



12th International LAB Meeting - Summer Session 2008
14th International Summer School

European Ph.D. on
Social Representations and Communication
At the Multimedia LAB & Research Center, Rome-Italy

Social Representations in Action and Construction
in Media and Society

"Social Representations, Collective Memory and Socially
Shared Emotions: narrative and experimental approaches"

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http://www.europhd.eu/html/_onda02/07/14.00.00.00.shtml

Scientific Material

European Ph.D

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International Lab Meeting Series 2005-2008

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Psychology within Time

Theorizing about the Making of Socio-Cultural Psychology

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A Socio-Cultural Look Upon Psychology

The aim of this chapter is to examine the kind of explanations Socio-cultural Psychology offers as a discipline. Our attempt will be to deploy a self-reflective approach, taking Psychology itself, and specifically its socio-historical or cultural aspects, as the subject matter of our study. In order to do so, Psychology will be considered here as a cultural product resulting from specific socio-historical conditions and demands. We will focus on something that most psychologists tend to leave aside: the fact that Psychology is, like any other product of human behavior, a consequence of situated activities and thus the knowledge it offers is subordinated to a process of continuous cultural and historical transformation.

This chapter, rather than referring to psychological theories concerned with the explanation of behavior, knowledge acquisition, or whatever, will focus on developing a theory about how Psychology develops, about what psychologists can do developing

theory and practice and, in addition, how their labor affects not only the historical change of the discipline, but also the way people make sense of themselves.

Reflexivity as a Methodological Tool

Before going into the development of our argument, an explanation of the assumptions on which it is elaborated is needed. This requires, first, to refer to the notion of human subject we hold (for a more detailed explanation see Chapter 14) and how an acting human psyche can produce knowledge.

This move is a methodological application of reflexivity (Rosa, 1994; Rosa, Huertas, & Blanco, 1996). We take reflexivity to be a necessary requisite for the consistency of a theory. It is not enough that a socio-cultural psychological theory explains the individual and collective processes of knowledge production, but the explanations provided also have to be compatible with how knowledge production results from historical processes situated in socio-cultural settings. None of

these two kinds of processes can be considered in isolation from each other. They are inextricably united and can only be considered separately for analytical purposes. But even when this is done, the theoretical apparatus employed, and the description and explanations produced, have to be careful in providing the slots and interfaces necessary for linking the final product to the complementary side of this two faceted process. The tensions and challenges so posed when these two sides of the endeavor are matched, call for the consideration of particular phenomena otherwise neglected, while they urge to develop transitional categories (Vygotsky, 1926) to bridge the gap between the socio-cultural and individual processes of knowledge construction throughout history.

This chapter focuses on the historical socio-cultural processes of producing psychological theories, and most specifically theories of a socio-cultural kind. So the reflexive approach we have chosen to take requires us to start with some consideration of how psyches are able to produce knowledge, and particularly knowledge about themselves.

A Socio-Cultural View on Cognition

Following the approaches of authors such as Vygotski (1978, 1986) and Leontiev (1979), we are interested in the socio-cultural re-elaboration of biological activity throughout the historiogenetic and ontogenetic processes. The instruments, tools, or mediational signs acquired in socio-cultural interaction will be the focus of our study. Within a specific culture, these artifacts (Wartofsky, 1973; Engeström, 1987) allow human beings to communicate and collaborate – or disagree – with the rest of his/her fellow beings in an effective way.

Communication and language form the backbone of these mediational means. The explicit or implicit function of any linguistic category used in everyday life is to define, explain and control (to adjust and allow the self adjustment of) our own experiencing of the world. Throughout history, these cat-

egories relate to each other through rules which shape specific forms of reason and different rationalities, which develop from, but are not reducible to the rationale of the primary functions of biological adaptation (see Chapters 10 & 14). The adaptative value of every particular cultural rationality is established within a symbolic space – a socio-cultural framework – where the meaning and pragmatic logic of daily life needs to be continuously negotiated, what results in many different ways a human life can be lived and understood. Human activity is always meaningful. It is placed within a normative framework, or as Wittgenstein (1973) said, it is always inscribed in some of the “Language games” which shape the semiotic network of a culture in a specific time and place.

The Argument of the Chapter

It is from this point of view that we will develop our argument. We will start by going into describing how human rationality gets shaped in a socio-historical spiral. It is within the construction of socio-cultural realities, that different levels of self-reflection about human experience appear. The emergence of these levels makes possible human activity to become an object for scrutiny. It is within such process that linguistic categories and social institutions picture collectivities and individuals as active or passive subjects of socio-cultural activities. Our main focus here will be on how culture establishes and distributes levels of self-reflection about human action.

An analysis of the emergence of psychological theories about the socio-cultural phenomenon follows. Psychology is a field of knowledge where different disciplines concerned about the study of the human phenomenon interact. From the first moment of its constitution as a discipline in the 19th century, Psychology became a meeting point for the integration of theories about individual and collective entities, as well as a ground for the development and intertwining of technologies elaborated by Philosophy and the Natural and Social Sciences. The result is

a psychological approach to culture (understood as practices oriented towards the construction of meaning), which is responsible of the two main attributes acquired by the subject of modernity, that is, individuality or singularity, and agency or responsibility.

The third section is devoted to follow up how this multidisciplinary heritage produced current psychological approaches to socio-cultural phenomena. The socio-cultural network of contents, reasons, and meanings, which shape subjectivity and permit to make sense of human activity will be examined, together with the clues and tools devised in order to achieve a self-reflective look at any account of what "human subjects" do. This includes Psychology itself, and of course (as it should be expected), our own perspective.

Finally, it will be argued that human behavior always involves, in one way or another, an activity oriented towards establishing the meaning of experiencing. Psychology itself is a part of such activity.

The Inscription of the Human Subject in the Structure of the Socio-Cultural Reality

A discussion on the discursive construction of the category of subject within the socio-cultural framework is the main concern here. This requires focusing on the cultural distribution of semiotic resources for self-reflection on human action, as well as in the stabilization, preservation and change of these resources throughout the processes of socialization and institutionalization, that is, how public discourses formalize, homogenize, and regulate the agent's behavior within socio-cultural practices.

Individuals, as linguistic agents, are themselves constructed by the discursive categories present in their culture. From a semiotic point of view, we are talking about multi-purpose categories susceptible to different linguistic "uses", that is, possible senses and references – when facing new contexts of experience. However, this openness is relative, since the potentiality of lin-

guistic "uses" are actualized according to socio-cultural rules, which act as devices which allow and constraint the possible relationships of the individual with reality' within a specific culture.

