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THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE 20TH CENTURY. THE CASE OF FRENCH PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This paper issues from the observation of the paradoxical recurrence of proposals for a societal, historical, and cultural psychology, none of which takes account of the considerable corpus of knowledge accumulated in the French psychological literature of the first half of the twentieth century. The paradox consists in the fact that such literature seems to be particularly consonant with, if not decidedly anticipatory of, many of the issues those proposals drive attention to, provoking heated debate.

A historical/cultural psychology already seems to have been clearly delineated in French literature before the fifties. Omitting the contribution of scholars like Janet, Meyerson, Wallon, (as it formerly happened to Vygotsky's) ends up in depicting cultural psychology too as a science with a long past and a short history, which is how psychology presented itself in official texts, and which only recently is beginning to be corrected. Besides the contribution to historical debate about psychology, the confrontation with those as important as strangely disregarded scholars takes nothing away from the value of current proposals, and in some cases offers useful suggestions for completing and refining the theoretical and methodological framework of cultural psychology.

Key words: Cultural psychology, history, France, Janet, Meyerson, Wallon.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo se origina a partir de la observación de la paradójica recurrencia de propuestas para una psicología cultural, social e histórica, ninguna de las cuales tiene en cuenta el considerable corpus de conocimiento acumulado en la literatura psicológica francesa en la primera mitad del siglo. La paradoja consiste en el hecho de que esa literatura parece estar particularmente en consonancia, si no es que decididamente se anticipa, a muchas de las cuestiones sobre las que estas propuestas llaman la atención, provocando un acalorado debate.

Parece que en la literatura francesa se había ya claramente delineado antes de la década de 1950 una psicología histórico-cultural. La omisión de contribuciones de académicos como Janet, Meyerson, Wallon (como antes sucedió con Vygotski) lleva a presentar también a la psicología cultural como una ciencia con un largo pasado y una corta historia, que es como la psicología se presenta en los textos oficiales, lo que sólo recientemente empieza a corregirse. Aparte de la contribución al debate histórico sobre la psicología, la con esos académicos, tan importantes como extrañamente descuidados, no disminuye nada el valor de las propuestas actuales, y en algunos casos ofrece sugerencias útiles para completar y refinar el marco teórico y metodológico de la psicología cultural.

Palabras clave: Psicología cultural, historia, Francia, Janet, Meyerson, Wallon.

INTRODUCTION

The stimulus for this paper was the realization of a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, we see a decisive resumption, not by chance contemporaneous, of historical reconstructions of psychology that differ from traditional "official histories" (Danziger, 1990; Smith, 1998), of theoretical psychology studies (Royce, 1992), and of proposals for a societal (Himmelweit ,1990), historical (Gergen, 1985), and cultural (Shweder, 1990) psychology. On the other, there is still little account taken of a considerable corpus of knowledge accumulated in the French psychological literature of the first half of the century, which seems to be particularly consonant with, if not decidedly anticipatory of, many of the issues that recent studies, such as those cited, have drawn attention to, provoking heated debate. This is particularly true of the two cases, in

some respects separate and in others closely linked, of "historical psychology" and "cultural psychology" [1].

A historical psychology already seems to have been clearly delineated in numerous French works of the first half of the twentieth century (Meyerson, 1948) or of the sixties (see Vernant, 1979), none of which is cited, if only to mark a distinction from them, in subsequent works that use the same term and bear the same title, and which appear as innovations in theory and research (Gergen, 1973, Gergen & Gergen, 1985). As for cultural psychology, to which we are mainly directing our attention, we do not find the same continuity between the terms used in the French psychology of the early twentieth century and the current definitions of this theoretical brand. Yet, as can easily be observed, the consonance and substantial agreement of the main theoretical assumptions and the methodological orientations is even more evident. Therefore, the "documentary evidence" that can be acquired from the contributions of some French scholars in that period seems to be a sufficient stimulus for a more detailed history of cultural psychology, and a contribution to the current debate about this undoubtedly innovative orientation in the field of human sciences.

The fact that the two cases (historical psychology and cultural psychology) happened in the France of the first half of the twentieth century constitutes another rather paradoxical aspect, France being precisely one of the central places of that "European" social psychology which was proposed in the second half of the century as an alternative to American psychology: a "more social" psychology than the "individual" social psychology in the USA version (Jaspar, 1986; Farr, 1990). Omitting the contribution of scholars like Janet, Meyerson, Wallon to the continuance, though not in the main stream, and subsequent re-emergence of a psychology aimed at a unified picture of biological, psychological and cultural phenomena, ends up in depicting cultural psychology too as a science with a long past and a short history, which is how psychology presented itself in official texts, and which only recently is beginning to be corrected (Hilgard et al., 1991).

An acute observer like Vigotsky described psychology as it appeared in the first decades of the twentieth century as a great arena in which various competing schools confronted each other. The differences in theoretical perspectives and methodological orientations did not however exclude an intense exchange both on general issues and on studies carried out with specific objectives and research techniques. Vigotsky and his school knew and appreciated the contributions of Janet, Meyerson and Wallon (Leontiev, 1987), who on their part directed their attention towards

the work of the Russian historical-cultural school no less than towards those on the other side of the Atlantic. Furthermore, there was the same intense exchange between psychology and sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history. What linked them was the fact that "In the days of the pioneers, those whom we would recognize as 'psychologists' and 'social scientists' grappled with conceptually similar problems. It was easier to interrelate 'mind' and 'society' when psychology was the science of the mind than when it became the science of behavior" (Farr, 1990, p. 48).

Psychology's scope expanded beyond single mental functions to phenomena such as consciousness, language and communication, social interaction, embracing also religion, art and other manifestations of "human nature" on a social and cultural level. The multiplicity of the phenomena investigated led also to an acceptance of a multiplicity of methods. Experimental methods, clinical observation, verbal reports analysis, even the collection and systematic comparison of texts and 'documents' of various kinds, were all possible means of access to the subject-matter of psychology, the human being, which was, just because of its essential complexity, a particularly exciting challenge to knowledge. Side by side with Wundt's 'separatist' solution, there were those that attempted to focus just on the interconnections between the individual and society, between mind and culture. This approach is evident in general psychology as it is in developmental, social, clinical psychology, in scholars like James, Bartlett, Janet, Baldwin, Wallon, and Vigotsky.

All of these features were subsequently lost or became attenuated to the point of almost disappearing even in social psychology. The development of psychology in the twentieth century was dominated by an ideology of science that absolutized "a particular version of scientific method and removed it from its human, and therefore social, historical and cultural context" (Danziger, 1994, p. 469). Scientific progress was guaranteed only by scientific method as something placed beyond history. The two principles of spatial-temporal homogeneity of reality, and of its total determination (or at least broad statistical predictability), on which classical physics was founded, once transferred into the field of human sciences, excluded (Paolicchi, 1994) the possibility and the necessity of extending inquiry beyond the limits of the laboratory and of the total definition of phenomena that allows repeatability. If to the exclusive validity of laboratory experimentation, firstly stated by Wundt's pupils in Europe and then continued in the USA, is added the substitution of directly observed single subjects with data gathered by means of statistical methods (Danziger, 1990), it is understandable how both individual entities such as consciousness, will, the self, personality, and social entities such as

language, systems of beliefs, myths, should have disappeared from psychology research projects and handbooks.

