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ACTUATIONS OF IDENTIFICATION IN THE GAMES OF IDENTITY

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Abstract

This paper approaches identity as a psychological (both natural and cultural) phenomenon. This is done by relying on a theory of action which allows a transit from the biological to the semiotic and cultural (Rosa 2007a & 2007b) and assumes that alive beings construct the knowledge of the world they live in. Identity can only arise from action and it is a result the semiotic processes that occur in an ecological and cultural *Umwelt*.

What is identity?

Identity is a term which deserves a carefully examination. This term can be qualified in different ways (e.g., ontological, logical, personal, cultural, national, political, etc.), qualifications which sometimes overlap and sometimes call on to realms separated by epistemological abysses. When approached from a psychological standpoint, identity shares semantic or pragmatic attributes with terms such as *I, self, self-concept,* etc. An examination of the connections between this family of terms will be the task of this paper. But before moving further, it is worthwhile examining some of the current uses of the term "identity".

Identity probably comes from a combination of the Latin words *idem* and *entitas*, but also may originate from *identidem*, which means "over and over again; repetidly" (Oxford Dictionary, 1974). Following this dictionary a cluster of words sharing the same root appear: *identic, identical, identically, identification, identify* and *identity* - two nouns, two synonymous adjectives, an adverb, and one verb. Let us look at some of the meanings of these terms. **Identical** means "1. the same, the very same. [...] 2. Agreeing entirely on material, constitution, properties, qualities or meaning [...]. 3. *Logic*. Said of a proposition, the terms of which denote the same thing [...]. 4. *Alg.* expresing or affecting identity". **Identification** is "the action of identifying or the fact of being identified". To **identify** is "1. To make identical [...]; to regard or treat as the same. **b**. to make one *with*; to associate inseparably. [...]. 2. To determine the identity of; in *Nat. Hist.* to refer a specimen to its proper species [...]". **Identity** is "the quality or condition of being the same; absolute or essential sameness; oneness. [...] 2. Individuality, personality; individual existence [...]. 3. *Alg.* An identical equation, i.e. one which is true for all values of the literal quantities. 4. The condition of being identified in feeling, interest, etc. 5. Attribute that serves to identify the holder, as *identity card, disc*, etc." (vol. 1, p. 1016).

Some of these meanings refer to the uses these terms had in philosophy, being the *ontological* and the *logical* the most important ones (Ferrater Mora, 1981, vol 2., p. 1606 *passim)*. The so called "ontological principle of identity" states that everything is the same as itself. The "logical principle of identity" is often considered as the logical consequence of the ontological principle. It usually takes the form of "*a = a*", "*a* belongs to all *a*", or

"if *p*, then *p*". Some authors even talk of a "psychological principle of identity", which refers to the supposed impossibility of thinking of the non-identity of an entity with itself.

Meyerson (1908, quoted by Ferrater, op. cit.) says that there is an unavoidable tendency of reason to reduce the real to the identical, i.e. to sacrifice multiplicity for identity in order to look for explanations. If this is taken to hold, then it could be said that $a = a'$, when *a* contains attributes of the class *A* and therefore *a, a', a''*, etc. belong to *A*, where $A = [a_1, a_2, ..., a_n]$. The apparent contradiction of taking two different things as being identical, can be reconciled from a Platonic point of view by saying that $a_1, a_2, ..., a_n$ belong to the phenomenal realm, while *a* is the idea which gives them their being. In contrast, an Aristotelian would say that they share their *essence*, but differ in their *accidents*.

Nominalists approached identity in a different fashion. For them the identity of something is mediated by a label, by a sign that points to a group of objects, and so make them to belong to the same category, and so makes them identical for some purpose. Identity then is not a property of things, but the result of an operation of the subject.