The Discursive Control of Human Activity

Any dynamic socio-cultural framework produces new meanings, but also sets limits for interpretation. The processes which exercise this controlling function are not very different from the ones that make possible, and regulate, individual enculturation and socialization. They are varied enough as to provide a discursive variety that makes possible a limited "polyphony" of possible interpretations of individual experiences. The social languages of a culture are a resource, but also a constraint, for the socialized individual's interpretation of his or her experience.

Social languages exist in a structured social milieu, with a social hierarchy. This means that there are politics of interpretation, so the political side of the management of these linguistic resources cannot be neglected. Every collectivity, independently of its degree of sophistication, has a series of leaders and elites strategically placed in the social network, who have some degree of management control on the polyphony of discourses.

Bakhtin's notion of *voice* is a useful tool for the examination of the effect on the human subject of all these discursive controls. Wertsch (1991) addressed this point when posing the question "Who is doing the talking?" An utterance, besides being pronounced by a speaker addressing a particular addressee, also borrows categories and ways of speaking belonging to a social language and previously uttered by other voices. Bakhtin called this process *ventriloquation*, which is not only a way of accounting for the individual appropriation of cultural resources, but also is one of the devices for cultural transmission. Of course, ventriloquation is beyond a complete control of the political agenda of social elites, but this does not mean that they do not have enough power to set limits on what meanings are to

be taken as legitimate, and so to be privileged to be distributed throughout the socio-cultural network via the institutions developed for this purpose.

Institutions are responsible for what Berger and Luckman (1966) called *objectivisation* – externalization – and *subjectivisation* – internalization – of social knowledge. They organize the life and experience of individuals throughout their whole life: from the very cradle of the vital experience of the individual (the family), passing through the acquisition of the cultural skills explicitly and formally required to become a full member of the social group (the school, where cultural homogenization takes place), and eventually providing the resources and the framework for dealing with their adult life in social, economic and power relationship (workplace, law, courts, state administration). Within all these spheres, certain discourses and social practices get privileged, become legitimized and made official, so that “normality” and “abnormality” eventually appear. As Foucault (1971/1972) explained, institutional support and distribution of some discourses tend to put pressure and coercion on some others.

Institutional distribution usually intervenes in the negotiation of meanings in a conservative or even reactionary fashion, since official and legitimate discourses are necessary tools for the maintenance of institutions. Something which is also valid for the institutions devoted to the production and distribution of knowledge, including science. As Foucault (1971) pointed out, the “will to truth” comes together with the way knowledge is put into practice in a society where is valued, distributed, shared, and also attributed to individuals and institutions. Discourses and institutions mirror each other.

Social structure and power distribution are also issues to be taken into account. Latour (1987) points out the symmetry of the *technogram* of scientific texts (i.e., the structure of theoretical knowledge) and the authors’ positions within the institutional *sociogram* of the discipline. And Bourdieu (1991) coined the terms *symbolic cap-*

ital and *symbolic power* to refer to the political-academic position of their bearers, and how value is attributed within the *symbolic market*. The best example is the institutional organization of knowledge in schools and universities where modern elites are selected and shaped.

The reproduction of structures of meaning is one of the most important mechanisms of defense used by societies or cultures. It is useful not only to normalize their members’ interpretation of reality (what is especially relevant for newcomers into the group, either children or migrants), but also to avoid radical transformations which could put at risk the established socio-cultural order or the very existence of the group as a collectivity with a specific identity. This process is neither simple nor direct. Discourses are not reproduced as if they were faxed from one mind to another. They are resources to be used in the contexts of everyday life, and so they have to be selected, negotiated, re-elaborated, and combined in conflictive intersubjective contexts, and so new discursive categories or meanings emerge, and with them, new tools to make sense of the person’s experience in the world. A close scrutiny over the practices which legitimize official discourses, and their continuous updating in the socio-cultural network is of prime importance for the understanding of cultural and historical change. Science is no exception.

Thus, socio-cultural normalization controls the production of possible meanings within a socio-cultural framework. It has provisions for almost any encounter (even with illegitimate discourses and practices) in which changes in the established discourses and social-cultural practices could be considered. There are even some particular institutions which offer self-reflective contexts (e.g., some universities and research centers) where tolerance for a greater polyphony of discourses could be instrumental for the exploration of ordered possibilities of socio-cultural change. But historical change does not only proceed in such a conservative and ordered way. The unavoidable existence of any grade of polyphony of discourses

within a social group offers a ground ready for the development of deviant discourses that could end up producing subcultural or even countercultural tendencies. However, if they are to get some success, they have to reach some form of institutionalization, even if this is informal and alien to the institutional fabric nurtured by the discourse of the specific power. Thus, official and alternative discourses are weaved with the same semiotic threads.

No doubt, the tension between preservation of normality and socio-cultural change has effects on how people conceive themselves, that is, on how they use linguistic categories and discourses for self-reflection in an effort to make sense of their lives. When they do so, they have to enter into a dialogue in which categories taken from different discourses and social languages present in the group are borrowed and so new discourses are made possible to appear. This may result in a challenge to official cultural models, and to attempts to revise, resist or eliminate the received legitimacy. If these new discourses get widespread, if the number of people able to appropriate them increases, then a radical rupture may happen, since the distance between the official discourses and alternative ways of making sense of personal experiencing is made apparent. Individuals, then, may realize that cultural (scientific, political, religious . . .) knowledge is a device for managing and legitimizing what should be considered *normal* or *abnormal*. In extreme cases, this discursive struggle may involve not only a dispute on what is to be taken as legal or official, but also to the very understanding of the structure of reality, and so, to the very consideration of what is to be taken as true or deceiving.

The existence of discursive struggles is a proof that, given the right circumstances, human beings can be sensitive to the effect of discrepancies between discourses, as well as to the politics of discourse management. If this is so, then it becomes possible that discourses on how to deal with alternative semiotic devices (which permit to make sense of experiencing in different ways) may also appear. The question then changes radically.

Now there are discourses not only on how to make sense of experiencing, but also on how to figure out that different discourses take one to make sense of the world in different manners. Discourses, and oneself, become then issues to be considered as detached from immediate experience. When this happens, conditions are served for the idea of *self* to come to the forefront. A sociological and anthropological turn is then in effect.

The Socio-Historical Emergence of Self-Reflective Discourse

What changes is not the fact that any one is reached by the discourses distributed by official institutions. What is new is that now there are also self-reflective discourses available. Then a new rationality appears within this cultural group: a rationality that is able to report that itself is not the only way of making sense of the world, but just one of the possible ways of understanding experiencing. Such rationality did not exist before, it is a result of a historical process that followed a particular path of development that we are still witnessing in the Western and Westernized cultures at the present.

