

The Social Turn in the Science of Human Action

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1 Psychology as a Social Science

In psychological science the social world has always stood as a dark and silent specter. The fact of our existence in a social world is clear enough. However, the point of psychological science is to illuminate the activities of the mind. How are we to understand perception, thought, the emotions, motivation, learning, and the like? To carry out research on such processes it is essential to cut them away from the social world, to treat them as independent entities subject to investigation in their own right. In this context, if the social world is to exist at all, there are two major possibilities: First, others' actions may serve as a stimulus input, perturbing the internal mechanisms in one fashion or another. Or, social action may result from the operation of the internal mechanisms. In both cases, if recognized at all, the social world is secondary and/or derivative. And yet, the specter remains to haunt the field with reminders of how central to daily life are the relationships in which we are immersed. It whispers of possibilities that the social world may just be primary, and the mental world secondary or derivative.

This suppression of the social has also been reinforced by the guiding metaphor for most psychological theory, that of the machine. During the behaviorist decades, the dominant metaphor of the person was that of an input-output machine. Individual behavior was viewed as function of "stimulus conditions" impinging on internal mechanisms. It is this metaphor that is largely captured in the experimental method, in which the investigator manipulates the "independent variable" in the stimulus world, and records the resulting human behavior (the "dependent variable"). With the later emergence of the cognitive revolution, the machine metaphor remained, but in this case the input-output machine was replaced by the computer. The mind was (and continues to be) viewed as a computational device,

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with behavior viewed as the outcome of “information processing.” For advocates of the computer metaphor, the major research focus is essentially the hardware, that is, the neurological basis of computation. Such neurological structures are largely viewed as products of genetics and evolution, with cognitive psychology (and artificial intelligence) articulating the implications for mental functioning.

Critiques of the machine orientation to understanding human action have long been extant. They have variously focused on logical shortcomings, paradigmatic narrowness, and the inimical implications for cultural life. However, while impressive in both sophistication and passion, they have largely failed to stimulate a self-reflexive pause in practices of inquiry. One important reason for the resistance of many psychologists to engage in self-reflexive dialogue, is the lack of an obvious alternative to the mechanistic metaphor. For the scientific psychologist, most of the alternative metaphors have seemed unpromising. The hydraulic metaphor of the psychoanalytic tradition seemed resistant to empirical validation; there were no valid methods for studying the content of human consciousness, the metaphor favored by phenomenologists; and the humanist metaphor of the person as voluntary agent promised little in the way of predictive research.

This historical condition gives rise to the drama unfolding in the present volume. In recent decades there has been a slow but distinct development of what many now see as a viable alternative to the vision of the human being as machine, and the mind as independent from the social world. This development is not specific to a single locale or group of scholars, but has taken place in far flung regions of the world, with different emphases, assumptions, and concepts favored in different enclaves. Yet, common to all of them is a vision of the individual action as inherently social, and more specifically, deriving from shared meaning.

On the broad level, such movements suggest that one’s major investments in life – in marriage, family, friendships, occupation, religion, leisure pursuits and so on – are lodged within shared conceptions of what is possible, appropriate, and valuable. More microscopically, it is to say that even in the small details of daily life – one’s facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, gaze, and stride – are fashioned from shared intelligibilities. Students seated in a class have infinite possibilities for action available to them in principle. Biologically they are capable of shouting, throwing chairs, playing games, making love, fighting, urinating on the floor, and so on. But they do not. They do not even consider such possibilities, because these actions are beyond cultural intelligibility.

This is not to say that biology is of no importance. Indeed, genetics and evolution do furnish both potentials and limits of human behavior. By virtue of biological inheritance, one can (with training) leap almost two meters into the air; biological being makes this possible. However, regardless of practice, one cannot make a leap of 10 meters. In this case biology fixes the limits. In effect, biology is important in providing the grounds for participation and change in cultural life, but does not determine the outcomes.

An often disregarded role of our biological inheritance is its importance in providing the learning mechanisms that play a pivotal role for when and where people attain their basic socialization. In the social realm the workings of nature

are far from genetically fixing what behavioral preferences they may possess. Instead, learning mechanisms offer a flexible way of attaining locally important cultural knowledge within temporal windows of opportunity as has been convincingly shown by research in language and culture attainment. Similar mechanisms are likely to exist for other social capacities, such as mate preferences, for example. It is this role of our biological inheritance that social science must appreciate in order to furnish a more complete understanding of human behavior. Within the natural range of variation of capacities and armed with biologically conditioned learning mechanisms we live out lives of meaning – in which we hold some things to be real, rational, valuable or morally right, and others not. It is this world of meaning in which we find love and hate, struggles for justice, power, and money, and the dramas that lend to life both its depth and passion.