The introduction of time had devastating effects for a metaphysical approach to the issue of identity. Hume's position is well known. For him the ontological problem of identity is unsolvable, since we only have bundles of different impressions along the time, so we cannot jump from the phenomenical realm to that of what things really are. Then, $a = [a_{t_1}, a_{t_2}, ..., a_{t_n}]$ (where t = time and t_n refers to different moments in time) is nothing else that a feeling arising in one's mind which results from a habit. So viewed, identity is a result of the working of the mind, and cannot be reasonably predicated to objects existing beyond the realm of mental representations. Kant's answer to Hume is also familiar: identity can only be salvaged if it retires to the transcendental realm, and it does so via the activity of the transcendental subject, which allows, through synthesis, to identify different phenomena as instances of a transcendental concept. So that any $a_{tn} = a$, once *a* is abstracted from time, and so deprived of any phenomenical features and transformed into a creature of reason.

Identity then results from the activity of an agent, who him/herself is an object. Identity then ceases to be a metaphysical or an empirical question, and so becomes a pragmatic issue – the result of the actions carried out by the agent. The issue now is not to go into the elucidation of which is the real identity of something (an object or a subject), but what *operations* are to be carried out in order to produce a concept or to identify an phenomenical experience as belonging to a class of objects, whatever virtual this object may be. Now identity is not only to be predicated to the perceived objects, but also to the subject him/herself, whose experiences of his or her own operations are also changing, and so becomes a subject-matter for inquiry. So, personal identity becomes an issue to be solved by practical reason.

Actuations of identification

So viewed, the issue of identity becomes that of identification - the outcome of the act of identifying. Thus, when the object to be identified is an acting subject (as is the case of personal or social identity), one should look at what operations that subject carries out; namely: a) what to identify with, b) what signs are used in order to identify oneself with that something, and c) what shape these operations take. This has methodological consequences for psychology. Its task is that of examining his or her *actuations of identification*, the function they play in the life of the individual, and the resources applied

for this purpose; something that may only be elucidated by looking at the kaleidoscopic shapes these operations show in the sceneries in which they are performed.

Rorty (1989), echoing other voices, says that there are at least two ways of using a philosophical vocabulary; which is also to say that there are two ways of conceiving of philosophy: a) to attempt to establish veritative relations between philosophical terms and reality, and b) a post-Wittgensteinian approach, which holds that any philosophical enterprise involves, albeit not always, the creation of a new terminology, and certainly the design of a new linguistic game.

If one takes the first position, then the relevant question is that of whether the language one uses is "correct", whether it is accurate enough to reflect the nature of the phenomena under study. This position is founded on the assumption that "all vocabularies are dispensable or reducible to other vocabularies, or capable of being united with all other vocabularies in one grand unified super vocabulary" (p. 11).

The post-Wittgensteinian possition, on the other hand, assumes that the relevant question is not whether the definition of the sign is capable of containing all the worldly manifestations of the referent. Rather, the question is whether the use of the sign is coherent with the uses of other signs within the same game of language. This form of examination does not require an ontology of permanence, since truth is not in the accuracy of the word to reflect the referent, but in the internal coherence of the different uses of the sign within the same language game.

So, what do we think is identity? Rather than talking of identity as a transcendental entity, we shall start playing our game by referring to *actuations of identification*. Actuations are formed by actions connected among themselves within intentional schemes which form the bases of scripts (Rosa, 2007a). They involve intentionality in the Brentanian sense, since any act of identification involves identifying something *with* something else, and so has an immanent directionality and objectivity, as well as being always culturally meaningful and situated in particular scenes (Bruner, 1990).

How can identity games be played?

Predicating the identity of things.

Identity has difference as one of its antonyms. An organism must be able to distinguish both in order to keep alive. Identity is the result of a predication (an actuation) performed upon an experience which assimilates it to another one previously experienced. A predication dos not necessarily have to be carried upon speech, it could be done by motor actuations. An organism may behave as if it were recognising a new situation as identical to a previous one. Something felt acts as a sign of something beyond what is actually present.