Such an exclusion seemed to a minority also in the USA an unacceptable limitation for a science of "human facts" in all the variety of their manifestations, and neither there was a lack of critical voices and alternative proposals, e.g. from Murray (1938) and from the humanistic "third force" (besides behaviorism and cognitivism) of American psychology (Maslow, Rogers). As Gordon Allport observed, for example, on the subject of personality, the choice of method as a starting point and only way forward is totally inadequate. "We focus attention on our own measurable manipulations of input and on the measurable manipulations of output. Personality thus evaporates in the mist of method" (1963, p.345); or, which is much the same, "it is taken captive into some autistic paradise of methodology" (p. 348). The weakness of such positions, however, was that they also tended to ignore the invitation to consider the individual and the social as essentially interdependent, both with regard to their conceptualization and to their study, as James, Dewey and other "founding fathers" of social psychology had proposed. The breaking of such a link made it "just as difficult to identify 'society' as it was to identify 'mind'" (Farr, 1990, p. 48). Then, together with the person, also "culture and other forms of societal psychology dissolve[d] readily enough in the acid bath of [Floyd] Allport's methodological individualism" (p.59).

The bath was not able, however, to amalgamate the treated material in such a way as to offer a unified, coherent image of it. It was precisely in the pages of that *Journal de Psychologie normal et pathologique*, which had for decades hosted a quite different psychology, that in the seventies a lucid attack appeared to a psychological science understood in such a way, just on its own ground, that of method. Analyzing one of the best-known psychology handbooks of the sixties (Koch et al., *Psychology: A study of a science)* Bresson (1972) demonstrated that the works grouped there under the term psychology in no way formed a body of homogeneous knowledge. "The apparent identity of methods: experimentation, statistical analysis, methods that make it possible to discard hypotheses and, in such a sense, to constitute a proof, this identity of method, then, is not a guarantee of an identical validity" and therefore " conversely, it would not be possible to exclude from the field of 'scientific knowledge' bodies of knowledge to which these methods of proof could not be applicable." (p.445). This is true in particular of "those fields that activate social relations", in which the observed phenomena cannot be miniaturized and controlled by excluding the essential part constituted by "cultural and ideological data". In these, "the control necessary for the proof must therefore proceed

in subtle alternative ways, that vary according to the behavior studied. The structure of the proof is closer to the problems posed by history than to those of physics. This does not mean that these fields should be excluded from the body of scientific knowledge, or that they should resort to an arbitrary experimental structure which, while destroying their objects, would yet give them the right to the title of Science" (p.446).

More recently, the same problem was addressed once again, although with some differences in the conclusions, by Gardner (1992). According to him, we can now "celebrate the funeral of a scientific psychology", given that, having failed to establish itself as a "primary science", it is for the most part "cannibalized by the brain- or neuro-sciences", and it seems it will be even more so by the new hybrid, cognitive neuroscience, characterized by "an even greater imperialistic design". Yet, some fields like social, developmental or clinical psychology, seem to be less in danger of an immediate absorption. Their capacity for resistance seems to be founded, on the one hand, on their very character of disciplines "not adding up cumulatively into a cohesive science" (p. 184) and destined rather to become part of the vast field of "cultural studies"; on the other, on their being the only ones capable of dealing with issues like those of the "person centered quartet" (personality, self, will and consciousness), which "since James are key in psychology", but resist any attempt at reduction in terms that make it possible to "do science" on them. Then, those who will want to continue studying problems like "the self or ego - its experiences, its internal and social aspects, its aspirations, and its evolution through life", or "certain aspects of emotion and motivation, [which] may also elude the cognitive and neurosciences", will be able, on the one hand, to find in psychology some special methods and insights, on the other, to take account of and collaborate with "writers and other artists, and those who study them, like literary critics and theorists" (p.187). However, even if the psychologist's precise methods and rigor will be able to balance "the literary scholar's broad view and skeptical cast of mind" [...] "no hard science à la physics is likely to emerge from [their] collaborations" (p. 184).

The distinction between fields of knowledge on the basis of a scientific method defined according to a principle of truth in terms of correspondence between ideas and facts and of empirical verification, already criticized by Bresson, continues therefore to be central to the issue. Some psychologists, on their part, continue to aspire to an understanding not only of those facts on which it is possible to carry out 'technological' operations of verification and control, but also of those on which only operations of understanding in terms of truth as coherence are possible,

of which psychology can find examples not only in mathematics and logic, but also in art (Oatley, 1992). Adopting a criterion of truth in terms of coherence does not, however, prevent the subject-matter of psychology being formulated in substantially cartesian, idealistic ways, even when it is no longer constituted by stable and universal causal relationships between stimuli and responses, but by equally stable and universal structures of a universal mind or subject. In either case, it is still the subject-matter of a science that, as Windelband (1894/1998) had asserted long time ago, defines "the existing thing (*das Seiende*) in terms of the enduring necessity of things happening within it", simply placing "the laws of nature in the position of the Platonic idea" (p. 13).

For psychology, then, the way to avoid falling into metaphysical, though apparently opposite, positions, seems to be to identify its subject-matter in the specific reality that emerges, as Meyerson said (1952), with "l'entrée dans l'humain": a reality in dialectical tension between biology and culture, the individual and society, permanence and change, order and creative violation. Such were the elements of the Jamesian "person centered quartet" (personality, self, will and consciousness); such are also all the higher cognitive-social processes, connected with language, myth, religion, and habits, which according to Wundt were to be left to the separated branch of social psychology and as such to be studied outside the laboratory. A study that, as Markova (1992) states, has not progressed much just "because it has focused on the *person* only, in abstraction from her or his social, cultural, and historical context". Therefore, another member has to be added to the quartet: language and communication, by which concrete, historically situated and culturally constituted subjects/agents emerge in and through the dialectical relationships with their concrete, historically situated and culturally created worlds. Their study will obviously require a different approach, because the issues it addresses are of a different kind than those addressed by any science of brain, mind, or behavior. For those issues, "a laboratory experiment based on the manipulation of variables is only one of the scientifically acceptable approaches. Conceptual analysis, qualitative methods, the combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, all are available as routes to a meaningful understanding of phenomena" (p. 219).