Self-reflection, as a result of self-reflective discourses, is not only the cradle of the idea of the self, but also a feature of Western culture. Havelock (1986) and Foucault (1988) showed how ancient Greco-Latin literature provided spaces for critical self-reflection which produced an assortment of different structures, grammars, and theories of action. These spaces for critical reflection resulted in a sophisticated specific rationality to theorize about the "self," to shape and bureaucratize it, as happened in Roman law. This contrasts to the persistence and immutability of other cultures, which relied on ritualized and cyclic myths with a rigid structure that made very difficult a socio-cultural change of the view of reality to happen. It is when referring to these kinds of cultures that Levy-Bruhl (1963) coined the idea of the collectivism of "primitive mentality", a controversial expression because of its ethnocentric phrasing. His ideas were furthered

by his disciple Leenhardt (1971), whose studies forerun the idea of the lack of a consciousness of individuality observed in exotic and illiterate societies, so different to the conceptions of singularity and responsibility (or a self-reflective view about the agent) common in Western cultures. In those societies mythical structures shape human daily actions, providing ready-made immediate decision-making theories, and so leaving little room for the development of self-reflective discourses.

This type of discourses did not percolate into Western cultures, becoming quite widespread, until the end of the 18th or the beginning of the 19th century. It was then when Modernity brought in a new set of related socio-cultural phenomena: the extension of liberalism and industrialism, political revolutions, the crisis of the monarchies and empires, the birth of nation-states, the culture of leisure, intimacy, privacy, and so on (see Ariès and Duby, 1999; Elias, 2000). This was a critical socio-historical moment, closely related to the self-reflective turn to culture and to the development of the idea of the human individual. Such turn made possible that discourses calibrating alternative paths for action and choice among possible vital alternatives started to appear. In short, a complex anthropology – a theory of the human subject – began to unfold. New theories were needed when (and where) the belief that the course of personal life (and history) was determined by Providence started to be shaken (Blanco, 2002). These new theories of the human subject were supported by two pillars: (1) individuality or personal singularity, and (2) responsibility or human agency. The intersection of both attributes defined a singular and independent human subject – either individual or collective – who, at the same time, was distributed, fragmented, and prepared to carry out the multiple socio-cultural functions demanded by the modern scenario. In sum, human individuals had to become competent to deal with socio-cultural polyphony (some times even cacophonies of discourses), at the same time that they become liable for their own actions (see

Gergen, 1991 for the concept of fragmentation and saturation of modern subjectivity).

It is evident that self-reflective discourses about singularity (or individuality) and agency (or responsibility) do not govern individual activities in every socio-cultural context. Certainly, the complexity of Western societies favors the production of self-reflective discourses, but this does not mean that every social agent is continuously in touch with them. This means, that the gap between a *collective mentality* (with a scant articulation of their individual self) and a well developed self-reflective consciousness (which would imply a complex articulation, or even disarticulation, of the individual self) is not an effect of geographical location or historical distance, but also runs between different contexts within the same socio-cultural framework. So, there is no clear-cut historical transition line between one type of mentality (or reason) and another. There are fuzzy limit zones which cross throughout the contexts of different socio-cultural practices within modern groups. A variety of theoretical and practical technologies had then to be developed in order to facilitate transitions between these different contexts. These theories and technologies offer explanations and provide techniques, which include a way of accounting for the transitions between the collective and the individual, and so offer a way of distributing the agency of actions. A schema of the dynamics of this transitional process is shown in Figure 3.1.

So viewed, self-reflective discourses do not only belong to specific socio-historical conditions, but also to particular socio-cultural practices. These are practices which have evolved from what Foucault (1988) called the "caring of the self", that is, the old hedonistic, stoic and Christian formulas for the knowledge and development of the body and the spirit. It was in the Enlightenment and Romanticism of later 18th century that these formulas re-appeared in context of leisure, intimacy and privacy. But they were also essayed in philosophical and scientific contexts where social and individual phenomena were explored and started to

be redesigned. The most powerful prescriptions to objectifying, ordering, and administering private and public life in the new emerging nation-states were developed in academic institutions reformed for this purpose.

It was within this context, and precisely in the new fields of knowledge then emerging, where classical anthropological self-reflective theories, still in use nowadays, were constructed and sanctioned. Slowly first, but with increasing determination later, a new psychological field appeared and soon appropriated the treatment of the individual and collective self. From that position, Psychology claimed a role for influencing self-reflective theories. But, of course, once Psychology started to take shape within in its own discursive formations, institutions and practices, could not escape from the rules of administration and circulation that, as stated above, govern any social discourse. So, Psychology cannot avoid Bakhtin's and Wertscht's suspicion that there is neither "neutral and impersonal language" nor possible of "de-contextualization" of utterances (Wertsch, 1991). The origins and purposes of any discourse, and Psychology is no exception, have to be found within the socio-cultural framework in which it developed.

It is then clear that the products generated in the disciplinary field of Psychology can only be understood through an analysis of how Psychology, as a disciplined form of knowledge, became culturally important. Or, in other words, by taking into account how culture and the human subject became psychologized themselves (Blanco, 2002). So, an inquiry into how civilization established and transformed devices to control the more basic psychological structures of the human being – such as Norbert Elias's (2000) study on "emotion" – is of great interest. But we need to go further, and focus on how the semiotic and socio-cultural values of self-reflective categories were used to construct psycho-sociological phenomena, such as "emotion".

The links between Psychology and its socio-cultural contexts attracted the atten-

tion of researchers influenced by cultural history (see Daniel, 2001). Following Elias, J. Jansz, and P. van Drunen (2004) gathered a series of studies to shed light on the relation between the practical orientation of Psychology – education, mental health, organizations of work, delinquency, and so on – and the particular concerns of Western society during the last three centuries. From a Foucaultian perspective, Rose (1985, 1996) reconstructed the genealogy of Applied Psychology in the United Kingdom, and the role of psychological discourse in the construction of contemporary subjectivity. Danzinger (1990, 1997) explained the origins and cultural importance of the laboratory as an institution in modern scientific Psychology, as well as the historical process of construction of psychological categories. Leary (1990), Soyland (1994), Draaisma (1995), Blanco and Castro (1999), Castro, Jiménez, Morgade, and Blanco (2001), and F. Blanco (2002) explored the metaphorical and rhetorical condition of psychological categories.

All these studies, rather than attempting an epistemological foundation of the discipline, centered on exploring how Psychology became a culturally significant instrument. The resources and limits established by socio-cultural discourses and institutions, and the socio-historical constitution of a human subject defined by singularity (or individuality) and agency (or responsibility) are the foundations on which a genealogy of academic Psychology can be built. It was in the 19th century, when the theoretical, practical, and institutional keys which shaped contemporary Psychology appeared.