Things get more complicated when identity and difference cease to be dichotomic, when something is identical to something else in some respect and different in some others. When this happens the organism needs to identify what is identical and what is different vis-à-vis its goal and adjust its actions accordingly. Learning and perception are a result of this increase in quasi-semiotic capabilities. Some features of what is perceived are taken as signs of a particular kind of thing. Stimuli turn into signs of *objects*, and later they come to signify *situations* in which some particular patterns of actions are more adequate than others for reaching the desired results. Once objects and situations are

recognised, actions get combined forming *actuations*. When these actuations are carried out in situations involving other organisms (particularly, but not always, congenerics), these actuations eventually become *dramatic actuations)* (see Rosa 2007a). Organisms show their capabilities of recognising what is similar and what is different by the way they actuate and perform. Actions and actuations are the first semiotic mediational means for identification of regularities and differences, and so for understanding and making sense of the world.

Social life set a scenery for new type of issues. Not only members of one's own group have to be distinguished from foreigners, but also each individual of the group has to be identified. Otherness and sameness create each other by way of the developing of patterns of actuations adjusted to particular social situations. Identity and difference, from being an attribute of material things also become of importance when applied to individuals, to the performances of those individuals, and even for oneself. Behaving accordingly to one's position within the social hierarchy becomes then an issue of importance. Still representation is carried out through movements (actions and actuations), but now emotional expression can start to turn into gestures, and eventually will evolve into socially conventionalised signs. When this happens culture is on the move.

Towards social and individual identity

Conventional symbols transform actuations of identification. Rather than leaving in a transient world, symbols (signs, first conventionalised with oneself, and then with other members of the group) make possible to stabilise the world, providing objects, situations, groups, individuals, and oneself with a permanent entity and so identical to themselves throughout time.

Identity is something that is predicated of an entity in different moments of time, or better, it is the result of the performative constitution of a permanent entity through motor and speech actuations. So, *actuations of identification* have to be explained in the contexts in which they are performed and uttered, i.e., as situated actions of biological and socio-cultural-historical beings.Our argument takes us to state that terms such as *I*, *self*, or *we* are deictic terms in speech actuations which attribute agency and performatively create an object which also is a subject - an entity which appears in consciousness with an identity which runs along time, but who also has agency as one of its key features. Such a personal identity may appear in many guises: e.g., as a self-concept, as a cluster of attributes belonging to different classes or as a narrative *I* or *we,* depending on the way it appears in discourse. In this sense, personal or collective identity is a result of discourses which themselves are speech acts of individuals who actuate with the mediational means they have at hand.

Individual identity starts then, first, by constituting one self as a permanent object, and then as a member of a class. A man, for example, may identify himself as belonging to a category, as a son or a father, as a psychologist, a Spaniard, a music lover or whatever.

Social Categorization Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) assimilates inter-group processes to matters of categorization and social identity. Shared self-definition as member of a category will serve as a basis for collective behaviour involving groups of a range of sizes and qualities: from small peer groups to the whole society. The meanings ascribed to those categories will determine the meaning of collective action regardless the

scale of the collective. Self-concept bridges the gap between personal and social identity (Turner, 1985; Turner & Oakes, 1986) through the use of the concept of social identification. The image of the self gets categorized as belonging to a certain group, providing a sense of belonging to a higher entity with which the individual shares systems of symbols with a shared significance.

Actuations of identification may appear in many different occasions. One may identify oneself by showing an identity card, or by defining oneself as a consumer, a civil servant, a defendant, or a client when immersed in a particular activity in which one plays a role. But one also identifies with a group and not with others. One has a *feeling* of belonging to some classes of individuals and rejects to be identified with others. Acts of identification are not purely cognitive, they also have an affective side, and sometimes a very strong one.

Who carries out actuations of identification? From individual agency to the person.

Acts of identification have a phylogenetic origin. Animals not only actuate as a result of the coupling of their morphological structures with those of the environment, but at certain level of evolution they become able to identify their offspring and mates, their victims and their enemies. Identification then results of actuations carried out by agents. Or better, by actors acting within dramaturgical situations.