It is with similar new (and very old) choices about object and method that also current cultural psychology proposes itself as a concrete way out of the long lasting slavery to platonic philosophy and its modern 'scientific' versions (Shweder, 1990). The subject and culture, as they went lost together in a dominant "depopulated" social psychology, (Billig, 1994), can come back from the mist of scientific methodolatry only hand

in hand in their vital inherent relationship. This is now coming to be possible also because they had remained alive, though in different features, in the many tents of the psychological arena, where cultural psychology could go on "doing its unorthodox things outside the main pavillons and the center rings" (Shweder, 1990, p. 21). In what follows, we hope to demonstrate that one among those tents, and not the least important, was a large part of French psychology in the first half of 20th century.

THE RECOVERY

From the seventies on, the cultural climate changes sensibly in the whole of the western world both within psychology and without. Faith in science's capacity to resolve human problems weakens, and also in the USA there are signs of a decidedly critical attitude towards the role of science in society. Among psychologists, "the increasing autonomy and confidence of previously marginalized sections of the discipline, the organizational splitting off on the part of disaffected experimentalists, the proliferation of radical alternatives to traditional - all these are signs of the ongoing corrosion of old certainties and old hierarchies (Danziger, 1994, p. 476). Indeed, at the beginning of the nineties, Hilgard et al. observe that "perhaps more than any other science or profession, psychology has become reflective about its history" (1991, p. 100). A growing interest in epistemological questions tends also in the USA to make up for "the psychologist's lack of sophistication in philosophy" on which for decades was founded the belief that "biological events are more 'real' than mental events and, hence, that biological explanations are more 'scientific'"; the development of a section of philosophical psychology within the American Psychological Association is valid evidence of this ongoing change (Royce, 1982, p. 264).

In the same period in Europe, according to Danziger "psychology was recovering from its mid-century depression, 'behavioral science' was no longer the only game in town, and a few critical and reflective historical studies saw the light of day". (1994, p.472). Not unconnected with this is the fact that "particularly in Britain, there has been a vigorous growth of sociological studies on science [...] which propagated the once shocking idea that the practice of science is a mundane human activity governed by the same principles as other forms of human work" (p. 473). In Germany, critical thought had developed that questioned the very status of psychology as a science (Holzkamp 1972). Certain characteristics of European psychology would, on the other hand, be due to the smaller influence of American psychology in the first half of the twentieth century and to the

persistence of preceding cognitivist orientations that were independent of the "cognitive revolution" that took place in America in the fifties. "Major themes in the American context, like behaviorism, are relegated to minor footnotes, and other themes, unknown to most American psychologists, become highly significant. Important developments for American psychology, like the cognitive revolution, turn out to be non-events from a European perspective, because of the existence of a local cognitivist tradition that never managed to cross the Atlantic" (Danziger, 1994, p.474). Europe had, indeed, kept alive, though not dominant, a tradition that was not reducible to a generic local 'cognitivist' tradition. But the changes that take place in the last three decades of the twentieth century are possible mainly because here, more than elsewhere, the victory of a scientist ideology in the field of human sciences has never been complete, and the conflict over the status of psychology was never settled in favor of a totally shared definition of it as a natural science. This can also explain why the proposal of an alternative explanation of human behavior by Harré and Secord (1972), or Chein's acute analysis of psychology on a philosophical basis (1972), or again the analogous analysis by one of the best-known disaffected experimentalists, Shotter (1975), which were no less radical and provocative than Gergen's article (1973) on "social psychology as history", did not, however, cause such a stir in Europe.

The development of a societal, historical, cultural psychology in Europe, cannot therefore be reduced to an event taking place in the brief period of two or three decades after the middle of the century, as an almost 'natural' (in such a context) gemmation from the strain of mature cognitivism, or, conversely, as a simple reaction to it. The first hypothesis seems to be shared, for example, by Farr, who observes that after the sixties, in European psychology, "culture is back in vogue, though many experimentalists fail to recognize it for what it is. [...] Culture is very much a key element in any societal psychology. It is also a key element in cognitive science" (1990 p.49). Therefore he concludes that "the modern tendency to consider psychology a form of cognitive science is conducive to a renaissance of interest in forms of societal psychology. This is because 'culture' is, once again, a vogue topic of research in modern psychology [...] a good example of such a compatible form of societal psychology is the modern French tradition of research on social representations" (p.63). Shweder (1990) upholds the second hypothesis in what can be considered the manifesto of cultural psychology. He starts with the premise that "many 'origin stories' can be told, at varying orders of magnitude of historical time depth, about ups and downs in the life of cultural psychology" and that the tale he is about to tell "is but one story, a short and contempo-

rary one, selected out of the many that could be told" (p.17). His choice, however, risks not so much depicting cultural psychology as a science with a brief history and a long past to which many significant contributions would be relegated, as failing to cite important, recent episodes and personalities of such a history. Their work is not interpretable, not only for chronological reasons, as a reaction to the limits or 'pitfalls' of cognitivism, though they had already come to fundamental criticisms of its original European forms (in particular of *Gestalt theory*) precisely because of that character of "platonic idealism" that Shweder imputes to mature cognitivism and in general to 'scientific' psychology.

Since its origins European psychology had kept up, both in Germany and in France, an intense exchange with sociology, anthropology, history and philosophy. We need only think of the strong influence of Bergson in France and of Dilthey in Germany. Windelband (1894/1998) had already asserted that the method usefully applied to the study of "occurrences such as movements of bodies or changes in physical structures" is not suited to explaining "a process of ideation, feeling and willing". In human sciences too, therefore, "the knowledge of general laws has everywhere the practical value of making possible the anticipation of future circumstances and the goal-appropriate intercession of the human in the course of things. [...] But no less is all purposeful activity in communal human life dependent upon the experiences of historical knowledge. The human is, to employ a variant of an antique word, the animal which has a history" (p. 17).

In European psychology, the necessity and validity of historical knowledge is therefore very soon connected with the idea of a historical and cultural nature of its very object; an idea that would be back on stage in the seventies in the growing awareness that "in the case of psychology, it is not only the concepts and methods of the discipline that undergo constant historical change, but the very subject-matter itself" (Danziger, 1994, p. 475). The roots of such a cultural heritage are currently traced in early forerunners like the Italian philosophers Vico and Cattaneo. In the writings of the latter, Doise (1985) recovers the proposal of a "joint minds psychology" that preceded considerably the same concept proposed by the Russian historical-cultural school, and the idea of conflict as its main mechanism, which in turn would anticipate elements of the concept of "socio-cognitive conflict" (Doise & Mugny, 1984). As for method and research techniques, the clinical and developmental perspective, both in France with Binet and Piaget, and in Germany with the Bühlers, had resisted the predominance of experimental design and evaluation on statistical bases: Binet's subject-matter was "the individual differences in

psychic processes but also, in the end, the individual as such" (Zazzo, 1989, p. 184). As Farr (1985) also observes, the almost exclusive predominance of standard experimental design in American psychology was not to be found in Europe, where other non 'ahistorical' techniques such as case studies, self-reports, child studies, had been maintained in research. In other authors of the early twentieth century, like Baldwin, who was well known in France, one can trace statements about society that clearly anticipate the link between "intentional subjects" and "intentional worlds" which is central to current cultural psychology in Shweder's (1990) definition. For Baldwin, society is "a body of mental products, an established network of psychical relationships [...] Society is a mass of mental and moral states and values, which perpetuates itself in individual persons. In the personal self, the social is individualized" (1913, 107-108). In sum, if "in a sense, modern psychology is returning to the position from which it began: a polycentric position in which there are diverse but interconnecting centers of psychological work that reflect a diversity of local conditions and traditions" (Danziger, 1991, p.477), European psychology had moved away much less than American psychology from such a position, at least for one half of the century.