A Brief Genealogy of Psychology as a Discourse on Socio-Cultural Phenomenon

The exploration we are about to begin now does not derive from a reconstructive historiographical approach to History of Psychology, nor is an attempt to defend identitarian interests. It results from our conviction that

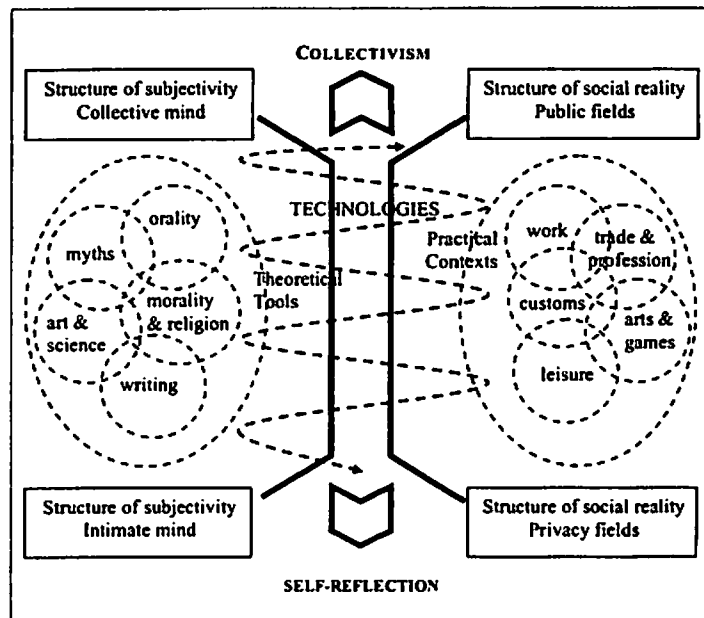


Figure 3.1. The dialectic between collective and self-reflective contexts and their technologies.

any discursive formation should be analyzed through its socio-historical, epistemological, and ethical-political determinants, if one wants to produce a self-reflective explanation of that disciplined realm of knowledge.

Disciplined Psychology as a Discourse Reflecting upon the Self

The 19th century was an epistemologically crucial period: it was then when “man was invented” (Foucault, 1966). The fixed order of all the creatures of Creation, the representationalism and the taxonomic structuring of knowledge typical of the 18th century were disposed of to be replaced by new hidden forces with a high explanatory potential: origin, causality, and history (Foucault, 1966), which resulted from the discovery of time (Toulmin & Goodfiel, 1965). This new *episteme* made human beings to be the ultimate object and subject of all knowledge. Once a general theory of representation of the world disappeared, the need for inquiring into how human cognition proceeds became crucial for the explanation

of knowledge. “Man became that upon the basis of which all knowledge could be constituted as immediate and non-problematized evidence” (Foucault, 1966, p. 345).

The development of a self-reflective anthropology is the fundamental landmark of 19th century knowledge, and was the main factor for the birth of the Human Sciences. New intellectual interest centered on the understanding and control of the “human phenomenon”. From the 1850s onwards, Psychology grew into a key force in the new context of the Human Sciences. A consequence, we believe, of its epistemological capacity to integrate every kind of theoretical and practical knowledge about the human being. Furthermore, Psychology seemed to have been able to gather under the umbrella of its name discourses and technologies fitted to the demands of modernity.

This placing of Psychology in a crossroads of various disciplines devoted to the study of the human phenomenon was a key element for its institutional success, but this was also a burden bought at the price of a chronic epistemological crisis suffered from the very

moment of its institutional foundation. Its difficulties in integrating philosophical speculation with the mechanicism and materialism of natural sciences of the time are a reflection of the paradoxes and controversies inherent to the theoretical and practical design of the modern subject. Eclecticism and multiple theoretical-practical faces were constitutive conditions of the new Psychology, and still remain to be so (for an analysis of the structure of the different current handbooks of Introduction to Psychology see Castro, Jiménez, Morgade, & Blanco, 2001).

The new *episteme* pictures the modern human subject as beholder of two basic characteristics: individuality or singularity, and agency or responsibility. Psychology attempted to address these features by means of the use of concepts such as *character, will, intentionality, mind, personality, purpose, motivation*, and so on. These categories were applied to ease the tension between free will and creativity (a heritage of metaphysical categories such as *soul*) and determinism or mechanicism (implied in the naturalist approaches, and presented in racial and anatomical-physiological terms). Nevertheless, Psychology managed to establish different areas where some theoretical and practical rules were developed as a contribution to the design of modern man. Agency and individuality are two dimensions along which the different areas of classical psychological knowledge can be articulated. Agency or responsibility spans between consciousness (or self-reflection) and the unconscious or the automatisms of behavior. On the other hand, individuality or singularity shapes a second dimension spanning from the particular character of each individual to the collective features of groups. Figure 3.2 distributes the theoretical subdisciplines (circled by a dotted line) and the practical applications (circled by a continuous line) of Psychology, as they were at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century.

Three well-defined psychological areas appear in Figure 3.2. The top – ruled by General Psychology – deals with the psychological processes belonging to an abstract

canonical human subject. The bottom – concerned with collective psychological phenomena – started to develop from earlier *Völkerpsychologie*. And the transitional area between the other two is occupied by applied subdisciplines. It was in these latter fields where theoretical arguments arising from the areas of elaboration of psychological knowledge were tested and updated.

This division in three areas was already perceptible in the early 20th century, when there was still some epistemological symmetry² in their inter-exchanges. General Psychology consolidated, first, through academic institutionalization (starting with Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig in 1879), and then by developing applied areas as the drift of Dewey's pragmatism towards education or Münsterberg's Practical Psychology towards industrial settings show (Leahey, 2004). However, *Collective psychologies* failed to reach a similar status, perhaps because there the epistemological problems derived from the eclecticism of 19th-century Psychology were more extreme. In addition, there were two well established traditions sharing the field. On the one hand, was the German *Völkerpsychologie*, inaugurated by Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) and Hajim Steinthal (1823–1899),³ and continued by Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) (see Jahoda, 1992), which was interested in the study of psychological processes common to all human beings. And, on the other, the French characteriological tradition of Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), Alfred Fouillée (1838–1912), and Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931),⁴ devoted to the study of specific psychological processes in particular human groups. In spite of Lazarus and Steinthal's initial confidence in the complementarity of both approaches, their irreconcilable distance was definitely pointed out by Wundt in his *Elements of Folk Psychology* (1916).

