mainstream"

4.2 The Discursive Turn: Literature and Social Psychology as Texts

While also stressing the importance of language, Potter et al. (1984), advance a different view. They argue that literature and social psychology "in certain important respects . . . share their concerns, methods and theoretical perspectives" (p. 1). Promoting the "discursive turn" in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Potter 1996; Harré 1979; Harré and Gillett 1994), the authors examine topics such as gender identity, environment, groups, and the Self, recommending for social psychology the same kind of critical deconstruction which has been influential in recent literary criticism. According to these authors, literary texts have been erroneously employed as depositories of real life facts. On the contrary, they should be analyzed as discourses involved with sense-making as a constructive activity, just as social psychological discourse should be.

The chosen texts are, again, important passages of literature relevant to the various topics treated. But throughout the book, the authors consider works with varying degrees of authoritativeness, touching on Musil's *A Man without Qualities*, and works by Tolstoy and Shakespeare (through Harré's reading), both revising and criticizing previous uses of such texts and proposing their own perspective. The method which they suggest is framed within a post-modern and deconstructionist perspective, close to contemporary literary criticism (cf. Barthes 1970; Culler 1981). In their view, discourse analysis is a craft which shares features with ethnomethodology and which, according to contemporary philosophy of science, regards the search for variability and consistency in either the content or form of accounts (as well as their function and consequences), as the most important route to validation. It would thus appear that discourse analysts are looking for clues, giving themselves some stricter rules than historians or literary scholars (cf. Potter and Wetherell's ten stages in research proceedings), and stressing the "reflexivity" of this approach, i.e. they seek to apply the same kind of analysis to their own written texts.

In advocating for themselves a "radically non-cognitive form of social psychology" (p. 178), the authors provide an interesting end-point in dramatic contrast to that of Oatley as well as radically opposing theoretical (or metatheoretical) stands. Both these approaches suggest some interpretative analyses of texts which have their roots in literary or narrative analysis.

4.3 The Narrative Turn: Time, Self and Narrative

Other theoretical frameworks developed in the last decades give voice to literary texts more directly, mainly through the success of perspectives derived from different disciplines, from philosophy (the second Wittgenstein, MacIntyre, Ricoeur), philosophy of language and pragmatics (Austin, Searle, Grice), to literary critics

Within the social psychological context, Jerome Bruner refers to literary texts as privileged sources for the study of regularities and deviations in the construction of the Self (as well as of the world, and "life"):

... literary inventions are inspirations to new modes of life, invitations to experience fresh ways of violating the banalities of folk psychology, and we honor the Laurence Sternes and Natalia Ginzburgs, the Virginia Woolfs and Anaïs Nins as much for their "human insights" as for their literary skills (Bruner 2001, p. 30; cf. also Bruner 1964, 2003).

They have the auspices to construct and reconstruct new possible worlds with the active and resolute participation of the reader (Eco 1979). Yet, research performed by Bruner and his school turns to everyday-life narratives more than to literary ones, e.g., autobiographies of a whole family (Bruner 1990) or group narratives (Bruner and Feldman 1996).

4.4 The Social Constructionist Movement: Self, Narrative and Relationships

The central importance of language in the social construction of the world and of narration in psychological theory is further emphasized in the social constructionist approach proposed by Kenneth and Mary Gergen (Gergen and Gergen 1988; Gergen 1994). "Aware of the potentials of language as a means of creating reality" (p. 20), they focus their attention on the potential that literary forms have to shape reality. They also analyze themes which are highly relevant to this paper – mainly matters of truth and multiplicity in narrative forms, and focus their attention on narrative processes, particularly on accounts of how relationships develop over time (cf. also Gergen and Gergen 1987). Kenneth Gergen underlines the special power of persons of letters and thus their potential voice in the study of the development of self-understanding and self-construction. He wrote:

Although the unfolding of psychological discourse frequently takes place on the level of daily relationships, special power may reside in certain enclaves. Specifically, the culture and/or its various interest groups may rely on those with well-honed language skills. If the language is to be forcibly reshaped or transformed, then those with a talent for games of language are required. Persons of letters – including poets, historians, journalists, essayists, philosophers, novelists and the like – are of special interest in the study of the diachronic development of self-understanding. It is such groups in particular that have most effectively pushed forward the dialogue of self-construction (Gergen 1989, p. 76) and, later,