One of the reasons for this is certainly the fact that, as Smith (1998) observes, "there is a substantial European scientific culture, again in the present as well as in the past, committed to forms of rational and systematic knowledge that rejects the model of natural sciences (dialectical materialism or phenomenology)". This particular scientific culture indeed continues to support knowledge of "human nature as it appears in the humanities and cultural studies disciplines [...] as self-created, an achievement of reflective consciousness articulated through symbol systems, an achievement of time and of human history", which therefore "requires its own forms of understandings". This argument - concludes Smith - "does not oppose or exclude a natural science of 'the human', but it does oppose the claim that only scientific-natural knowledge is rational knowledge" (p. 8). A second no less important reason, however, is that, especially in France, the distinction between domains of knowledge about "human facts" went alongside of a fundamental effort to integrate them, through the dialectical confrontation of different perspectives and the attempt to develop theoretical constructs and research designs which respected both the commitment to the systematic analysis of experimental or clinical data and the aim of representing and studying human behavior in its complexity as a bio-psycho-social phenomenon.

The dual link between organism and mind, between mind and society, was not easy to maintain in actual research, yet it is what characterizes

a large part of French "objective" psychology. It implied openness to the promptings of contemporary philosophy, but an equal commitment to a scientific discourse in more complex and modern terms than the contemporary behaviorist or cognitivist versions. Its analysis therefore provides suggestions of considerable interest. They take nothing away from the value of the current proposals of a cultural psychology, but put them to confrontation with interlocutors that already faced up some of the complex questions to which currently new answers are being sought, and in some cases offer useful elements for completing and refining the theoretical framework and the methods to be used in future research.

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY: PRESENT AND PAST

Shweder's definition of cultural psychology as proposed in his opening 'manifesto' to the homonymous volume (1990) is clear, organic and complete. "Cultural psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for mankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion. Cultural psychology is the study of the ways subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground, practitioner and practice live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up (p.1). As he then adds, cultural psychology "is premised on human existential uncertainty (the search for meaning) and on a (so-called) intentional conception of 'constituted' worlds". The first premise (existential uncertainty) "asserts that human beings, starting at birth (and perhaps earlier), are highly motivated to seize meanings and resources out of a sociocultural environment that has been arranged to provide them with meanings and resources to seize and to use". The second principle (intentional or constituted worlds) "asserts that subjects and objects, practitioners and practices, human beings and sociocultural environments interpenetrate each other's identity and cannot be analytically disjointed into independent and dependent variables" (p. 1). Consequently, cultural psychology can be defined as "the study of intentional worlds. It is the study of personal functioning in particular intentional worlds. It is the study of the interpersonal maintenance of any intentional world. It is the investigation of those psychosomatic, sociocultural, and, inevitably, divergent realities in which subject and object cannot possibly be separated and kept apart because they are so interdependent as to need each other to be" (p. 3).

The core statements about cultural psychology (C.P.), as we propose

to select them from Shweder's manifesto, are the following:

- C.P. is an "interdisciplinary human science", which aims at developing other "companion disciplines, especially an anthropology (reunited with linguistics) suitable for the analysis of sociocultural environments (meanings and resources - 'forms of life') in all their intentionality and particularity, and a psychology (reunited with philosophy) suitable for the analysis of persons in all their intentionality and historicity" (p.3).

- C.P. is attempting to recover a common perspective by which mind and culture can be studied as "same stuff": a stuff made up of a very complex texture of psychocultural, psychophysical, psychosomatic components which traditional psychology has kept apart as mere "noise".

- C.P.'s methods have to be multifarious, if it has to confront with the entire scope of intentional worlds "composed of conceptions, evaluations, judgments, goals, and other mental representations already embodied in socially inherited institutions, practices, artifacts, technologies, art forms, texts, and modes of discourse", and with a set of concrete persons "functioning (or malfunctioning)" in and through those intentional worlds.

- No place is left for "pure psychological laws" or "unreconstructed or unmediated stimulus events". C.P. is "a return to the study of mental representations (emotions, desires, and beliefs and their intentional objects) without the presumption of fixity, necessity, universality, and abstract-formalism (p. 24). Accordingly, systematic comparison stays as a main research instrument; such comparative work has always to be put forth within "an interpretive framework in which nothing really real is by fundamental nature fixed, universal, transcendent (deep, interior) and abstract; and in which local things can be deeply embedded, but only for a while (p. 25).

- The truths that C.P. can formulate about its "intentional subjects" and "intentional object worlds" are "typically going to be restricted in scope, because the causal processes they describe are likely to be embedded or localized within particular intentional worlds. What we are likely to discover are patches of institutionalized regularities, stabilized within culture areas during certain historical epochs, perhaps even for centuries, yet subject to change" (p.31). In sum, this "new (and very old) way of talking about psyche and culture" has to be essentially historical.

- The world of cultural psychology is "a world of dialectical feedback loops and dynamic nonlinear relationships between things undergoing transformation. (p.31-32). Culture and individual psychological powers continually interfere, condition, perturb, stimulate, enrich, and in fact make up each other. Because of their inherent connection and dialectical relationship of sameness/opposition, they are understandable only as

parts of a multi-level and multifarious human reality changing in time and space.

French psychology in the first decades of the twentieth century, like the Russian historical-cultural school already analyzed more systematically (Wertsch, 1981, 1990; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994), shows an intense exchange among all its branches (theoretical, experimental, clinical, educational) and also with philosophy, sociology and anthropology; an interest in artistic-literary and historical production, in linguistics and aesthetics is also manifest. If to this is added participation in social and political life, which the two contexts also have in common, the general hypothesis can be advanced that such a climate is not extraneous to the production of that synergy between different fields of knowledge that characterizes the moments of substantial developments in human sciences. On the other hand, those very characters, beyond the personal and political events in which some of such scholars were involved, can explain why they did not obtain an adequate recognition from contemporary scientific community: in some way they could not help contravening its canons as they were in advance of the times of its historical evolution.