It is to this emerging sensibility in psychology that the present volume is devoted. The attempt here is to bring together exemplars of several of the major perspectives contributing to what may be called “the social turn” in psychological inquiry. In this introductory essay, we shall first sketch out several significant movements in psychology that converge in the importance they attach to processes of human meaning making. While these endeavors are important enough in themselves, there are ways in which they also invite a reconsideration of psychological inquiry itself. We shall thus consider, as well, some of the broader implications to which these paradigms give rise in terms of the conception and practice of psychological science. Finally, with this background in place we will be positioned to consider the contents of the present volume.

2 Converging Paradigms of the Social

While concern with social process is shared by a number of significant movements in psychology, such concerns have emerged from quite different intellectual contexts. To be sure, there are broad domains of agreement in their formulations; but simultaneously certain tensions exist in their assumptions and outlooks on inquiry. And, while we shall treat each of the following movements as coherent and univocal, the reader should also be aware that there are significant differences among scholars who might identify themselves within a movement. Rather than viewing these as coherent movements, then, it is more adequate to view them as converging domains of continuing deliberation. We first treat four major streams: social construction, social representation, narrative psychology, and cultural psychology. We then consider a range of lesser tributaries.

2.1 *Social Construction*

Social constructionist inquiry in psychology may be traced most prominently to the social studies of science and their critique of empiricist claims to transcendental or culture free truth. Pivotal in this respect were Kuhn’s (1962) work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and Berger and Luckmann’s (1966), *The Social*

Construction of Reality. Although differing in many respects, both works were dramatic in reversing the familiar view of knowledge as a reflection of the world, and replacing it with a view in which what we take to be the world is a byproduct of community. With added developments in literary and rhetorical study, critical studies, ordinary language philosophy, identity politics, and micro-sociology, among others, there has developed a far broader and more nuanced movement now typically identified as social construction.¹ The chief focus of constructionist inquiry is on the social construction of the granted world in both science and everyday life. And, as it is reasoned, this constructed world is deeply embedded within social practices.

Within this broad space of concern, scholars and practitioners in psychology have moved in a variety of different directions.² Among the most prominent are:

Discourse Study. If understanding is largely a linguistic construction, then one obvious locus of inquiry is discourse. The preponderance of study stimulated by constructionist writing is thus into processes, structures, and functions of language use. Research may variously focus on the normal or sedimented discourses of both science and quotidian life, on the relational processes through which these discursive realities are achieved, and the functions served by various constructions in society. Study has thus focused on such broad issues as discourse and gender, power, education, scientific reality, organizational life, therapy, the news, and more. For a more thorough view of discourse study, the reader may consult Edwards and Potter (1992); Harre and Stearns (1995); Wetherell et al. (2001).

Critical Psychology. When claims to truth are understood as social constructions, significant questions are opened on whose truth is given priority, who is silenced, who gains by the dominant discourse and who loses, and what ideologies and societal practices are sustained by the taken for granted realities. Such questioning has given rise to a substantial body of critical analysis in psychology (Fox and Prilleltensky 2002; Parker 2002; Hepburn 2002). While many who engage in such analysis do so by virtue of realist claims of one sort or another, their deconstructive work effectively illustrates the potentials of social constructionist inquiry to bring all claims to reality, rationality and value into critical reflection, thus liberating people from the realism embedded in longstanding assumptions and practices, and inviting deliberation on alternatives.

Therapeutic Practice. Many therapeutic practitioners have contributed to the constructionist dialogues, and most importantly, have developed practices that realize constructionist ideas in action. In this case there is broad consensus that “the problem is the problem,” in the sense that problems do not exist independent of our construction of them, and that the way a client constructs the world is the major source of his or her problems. Narrative therapy, in particular, is identified as a form of practice in which the central aim of therapy is a “re-storying” of life circumstances (see White and Epston 1990; McLeod 2004). A

¹ This movement cuts across virtually all academic disciplines, and one can now find over a million websites that treat issues in social construction.

² For a more complete survey of constructionist developments in psychology (see Gergen and Gergen 2007).

range of so-called “brief therapists” often replace inquiry into the client’s psychological dynamics with questions about resources and potentials that would enable a new future to be achieved (De Shazer 1994). Therapists such as Harlene Anderson (1997) propose replacing the idea of a fixed knowledge that guides the therapist’s understanding, with a process of listening to clients and joining them in co-constructing new worlds.

These initiatives scarcely exhaust the range of inquiry and practice now contributing to the constructionist movement. For example, feminist scholars (Gergen 2001), historians of psychology (Danziger 1990), and life span developmentalists (Gubrium et al. 1994), among others, all make significant contributions. It should finally be added that some scholars refer to many of these developments as *social constructivism*. At its roots, constructivist psychology was more fully allied with cognitive psychology. Both George Kelly and Jean Piaget, for example, were considered pioneers. In this early form, constructivism and social construction were in conflict. The former placed the site of construction within the mind of the single individual, while social constructionists viewed relationships as the source of meaning. Over time, however, there have been shifts in both schools of thought. Many constructivists now hold that individual meaning is a byproduct of social interchange, and many constructionists view cognitive processes as discursive action carried out privately. In this case, the two schools converge into social constructivism (see especially Neimeyer 2001; Neimeyer and Raskin 2000).