Even so, controversies within Collective Psychology⁵ may have been eventually fruitful, since they were forerunners in the attempt of offering socio-cultural explanations. The following section studies how this

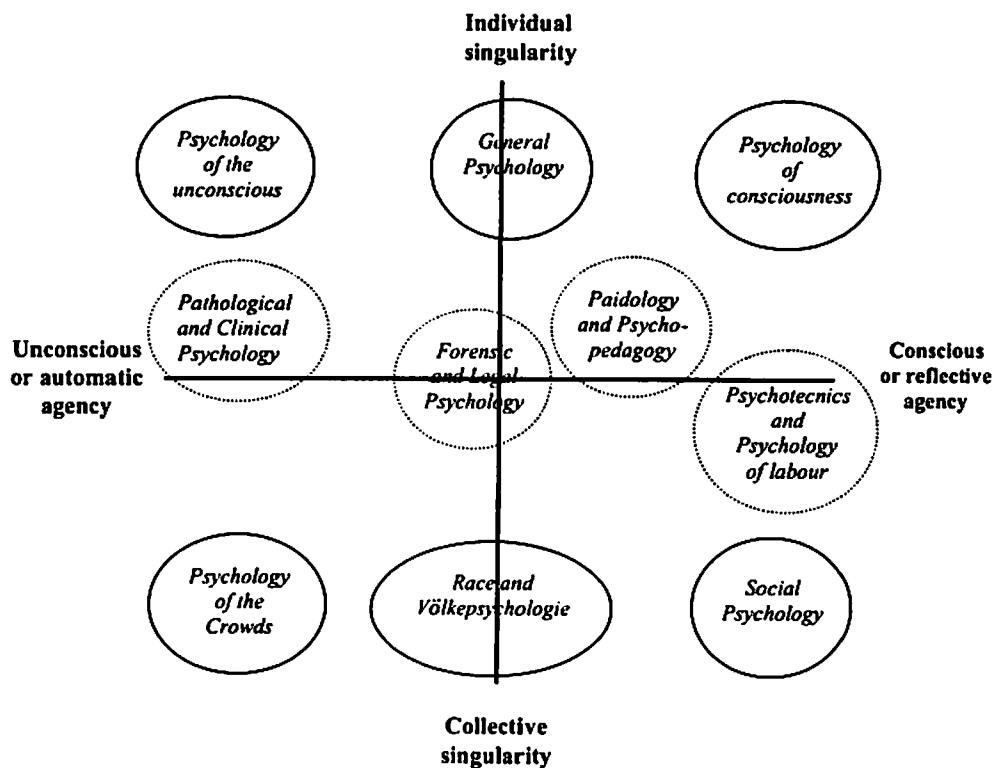


Figure 3.2. Distribution of psychology realms as related to individuality and agency.

contribution was linked to its capacity to integrate very different disciplines.

Collective Psychology: A Multidisciplinary Effort to Link Psyche and Culture

It is a merit of *Collective Psychology* to have taken culture within the regard of Psychology. It is worthy to remind that the first chair with the term "psychology" in its denomination was occupied by Lazarus at Bern in 1860, and held the name of *Völkerpsychologie* (Jahoda, 1992). This was a discipline that gathered concepts and arguments of the Humanities and Social Sciences of the time, including those belonging to disciplines such as Metaphysic, Philosophy of History, Linguistics, Sociology, Law, Anthropology, Biology, and of course, General Psychology.

It is important to remember the role these disciplines, and their representatives, played

in the theoretical and practical construction of the socio-cultural structure of modernity. Such structure came to replace the guidelines for behavior of the old monarchies and empires by the means of a new socio-political device: the liberal nation-state. Individuality (or singularity) and agency (or responsibility) became features not only of individuals, but also of collective entities. An intersubjective framework was assumed to underlie any socio-cultural phenomenon, including the nation-state. Its formulation and design demanded theoretical concepts to express the "natural unity" of all members of the collectivity. Scientific rhetoric was used to reinforce the national community and provide political agendas and common future projects in competition with other national groups (see Hobsbawn, 1983; Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991). But constructing the singularity and agency of the collective subject should not jeopardize the preservation of the singularity and

agency of the individual subject, since the distribution of different socio-cultural roles and responsibilities was basic for the protection and progress of the collective.

The idea of social unity appeared first with the concept of *Volkgeist*, especially in the fields of Metaphysics and Philosophy of History (Fichte, Hegel, etc.) and Linguistics (Humboldt, Grimm, Bopp, etc.). From the mid-19th century onwards, the concept of social organism was also operative in Sociology and Law (Comte, Spencer, Le Play, Savigny, Jhering, etc.) and Anthropology and Biology (represented by Tylor, Waitz, Quatrefages, Darwin, Haeckel, etc.). Attention should also be paid to the widespread use of the idea of "race" as a way of accounting for collective identity. Race at the beginning was an idealistic and positivist concept, and only later acquired the reductionistic and biological connotations it now has.

By mid 19th century, *Collective Psychology* was a meeting point for the conceptual categories of the emergent Humanities and Social Sciences. It offered a ground to integrate and regulate the conceptual tools of the above mentioned disciplines and authors. Table 3.1 arranges some of these concepts distributed in five fields (subject, place, product, time, and finality).

The elements and categories gathered in Table 3.1 were employed for dealing with multiple theoretical and practical questions in relation to socio-cultural phenomena. They were the bases for the evaluation of specific differences, peculiarities, authenticities, and singularities of human groups. They also defined the degree of agency – consciousness and unconsciousness, activity or passivity – that could be attributed to the behavior of such groups.

By late 19th century and early 20th century, guidelines for intervention started to appear within Psychology. They were technologies addressed to deal not only to understanding socio-cultural singularities but also to tailor the responsibilities of human collectives to the demands of the times. This meant that *Collective Psychology* was challenged to get in touch with the applied areas of the discipline. Indi-

viduality (or singularity) and agency (or responsibility) were the key issues for this test.

Concerning singularity, the goal was to underpin and harmonize the cultural framework of the new nation-states. This task depended mainly on Psychopedagogy and Clinical and Legal Psychology. The former worked as a means of monitoring the incorporation of new subjects to the national community. It had an important role in the process of education for literacy and in the articulation of collective memories, usually the teaching of history, art, folklore, and customs. On the other hand, Clinical and Legal Psychology were in charge of the control and normalization of the "sick", the "degenerated", or marginal individuals and groups, who were viewed as deviant from the official culture, and so considered potentially dangerous.

In relation to agency, the goal was the management of socio-cultural activities and progress. This was a task that also first started within the psychopedagogical context, as it was in charge of the social distribution of basic tools for reaching the civilized and scientific progress of the ideal modern world. But when dealing with the economic structure and the division of labor, new technologies had to be developed to deal with the complexities of socio-cultural articulation. So Psychotechnics and Psychology of Labor started to be instrumental, as nowadays Communitarian Psychology or Socio-cultural Animation also are (for a socio-cultural approach to the different fields of application of Psychology, see Jansz and Van Drunen, 2003).

