



Theoretical Psychology

Global Transformations and Challenges



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Edited by

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and Ye Haosheng (Honorary Editor)

Peer-reviewed, Edited and Selected Proceedings of the Thirteenth Biennial Conference
of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology Nanjing, China, May 2009.

Captus University Publications

CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
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KEY NOTE ADDRESS

1 Wicked problems and the construction of theory in psychology Hank Stam	2
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------

CONNECTIONS TO CHINESE PSYCHOLOGY

2 Neo-confucianism and continental psychology: A note on consciousness in Zhu Xi and Wundt Hans van Rappard	14
3 Greek and Chinese words: Concrete links to concrete beginnings of abstract thought Martin E. Morf	23
4 The concepts of self and self-transcendence: Fung Yu-Lan's perspective Ying Zhu & Hongbin Wang	30
5 The characteristics of indigenous theoretical psychology in modern China Haizhong Zhang & Hongxia Li	38

PROCESS ONTOLOGY, DEEP EMPIRICISM AND ACTIVITY

6 Psychology in the key of life: Deep empiricism and process ontology Paul Stenner	48
7 Around the day in eighty worlds: Deleuze, suggestibility and researching practice as process Johanna Motzkau	59
8 Self as unifying process: On the grammar and phenomenology of agency Paulo Jesus	73
9 John Dewey's theory of activity: Precursor to Leontiev Brad Piekkola	84

ACTIVITIES OF MEDIATED KNOWING AND REMEMBERING

- 10 Mediated getting-to-know-the-world: Approaching learning with S. L. Rubinstein** 94
Manolis Dafermos and Athanasios Marvakis
- 11 Meaning construction in remembering: A synthesis of Bartlett and Vygotsky** 105
Brady Wagoner
- 12 Remembered persons and the self-defining memories of adolescents** 115
Gertina J. van Schalkwyk

AFFECT, FEELING AND EMBODIMENT

- 13 The affective roots of thought** 128
Rachel Joffe Falmagne
- 14 Scullery's question: Multiplicity, felt experience and continuity** 138
John Cromby
- 15 The notion of embodied knowledge** 149
Shogo Tanaka

EVOLUTION, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

- 16 The societal nature of the human being and the new genetics** 160
Vanessa Lux
- 17 Moral psychology and evolutionary explanation** 172
Huib Looren de Jong
- 18 The barrel, the fuse and the lighter: Evolutionary precursors to culture** 182
Jannes Eshuis and René van Hezewijk

PSYCHODYNAMIC DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

- 19 Delusions and metonymic disturbances: A discussion of Lacan's approach to psychotic disturbance** 196
Stijn Vanheule

20 On the introduction of the cyborg: A struggle for identity 205
Vasi van Deventer

21 White narcissism and black consciousness 216
Derek Hook

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POLITICS OF TRUTH, POWER AND VIOLENCE

22 Racism in a post-colonial world: European myths and truth effects 228
Eri Park

23 Theory and empirical research: Can scientific ideas be violent? 239
Thomas Teo

**24 'Culture', violence and manhood – A critical analysis of
constructions of masculinities in explanations of gender violence
in the South African context** 247
Werner Böhmke

THEORIZING APPLICATION AND INTERVENTION

25 Intervention, evidence-based research and everyday life 260
Ole Dreier

**26 The diverging paths of phenomenology: Contributions by George
Kelly and Carl Rogers** 270
Andrew H. C. Wong

**27 Theorizing effective civil-military cooperation: Examples from the
Canadian Military** 280
Laura C. Ball and Angela R. Febraro

CONTRIBUTORS 293

SUBJECT INDEX 298

NAME INDEX 302

Chapter 8

Self as unifying process: On the grammar and phenomenology of agency

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SUMMARY

Reasons and causes typify two language games or grammars tending to incommensurability. These grammars institute a qualitative discrimination between the self-efficacy of being someone and the symmetric, selfless, efficacy of being something. Reasons can behave as causes, although it is fully absurd to interpret reasons as causes and vice-versa. Yet, in order for reasons to possess causal efficacy, one must assume: first, a monist ontology warranting the communication of dynamic efficiency between two chains of phenomena, that is to say, the chain of intentional representations and that of body movements so that a deep ontological homogeneity may coexist with a surface heterogeneity; and, second, a self-alert phenomenology which recognizes the peculiar "I feel" that must be able to accompany "my acting" and "my making happen", while acknowledging, however, the validity of an invincible metaphysical uncertainty. Selfhood emerges here as an unstable but unifying process of meaning-construction.