2.2 *Social Representation Theory*

When Moscovici introduced the term social representation to a wider audience, it was in the context of a review on opinion and attitude research. His concise description of what he considered to be a social representation is still frequently quoted today. A social representation “is defined as the elaborating of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating” (Moscovici 1963, p. 251). Originally social representations were conceptualized as forms of popularized science that inform large parts of everyday knowledge in modern society, but in later work the term included also cultural and social facts that did not derive from science at all.

Starting from Moscovici’s view, a social representation constitutes a socially constructed object *by* and *for* a social group. If, for example, US-media represent the so-called Mozart-effect (Rauscher et al. 1993) as augmenting the general intelligence of young children instead of temporarily increasing spatial performance on intelligence tests in college students; and if they do so particularly in those parts of the United States, where the school system is in financial trouble, the representation serves the population’s desire for an easy remedy in a situation of pressing educational problems (Bangerter and Heath 2004).

The object or fact is determined by the relationships that the members of the community maintain with each other as well as with their environment by means of communication and overt behavior; thus, it is inherently social. The emphasis on social relationships within a group implies that a social representation cannot be reduced to knowledge held by individuals, but that individual knowledge,

accessible by standard psychological methods, is just one aspect of a shared social reality. The other aspects is the personal and mediated discourse that unfolds in a community and society as well as the institutions, which tend to reify social representations in the form of laws, rules and sanctions.

Social representation theory, hence, is a many-sided enterprise involving the individual level of behavior and the collective level of relationships and discourse. It attempts to describe the conditions under which new social representations emerge and are being elaborated in times of rupture where traditional ways of interpreting the local world fail; the theory attempts to unravel the social psychological processes of collective symbolic coping accompanying a representation's emergence (Wagner et al. 2002; Zittoun et al. 2003); and it deals with the processes leading to a representation's objectification as an unquestioned object or social fact in a community. In doing so, social representation theory emphasizes the symbolic level of images, iconic forms and metaphors prevalent in everyday thinking besides the level of language in use. In fact, social representations are considered to be more of an iconic and figurative than propositional matter (de Rosa and Farr 2001; Wagner and Hayes 2005).

Three large areas of research have emerged within the social representation approach: First, there is the social impact of scientific and technological developments in modern societies (Wagner 2007). Recently, for example, the world-wide debate about genetically modified organisms has motivated a large number of social representation researchers (Bäckström et al. 2003; Bauer and Gaskell 2002; Gaskell and Bauer 2001). Other areas covered are, for example, scientific ideas about the universe (Nascimento-Schulze 1999) and black holes that Moscovici (1992) calls scientific myths, psychiatry and psychology (Moscovici 1976; Thommen et al. 1988), and biology and medicine (Joffe and Haarhof 2002).

Second, there are social and political processes that continuously reshape the structure of our societies due to political and economic historical change (Liu and Hilton 2005). Xenophobia and intergroup conflicts are important emerging social facts and topics of public debate (Augoustinos and Penny 2001; Chrysoschoou 2004; Sen and Wagner 2005), as are community life and the role of the public sphere (Campbell and Jovchelovitch 2000; Howarth 2001) as well as the global issue of Human Rights (Clémence et al. 2001) to name but a few. Social and political processes in modern society are, to a large degree, driven by mass media communication. Consequently, mass media and their role in public meaning making are a pivotal part of social representation research since the inception of the theory (Bangarter and Heath 2004; Bauer 1998; Moscovici 1976).

Third, everyday mentality and collective relationships are to a large degree determined by our cultural heritage that circumscribes objects and facts with a long-term historical development and a high degree of mental inertia. Nevertheless, many of the cultural preconceptions are being challenged in modern times and undergo change as complementary ideas are being added (Wagner et al. 2000). In this context social roles and gender are a frequent topic of research (Flores Palacios 1997; Lloyd and Duveen 1992; Lorenzi-Cioldi 1988), as are Gods and religion (de Sa et al. 1997; Lindeman et al. 2002), sexuality and the human

body (Giarni 1991; Moloney and Walker 2002) as well as disease, health and human life (Flick et al. 2003; Herzlich 1973; Jodelet 1991).

The field of inquiry covered by social representation theory is open to a diversity of methodological approaches covering qualitative and quantitative methods including experimentation. The kinds of experimental inquiry used in social representation theory, however, are not “experiments in a vacuum” (Tajfel 1972) but take the complexities of social positioning and collective mentality explicitly into account to ward off mechanistic views of cognition (Moscovici 2000, p. 78ff). There are also significant attempts at combining narrative theory (László 1997), dialogical theory (Marková 2003) and collective memory theory (Jodelet 1998; Laurens and Roussiau 2002) with social representations that yield promising results and broaden the field.