The task of overcoming dependence on philosophy was entrusted, in France as elsewhere, to the instrument of *objectivity*. Yet this was interpreted quite differently from the reductive way of identifying it with experimentation. Already in 1870 Ribot, considered the founder of French psychology, had stated that psychology must be "experimental": but this did not mean placing one's trust in one or more particular techniques, but rather "having as subject-matter only phenomena, their laws and immediate causes; [psychology] will not address the soul or its essence, because such an issue, not being capable of verification, belongs to metaphysics" (quoted by Fraisse, 1972, p. 50). Objectivity was rather guaranteed by the accurate observation of concrete individual subjects, expressed in an equally descriptively concrete and precise language. As another among French psychology's 'fathers', Janet, will observe later, "psychology had to be objective, in the sense that it had to address what it saw, the actions, the movements, the attitudes of the subject, his words and his ways of speaking and, consequently, all the psychological facts, even if known in another way, had to be expressed in the language of external facts" (1929; quoted by Fraisse, 1972, p. 53).

Though the first chair of psychology assigned to Ribot at the *Collège de France* had the title of experimental and comparative psychology, and Dumas held a chair of experimental psychology for more than thirty years, until 1939, the dominant dimension in the training of both and almost all the other French scholars for the first half of the century will be psychopa-

thological. The presence of scholars like Liébault, Bernheim, and Charcot was fundamental for both the cultural and professional training of some generations of French psychologists, including Binet, Janet, Meyerson, Wallon and many others. This induced, on the one hand, a particular attention to persons in the complexity and diversification of the concrete manifestations of their distress; on the other, attempts to understand such distress, which, precisely because of its complexity, would necessarily lead beyond the observation of immediate data, through intuition and interpretation. This in turn meant that a prominence unknown elsewhere (with the exception of the Russian historical-cultural school) was given to areas that were quite far from those of directly observable biological and physiological data, areas also open to philosophical thought and to literary and artistic creation. This explains the importance given by the masters of French psychology to a philosophical and humanistic training side by side with that in the medical field. Ribot had begun as a philosophy teacher; Dumas, Janet, Pieron, obtained professorships in philosophy, and Wallon, though he taught for just one year in a Lycée, considered philosophy very important in psychology training. The first psychological works came out in the *Révue Philosophique* founded by Ribot in 1876, and from 1904 in the *Journal de psychologie normal et pathologique* founded by Janet and Dumas and then edited by Meyerson with various collaborations until his death in 1983. Its being a definite link between the medical-biological and the philosophical-humanistic fields is the mark of a psychology that, in the words of Janet, "by the very definition of its subject-matter, concerns everything" in that "there are everywhere psychic facts; there are as many in works of a man of letters as in the anatomical studies of a brain" (quoted by Falorni, 1961, p. 70).

The field of psychological inquiry thus continues in France for some decades to be much broader than the behaviorist reduction suggested. The leading idea was, in Janet's words, that "to apply behavior psychology to men it is necessary not only to make room for consciousness, but also to consider it as a complication of the act which is added to the elementary modes of conduct, without forgetting, in the description of such conducts, their higher forms, such as faith. This psychology can be called 'psychology of conduct'" (1946, p. 85-86). The development of a functionalist psychology, begun in the USA by scholars like Angell and Baldwin, also encouraged such an orientation: "the American option for the functionalist point of view will enable contemporary psychology to find its own equilibrium interpreting human activities rather as conducts in Janet's sense than as behaviors in Watson's" (Fraisse, 1972, p. 63). In France, such an influence was accentuated by the presence of Baldwin in the last years of his life, by

Claparède's work in educational psychology, and by the circulation of Charlotte and Karl Bühler's works. The influence of Baldwin and Janet, with their emphasis on a sociogenetic interpretation of mental development processes, is evident in France as it is in Vigotsky (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993) and in Leontiev (1976). Janet's ideas, subsequently to be found in many other French authors up to the fifties and finally spreading to other areas including America, constitute the deep roots of a social psychology founded not on the extrapolation of individual processes into interpersonal and collective situations, but on a vision of the individual and culture as an inseparable unity. Psychology, understood in this way, appeared to most scholars of the time "too difficult a science"; it was in fact "more for foxes than for hedgehogs" (Gardner, 1992), but French psychology shows us that the invitation made today by cultural psychology to accept the challenge was taken up long time before the "crisis" of psychology in the sixties and seventies.

Consistent with such a choice to focus inquiry on conduct and action is also the intense exchange between French psychology and the social sciences, which anticipates that collaboration between "companion disciplines", which Shweder indicates as the prime characteristic of cultural psychology. The openness towards the humanities has if anything in French psychology a broader perspective, as it quite definitely includes history, particularly alive and evolving at that time. Moreover, such an openness is seen as a risk of absorption, given that conducts always refer to a subject that remains at the centre of psychological inquiry, as it always addresses individual "inner histories" in the context of "historicity". Interdisciplinary openness, together with a training in the two main areas, medical-biological and philosophical-humanistic, contributed also to the above mentioned attitude towards method, which Fraisse summarizes by stating that "France, with Ribot and Janet, had been able to recognize the true meaning of the word 'experimental', that which indicates a scientific method and not a subject-matter, or a theory, or place of work" (1972, p. 67, footnote). The deep roots of this perspective in psychopathology were already evident in Ribot's assertion that "method in pathology derives at the same time from observation and from experience. Illness is in fact the most ingenious type of experimentation, implanted by nature itself, in quite definite circumstances and with procedures that are not available to human art" (quoted by Fraisse, 1972, p. 51).

The "ingenuity of nature", and the complexity of the phenomena it offers to observation also in the non-pathological forms of human conduct, are such that experimentation alone is not enough: a plurality of methods and research designs are needed, which however can and must be

concrete, objective. They range from clinical inquiry and observation to experimentation, to the collection and systematic comparison of data, to the definition of "sets" in which to contextualize groups of data. "Contextualization" is particularly important for Wallon (1938), according to whom the objects with which psychology deals are not closed systems of data, but sets situated each time in complex, variable frameworks. Any procedure that separates into elements one of such sets in order to analyze it, distorts it to the point of hindering proper understanding. For the very same reason, psychology's subject matter is never psychic functions in general, human beings in general, but always "the human being in contact with the real". There is therefore a danger in "the use of abstractions which, in the field of the most antique sciences, have made it possible to establish simple, invariable concatenations of properties and relations of cause and effect". This is true, according to Wallon, for a psycho-vegetative reaction, a perception, a character, an individual conduct. Moreover, the individual has, in turn, to be "referred back to the group, to the collectivity of which he is part, in order to be better known" (1938, p. 8.04-5).

