

公開企画「文化心理学と人間関係の諸相」講演

## CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

- Personal introduction to the Ritsumeikan Symposium -

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I am very pleased to be here. As I told you I want to thank everybody involved particularly in all of the organizational efforts to make this event—the symposium today-- into a relevant intellectual encounter.

I think our symposium today can have two functions-- first of all to look at what cultural psychology does, and how it operates. An overview of the ways in which it does its job comes through all of today's presentations. And—secondly—we need to find out what is lacking in cultural psychology today, what needs to be developed further in order for it to become a viable scientific discipline. We need to really focus on what could be new ways, new developments, in all of cultural psychology. These developments have no geographic boundaries.

My sincere hope is that there are new developments in which many of you coming here for this whole day would want to participate. There is much to be done—and knowing the world through the intuitions that differ from those

that gave rise to psychology in Europe is a great advantage for developing such new views. Psychology is still very far from its goal of understanding the human being. We cannot follow any existing traditions in psychology unless we actually innovate them all the time. This is why cultural psychology is a potential framework for serious innovation—if it continues to see the world in new ways. Yet, as all other previous inventions of new perspectives in psychology—it may fail unless it results in substantive progress.

Cultural psychology has been called an “up and coming” discipline—but I would rather call it “coming and vanishing” discipline. It is a curious discipline because it seems to come into being all the time and disappear all the time within the larger intellectual landscape of psychology. Three periods of “coming” can be charted out—end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first two comings were accompanied by subsequent vanishing. We have to wait and see about the third one—still in progress.

There is also the constant comparison with the core of psychology. The roots of cultural psychology are actually historically longer than that of experimental psychology—the core of psychology. The first official professorship of psychology was given to Moritz Lazarus in 1860 at the University of Berlin in Switzerland in the area of folk psychology, whereas experimental psychology is known to be started by in 1879 in Leipzig by Wilhelm Wundt’s new laboratory. Yet in usual histories of psychology it is the 1879 date that is viewed as “birth date” of psychology.

But of course different countries have different ways of introducing academic institutions. They make different decisions and— perhaps from some experimental psychologist’s standpoint it may look that maybe the Swiss made the wrong decision in 1860. What Lazarus’ *Völkerpsychologie* meant was not yet

the “real psychology” in the eyes of any 19<sup>th</sup> century (or later) scientist who idealized the connections of the *psyche* with physiological, rather than language, processes. Yet it remains the fact that the purposefulness of language use, our uses of clothes, costumes, and masks, and our complex socio-political rituals are as important for understanding human psychology as basic biological drives are. Thus, *Völkerpsychologie*—the first version of cultural psychology-- focused on the way our language is used organizes human psychological processes. Both cultural and experimental psychologies have a place in the human science – both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now (Diriwächter, 2004). They prepared psychology for the dualism it has suffered through in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—all experimentally approachable problems are of simple kind, while what really matters for human mental life is complex and deeply intertwined with cultural heritage. Wilhelm Wundt’s version of *Völkerpsychologie* in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century exemplified that contrast very well. What really matters cannot be studied experimentally (at least in the narrow sense of that term), and what is peripheral to the human condition can be studied with precision—yet it does not illuminate the basics of human psychology.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology became largely fearful of addressing the question of higher mental processes-- and cultural psychology disappeared, only to attempt to re-appear in new clothes. Within the empire of behavioral reductionism in the United States, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new version of synthesis of anthropology and psychology emerged—the Culture and Personality “school” of thought. At the same time you see social psychologists talking in terms of cultural issues (Sherif & Sherif, 1948), but soon again this focus disappears. Two more decades [pass—and cultural psychology again starts to show its presence. So it is in the 1980’s and especially in the 1990’s we begin to talk about the term cultural psychology. As usual psychologists fight against one another on who was the first to use the term, but that is irrelevant. What is

relevant is exactly that the fact that culture has become possibly in psychology more and more intensive.

The new cultural psychology faces the old problem-- psychologists' methodology has largely remained as it was, so in the one and with an increasing topic of culture, and how important it is to take culture into account, on the other hand we know exactly the same methods that have been used in non-cultural psychology, and these methods are used as if they do not need innovation. If cultural psychology is really an "up and coming" discipline of the future, it needs to re-think its methodology. The set of methods may remain as it has been invented before—there is little to innovate in interviews, questionnaires, experiments, and observations as specific methods. Yet how these methods enter into the complex process of methodology cycle (Branco & Valsiner, 1997; Valsiner, 2001b) requires radical innovation.

I have been lucky to be in the center of the development of the third effort of building cultural psychology. Since 1995 I have had the possibility to be in the center of the growth of cultural psychology—by establishing its central journal *Culture & Psychology*. The journal was an experiment—it was explicitly set up to foster the integration of theoretical and empirical sides of the thinking of its authors (see Valsiner, 1995). As its Editor from the beginning, I had the possibility to see the development of this discipline in the last 9 years. It has been an eye-opening experience for me—not always a positive one.