2.3 *Narrative Psychology*

Narrative psychology is concerned with the pivotal place of narrative or story telling in the life of persons and cultures. While emerging in different intellectual contexts, there is broad agreement that people understand themselves and others in terms of narratives (e.g., stories of success and failure, development and decline). These understandings are also significantly linked to forms of action. Thus, any adequate study of human action must necessarily take account of narrative constructions, within persons or shared within the culture. Much like social construction, narrative studies move in a variety of directions, not always fully compatible. For the most part, narrative research attempts to illuminate what are seen as the privately held narratives (e.g., subjective understandings, cognitive structures, phenomenology) that characterize the single individual, a particular class, or subculture, or that may be pervasive in a culture more generally (McAdams 2005). A second movement in narrative inquiry is concerned with the pragmatics of narrative in everyday interchange. Here the emphasis is not so much on the privately held story as the way in which narratives function in relationships. Still other scholars are concerned with the impact of narrative representations – in the media, politics, religion, moral training, and the like – on common cultural practices (For a general review, see the special issue of *Narrative Inquiry*, 2006, v. 16, 1). Narrative psychologists take a particular interest in qualitative methods, as such methods typically seem far more useful than quantitative in allowing the researcher to grapple with subtleties and variations. As should be evident, there is a substantial similarity in concerns with many who identify themselves as social constructionists. This similarity is perhaps most evident in practices of narrative therapy, as described above.

2.4 *Cultural Psychology*

Cultural psychology finds its early roots in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and most particularly his view of higher mental processes as issuing from the relational surrounds. This view, when writ large, suggests that what are often taken as

universal psychological processes of thought, emotion, motivation and the like, are born within relationships. This possibility has stimulated inquiry across a broad spectrum. On the most conservative level, a substantial number of social psychologists have taken up the exploration of cross-cultural differences or variations in psychological functioning (cf. Markus and Kitayama 1991, 1994). Such research is not simply a repetition of traditional cross-cultural psychology, in which the existence of universal processes was assumed. Rather, researchers begin to explore the possibility of entirely different dynamics. Such ideas are rendered more catalytic in the work of Cole (1998), Bruner (1990), and many others, who explore the possibility that social processes give rise to possibly infinite variation in psychological functioning. Most radical in potential is the so called indigenous psychology movement, in which scholars assert the preeminence of local traditions of meaning in both the understanding of any given cultures and the methods through which understanding is achieved (Kim et al. 2006).

3 The Broadening Base

Over the past decade, these four over-arching centers of deliberation have generated a spectacular body of scholarship. However, this treatment does not do full justice to the range of inquiry placing the social production of human meaning in the vanguard of concern. While a full account of the converging movements is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is essential to touch on the significant work taking place in the following domains:

Dialogic Psychology: Drawing importantly from the work of Hermans and Kempen (1993), an increasing number of scholars are abandoning the mechanistic conception of mental functioning in favor of a dialogic perspective. On this account what we take to be thought or reasoning is essentially internalized conversation, a view that resonates with several of the orientations discussed above. However, in an advance over similar formulations, dialogic psychology is particularly concerned with the movement of meaning taking place when multiple “voices” engage in the internal dialogue.

Action Research. Increasingly dissatisfied with empiricist methods of research, including the alienation they foster between the researcher and the “objects” of inquiry, a vital movement has developed that views research as a participatory process. The researcher effectively joins a group of people struggling to achieve some end (e.g., overcoming poverty, creating a school, reducing conflict), and offers resources that may enable them to succeed. The Reason and Bradbury (2001) volume, *Handbook of Action Research* provides a rich range of illustrations. Such innovations raise significant questions concerning the relationship between theory and empirical research in future inquiry (Sugiman 2006).

Relational Psychoanalytics. Emerging from object relations theory, an increasing number of psychoanalytically oriented therapists now view inter-subjective process as the key to therapeutic change. While they retain a view of internal dynamics, they are keenly sensitive to the ways in which individual dynamics are wedded to ongoing relations with others. (See especially, Mitchell 1993).

Feminist Relational Theory and Practice. Many feminist scholars have been disenchanted not only with the mechanistic models dominating traditional psychology, but as well the virtually exclusive focus on individual action. The result has been a spate of theory and research that emphasizes relational process, both in itself and the way it influences thinking and emotion. Robb's (2006) volume, *This Changes Everything*, provides an overview of the grounding work in this movement.

Qualitative Methods. There has been sweeping criticism throughout the social sciences of the positivist/mechanist forms of inquiry. One result has also been a burgeoning of new methods of qualitative inquiry (cf. Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Many of these methods are centrally concerned with the place of meaning in personal and social life. Researchers are also manifestly aware of the ways in which they, as scientists, enter into the creation of meaning in their work. As a result, dialogue often replaces interviewing as the method of choice, as the former demonstrates the social interdependency of meaning, while the latter obscures it. In auto-ethnographic methods, researchers are themselves the subject of the analysis. They report on their own life conditions and experiences as representative of certain groups (e.g., people with eating disorders, grieving, or obese).