Collective Psychology could not match this challenge. The Psychology concerned with the study to the abstract canonical individual human subject surpassed the Psychology concerned with the study the cultural processes and products. Soon *Collective Psychology* started to fade away within Social Psychology, and ended up disappearing without a trace. Nevertheless, some of its concerns were preserved within the work of scholars such as G.H. Mead in the United States or L. Vygotsky, A. Luria, and A. Leontiev

Table 3.1: Humanities and Social Science concepts used by Collective Psychology in the second half of the 19th century

<i>Conceptual Signs or Elements</i>					
General Psychology	Personality Intellect/ feeling Will Soul		Logic Ethics	Psychological laws	
Metaphysics and Philosophy of History	Great Man Mentality	Landscape Territory	Customs Religion Art and Science	Historical law Historical stages Eternal return	Cosmopolitanism Fraternity Harmony
	Genius/Spirit <i>Volkgeist</i> People	Nature	Languages	<i>Zeitgeist</i>	Humanity Nationalism
Linguistics	Language Character Race	Geography and Climate	Myths	Stages of language	
Anthropology and Biology	Brain Instincts			Laws of evolution Laws of heredity	Natural selection Survival
	Organism Crowds/Elites	Environment	Folklore Technology	Cultural stages	Civilization Colonialism
Sociology and Law	Society Individual Social classes	Nation-state	Law Institutions Division of labor	Laws of Economics	Order and progress Pacifism Revolution

in the Soviet Union (see Valsiner and van der Ver, 1996). Meanwhile, General Psychology reached a privileged place in official discourses. It ended up as a background for the regulation of the practical aspects of the discipline, some of which developed technologies to be applied in the socio-cultural realm.

When looking at the past, it can be said that Psychology succeeded in its evolutionary struggle because of its ability for drawing clear institutional, academic, and professional demarcations. This was a process that ran parallel to its increasing theoretical-critical disinterest in socio-cultural and historical reflections. There is little doubt that this capability for self-reflection was given back to the disciplines that, at first, inter-

acted in the field of *Völkerpsychologie* (see Cole 1996).

It seems that Psychology's interest for culture as a constituent part of the human phenomenon faded away as it became institutionally stronger. The ability *Collective Psychology* showed to integrate strong currents of the Humanities and Social Sciences of that time, at the same time that reinforced its apparent power to manage the attributes of singularity and agency of the modern subjectivity, was also the source of its weakness, making extremely difficult to reach a proper systematization. The synthesis it attempted was not achieved, and the field about to be constituted broke into pieces. Eventually, the sign "psychology" was appropriated by generalist and applied approaches addressed

to the study of individuals and groups, which left culture aside. However, the socio-cultural perspective did not completely disappear out of contemporary thought. We will deal with some of its lines of continuity in the next section.

Towards a Self-Reflective Proposal About the Analysis of Socio-Cultural Contexts

In spite of its lack of success, *Völkerpsychologie* is currently considered as a forerunner of the contemporary families of Cultural and Socio-cultural-historical Psychology (see Jahoda, 1992; Cole, 1996; Rosa, 2000a and 2000b). These approaches continue to claim that intersubjectivity is a key issue for the constitution of the human phenomena, even if sometimes this means to pay the price of some eclecticism. They also keep alive the interest on the two issues of modernity we have been repeatedly mentioning – individuality (or singularity) and agency (or responsibility) – two attributes referring to decision-making capabilities and to the distribution of socio-cultural functions, for both groups and individuals.

An example of such concern is apparent in Wertsch (1991). For him “the word in language is half somebody else’s” leaving the explanation of how this happens to the following Bakhtin quote.

“It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other peoples’ concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own.” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293–294, quoted by Wertsch, 1991, p. 59)

The agent must mediate between the individual psychological functions and the

available resources offered by the socio-cultural contexts in which s/he inhabits. So there is clearly some room for a decision that can be attributed to the human subject. Cole (1996) also claims the need “to place Culture in the center”, what for him means that Culture acts as an agent providing artifacts to impulse and develop individual or collective anthropological structures.

We agree with Wertsch and Cole’s views on socio-cultural psychological phenomena. Individual and collective subjects, together with social structures and practices and the mediational artifacts of culture, share the agency of human actions. But our interest here is not going into a discussion on how to develop a psychological theory about socio-cultural life, but to go into an examination of some aspects of how theorizing about Psychology is being performed.

We do not believe that the goal of Psychology as a discipline should (or could) be to explain and control what people may be and do throughout their lives, as the universalist theories of General Psychology and its technological promises for a better world (for some) sometimes do. Our option is take a turn that, as Bruner (1990) stated, makes one to seriously take into account what people say they are and are doing when carrying along in their daily lives.

Furthering Bruner’s perspective, we are interested in the study of the kind of strategies humans apply when searching for meaning in what they are doing. And this ranges from the observation of somebody carrying along any daily activity, to the scrutiny of how a scientist proceeds when formulating a hypothesis or struggling to articulate a disciplinary theory about some part of the world – including psychological theories. The socio-cultural (and epistemological) activities carried by scientists (and also by analysts of culture) become, then, a part of the subject matter to study.

In order to approach this goal a self-reflective strategy of analytical decentration is required. A strategy that, on the one hand, resorts to particular theories developed within particular psychological or socio-cultural subdisciplines to describe

and explain how meaning-making in context is done. And on the other, struggles to adapt these theories to our goal of explaining the processes of producing accounts of socio-cultural activities, and among the latter, the activity of building theories about socio-cultural psychology.

Any explanatory account of an observed action is done through language, it is a discursive process. So, if explanations are to be taken as the subject matter of an inquiry, some features of language should be taken into account. Linguistic signs reify experiences. The semantic categories in use within a socio-cultural activity, such as an epistemic practice, are the building blocks with which an image of the world is built. This means that any examination of how an explanation is produced requires a genealogical exploration of how the categories employed in such explanation were coined.

Devising an Auto-Reflexive Method

Current socio-cultural psychology dwells in the heritage received from 19th century modern Social Sciences and Humanities. Subject, place, time, product, and finality were the fields which ordered the categories gathered within *Collective Psychology* (see Table 3.1). They are still alive in the current interest of Cultural Psychology for the self, contexts, mediation, artifacts, and socio-cultural integration. On the other hand, Socio-cultural Psychology also keeps alive a concern for accounting for the two main features of modern subjectivity: individuality and agency. These two dimensions will be instrumental for our purposes here. Our strategy will be to relate these two sets of dimensions in order to create some new categories useful for our purposes.