Psychology thus becomes the science of human beings "studied comparatively in the totality of their mental life", and in this way it also reveals that mental functions are modified, through adaptation to different activities and environments. The "restructurings of mental life" observable in a clinical and developmental perspective, show us that "mental functions are not therefore a reality in themselves and their study cannot but be a differential study" (8.04-6). In such a demanding undertaking "similarities are revealed, taking account of the circumstances"; however, "the unity of human nature is not an *a priori* where the most disparate contents can be assimilated to one another; it is necessary to seek the vicissitudes out of which it springs" (8.04-7). The comparative method and the "concrete" analysis of phenomena always contextualized in "sets" and "series" according to processes of individual or social development, ensure that psychology does not fall into "metaphysics", whether of the abstract subject or of universal schemata or processes. The method's application extends from animal psychology to cultural systems between which again, as in psychic and biological evolution, "there is not necessarily unity or continuity of type nor unilateral filiation" (8.04-7). The lesson of cultural anthropology, and in particular of Lévi-Bruhl with his studies of primitive thought, thus proves to be no less fundamental than the discipline imposed clinical work. For Wallon, Lévy-Bruhl's main merit is precisely that of having denounced the mystification of a so-called universal, eternal man, which everyone could find within himself through introspection or inspect in

objective behavioral forms.

The same broad horizons that the variety and complexity of conducts open up to psychology had been anticipated by Janet, whose contribution both to psychopathology and to an articulated theory of conduct, in a relationship of continuity-distinction between biological and social levels, has only recently (van de Veer, Valsiner, 1991) begun to be explored. Fundamental also for Janet is the assumption that higher mental functions like thought and language have their roots in action, are instruments for action. Therefore, "to begin the study of human psychology from thought, would simply be to risk becoming incomprehensible" (1928, p. 23). On the other hand, in the transition to "higher" levels of mental functioning, Janet emphasizes the constitutive role of culture and society (1928, 1929,1935). Along both the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic lines, the transition from the animal to the human level, and from the mental activity of the preverbal child to that of the later developmental phases, occurs with the detachment from the immediate context of sensory-motor data, by means of the more powerful system of signs, language. Interindividual communication is what qualifies and structures the human mind. Accordingly, human conduct in its higher forms is interpretable only in the context of "joint actions" in which any mental function, though individually instantiated, is organized by requirements of social interaction and therefore according to socially constructed and shared patterns. The latter, in turn, are "used" by individuals to make coherent and meaningful their action, which therefore maintains its autonomy and remains the specific object of psychological study (Janet, 1928).

The dialectical character of the subject-world, individual-society relationship, which has remained the central issue of social psychology from its origins up to the current proposals of cultural psychology, is also developed systematically by Wallon (1934; 1941). Socialization and individuation are indeed for Wallon intimately and reciprocally connected in the dialectical emergence of the "person" through the conflicts between the I and the Other, between the past organization of action and the unbalancing forces of new adaptive problems brought into being by development itself, between "the unconscious of biology" written into the organism and "the unconscious of society" internalized through unreflected learning and identifications (Wallon, 1930).

In contrast with the "ahistorical" interpretation of human acting as structured by culture, which Shweder criticizes in traditional cultural anthropology, Wallon's position is absolutely consistent with the need, emphasized also by Wertsch (1997), to take into account both "the power of cultural instruments to model such acting" and "the role of active agents

that use these instruments". In this light, on the one hand, cultural instruments always model action, but do not determine it; on the other, "attempts to understand action by analyzing individuals isolated from cultural instruments leaves out a crucial dimension of the *irreducible tension* that defines human acting" (p. 6-7). In Wallon such a tension is clear and the process of mediation, commonly referred still now to the action of material and cultural instruments on psychic functions, is indissolubly connected by him with a subject that *acts* by means of such instruments and therefore is never totally reducible to them, to their canonical collective use. Against any form of mechanism or substantivism, Wallon identifies the subject-matter of psychology in a really dialectical process of "becoming a person" (*personnalisation*). In this way psychology concentrates on the "confluence of the *reciprocal actions* that are performed between the organic and the social, between the physical and the mental, through the *mediation of the individual*" (1938, p. 8-04-5). The socially mediated character of higher functions and the restructuring of the child's mental activity produced by their acquisition is stated again and again by Wallon in unequivocal terms. The very nature of language and discursive thought as "signs" makes them depending on shared, conventional meaning systems, and then "implies almost a complicity, an understanding with others" (1942, p. 186). Yet it is precisely the concrete observation of this apparently simplest but most decisive form of *appropriation* of cultural instruments that offers so rich an evidence of the active intervention by the child. For Wallon, therefore, every human activity, however complex, socially and culturally mediated, always remains, as he often repeats, the product of the "conflict" between inner forces and outer forces: and this implies not a modeling of the first by the second, but a *reciprocal action*.

Besides the differences on a merely lexical level, Wallon's work can be considered an anticipation of another essential point of cultural psychology as formulated by Shweder: the "existential uncertainty" because of which "human beings, starting at birth (and perhaps earlier), are highly motivated to seize meanings and resources out of a sociocultural environment that has been arranged to provide them with meanings and resources to seize and to use" (1990, p. 1). The idea of *appropriation*, to which Wallon often returns in his works, is indeed closely linked to the idea that the human being, at birth and subsequently, is always open, incomplete (*inachevé*). The biological nature of the child at birth is not "the only law of his subsequent destiny. Its effects can be amply transformed by the circumstances of his existence, from which personal choice is not absent" (1954, p. 288). The "person" (a term which in Wallon indicates the arrival point of the properly human development process) is formed

through the stages of functional development of the sensory-motor system, of intelligence, of affectivity, as a progressive liberation (*disaliénation*) from emotions, from external conditioning, and from the fragmentation of self-consciousness, solely through the meeting with culture. Essential elements of the "disalienating" process, such as the acquisition of the sense of personal dignity and the construction of systems of values, are founded on an "appropriation" of the cultural regulations of activity that enable a person to establish a dialectical relationship with others and with culture itself. This capacity for "transcendence" presupposes not a metaphysical subject, but a subject originating out of a multi-level "historical" process: of the child's individual development, of the long natural history through which the basic psychic functions have evolved in the humans, and finally of history, along which higher psychic functions develop as they are continually transformed by historically changing cultural instruments and practices.

The not merely interactive, but inherently dialectical character of the subject-world relationship is clear from the way Wallon outlines the development of self-consciousness in the child, in which "the role of the other" is essential, as he stated in the very title of a fundamental paper (1946). The thesis according to which humans are "essentially", indeed "genetically", social (p. 284) was systematically tested by Wallon through the analysis of child behavior and the overall development of the person in the subsequent life course. It was also the origin of the polemic with Piaget, whose theory of infantile autism Wallon criticized for its sense of being enclosed in a "totally personal world", out of which the child would come only in a more advanced developmental stage. This, according to Wallon, simply "does not stand up to observation" of children's behavior "with their extreme sensitivity to every external stimulus, their vital communion with the environment and above all with their preferential orientation towards people". The fundamental observation is that "the first personal relationships of the child are not of a practical kind towards objects, which, when they appear, come to be of a merely ludic kind: they are human relationships, relationships of understanding, for which the necessary tools are means of expression: even if the child is not a conscious member of society, he is a being primitively and totally orientated towards society". (1947, p. 307)