As we find, the four significant movements toward a social account of human action are vitally supplemented by an additional range of lively endeavors. At the same time, none of these initiatives is surrounded by walls. The movement across these various domains – large and small – is active, continuous, and innovative. Broad social concern, combined with a heady sense of a new horizon, invite resistance to canonization. In what follows, we sketch out some of the broader implications of these movements as a whole.

4 Social Meaning and Psychological Inquiry

As we find, there is broad convergence in the importance attached to social process in understanding human action. At the same time, these converging movements begin to raise significant questions concerning the individualistic cast of traditional psychology. At the outset, they begin to offer an alternative definition of the human being, one that replaces the traditional picture of isolated minds in mechanistic exchange, with human connection as the well-spring of meaningful action. Yet, as historian Kurt Danziger (1990) has pointed out, the traditional forms of inquiry in psychology are premised on the individualist conception of the human being. Thus, transformations in this conception bring with them significant shifts in the nature of psychological science. Four of these shifts deserve attention:

4.1 *From Individuals to Relationships*

Psychological science has traditionally taken mental process as its preeminent focus of study. The common practice is to select a particular process of interest and through empirical research illuminate its character. Thus we have available

today genres of research on cognition, the emotions, motivation, attitudes, creativity, mental illness, and so on. As described above, the result is to obscure the social world and to reduce it to a secondary derivative of psychological process. However, as a group, the movements described in the preceding sections function to reverse the direction. The social world serves as the primary focus, and mental life becomes secondary and derivative. It is not the private world of single individuals that gains prominence but the shared worlds of people living together.

The result of this shift is a transformation in both the content of research and the methods of study. In the case of content, researchers participating in the social turn become increasingly interested in studying socially shared artifacts, such as discourse, community activity, narratives in action, and so on. Socially meaningful conduct takes center stage. Methodologically, this means a reduction in both experimental methods and mental measurement. With its emphasis on the manipulation of individual mental states, experimentation tends to carry with it an individualist vision of human functioning. Further, the vagaries of mental measurement are bracketed in favor of studying shared human action. At the extreme, there are scholars in the constructionist wing who are deeply critical – both on philosophic and ideological grounds – of dualist assumptions (e.g., a mind “in here” and a world “out there”).

4.2 From Testing Theoretical Laws to Cultural Concern

Much traditional research attempts to test hypotheses about the fundamental nature of psychological processes. Here the assumption is generally shared that because mental process is biologically based, and human biology functions in a similar way across the species, then trans-historical and trans-cultural truths may be established about the nature of mental functioning. Within social constructionist camps, in particular, these assumptions have come under considerable critique. This is so, in part, because the very idea of mental functioning is a cultural construction. To test hypotheses about what might be viewed as cultural myths is unproductive.

More commonly shared among those contributing to the social turn is the assumption that most phenomena under study are culturally malleable. Thus, forms of discourse, narrative structures, shared representations, conceptions of mental illness and the like may vary considerably from one culture or sub-culture to another and across time. The idea of general laws, and accumulating knowledge through continuous sharpening of experimental research, both lose their attraction. Illuminating the social worlds we live in today becomes paramount. Discussions shift away from topics such as attribution error, dual processing, priming, and motivated cognition, all of which tend to remove the profession from socially relevant conversation. Rather, attention centers, for example, on issues of social equality, oppression, mental illness, the human body, sexuality, and human rights legislation. Herein we find substantial potential for contributing to dialogues that shape the future.

4.3 *From Prediction and Control to Transformation*

The major goal of traditional psychological inquiry was to enhance the capacity for *prediction and control* of human behavior. Experimental hypothesis testing was to culminate in an array of empirically grounded theories of universal application. Yet, as widely recognized, a century's pursuit of this project has added very little to the human capacity for prediction and control. For many engaged in the social turn this meager outcome is not surprising. Not only is most human activity highly malleable, sensitive to both cultural and historical context, but the very reality of the objects of traditional study are in doubt. And, as many critically oriented psychologists add, the attempt to generate means of social control is itself suspect. After all, who is envisioned as the controlling agent, and who are the subjects under control?

As we have seen, participants in the social turn tend to be concerned with topics of broad societal significance. Implicit in this selection is the intent to speak into the culture about issues of common importance. As we unpack the implications of this assumption, we also find a significant shift in the definition of the science. Rather than using laws for purposes of prediction and control of *others'* behavior, the presumption is that as people engage in dialogue they develop the grounds for social change. In broader form, we might say that the aim of the science is *liberatory*, that is, setting us free to deliberate and alter our ways of life. The challenge is not to study the past in order to predict the future, but to grapple with the present in order to shape the future. This assumption is most fully realized in action research projects touched on above. Here the researchers offer themselves to groups actively engaged in projects aimed at improving life conditions. Research and social change become one.