Any current consideration of *individuality* requires the development of a theory of identity. Hedetoft (1995), from the standpoint of Political Science, carried out a research project on national identity in several European countries. His methodology was heavily influenced by Peircean semiotics, and was able to pinpoint several areas where national identity was exercised. Territory

was the central issue, and ethnicity, history, immigration, and confrontations (either in war or sport) acted as pivot elements for exercising national identity. These areas provided a semiotic space where the intersection of political entities and cultural identity had to be negotiated using signs and arguments. Hedetoft's semiotic categories were not far from the above mentioned five classical fields of 19th century *Collective Psychology*, and permits to rearrange them in four thematic categories: *actors*, *objects* (tools and material or symbolic instruments present in socio-cultural activities), *spaces*, and *time* (past, present, or future events). These four categories are not ordered in any kind of hierarchy. They are thematic categories for the discursive production of acts of identification (or counteridentification) in socio-cultural activities. As it will later be shown, they are useful for the analysis of how Socio-cultural explanations address the issue of individuality.

Any socio-cultural concern about *agency* requires referring to how goals, intentions, or motives are present in individual or collective actions. These are elements which are not independent. They together shape a motivational structure, which in turn cannot be considered independently from a theory of action. Such a theory, when approached from a discursive outlook, as is the case here, needs to take into account how these conceptual elements are arranged, in order to figure out how the explanation provided pictures the way in which action starts and follows a particular course.

Kenneth Burke's *Grammar of Motives* (1969) offers some tools useful for this purpose. For him any explanation of action provided can be characterized as a result of a *dramaturgical action*, which can be portrayed by going into the examination of the functional articulation of five elements: *agent* (whom or what the responsibility of the activity is attributed to), *"agency"*⁶ (the means or ways applied to reach the goal), the *scene* (where the activity takes place), *act* (action and the form that it takes), and *purpose* (the aim or goal, the "why" or "what for"). These five functional elements are not

independent from each other, they relate among themselves conforming a structure, which then is able to picture the particular grammar of motives articulating the explanation provided.

These five grammatical functions are always apparent in any explanation provided to an observed activity. There are always some beginning conditions that are articulated in the *agent-scene ratio*. From such conditions, the motivational structure employs "agencies" to develop a particular *act*. This model assumes that the agent-scene ratio can be preserved or modified continuously during the act. This is a kind of grammar that has the added property of portraying its object in a way that resembles a narrative plot, which implies a program of future.

Hayden White (1973, 1987), when applying a narratological strategy to the examination of History and Philosophy of History, pointed out to how within a narrative, besides the plot and the argument, there is also a moral and an ideology. They together take a particular form which he termed a *historical style*. This concept is defined as a narratological strategy that links past and present, emphasizes some events instead of others, and promotes a desired future to be reached by following some particular means. Joining together Burke and White's contributions, it could be said that the weight of *ideology* is in the *act-purpose ratio*, as this gathers the moral of the story – that is, the theory of change – that runs through the act until the reaching of the purpose.

So far we have devised two set of categories to deal with the two main issues of concern: individuality and agency. Individuality is addressed by a set of categories which can be treated as themes in discourse analysis; while agency is dealt with another set of interrelated functional categories. They together can be taken as two axes conforming a grid for the analysis of current approaches to Socio-cultural phenomena.

At a first glance, the categories of both dimensions may look coextensive. The "agent" is usually an "actor", the "scene" can be identified with the "space", etc. How-

ever a specific sign does not always necessarily play the same function in the structure of the activity. In fact, different accounts of an observed activity make possible to uncover different motivational structures in the explanations provided, since each thematic element can play a different functional role. The first dimension is descriptive; it simply pinpoints the presence of actors, objects, spaces, and time. The second, however, deals with the function that these described elements play within the explanation under analysis.

For example: any topic of the category *actor* could work as *agent* as long as it plays the main character of an historical-temporal event – which then plays the function of *act*. But this *actor* could also appear as "agency" if it is considered only a vehicle that transports the *act* of certain *spatial* factors, which then would play the function of *agent*. This strategy allows uncovering differences on the functional role given to each element when explaining a particular action. In other words, the method of analysis here presented is concerned on describing how current views on Socio-cultural phenomena can offer explanations about the distribution of agency.

A Catalogue of Ways in Which Socio-cultural Psychologies can Address Agency

The result of the application of this method is the grid presented in Table 3.2, which offers a catalogue of all the possible ways in which the four thematic categories can play a functional role in the explanation of action. The 20 cells so produced present the currently available possibilities for an analyst of socio-cultural activities to attribute meaning to his or her observations. In other words, Table 3.2 acts as a catalogue of current possible ways of producing explanations about how singularities (either individual or collective) interact with agency (can be made accountable of the observed outcomes).

The 20 possibilities presented in the table are interdependent alternatives. A specific

Table 3.2: Thematic categories in a grammar of explanatory functions

	<i>Agent</i>	<i>Scene</i>	<i>Act</i>	<i>Agency</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Actor	1. Entity or subject that performs the activity	5. Entity or subject included in the activity	9. Change or preservation of a subject as activity	13. Entity or subject that suffers or carries the burden of the activity	17. Kind of entity or subject projected or pursued in the activity
Space	2. Physical space that causes the activity	6. Physical space where the activity takes place	10. Construction or destruction of a space as activity	14. Physical space suitable for the appearance of the activity	18. Utopia projected or pursued by the activity
Time	3. Temporal instance that causes the activity	7. Moment when activity takes place	11. Temporal change as activity	15. Temporal space that favors the activity	19. Uchronia projected or pursued by the activity
OBJECT	4. Symbolic or material artifact that causes the activity	8. Symbolic or material product that confines the activity	12. Symbolic or material creation as activity	16. Product that expresses or canalizes the activity	20. Tasks projected or pursued by the activity

thematic element could play different functions in alternative motivational structures. This may be clarified by looking at examples of 19th century Collective Psychology. If we look to Hippolyte Taine's theory (1863), he made geo-climatic or historical environments to play the function of *agents* (and so they could be placed either in box 2 or 3) in determining the character of the collective, which, in this case, would be an "*agency*" (box 13) or even an *act* (box 9). Another author may offer alternative explanations in which the environment may play the role of a background landscape or a momentary *scene* for collective action (and so to be placed in boxes 6 and 7). Or, alternatively, make this *space* to play the function of a *purpose* if environmental change is to be taken as a goal (boxes 18 or 19) pursued by an individual *agent* – the Great Man – or a collective one – the race – (box 1), as Joaquín Costa did (1898).