Consider the first formal indicator of a journal—how many manuscripts it rejects. Our reduction rate in the journal continues to be around 90%. When I mentioned that I practice to my American colleagues they say that this is good--this means you are serious journal. However, I am very worried about it—for me it means that 90% of the papers submitted for one reason or another are not

sufficient for publication. For me such high rejection rate indicates the intellectual weakness of the area. Sure, the editorial process may be blamed for being too “strict”, or unreasonable—these judgments are not for me to make here. As it looks from the inside of the editorial process, the material submitted to us is very uneven. We get all kinds of submissions, sometimes we get poems on topics of culture, or endless philosophical essays about culture. At times we get purely on theoretical papers-- although the policy from the beginning has been that we integrate theory and empirical work. There is sloppiness in the submission efforts—I have received some submissions where the cover letter—with correct postal address—is addressed to *Culture & Society*. Obviously the busy submitters failed to double-check the name of the journal—as long as the magical term *culture* is mentioned, the rest need not be bothered about!

There are also “mass mailings”! Perhaps the most extreme case was a recently finished Ph.D. student who submitted five manuscripts simultaneously—all cuts from the same dissertation—with the letter saying functionally “take whichever fits”—be it piece 1, piece 2, piece 3, piece 4, or piece 5. Unfortunately none of the five were fitting even for the first round of editorial review.

So you notice the 90% rejection rate is not a mark of quality of the journal, but of the conceptual and scholarly weaknesses of the field. Psychology at large has been known to be hyperactive in its publication efforts—getting a journal article published has become a goal in itself (producing symbolic capital for the authors), rather than a way to communicate knowledge to colleagues who want to have it. We at *Culture & Psychology* continue to insist upon scholarly sophistication, rather than be an outlet for gaining such symbolic capital for the authors. We have some success – the journal has been intellectually open and has promoted some new ideas (see editorial reviews: Valsiner, 2001a, 2004)—yet

these are the result of the 10 % of the mass of submissions. The science—*Wissenschaft* in German use of the term— of cultural psychology seems to be in danger of drowning in the vast ocean of public discourse texts about culture and its relevance. The latter discourse is of socio-political origins—both North America and Europe experience increased flow of immigrants, guest workers, and tourists who bring to their rigidly established societies the challenges for tolerating the very different ways of living by “the other”. Soon “the other” takes over in numbers—and that means political votes—in many of these societies. Hence no surprise that social discourses in contemporary societies highlight culture in many ways—“multiculturalism” or “globalization” are inherently ambiguities-filled terms.

Psychology has also been known for its irrational devotion to empiricism. In a direct contrast, within *Culture & Psychology* empiricism has no place. We do emphasize from the very beginning the need to emphasize theory-- bringing culture into psychology in whichever form, but being explicit about it. So we do publish papers that use variable methods including very traditional ones like factor analysis even, and this also including very new ones-- discourse analysis, conversational analysis, etc-- but our goal is to see what these uses tell us about general knowledge. Therefore, the conditions for the use of any particular methods have to be theoretically meaningful. Our manuscript reviewers scrutinize how the theoretical work of the manuscript author links with the empirical presentation. So, unfortunately, the realities of modern day psychologists’ lives are such that publication efforts become hyperactive. Knowledge becomes seen as fragmented—resulting in proliferation of publication of small, inconsequential empirical papers. Psychology has lost the idea of the forest as a whole while looking at the trees.

Psychology also prides itself by its quantitative rigor. Much of that rigor is ritualistic—as any reader of a regular empirical psychology articles can see. The parades of p, beta, and F values, and the claims of “effects”, are all over the place in the article texts. Qualitative evidence is shyly entered as “anecdotal”—yet the authors usually make use of that ahead of the sophisticated statistical alchemy. Again, in *Culture & Psychology* we do things differently--quantification of data is not a methodological rule (as it is in most of psychology). Instead, authors need to first prove that—given their theoretical premises—quantification is feasible, or necessary. Sometimes it is so- but most often not. Quantification in psychology has resulted in false comfort of the illusory precision of numbers. It has guided psychologists away from a number of fields of inquiry, and has trivialized many areas of psychological investigation. This is a very sad result because it indicates that something very basic is wrong in psychology. Psychology produces enormous number of published articles, and has accumulated enormous amount of empirical evidence. Yet the progress in ideas is slow.