From identity to the self

George Herbert Mead (1934) stated that the self appears as a result of the actions of a biological agent. Before reaching consciousness of itself, the individual has to be an actor in the world. His or her dramaturgical performances are instantiated through gestures, vocal signals and voices. It is through this social interplay that the others acquire a meaning. The meaning of the subject's self cannot appear without the idea of the others. Consciousness of the self only emerges when the individual is capable of using the voices of the others to refer to her or him-self. The *self* is formed by the *I* and the *me*. The *I* is the subject of immediate experience and cannot appear in consciousness, something very close to a transcendental *I*. The *Me* is the experience of the actions of the *I*; it is a selfconsciousness that emerges in every social action that is capable of changing the *I*: when the *I* speaks, the *Me* listens. For this to happen, the *Me* has to be taken as some kind of otherness for the acting *I* (Ricoeur, 1990).

The last few years have witnessed a reconceptualization of identity under the banner of contextualism. Now identity is not understood in the social sciences as an intrapsychic, personal reality, but as the result of processes of a historical-cultural character. Let us retrace some milestones of this journey.

The movement started first in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology or social philosophy. Kenneth Gergen was among the first psychologists to call for an interpretative, constructivist and distributive attitude towards psychological phenomena. For example, he realized that the values an individual embodies in his or her self-steem or self-concept could substantially change as the context of evaluation or the people change. "In a distributive sense (...) the I can be considered as a product of the situation in which it operates, a 'swarm of its participations', as Perkins says." (Bruner, 1991; p. 109).

The *self*, then, is a result of the dialogues between the *I* and the *me*, which also evolve from social dialogues with others. The self then has an inherent dialogical character. Hermanns (2001, 2002) acknowledges this character combining it with Bakhtin's contribution developing a theory of the dialogical self as a construct which takes into account different *I-positions* vis-à-vis the others with whom the *I* interacts, which together shape the self as a continuously moving entity. The *I* changes positions as an actor moving from one scene to another, changing addressees and then playing different characters in diverse sceneries.

The self, then, appears as something which cannot be exhausted by the use of the term identity. This takes Ricoeur (1991) to distinguish between two different uses of this term: identity as *sameness*, and identity as *selfhood*. This distinction between *idem* and *ipse* is not merely grammatical, logical or epistemological, but also ontological. Heidegger (1927/1962) refers to the same distinction suggesting that selfhood belongs to the realm of *Dasein*, while sameness refers to the things at hand. That is, we can predicate a logical identity when referring to things (*a = a*), but not when we talk about people. Unless people are considered as things and alienated from their human nature. We may say that if there is not an ontological gap between the *idem* and the *ipse*, certainly there is an epistemological abyss between them.

Whatever the case, *selfhood* contacts *sameness* via the category of permanence through time, a category that can only be narratively solved. The question is whether it is possible to refer to permanence only by the adscription of properties to an individual, or whether when talking of selfhood it is also necessary to call for a process of imputation, for a moral standing towards our own actions or those of the others. Actions of telling things would then be the key for understanding what Dilthey called vital cohesiveness. Ricoeur's proposal is that identity is a self-interpretation process mediated by systemic and narrative structures. Self-knowledge is interpretation, and self-interpretation (the interpretation one makes of the self) finds a priviledged mediation in narrative forms, although there are other possible mediational means (signs, symbols, etc.). When self-interpretation is mediated by narrative forms, we are talking of *narrative identity*.

Narratives in dialogue: Individuals playing as actors and authors

The *I* produces a narrative self, a life-story, a biography, which is a literary production. One recognises oneself as the same individual in the photographs of his first communion, in his army uniform, or his wedding. It is in this sense that identity is a polyedric concept. The perceived permanent self may display a different facet, may take many guises, it may even change, as the deictic *I* appears in different actuations of identification.

Telling one's life story is a form of identification, is a way to present oneself as an unique entity which evolves through time. But telling a story is also a communicative actuation, it is addressed to somebody, is enplotted in a literary genre and has a sense of closure (Gergen, Albert). Such life narratives are not a permanent or definitive way of presenting oneself. They get transformed as the addressee or the scenery changes, as one's I position moves. The narrative self is a product of the dialogical self (Hermanns, 2002?). But now this dialogical self is not only the result of an actor playing a script, it evolves towards the creation of an author composing a literary production.