4.4 *From Neutrality to Socio-Political Engagement*

Traditional psychology has taken pride in its claim to rising above ideological conflict in supplying empirically neutral facts about the nature of human functioning. However, as constructionists and critical psychologists have argued, such pride is without warrant. All propositions about the world carry with them a particular tradition of understanding and its favored way of life. This is most obvious when researchers label various activities, mental illness, prejudice, intelligence, or creativity. However, it is also the case in the less obvious terms such as information processing, mental heuristics, or decision-making. All place the center of human activity within the individual as opposed to the social world, thus favoring the tradition of western individualism. As a result of such concerns, many within the social turn avoid claims to political neutrality (which they see as in "bad faith"), and recognize their activities as forms of political activism. This is especially so in the case of discourse analytics, critical psychology, and action research.

5 The Present Volume

The present volume assembles chapters by representatives from many of the so-called “schools” described above. Although they differ in many respects, they are all concerned with the social generation of meaning, and its major significance in human affairs. This convergence makes a fascinating reading where, despite a variety of conceptual and methodological investments, we find a consistent emphasis on social as opposed to individual process, its multiple manifestations, its lodgment in culture and history, and its vital importance in addressing the future. There are multiple ways in which these chapters could be organized, and readers are invited to link and pair according to their own needs and interests. We have selected a clustering that points to certain thematic affinities. Thus, we begin with several chapters concerned with meaning and power, and follow this with clusters variously focused on the construction of meaning in everyday social practices, narrative and dialogical communication, and finally, textual, cultural and historical representations.

5.1 *Part I Power and Meaning*

When meaning informs social action, invariably the issue of power becomes salient. The tension between dominating and being dominated springs up as a major source of conflict in defining what is right and wrong and in determining what is the case. In the initial chapter, *Reflections on the Diversity of Knowledge: Power and Dialogue in Representational Fields*, Sandra Jovchelovitch places this issue in the fore. Her argument is based on the view that the power of defining the world in social groups depends on whose representation of an issue is given a voice and whose meaning is being silenced. Using Paulo Freire’s pedagogical ideas she makes a strong case in favor of dialogical encounters where communication partners equally exchange their views and where lay knowledge is accepted as equal to expert knowledge in interpreting local worlds.

While we often view dialogue as democratic, the process is often governed by realms institutions and the unilateral execution of symbolic and physical power. This process and its effects is addressed in Chapter 2, *Discourse and Representations in the Construction of Witchcraft*, by Wolfgang Wagner, Andrés Mecha and Maria do Rosario Carvalho. The chapter presents a social psychological analysis of Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible” showing how the impetus of private interests, step by step, leads from a dialogical and consensual form of communication to a reified and a-symmetric dominance of institutionalized discourse in a community. The authors show how the representation of witchcraft is maintained as a dynamic pattern across different forms of discourse, and eventually leads to a social construction of physical events such as the execution of several members of the community.

In Chapter 3, *Psychotherapy as Cultural and Intercultural Practice: Reflections from Cultural and Constructionist Psychology*, Barbara Zielke and Jürgen Straub

carry the problem of institutions and their power to the arena of health psychology. They show how in a globalized scientific world, Western based psychotherapeutic practice hits the limits of cultural meaning. Concepts and practices of the West are problematic in maintaining and even determining the criteria of success in psychotherapy in non-Western cultures. The authors argue that this development favors a less individualist, post-national and culture-bound idea of personal identity, and thus a re-orientation of modern health psychology.

The collaborative process of constructing meaning is of focal significance in cases of family crisis. Therapeutic interventions are also complex, as families also collude in painful power games that interfere with confronting the crisis. In Chapter 4, *Facing Crisis and Conflict in Therapy: A Generative Perspective*, Dora Fried Schnitman describes the discursive resources and skills necessary for professionals to confront family crises. The author explicates different conversational tools that allow facing and resolving conflict processes by recognizing their particularities and dynamics. She illustrates her model of generative intervention using examples from clinical cases and consultations.

The institutional process of defining syndromes in clinical psychology is significantly determined by historical and economic conditions. Constanze Quosh and Kenneth Gergen trace this process in Chapter 5, *Constructing Trauma and Treatment: Knowledge, Power and Resistance*. In this chapter, “post traumatic stress-disorder” serves as the focus point. The authors show how the definitional power of mental health professionals is significantly augmented by the broad and uncritical use and dissemination of the concept in media reporting. In the course of their analysis, the authors refer to forms of resistance to the dominant stress-disorder discourse in society, and the potential of people to confront stressful events without being treated as deficient or requiring drugs.