This problem is not that of cultural psychology only—a similar story exists in cognitive science. Consider the use of modern high technology—fMRI for instance—to answer very old questions about localization of specific psychological functions. Phrenologists liked to locate such functions on the skull, modern neuroscience re-invents the same practice by locating these functions as shown by colorful firings on the fMRI computer screen of the brain scan. In both cases the question answered is old—where is the location of the given function? At the same time we do know that the grain functions as a whole system, different parts are relating with one another, and instead of the location we are better off looking for the redundant networks within the brain that guarantee the given function. Similarly, the Nobel Prize winning stories about “cognitive heuristics” are but a faint replica of the careful study of mental processes done in

the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by pioneering researchers of the “Würzburg School”—Oswald Külpe, Karl Bühler, Otto Selz, and others (Simon, 1999). This leads to the central role of knowing history psychology for our development of new ideas rather than eliminating the study of old ideas from informing our present.

Given that this is not very complimentary description of contemporary psychology as a whole let me try to comment on some key points that are important for understanding cultural psychology. First, it is not a study of comparison between societies—labeled as “cultures”. That latter task belongs to cross-cultural psychology. What is the value of finding a statistically significant difference in some psychological “measure” carried out in Estonia and the United States? As long as there is no functional link between the two societies—no immigration of Americans to Estonia, no intermarriages, etc—the contrast is a fact of uninterpretable kind. For me the most remarkable result from cross-cultural psychology comes from charting out family values in a large number of societies. I was informed that Estonia and Zulu in South Africa are the close together in their family values. I was not too enthused—Estonians are not in intermarriage with Zulu’s or vice versa in any substantial ways, hence there is no functional role present in this comparison. It is a superficial comparison of two different societies, where the discovered similarity blocks the investigation of the actual functioning of either of the two. Surely the similar outcome of family values has different roots in Estonia and Zululand.

In my version of charting out the discipline, cultural psychology centers on the person. I carry my particular cultural background with me wherever I go some are in the depth of my feelings, thinking, presentation, style and so on. This cultural background is as close it is to my psychological system through signs, symbols, through specific ways of dealing with feelings. It is internalized



by me personally, but at the same time it is connecting me with society—my internalization connects me with something far away what you may call Estonia. Estonia—a real country out there, far away—operates in my psychological world as a relevant abstraction. What I carry within myself is not a real life equivalent of “the Estonian culture”. The Estonian culture—by way of personal knowledge of history and nuances of native language use-- participates in the personal lives of each and every individual Estonian person in different variations. The same is true for the Japanese culture, and certainly for the very heterogeneous and almost un-definable “American culture” which includes so called native American Indians, many layers of immigrants over its century, and covers many geographic regions. Even within the stratum of “American middle class” we find high inter-personal variability.

So-- from my perspective as you can see cultural psychology deals with internalized versions or societal symbolic meaning systems by persons or the use of that in social interactions between persons, these are completely addressable, complete phenomenon that you can observe in others or in your introspection everyday. In another sense-- human beings are all cultural beings close in their interaction with others and in the interaction in their own picture of mind as long as they use at least one specific meaning which is internalized from the social world outside.

In the most general sense-- human *psyche* works as an integrated system. This feature of our being sets up new tasks for cultural psychology. Our models of causality need to fit that systemic nature-- instead of direct linear causality (cause A causes outcome B) which we find used in most of psychology, in cultural psychology we are better off using systemic causality models (system {Y-X-Z} leads to outcome B). Here a particular relationship between parts of the system whichever way we will construe it needs to be focused on.

The second methodological innovation of cultural psychology brings is a focus on a single case as the organized systemic pace. Here is where the traditions of clinical psychology, the practices of clinical psychology may in principle come close to cultural psychology's basic science. Clinicians always have to treat the particular cases-- they do not treat an average case. In fact, there is no "average case"—it is an abstraction of basically useless kind. However, most of evidence in psychology is based on samples and populations-- that's why any clinician who tries to take knowledge from scientific psychology has to back translate the average knowledge into this whether it is applicable to special case treatment norm. This is a very difficult and sometimes impossible process, because errors are made at any moment, so reality is highly variable in an individual. The average data that you find in psychology are actually representing very little, it's a very open issue, look carefully in the public articles even variability measures are not reported, it is only average presented of these papers.

Last but not the least-- cultural psychology in the present days becomes increasingly qualitative science. It does not deny quantification, but the test of quantification as a special case of course is the data construction. So as you know from last 50 or so years in world psychology is advanced; quantification of your data is almost an automatic pattern. In the last 15 or so years you see different revolts against the quantitative measurement in psychology. You see the qualitative methods starting to become a new fashion. Different versions of qualitative methods, narrative analysis, conversational analysis, discourse analysis and so on and so forth are emerging. But they are positioning themselves against quantitative methods rather than looking at all those or parts of the bigger psychological survey.

I think that the value of today's symposium this afternoon is precisely in the search for new ways of trying to reach that new understanding, and my deep wish is that the different ideas of today's symposium was triggered in all of us will not disappear, but will be put into concrete new practices or whatever particular projects we may have in mind. Thank you for your attention.

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