By using ... narrative conventions we generate a sense of coherence and direction in our lives. They acquire meaning, and what happens is suffused with significance. Certain forms of narrative are broadly shared within the culture; they are frequently used, easily identified, and highly functional. In a sense, they constitute a *syllabary of possible selves*. (Gergen 1994, pp 193–4) (my italics)

and, more specifically, to autobiography (see also Gergen and Gergen 1993; Gergen 1994). Her point is that "people magazines, gossip columns in newspapers, television news, movies, dreams and books all provide narrative models for people's self-understanding" (p. 20). Autobiographies, in particular, are of great value for social psychologists interested in the construction and development of the self: "Narrative forms shape the sense of what it means to live, to know, and to feel" (p. 22). From a feminist perspective, Gergen reflects that the autobiography well suits "individuality ... the most dominant personality conception of modern western man" (p. 23) and mainly takes the form of the heroic tale, which while unisex in appearance, is ultimately only appropriate to a man's biography. Autobiographies constitute convenient and familiar repositories for life histories and there are dramatic differences in the roles appropriate for successful men and women in the "mono-myth" which seems to shape the basic story of western civilization (p. 23). For this reason, Mary Gergen has investigated gender-related differences in this genre. She chose not literary masterpieces but twenty or so autobiographies of men and women published in the U.S. in the last century's eighties and nineties, selecting famous people outside the world of literature. The published books are often written to a formula meant to attract a large readership and are co-written with a professional, in order to keep historical, cultural and literary style variation under control. Among them, there are the autobiographies by the photographer Ansel Adams, the folk singer Joan Baez, the tennis player Martina Navratilova. In her initial approach, the author used quantitative methods of analysis, computing instances of behavior and psychological constructs (e.g. achievement) in each book. But later, disappointed by the "lengthy and tedious process of sorting samples of prose into categories of contents and form" and finding this process "more destructive and uninformative than helpful in assessing the overall flow of the book's content and form," she opted for a "qualitatively tuned method that attempts to encompass the narrative form in a more integrated manner." Gergen commented: "the precision and apparent reliability of the first method is lost, but the interpretative strength of the latter in maintaining the holistic integrity of the book is appealing" (p. 26). Four different themes are chosen and variations in narrative form, context of the life history, themes of individuality versus relatedness, and self-understanding are explored. In this way, the results showed that, in agreement with gender stereotypes: a) the theme of achievement is present both in men and women with differences in how crucially important it is in a person's life, b) the range of emotional bonds varies, with more pervading emotional ties in women's autobiographies, c) physical embodiment assumes different trends, the body being an integral part of a woman's identity, but often an impediment or simply a "house where personhood is merely" contained for men (p. 36).

In the closing lines of the paper, Mary Gergen defines her study as an "exercise in a possibility ... not the last word" (p. 41) and invites her readers to take into

4.5 Social Representations and Literary Texts

4.5.1 Relationships in Literary Texts: Quality and Quantity Revised

In previous studies, we have also turned to literary texts to find clues for a deeper understanding of social topics – especially interpersonal and intergroup relations – but tried to combine quantitative and qualitative research and to exploit the potentials of social psychological tools – mainly content and multivariate analyses – in order to study the texts. Along time, the social representations theoretical perspective, with its methodological devices, proved to be a most suitable one within which to explore and deepen our research topics (cf. Contarello and Volpato 2002).

First, friendship was observed through the ages. Works of writers from the twelfth to the last century were selected (Contarello and Volpato 1991). Choosing the texts in order to cover a wide time-span (twelfth to the twentieth centuries), our aim was first to distinguish enduring characteristics from those linked to a particular historical period and, second, using more recent depictions, to further our knowledge of friendship. Novels and tales by French women writers were chosen, both to correspond to our own interest in women writers and to facilitate the selection of our material. Following Moscovici's proposals, we carried out a systematic inquiry to detect the writers' more or less implicit theoretical formulations, analyzing, at the same time, the groups of friends described. The choice of relationships to be examined was based on those described in the text: every couple referred to in the text with the terms "friend" or "friendship" was selected; every interaction between these characters was then coded and defined as a unit of "social behavior" (following Adamopoulos 1982), including explicit reference to emotions, feelings, thoughts, intuitions (Pepitone and Triandis 1987). The coding scheme was developed mainly inductively, by examining the content of the text, and partly deductively, following the theoretical lines suggested in Triandis' dimensional study of relationships. Content analysis was performed, as suggested by Adamopoulos (1982) and Adamopoulos and Bontempo (1986), and cluster and correspondence analyses were then applied.