This requires recovering memories of the past. Narrative actuations of identification involve remembering. Bartlett (1932) insisted that there are no particular memories stored in the mind or the brain, only traces left from experiences (schemata)

that get transformed every time they are activated to produce a concrete reality in the course of current action. Memories are not fixed, but recreations of the past which provide us with a sense of continuity, with the feeling of being an entity with a past and a future. As Barclay and Smith (1992) say, remembering involves a) accessing available information as a result of brain activities, b) reconstructing our past in the present for some particular psychosocial purposes, and c) co-reconstructing through the collective remembering of personal and historical events and storytelling.

Memories always have a sense. They are included in a structured experience, in which the different remembrances are related to each other and to the current situation in which they appear. So we need to refer to the ways in which particular remembrances are linked to experiential structures. Bartlett (1925, 1932) showed the empirical fact that acts of remembering are not pure cognitive actions. Feelings drive to action when values strongly related to the self are involved (Frijda, 2004). It is feeling what allows one to identify a current material with another previously known. Thus, to remember something is to enplot the experience of the conscious activation of these traces of the past (either lived or referred) into a current set of actuations. When these remembrances are communicated among individuals, they shape a discourse which typically takes a narrative form. When these discourses about the past refer to lived experiences, we are talking of memories of the individual; when they refer to the past of a group, we call them historical memories.

Autobiographical memories are not any memories of one's experiences, but memories that contain information relative to the *I*; they are the raw materials, but also a consequence, of the narrative self. Autobiographical memories provide a sense of coherence as well as intellectual and emotional comfort (Barclay & Smith, 1992). They are shared with relatives, friends and acquaintances and interweave our personal histories with others'. Many of these memories are shared with a generational cohort, and include memories of important public events which affect our lives. Some of these memories are kept through rituals, graphic representations, statues, buildings, etc. (Pennebaker, Páez & Rimé, 1997).

Barclay and Smith (1992) conceive the interconnection between autobiographical and public memories as the basis for the construction of a *personal culture* in connection with a public culture. Public culture may be characterized as a set of social practices and patterns of meaning embodied in symbols.

> "Personal culture too is a system of significant symbols (such as autobiographical memories) serving to store and produce meaning. Personal culture, as with general culture, consists of 'a model of' and a 'model for' the production of meanings and realities (...), and it is created in interaction to serve physiological, psychological and interpersonal objectives" (p. 76).

Collective and personal culture intersect in personal interaction, in the relationship between the individual and cultural products, practices and institutions. The flow of personal reality emerges within the personal culture where it intersects with public culture. Of course personal reality is made of phenomenical experiences which cannot be shared. However, when public and personal culture intersect both get affected and re-structured in small or large ways.

> "It is in the ongoing interaction of personal and public culture that objective reality is created. Objective reality may be a constructed phenomenon, but one constructed in reference to a real physical and social

world that regulates, corrects and shapes our subjective experiences." (Barclay & Smith, 1992).

Many cultural symbols serve the purpose of acting as prompts for acts of identification (e.g., national flags or anthems, portraits of heads of State, religious images), as many rituals do (e.g., religious festivals, civic processions, rites of passage). It may very well be the case that the emotional side of the significance of a symbol is related to its use in rituals, i.e., in social activities among whose purposes is that of binding individuals together. It is not infrequent that those rituals include elements such as bright clothes or uniforms, flowers, colours and music capable of arousing emotions. Emotions get associated to the symbol and become a part of its personal sense. The symbol thus appears as a mediating device for a feeling of belonging. But it does so because of the previous use it had in a joint activity of a group. Symbols are not only embedded in systems of activities, but they are also included in myths and enplotted in narratives. They do not only have an affective side, they represent concepts which have values and norms attached to them, but which are also enplotted in discourses which superimpose a rationality upon them. This rationality may appear in declarative discourses, but also in narratives; narratives provide a *na-rationality* to history and autobiography

Narrative identity, in spite of its dialogicality, is a device for the coherence of the self, particularly when the *me* acts as a privileged interlocutor for the *I*. The *I* so becomes the author of the self. Even if it does so by ventriloquating other voices and moving between different I-positions a tendency towards the construction of an increasingly coherent idea of oneself may appear. The narrative self then may act as a resource and a constraint for the appraisal of experiences and for the direction of actuations. The narrative self, even if moving and transient, is made up of a selection of I-positions and narratives, for which not everything goes. Each sign, each utterance, each narrative has some value vis-à-vis the self in relation to the others.