5.2 Part II Constructing Meaning in Everyday Life

Meaning construction in everyday life requires persons to constantly reassess and redefine their knowledge as transformations take place in the social, economic and scientific-technological context. During the last decade or so technological innovation, particularly in biotechnology, has led to a bottom-up reappraisal of what it means to be human, how humankind relates to nature and to life. This development in science entails not only a revolution in everyday understanding of technologically modified life, but challenges our traditional moral understandings. Nicole Kronberger places this issue in the forefront in Chapter 6, *Moralities People Live By*. She understands moral communication as the ongoing social construction and reconstruction of values and their application to persons and world. Her focus is on the moral orders people take for granted, how they accommodate this order to new challenges, and the implications for personal and social identity.

Closely related to the meaning of morality is the issue of how norms are being created and meaning is established. In Chapter 7, *A Theory of Norm Formation and Meaning*, Toshio Sugiman presents an approach to this question that is

informed by the works of Japanese sociologist, Masachi Osawa, along with a mathematical theory of George Spencer-Brown and Jacques Lacan's idea of "the big Other." The principal thrust of this chapter is to outline a process of meaning formation without resorting to the concept of embodied minds. Hence, the author proposes meaning formation as a consequence of the interchange among bodies from which a norm that is attributed to a "third body" arises. The third body designates the horizon or frame in which admissible action takes place. A meaning of an object is defined by admissible action and is thus born in parallel with the birth of a third body and a norm. The concept of "mind-in-a-body" is developed as an effect of the expansion of the sphere of influence in which a voice of third body can be heard.

Giving empirical substance to this novel theory, Akiko Rakugi describes a related field research in Chapter 8, *The Transcendental Nature of Norms: Infants in Residential Nurseries and Child Adoption*. In a first study she shows how the behavior of infants who are reared in residential nurseries remains in a stage dominated by inter-bodily exchange. They fail to acquire the norm-giving third body, due to the lack of intense social interchange taking place in natural families. These behaviors are, for instance, smiling at nurses who are caring for other children, excessive exploratory behavior, and fear of soft toys. In a second study the author relates results from her action research in child adoption agencies. Drawing on her observations of the agency's activities, she shows how adopting parents are brought into close and intense interchange with their adopted child as an intentional action, which would be unnecessary in natural homes. This is interpreted as preparing the ground for the development of the third body that later brings about new norms among adoptive parents and their adopted child.

Often we think of psychological coping in purely individualist terms. However, when we view sense-making as a social phenomenon, we begin to understand coping in broader cultural context. Coping by sense-making is the topic of Tania Zittoun, Flora Cornish and Alex Gillespie's chapter, *Using Culture: A Case Study of a Diarist's Meaning Making During World War II*. The authors address this topic in an analysis of daily diaries written by two English sisters during the five years of World War II. They show how such a societal rupture becomes manifest in everyday activities, for example, in baking a cake. However, reliance on collective discourses, political propaganda, films, and music become aids in reducing uncertainty. The chapter brings the reader to understand how cultural products are used by the individual in constructing sense and in stabilizing identity in social exchange and community life under conditions of serious hardship.

5.3 Part III Narrative and Dialogue

The third cluster of chapters focuses on central features of social communication: narrative and dialogue. Michael Bamberg, in his chapter, *Narratives and Identities as Interactional Accomplishments: Toward a Broadening of Narrative Analysis*, takes up the topic of methodology. Arguing in favor of a socially, as opposed to an individually, embedded view of narrative, he usefully expands the potentials of narrative analysis. Using boys' stories about girls, he first points to the impor-

tance of the conversational context in order to assess the speakers' intended story meaning by reference to underlying "master narratives." Second, Bamberg emphasizes a story's openness to interpretation by the audience; and third, shows how the story-teller's identity is revisable and open to multiple interpretations. This approach favors a more dynamic view of analyzing verbal material than has hitherto been the case in the field of qualitative analysis.

In Mary Gergen's chapter, *Narratives of the Nature-Human Relationship*, we again turn to issues of broad societal importance. Her particular concern is with humankind's ever increasing exploitation of natural resources. As she reasons, our views of nature and its uses are embedded within our shared narratives. Such narratives are about nature as a power and threat, as a woman, mother or Goddess, as a source of spiritual feelings, and, as a new trope: Nature as victim. The author traces these metaphors and their philosophical underpinnings through popular culture and exemplifies how they define humankind's conceptualization of nature itself as well as how these narratives reflect our own relationship to nature. She concludes with a search for the implications that diverse images of nature might have on humankind's future relationship with nature.

As the move is made from the individual to the realm of the social, relational process becomes a primary target of inquiry. Conversation analysis is one significant byproduct of this shift. However, many scholars find it useful to focus on dialogic process in particular. While in the many cases dialogue is viewed in terms of a confrontation of opposing voices, harmonious exchanges is less frequently considered. This is the focus of Chapter 12, Yoko Yamada's account of, *Dialogic and Coexistent Narratives: Repeated Voices and Side-by-Side Position of Self and Other*. Yamada takes the film "Tokyo Story" by Ozu Yasujiro as her case material. She identifies narratives that are characterized by coexistence, repeated voices and harmonious transitions, and contrasts them with oppositional dialog in the same film. In contrast to oppositional dialogue, coexistent narratives are based on mutual inter-subjectivity, repetitions and variations of similarity, and by a development of the dialogue from tuning to harmony instead of from struggle to compromise.