Our categorical and dimensional analyses illustrated a wide range of friendship features which largely support Triandis' cross-cultural theory of social behavior (stressing the importance of affect, intimacy and status), and render literary "theories" explicit. In De Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins*, for instance, a model of friendship emerges which is very similar to the dialectic model of relationships proposed by Baxter (1988) and Baxter and Montgomery (1996) (cf. Rawlins 1992). Here, friendship is portrayed as a deep and intense bond, involving dialectical instances of autonomy-connection, predictability-novelty and openness-closeness contradictions.

Later, using the same approach, we turned attention to women and family relationships faced with cultural transition, particularly migration (Contarello and

developed in social psychology, both with regard to the relevance of the macro-context in the development of personal relationships and social identity (Levinger 1994; Montgomery 1992) and with regard to the construct of individualism-collectivism which Triandis reintroduced into social-psychological research (cf. Triandis et al. 1988).

The importance of the macro-context, social positions and identities, and their influence on personal relationships has long been of considerable interest to us. In further studies, we content-analyzed, in the manner mentioned above, novels by South African writers (Volpato and Contarello 1995) as well as collections of short stories and novels written and placed in different contexts (from Mexico to India) (Contarello et al. 2003; Contarello and Vellico 2003). From the analyses of the texts, very different relational worlds were illustrated, enabling us, again, to highlight various patterns of relationships coming from different cultural frameworks along (and above) the continuum spanning from individualism to collectivism and to point out the interchange between interpersonal links and social macro-contexts. Using the same methods, we studied social relationships in the extreme situation of the concentration camp, analyzing Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*. In this case, to highlight specific themes which content analysis tended to overlook, we also performed a purely qualitative analysis (Volpato and Contarello 1999).

In our research, what we explored were representations: of friendship, of selves and relationships in different contexts, of social life in a country divided by apartheid, of interpersonal and intergroup relations in extreme situations. The descriptions of phenomena were analyzed using cluster analysis to give categories, and through correspondence analysis to give dimensions of relationships and social behaviors. Although undoubtedly linked to certain weaknesses (cf. Contarello and Volpato 2002), we believe that our approach has a number of points in its favor. First, it enables us to illustrate social psychological theories through literary material using the systematic methods typical of our discipline, in our case close to Doise's socio-dynamic approach to the study of social representations (cf. Doise et al. 1992). Secondly, it stimulates the expansion of these theories following the ideas of writers, who are often particularly keen on this type of speculation. Lastly, it provides a systematic framework in which those ideas might find an explicit order and structure.

4.5.2 The Narrative Organization of Social Representations: The Case of National Identity and Hungarian Classics

Within the theoretical framework of social representations, meant to assume a narrative form (László and Stainton Rogers 2002), recently László and Vince (2002, cf. László et al. 2003) proposed to study representations of national identity through successful historical novels. The chosen texts are "classics" of the Hungarian historical literature of the second half of the nineteenth century: *Golden*

tity, preserved its own relative independence both from the Ottoman Empire and the Hapsburg Empire. The second deals with a victorious battle against the Turks in a war which let Hungary be subdued to the Ottoman Empire for more than a century. The third regards the 1848 revolution, an independence war against the Hapsburg Empire. The authors chose a method consisting in computer assisted content analysis (with Atlas-ti) followed by statistical tests to measure similarities and differences in features and values embodied in the characters or by qualitative analysis of the strategies enacted to cope with existential personal and inter-group challenges. In the depicted war contexts, in fact, it appears that the characters are often threatened in terms of physical survival, but mostly in terms of national or group identity.