Of course, a specific thematic element can only carry out one function within the particular instance of the grammar of action

under analysis. In that way, if a specific place and period – for example, a *context* according to Cole (1996), or a *cronotope* according to Bajtin (1981) – are defining a *space* and a *time* within an enclosed activity (boxes 6 and 7), they would not be able to carry out any other function in the analysis of the same activity. This, of course, does not hinder that different elements of the same thematic category could carry out several functions at the same time. A good example can be found in Lazarus and Steintal's *Völkerpsychologie*. In their works, People play the role of "*agency*" (box 13) that permits the expression of *agents* such as the *Volkgeist*, the *collective mentality* or *race* (box 1), which clearly play the functional role of *actor*. The same process happens when an *object*, with a symbolic meaning, configures a *scene* – a socio-cultural or institutional context – (see box 8) where other material or symbolic *objects* play the functional role of "*agencies*", that is, myths, art, technology, and so on (box 16). Moreover, these "*agencies*" could express or execute the prescriptions of an

object playing the role of *agent*, such as social norms may do (box 4). Something which is not too far from explanations sometimes offered by socio-cultural theorists such as Engeström or Leontiev.

Purpose plays a function which we believe is particularly interesting. It illustrates the projection of any thematic element or sign into the future, that is, its conversion into what Hyden White called "ideology" (boxes from 17 to 20). How *purpose* is dealt with is crucial for how a theory of change (or preservation) is presented within the motivational structure. In classical Collective Psychology, *purposes* were apparent in the tension between homogeneity (thematized in concepts such as *humanism*, *colonialism*, *civilization*, etc.) and socio-cultural singularity (with terms such as *survival*, *nationalization*, *social harmony*, etc.). Issues that are not too far from current concerns about the conflict between globalization and the preservation of cultural, religious, or national identities, which too often result in several forms of fundamentalism, sometimes together with a revival of ethnocentrism and neo-colonialist "manifest destiny" doctrines.

The function "purpose" plays within this grid helps us to notice that every analytical discourse – with its thematical variation and functional arrangement – negotiates in a particular way the tension between stabilization of the socio-cultural activity and its alteration and modification. In the first case, the burden of explanation is in the *agent-scene ratio*, reinforcing the view of actors as responsible for the outcome of their actions, while in the latter the *act-purpose ratio* makes the goal to play a causal role as a feed-forward drive with teleological properties.

These examples make apparent how this method could be useful as a self-reflective methodological tool for the production of socio-cultural explanations, since it calls attention on the need for a detailed consideration of the *ratio* between the elements. The result is that every analyzed instance ends up producing a particular grammar where the different themes are articulated in a particular functional balance.

Final Remarks

The method presented in this chapter takes reflexivity into account as a methodological resource. It is concerned about how the past left us resources for meaning-making, but also about how to use them to prepare a future. This means that any individual, when trying to make sense of what s/he experiences, is always empowered and constrained by the discursive and institutional limits within which s/he works. This is equally valid for a plain person, for a scientific observer or for an academic when devising an explanatory theory. Meaning-making is always a pragmatic and situated activity.

This is one of the consequences of modernity, which postmodern thinkers have been right in pointing out. Epistemological discontent is one of its outcomes. Any attempt to relate singularity and agency cannot avoid involvement with unending levels of reflexivity.

Our attempt here was to offer a tool for the systematization of such a self-reflective endeavor. We offered a sort of map (a meaning-making device) which may be of use for analysts and researchers in their interpretative journey. We believe it can be useful in fixing one's position and course. This grid offers a set of quadrants that have the added property of showing the resources one is working with, and the course followed by others to take us to our current position. Our view of reality is a consequence of this.

This method is also a travel guide. It helps to take a self-reflective approach when producing analysis and devising theories. This map is useful for keeping account of what resources one has available, as well as how to apply them for avoiding inconsistencies. It is also an analytical device for the examination of descriptions and explanations given, and for the theoretical accounts produced. In addition, it makes apparent that we cannot afford to forget the genealogy of the categories which constitute our own current rationality. The meaning and course of our life depends on this.

Maps are always a simplification for interpreting reality. They have a lifespan, and

therefore is a mistake to use them as corsets to restrict our movements. The landscape changes, and no course can be set without taking into account the conditions of the sea. No map can forecast future changes either. Maps are tools for orientation, but it is a mistake to ignore the environment when piloting. Although we believe the categories here employed are still useful, there is little doubt that they will be surpassed. This will be done by negotiating new waters, visiting new realms, devising new instruments, drawing new maps, and changing cartography itself.

This methodological proposal involves a self-reflective turn, and so helps to be aware of one's own activity and the compromises and commitments one has within the socio-cultural matrix of categories and functions. As it could not be otherwise, this method is itself inscribed within the socio-historical process of searching for meaning. A process which, at least since the beginning of the 19th century, shows our ambivalence between the nostalgia of what we were, and the worry about what we may become.

Acknowledgments

Preparation of this chapter was supported by the grants SEJ2005-09110-Co3-03/PSIC and SEJ2005-09110-Co3-01/PSIC from the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science.

The authors thank Elena Battaner and especially Ana Pereira for the help received in translating the manuscript.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion on "reality," see Chapter 14 and the General Conclusions of this volume.
- 2 In their mutual dialogue, collective psychologies tend to reproduce the classical structure of subjectivity in General Psychology: a rational part devoted to the soul, and an empiricist or experimental part devoted to the study of will, feeling, and sensation or thought. This scheme expanded to the characterization of the collective phenomenon.
- 3 Lazarus and Steinthal were the most important representatives of the 19th-century *Völkerpsychologie*. They founded the

Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft. The journal comprised a series of articles related to linguistic and cultural products associated with the human development and peculiarity. Wundt admitted this heritage in his *Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1900-1920).

- 4 Taine, Fouillée, and Le Bon are important representatives of different generations in the development of the French psychosociological thought during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. They all gave a fundamental importance to the temperamental heritage in the constitution of the collective psychology of a nation. In any case, there was a clear theoretical evolution since Taine's determinist position in works such as *History of English Literature* (1863), to the irrational vitalism that Le Bon showed in his *Psychology of Crowds* (1895). Fouille's moderate Hegelianism, present in texts such as *Psychological Sketch of European People* (1902), takes a sort of middle position between the other two.
- 5 *Collective Psychology* will be used here as a general label referring to the late 19th and early 20th century attempts to build a psychological discipline in the crossroads of the social sciences, natural sciences and humanities. It includes German *Völkerpsychologie*, but also other attempts among which the French contribution is particularly outstanding. A review of such contributions can be found in Castro (2004).
- 6 "Agency" in Burke's methodology must not be confused with *agency* as a feature of the modern subjectivity. Uses of Burke's category in this chapter will always appear in quotes. When the meaning of agency is related to modern subjectivity, it will appear without quotes.

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