Just as in Jovchelovitch's earlier chapter, Yamada's foregoing chapter emphasizes collaboration and coexistence in narration. This emphasis is brought into practical use in an applied study by Katsuya Yamori. Thus, in Chapter 13, *Narrative Modes of Thought in Disaster Damage Reduction*, Yamori presents a narrative tool based on a game used to educate people in fostering damage reduction in disasters. While education in its classic understanding involves experts telling lay people what to do and what to avoid, Yamori's narrative practice aims at the participation of all stakeholders, be they lay resident people, disaster experts, volunteers, or local government representatives. In doing so, the strategy employed in the game "Crossroad: Kobe" is shown to enhance local, inter-local, and cross-generational understanding and promotion of disaster knowledge and – hopefully – also action in disasters.

The issue of dialogicality is further explored in Ivana Marková's, *A Dialogical Perspective of Social Representations of Responsibility*. Responsibility is central in all moral systems and its representation is the shared basis of social behavior.

The author draws on focus-groups with Czech and French young people who spoke about responsible behavior in the dilemmatic situation of totalitarian societies. On one hand, persons living in such situations need to take care of their personal and family life, and on the other, opposition movements require activists to devote themselves to humanity and freedom on a broader level, putting at risk their personal and family freedom. The dialogues emerging in the focus groups reflect a multifaceted position taking on a public level, as well as dialogical deliberation on a private level.

5.4 Part IV Representations in Text, Culture and History

The last cluster of chapters in this volume concerns the interweaving of culture, history and textual representations, as they relate to the generation and sustenance of meaning. Jaan Valsiner's chapter, *The Social and the Cultural: Where Do They Meet?*, serves a linking function in this case. Here he attempts to relate the micro-processes of meaning making, central to the preceding chapters, to the broader concept of culture. In analyzing culture, which has been and continues to be a notoriously difficult concept in the social sciences, the author departs from Muzafer Sherif's notion of social norms and embeds it in a theory of semiotic self-regulation. In doing so Valsiner relates, and expands on the earlier discussions by Tania Zittoun and others where the "bounded indeterminacy" that culture – or "culturing" – defines for each of us furnishes directions for action in situations of life transition and social rupturing.

If, as argued in many chapters of this book, cognition and social behavior are not as subject to deterministic principles or laws as much psychological research and theorizing supposes, the way is opened for serious consideration of the concept of responsibility. In Chapter 16, *Moral Responsibility and Social Fiction*, Toshiaki Kozakai concretizes this insight in an ethnographic analysis of the societal functions of responsibility and punishment. If the social order is a collectively and historically fabricated fiction, then morality cannot be reduced to individual reason. Rather, morality becomes an emergent of social process *sui generis*. To make his point the author draws on historical material from medieval times up to the enlightenment.

Literary texts are the focus of Chapter 17, *Social Psychology and Literary Texts: An Overview*. Here Alberta Contarello takes literature as a rich source of insight into human behavior that social psychology has – up to now – rarely used as material for inquiry. Besides being useful accounts of human interaction, masterly literary texts frequently also take a historical perspective to behavior and development that is usually absent in psychological research data. The author shows that by offering insights into the changing patterns of motivation, behavior and social events, literature is a broad avenue to explore cross-cultural and historical differences in human action. Further, such study functions as a catalyst to developments in both method and theory.

The last seven decades of modern history are replete with the consequences of the unfinished business of military and political confrontation around the

world. While the enmity between European nations that resulted from wars during the last century has by and large been mollified by European integration, this is much less the case in other parts of the world. James Liu and Tomohide Atsumi look into the painful history of reconciliation between China, Japan and Taiwan in their chapter, *Social Representations of History and the Psychology of Forgiveness and Supra-national Identity*. The process of reconciliation, in the context of deeds and crimes committed by previous generations, has received virtually no attention in social psychology to date. This chapter is particularly tuned to the relationship of guilt and shame in Asian cultures where shame and face-saving is a particularly powerful emotion. The authors examine representations of history and narratives of identity, and their consequences for producing East Asian “group narratives.” They end with a discussion of new and inclusive Asian identities that may overcome lingering historical grievances.

As editors, we hope that the diversity of chapters collected in this volume give a taste of the exciting new world of a psychology in which social meaning is the critical element giving rise to human action. We also believe that this orientation to psychology is maximally suited to work in concern with virtually all other social sciences, including their methods, theories, and research outcomes. In our view such an orientation is also most relevant to issues of societal, and indeed, global relevance. The focus on human meaning is critical in the generation of political consciousness, public deliberation, and active change. In the long run our hope is for a science that can more directly feature in the enhancement of the global condition.

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