Reflecting upon the central role played by the chosen genre in the socialization process and in the construction of national identity (a genre which is highly regarded within Hungarian literature: these books are included in the school programs), the authors note, with Ricoeur (1984–85, 1991) that: “The role of narrative mediation is to develop variations of our own personality through identification that is the third-person construction of the self” (László et al. 2003, p. 78) and conclude, following Vygotskij (1971), that part of the success of a work of art relies on its capability to satisfy social needs, in this case the winning strategies outlined in the texts appear to support and transmit “a coping strategy characteristic of the Hungarian culture, i.e., transforming real defeat into moral victory” (p. 79). This proposal is challenging, both on theoretical and methodological grounds. On the one hand psychological processes and socio-cognitive strategies are singled out within historical contingencies, thus contributing to develop a more social or “societal” social psychology (László and Wagner 2003). Moreover, qualitative analyses help to select coping strategies (e.g., resistance, compliance, confrontation with acting out, negotiated compliance . . .) in ways which, on the one hand, help to draw a data-driven theoretical model and, on the other, is reminiscent of Propp’s (1928) masterly lesson and his morphology of folk tales (cf. also Péley 2002).

4.5.3 Discursive Constructions and Emerging Social Representations: *Witch Hunt or Quest for Meaning*

From the social representations framework comes Wagner (in this volume) proposal to study the relation between the emerging properties and the institutionalized version of a representation via a thorough analysis of Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*. The text is submitted to a careful reading in which both events and related discourses are taken into account in order to detect what, with Moscovici (1981), the authors see as a consensual space which paves the way to new and frightening social “realities.” Both the analysis of talk as depicted in the script and the “observation of situated social interaction over time” (p. 44) allow the

zens. Although embedded in the same theoretical framework as the previous approaches, the study suggests different methodological stances: the analysis of the web of discourse a “highly non-linear and recursive process” (p. 46) is intertwined with the analysis of the “opaque reality preceding and surrounding the creation of institutionalized facts” (p. 47). To this last aim, interpretive theoretical devices, informed by discourse and conversation theories, are called for. Again, literary texts prove to be a most suitable arena, models of real life, through which to outline and test social psychological interpretations, in this case, the construction of power.

5 Conclusions

In our overview of research from different disciplinary contexts, we have examined topics such as the mind, the self, creativity, emotions, social roles, plots and relationships, as illustrated in literature. The three motives Moscovici suggested for using literary sources in social psychological inquiry were encountered: literary sources are often used as data with which to illustrate, corroborate and give evidence to social psychological theories, less frequently to enhance generative thinking, but rarely to consider the interplay between art and science in the formation of ideas and the pursuit of knowledge. Various uses of literary material have been met. Sometimes a literary text has been seen as microcosm within which to detect a world of relationships, sometimes as a container of events which may be extracted from it or, following historians and their “clue paradigm”, as precious sources of information, sometimes again as text or discourse which, as much as any other kind of discourse, deserves accurate interpretation and deconstruction, or as a template to be considered, together with other sources, in the analysis of the construction of social phenomena.

Now, as social scientists, we have been trained to distinguish “fact from fiction”. In our research, is it legitimate to use “fiction” to speculate on “facts”? We encountered various answers and different positions to these questions. From the empiricist and positivist viewpoint, the scientific use of literary texts is out of the question; at most they might prove useful as parallel exemplifications. However, with its increasing recognition of the social construction of psychological processes – such that it has become almost a truism (Taylor 1998) – contemporary social psychology no longer precludes such use. Along these lines, the use of qualitative alongside quantitative analysis is increasingly often deemed acceptable, particularly within socio-constructivist perspectives (Contarello and Mazzara 1999). More importantly, while recognizing the specific features of two underlying modes of thinking, which Bruner (1986) named paradigmatic vs. narrative – rooted in two cultures with many centuries of tradition behind them – there is a growing perception of the legitimacy and usefulness of bringing the two modes together.

cated" (Smorti 1994) up to evoke a "double helix" of the mind (Mininni 2004).