Towards personal identity

The movement between actor and author of one's one self is a slow process not easy to disentangle. Every performance is not only an interpretation, but also a creation addressed to the audience. However it is always carried out by playing or writing a script with the devices at hand taken from the means available in the shared public culture. But, what happens when actors, authors and the audience do not share the same cultural materials? This is particularly important when values, ideologies and the emotions attached to them are involved. Ambivalence and ethics, then appear as key issues. The individual then has no script ready to solve the problem, no social moral appear as directly applicable, and the self may not be as resourceful for the I as one may desire. One has to go into solving dilemmas, into developing personal ethics beyond applying the receive morals. One may feel the vertigo of indeterminacy (or the excitement of freedom) and the thrill of power (or weight of responsibility or even fear of guilt). One has to go into developing new resources, into authoring one's own self beyond the received resources, and so becoming a person capable of reshaping one's own self according to the lived circumstances and, sometimes, doing so according to a rationality beyond the received reasons, and so developing personal ethics. When one goes into cultivating one's own virtues and making oneself agent, actor and author in the shaping of one's own self, one is on the path of becoming an ethically responsible *person*.

Conclusions

As we see it, the *I* is that which makes it possible to have experience, i.e. to decide what happens to *me*. The *I* is a grammatical instance susceptible to many predications. It is the *I* which allows distinguishing the different aspects and functions of mental life. An expression such as "*I am nothing*" allows to distinguish between the *I* and *identity* in a relatively easy way. I may have lost my signs of identity, but still here I am to say so. In sum, the *I* only dissolves if my relation with the world also dissolves (and my own body is a part of the world). In other words, the *I* disappears only if I cannot communicate with the other members of my species (including myself), if I cannot tell them *I cannot communicate with you.* So conceived, identity, as a formalized predication of the *I* can change and even dissolve, but this does not have to imply necessarily that the *I* also disappears or disolves. The distinction between identity and the *I* is somehow similar to that of the narrative and the narrator.

Identity is a result of actuations of alive beings. It is a consequence of the agency of life, it evolves as a result of natural processes which transform a natural agent into an actor, and through socio-cultural symbols into an author of one's own self. Dilemmas and ambivalence may also produce a person capable of producing ethics beyond social moral. Whatever the case, neither identity, agency, or the self should be taken as any sort of transcendental entity, but as the result of biological and socio-cultural-historical processes, which alleys are our task to explore.

The ideas on identity here developed are the theoretical background behind a research program on identity which has produced a significant amount of data concerning such different topics as personal identity (Mateos y Blanco, 1996), the role of historical narratives in the constitution or legitimating of national identity (Rosa, Blanco, Travieso, Mateos y Díaz, 1997; Rosa, Travieso, Blanco y Huertas, 1999; Castro y Blanco, 2006; Rosa, 2006), the relationship between identity and ideology (Rosa, Blanco, Travieso y Huertas, 2000), the relationship between national and European identity in Spaniards (Blanco, Rosa y De Castro, 1998), psychologists' professional identity (Rosa, Blanco y Huertas, 1991; Rosa, Blanco y Huertas, 1998; Blanco y Castro, 2000; Fernández, Rosa & Ondé, 2000; Castro, Jiménez, Morgade y Blanco, 2001), the role of intelectuals in national identity dynamics (Blanco y Pizarroso, 1998; Castro y Blanco, 1998; Blanco y Castro, 2001; Castro, 2004; Rosa, Castro y Blanco, 2006) or identification in fictional narratives (Sánchez y Blanco, 1996; Sánchez y Blanco, 1998; Rasskin y Blanco, 2002). Our current efforts are invested in the development a semiotic theory of action (Rosa, 2007a&b; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007; Rosa & Valsiner, 2007) from which we have here attempted to sketch a view on to the issue of personal identity.

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