This orientation, however, manifests itself initially in "a system without intimate cohesion and abandoned without the least control to the most fortuitous influences", characterized by reactions that are not directed towards a purpose, but must be "completed, compensated, interpreted" by the adult. Between the child's reactions of anger and the intervention

of the mother a simple *physiological* association is initially produced, which is, however, duplicated in a second which takes it to the level of *expression* and *understanding* of social relationships. "The resulting effect *makes the emotional manifestation increasingly clearly intentional*" (1946, p. 281; italics ours). The forming of an intentional subject in a world of intentional objects in no way seems to be an inappropriate description of this process, whose strong point is the meeting between the essentially social nature of the child and the constructed nature of the world of meanings that is indispensable to "give form" to the former. This transition from the level of purely physiological reactions to that of expression-communication is perhaps the main contribution of the psychologist Wallon to a general theory of human conduct. It is a concrete solution to the problem of the relationship between biology and society that Durkheim had indicated as a sort of metatheory without being able to derive from it an articulated sociological theory more directly connected with empirical observation. The passage that enables the child to reach the level of expression is that which, according to Wallon (1951), "has been, in the human species, of decisive importance, since it is linked, not to some so-called special instinct, but to the conditions of existence of the individual from birth". In individual development, the process starts from the condition of total dependence on the mother, in which "the child's means of action are reduced to means of expression". These are progressively and continually given form, already in a pre-verbal phase, for example through the "progressive introduction of nuances in the mimic attitudes of the child and of the adult", and are then based on "a sort of affective symbiosis between the child and his environment". (p. 48)

The concept of "psychic symbiosis", usually attributed to Spitz (1958) and recently taken up again also in a cultural psychology context to explain the new-born child access to the world of meanings, had already found in Wallon a formulation of great interest. "Even if we cannot speak of psychology of fetal life, conditions exist there that continue well beyond birth, which I would define conditions of symbiosis between the child and the mother" [...] The only gestures that the child is able to make are not of approach or avoidance in relation to objects, they are gestures addressed to people, gestures of expression. This is fundamental precisely because humanity is made up of groups in which individuals have in common rites, traditions, a language, which enable them to collaborate and dominate the external world" (p. 310-311). The same idea of psychic symbiosis has recently been taken up also by Harré, as "a permanent interactive relation between two persons, in the course of which one supplements the psychological attributes of the other as they are displayed in social

performances, so that the other appears as a complete and competent social and psychological being" (1983, p. 105). He adds, however, that such a relation has "nothing much to do with emotional ties, though as a cognitive process it is important in processes such as those by which mere feeling is publicly and collectively defined as emotion. It is an act of psychological symbiosis to define someone else's display of feeling as anger, hunger, frustration, misery, etc," (p. 106). What distinguishes Wallon's position is then precisely the idea of an essential relation between the "inner world" of the child and the "intentional world" that "defines" it.

Focussing attention on mechanisms of "emotional mimesis", which also recall certain basic empathy processes (Hoffman, 1991), and on the organization of communicative exchanges through the alternation of active and passive roles, Wallon looks for the essential features of a pre-verbal, but in any case expressive-communicative, phase, in which the emotional reactions of the child and of the social environment have a structuring function. In such a phase emotions act without doubt as an expression system preceding articulated language. The transition from the first to the second occurs neither by direct continuity nor by discontinuity and replacement of relationship patterns, but through a general dialectical process by which the human individual emerges from the sort of "primitive psychological communism" in which he or she is embedded before and immediately after birth. Both joint activity in a pre-verbal phase, and the discursive practices that accompany it and later specify it, mediate between "act and thought" (Wallon, 1942). By keeping them both dialectically related, Wallon will develop a perspective that distinguishes him from Piaget (for the opposition to the hypothesis of infantile autism in the name of the originally social character of the primary psychic functions), and from Vigotsky (for the importance attributed to affectivity in the process of meanings co-construction). For Wallon the sensory-motor system has, in the human species, an expressive function before also acquiring, later on, an operative function. Expression means exchange, relation with the other, although the ability to signify, the effectiveness of infants' behaviors, are not obviously of an intellectual nature as language will then be prevalently: they are rather linked to emotion thought of as a "prelude to differentiations between the psychic and the physiological, the self and the other" (Zazzo, 1963).

In the light of considerably later studies, such as those on pre-verbal communication (Bruner & Sherwood, 1981), on logical-experiential thought (Epstein, 1990), on metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), on the nature and ontogenesis of meaning (Overton & Palermo, 1994) and many others, Wallon's work takes on a special value of up-to-dateness, which is probably

the main reason for the scarce attention it has been formerly given. The fact that Wallon became known in the United States with a first translation only in the eighties (1984) cannot depend only on problems with language style; it depends rather on the dialectical thought that constitutes the novelty and difficulty of his works. Dialectics in Wallon is certainly neither a rhetorical game, nor is it easy; "it is rather a serious effort at understanding which moves incessantly between moments of intuition and of analysis, to identify the areas of fusion and articulation noticeable in the observed reality, especially when it is constituted by a human being in his complex bio-psycho-social reality". (Zazzo, 1989, p. 192). From this perspective, Wallon advanced a reformulation of genetic psychology that makes it particularly useful as a basis for social psychology and for cultural psychology in particular. The central core is the interconnection between the intentionality of the subject and the intentionality of the surrounding worlds, not only at the level of their full expression, but at the level of their reciprocal production and essential connection along the path of individual development.

The theoretical and methodological premises of an organic and articulated cultural psychology are no less present in Meyerson's work, which undoubtedly constitutes the most singular case of omission in the history of cultural psychology. In fact, his proposal is clearly that of a study of "human facts" as a manifestation and product of intentional subjects historically situated in a dialectical relation with intentional worlds of which they themselves are products and producers.

Meyerson's long and intense activity in the field of research and theoretical debate in psychology shows an interdisciplinary openness rare among psychologists. He is, as has been pointed out (Vernant, 1989), knowingly at the crossroads between the experimental and clinical tradition of Piéron, Charcot and Janet, the philosophy of Cassirer, the sociology and cultural anthropology of Durkheim, Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl, the reworking of Marxist thought outside the conditioning of the soviet regime, the post-saussurian linguistics of Meillet, the historiographical research of the *Annales* school. His long and intense work, a reconstruction of which has only recently been initiated (Parot, 1996), ranges from the early studies in physiology and experimental psychology on visual perception and from the systematic observations on the use of tools in apes carried with Guillaume and published in several articles on the *Journal* in the thirties, to the vast field that opens up with "*l'entrée dans l'humain*" (1952) in what is actually specific to it: higher mental functions in the concrete manifestations of their products, in their various cultural forms and in their historical evolution.