I am well aware that various knots remain a challenge and still need to be disentangled but I think that within the rich realms of literature we might find a suitable arena, from the narrative mode of thinking, to test our ideas. The different approaches encountered in the present overview all contribute to strengthen and legitimize the use of literary texts to study social phenomena. From within psychology and social psychology, different viewpoints have been highlighted, with authors either suggesting to parallel formal knowledge with literary extracts or radically changing usual research methods in the light of a post-empiricist and post-modern framework.

But if the aims are those suggested by Moscovici and re-proposed by ourselves, I think that traditional social psychological methods should not be neglected. The strengths of the paradigmatic mode, which help us to play devil's advocate against ourselves and our possible biases, may be usefully combined with those of the narrative one – the main aim being to blend rather than parallel experience and conceptualization. What we suggest is a sort of handicraft, consisting of content analysis, enriched with multivariate analyses with the aim of revealing underlying patterns and structures.

In a monograph on emotions and the analysis of literary texts, Scheff (1997) similarly put forward the idea of a convergence among various disciplines and methods. The "part/whole" analysis proposed by the author mixed qualitative analyses and microanalysis of interaction, and aimed to integrate the human sciences to obtain a deeper understanding of social psychological processes. While differing from the viewpoint adopted in the present paper, Scheff's view shares with it two concerns: the need to integrate quantitative and qualitative studies and the need to keep a distance between the researcher and the researched texts. This can only come about through clear rules and methods. In his view, microanalysis of interaction is the key to this distance: "By getting beneath the smooth surface of behavior, it exposes the invisible process and structure that give order and meaning. Estrangement is most obvious" (p. 231).

More central to our concerns is a recent paper by Moghaddam (2004) which attempts to explore the boundaries and relationships between psychology and literature. In his thought-provoking work, the author proposes an overview of psychological studies involving literary texts, which, in part, runs parallel to the present one but, interestingly, overlaps it. He also suggests three categories of possible relationships between the two domains. These vary in their level of abstraction from literature as a source of insight for psychology to literature as understood through psychology, and from psychology as nomothetic vs. literature as idiographic to psychology as culture-free vs. literature as culture-bound. The classification he proposes culminates in the idea that "psychology is litera-

historical and cultural context" (p. 519). I fully agree with some points he makes which are of great importance: first, that "major literary works" can be conceived of as "a series of vast mineral deposits" (p. 507) of "data," or rather of "new and deeper theoretical insights" (p. 508); and second, that the distinction between the world "as it is" and "as it might be" or "as if" comes across both in psychology and literature. However, I find myself less in agreement with the author's theoretical and methodological preferences, oriented towards discourse analysis. Moghaddam concludes by stating that metaphors and figurative language might represent a key to a better understanding, by overcoming cultural gaps. This conclusion, in my opinion, deserves great attention and might constitute a convergence point for research carried out using different methodologies.

An unexpected support – more properly, a "correspondence" – to the idea of a quali-quantitative analysis of literary texts comes from a recent work by Franco Moretti (2005). In three talks given in Berkeley in 2002, later gathered in a splendid little book, the author proposed a convergence between the history of literature and human sciences. Defending the processes of reduction and abstraction which allow the reader to take a distance from the texts – in contrast with a closer reading more typical of literary studies – Moretti invited the reader to analyze the relations, the pattern, the forms in the history of literature, employing instruments usual in different branches of science, like graphs, charts, trees. Although different in its aims and contents from the present one, the literary perspective of the author shares with it the basic challenge, and tries to give answers to the question which opens the book, in Musil's words:

A man who wants the truth becomes a scholar; a man who wants to give free play to his subjectivity may become a writer; but what should a man do who wants something in between? (Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, p. 274).

Our research, on the other hand, aimed to analyze structures of relationships. Based on content and multivariate analyses, it encountered shortcomings, as we admitted, mainly the peril of reductionism. However, it enabled the researchers to keep a beneficial distance and obliged them to take into account what is and what is not in line with their expectations. With the growing availability of computer procedures assisting interpretative analyses, moreover, the demands of a thorough inquiry of texts may become less burdensome. With analogous procedures, it will also be possible to investigate processes which develop along the time dimension. The analysis of structures and processes underlying social life represents the focus of social psychology. It is for this reason that a careful and systematic use of literary texts by social psychologists, together with less episodic interchanges between the two areas of knowledge, can make a major contribution to the study of social phenomena.

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