Meyerson's interdisciplinary approach is expressed clearly in his commitment as secretary from its foundation in 1920 of the *Société Francaise de Psychologie*, the presidents of which were in succession the physiologist Chaslin, the linguist Meillet, the anthropologist Mauss. Such a vision is equally evident in the *Journal* of which he was co-editor and then editor in chief for some decades, and which published original articles and reviews of studies not only of anthropologists like Mauss, but also of historians, philosophers, linguists, scholars of the ancient world, of aesthetics, of literary criticism. He himself was in contact both with the main French psychologists, including Piaget, and with the leading exponents in the above-mentioned fields and in others. In his fundamental work, *Les fonctions psychologiques et les oeuvres* (1946), actually a manifesto of historical psychology and, in some respects, an anticipation of current cultural psychology (Bruner, 1996), the most numerous references are drawn from the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the historian of thought Brunschwig, the mathematician Gonseth, the synologist Granet, the philosopher Cassirer, the Ancient Greece scholar Gernet (Vernant, 1989); and there is no lack of references drawn from painters such as Delacroix and Matisse or from writers such as Pirandello and Joyce.

Meyerson's theoretical-methodological perspective, which he himself defined as *comparative historical psychology*, is immediately characterized by the provocative proposal to identify as a privileged area of inquiry for the study of phenomena like thought and memory, not only individual behaviors and processes observable through them, but also and above all their products, commonly studied by the social sciences. The two areas, of the mind in its structures and operations, and of its manifestations in *Völkerpsychologie*, which Wundt considered it necessary to keep distinct because of the different nature of the phenomena and the corresponding different methodological approach required, are merged by Meyerson into a single field of inquiry, to be explored in an organically unitary way. Underlying this undoubtedly revolutionary choice was the criticism of the "fixity and apriority" assumption, in which he saw the shortcomings of all cognitivist psychology from Gestalt onwards. "In the field of the human – as Meyerson asserts decisively in one of his most important articles (1954) – pure nature, immediate data of experience do not exist. Our experience never apprehends the raw datum, but only something constructed". In the same way, "there are no pure mental forms that can be embodied in whatever matter, but mental forms and mental matters are conjoined; the languages of the great classes of expressive forms translate specific, original contents, corresponding to autonomous domains of human experience. Man would not have created music and painting

if common language had been able to express all of his experience and spirituality" (p. 10).

Meyerson had already clearly countered the idea of the mind that Shweder defines "platonic" with that of a mind inseparable from the "mental worlds" that it produces and by which it is produced, coming to be inherently "conjoined", "consubstantial" with them. The characteristics that unify mind and its products-instruments are *specificity* and *historicity*. "Mind is there where it actually operates on a concrete matter, where it constructs. Thought never operates in a void. In each of its operations, at each moment, it is consubstantial with its matter. It is therefore at the same time specific and historical. The human mind in its actual work is logical-discursive, or physical, or plastic, or musical, and its states are situated in certain moments of the different series, consubstantial with each new matter at each new moment" (1954, p. 8). In the hypothesis of a "solidarity of works and of operations, of the constructed and of construction" (p. 15), Meyerson indicates the way out of a substantially "tautological" study into which scientific psychology locked itself, when, in search of its own specific subject-matter, it found it in the systematic study of higher mental functions as abstract, formal universal systems.

The turning point initiated in those same years by Bühler with his abandonment of the structuralist for the genetic approach, is taken by Meyerson to the logical conclusion of a "historical" vision of functions not only in their "natural" development (both ontogenetic and phylogenetic) but in their evolution in the short, medium and long periods of a historical-cultural process. So the history of mental functions is indissolubly linked to that of their products, which had until then been addressed by the other human sciences from which psychology had wanted to keep itself distinct. Face to the impasse in which, according to Gardner, psychology found and finds itself in the study of consciousness, self, will, personality, with the only possible way out in "metaphysics", Meyerson had already indicated in the forties a possible alternative, a new arm to be added to the others that psychology had acquired: "To defend itself better from metaphysics, psychology resorts to history. The comparative method, which has proved to be so fruitful in most of the human sciences, enables psychology to widen its perspective. Examining together the great types of activity and their products, it finds before itself a solid and always available material. New fields are thus opened up to objective exploration" (1954, p. 3).

Meyerson dedicated his main work, *Les fonctions psychologiques et les oeuvres* (1948), to the attempt to demonstrate that the study of psychic functions cannot be separated from that of the rich, complex and historically and culturally variable world of "works" or of mind's products of every kind:

institutions, rules, inventions, works of art, artifacts, and so on. All of these are in fact "signs", original products of a mind that can innovate, discover and create "new forms", although using means (instruments and rules) historically and culturally accumulated; the latter, in turn, make such products sharable, understandable and interpretable, although never universally and totally defined and definitive. Acts and works, in so far as they are meaningful products or signs, contain possible extensions, not yet totally exploited virtualities, in the eyes both of the others and of the very subject that produced them. They are always at the same time "exemplary" and "unfinished"; they are defined, perfect and unique, and at the same time open to further interpretation. Therefore their highest form is perhaps art, which can express at best together "the human in its wholeness and the new" (p. 126). Signs, from the simplest acts to the most complex works, such as works of art and visions of the world expressed in any form, are products of a mind whose essential potentiality lies in the incompleteness of its functions, always open to development and change, both on an individual and collective, historical level. This depends on the fact that the mind operates only through concrete acts produced in concrete conditions, which influence its functioning in that "they have to be re-learnt by each individual, recreated or created autonomously". Recalling the linguist Meillet, who asserted that "the fact that the child must learn a language is one of the main causes of linguistic change", Meyerson then concludes that "as each man must learn to think and feel for himself, there is in this one cause of the change of functions" (p. 119).

On the other hand, and once more in a dialectical perspective, acts and works, as signs, are "systematic". They do not therefore have meaning each in and for itself, outside a system of meanings: they all belong to some species or series, "they exist only in relation to a series or mean that series". The systematic character of mental functioning, which manifests itself on an individual level in stimulus generalization, in anticipation and prediction, in the gestalt organization of the perceptive field, in the construction of concepts, classes, categories, appears again at an intersubjective level in the stabilizing forces issuing from the communicative function of signs. Being a means for living together and cooperating, signs imply a certain convergence and complementarity of intentions, and some shared rules for their use. They are therefore subject to the action of "collective preferences and conventions" that, once accumulated in the culture of the group, assume for the individual a character of "factuality" and "externality", so that "the collective preferences enter the life and actions of the individuals" belonging to the same community. (Ibid., p. 21 fll.). This justifies the historical-comparative

character of psychological research, which is not "the understanding of a single mental act, but the understanding of psychological functions in the complex and concrete difference of their history" (Ibid., p. 156). Here the human mind opens to observation through the double-faced reality of its concrete products, in which psychological and social processes appear to be inseparable and referring to one another for an adequate understanding of both.

Footnotes

(1) The same happens for a *dialectical* perspective, delineated in the first decades of the twentieth century in particular by Wallon (se below), but seemingly unknown to those (Buss, 1979; Georgoudi, 1983) who advanced similar proposals in the seventies and eighties.

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