REASONS AND CAUSES AS LIFE STRATEGIES

In line with Wittgenstein's seminars (Wittgenstein, 1958) the classical work by G. E. M. Anscombe (1957) illustrates vehemently the incommensurability thesis which implies the irreducibility and heterogeneity between reasons and causes. This thesis rejects the possibility of the identity of reasons and causes, considering it as alogical. For reason and cause would be impossible logical functions, semiotic processes with non-coordinatable normative principles. Reasons and causes would be parallel "language games" without tangency points, without mutual translation, given their lack of analogical grammars. They would be absolutely heteroclit tools without any common criterion of truth, each of them having its peculiar cognitive efficacy. From this standpoint, the fundamental option for the grammar of "reason" or for the grammar of "cause" is not grounded directly in the ontology but rather in the cognitive and symbolic practices. The same phenomenon may be described either in terms of "underlying reasons" (becoming thereby an "action") or in terms of "efficient cause" (becoming then an "event"), because each one of these descriptions belongs to *sui generis* modes of interpreting a phenomenon (either as dependent or independent with regard to a self-conscious agent) and of relating it with specific types of practices (*desire* or *conative practice* which aims to produce something successful in the world, and *belief* or *cognitive practice* that seeks for representational accuracy). Such practices involve different evaluative canons (one being performative and the other properly descriptive) as well as "symmetric directions of fit" (one subordinates the world-to-the-word and the other the word-to-the-world) (Anscombe, 1957, p. 56; Searle, 1985). The production of

selfhood or subjectivity appears as the key effect of a relative instability in the meaning of enacted signs. The cogency of Wittgenstein-Anscombe's proposal imposes itself by sacrificing entirely the ontology of action—or rather by abstracting from it with an attitude of ontological agnosticism (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 195). In fact, under this angle, the concept of *meaning* is absolutely neutral or indifferent towards ontology; and, hence, follows tacitly the crucial inference that ontology, in and by itself, is amorphous and non-constraining. Every phenomenon may be “action” or “event”, provided the necessary and sufficient obedience to the principle of semiotic non-contradiction, that is to say: “A phenomenon may be simultaneously or successively action and/or event if it is integrated in each one of both language games by different semiotic players in the same moment, or by the same player in different moments”. By definition, a language game is efficacious only if the players follow and enact a *Gestalt* of rules that suspends all other possible rules, and thus creates a space of inalienable symbolic sovereignty with onto-phenomenological effects. In this sense, the so-called pre-linguistic purity or indomitability of the “mode or process of being” is reduced to silence: indefinite, unintelligible and inefficient or inert silence. To evoke a striking Wittgensteinian example, one might say that according to this semiotic constructivism nothing *a priori* in a toothache determines its possible meaning, because there is no *universal ontology for a toothache* but only *contingent grammars* that rule the construal of a toothache as a particular object and quality of possible experience. One should assert, in the last analysis, that practical semiotics decides all meaning, including the meaning of senses, the meaning of sensoriality and all tonalities of *qualia*, like pain and pleasure. To suffer from pain in general and from a toothache in particular means to play a game that makes me play it. Something is “painful” only within a determined symbolic game that consists in the “institution of a painful meaning as sense” or a “meaningful system of nociperception”. Grammar evolves through embodied co-constructed learning and along epigenetic paths that define the developmental compossibilities of meaning and its embodiment.

Likewise, the self emerges as a grammatical competence, mainly self-narrative, defining a field of intelligible action, which can be termed “moral personality”. A rigorous linguistic turn would present itself as a non-ontological constructivism, a semiosis that neglects the possibility of *onto- or bio- or eco-semiotic nerves* capable of being determinant endogenous forces on the epigenesis and continuous restructuring of grammars. A strict symbolic autonomy would have an autophagic tendency and would claim for an exception regime of self-determination and over-determination, assuming its primacy over the realms of phenomenology and ontology. The living grammar is, however, a performing art and produces by itself all possible onto-phenomenological constellations. Semiogenesis and ontogenesis must merge perfectly so that embodied signs may produce what they signify. Thus, efficacious *semiosis* unfolds itself as a unifying experience of *auto-poiesis* and *auto-energeia* (or *self-creation* and *self-actualization*).

The grammar of reasons and causes: pathologies and therapies

The hermeneutic oscillation between reasons and causes denotes a metaphysical confusion which insinuates itself continuously into the relationships between subjects and verbs. It is legitimate to ask with Wittgenstein whether such confusion generates true philosophical questions or mere grammatical pathologies whose

therapy would consist in reestablishing functional affective bonds tying nouns/pronouns and verbs. All conceptual confusions, made manifest in the reciprocal ambiguity between reason and cause, would reside in *practical* confusions which are “grammatical” or “logical” performances leading to nonsense, confusions between games or between tools or between expressive symbols. The differential practice of the language games here at issue—“to give reason of an action” and “identify the cause of an effect”—is described by Wittgenstein as follows:

Giving a reason for something one did or said means showing a *way* which leads to this action. In some cases it means telling the way which one has gone oneself; in others it means describing a way which leads there and is in accordance with certain accepted rules. [...]

At this point, however, another confusion sets in, that between reason and cause. One is led into this confusion by the ambiguous use of the word “why”. Thus when the chain of reasons has come to an end and still the question “why?” is asked, one is inclined to give a cause instead of a reason. [...]

The double use of the word “why”, asking for the cause and asking for the motive, together with the idea that we can know, and not only conjecture, our motives, gives rise to the confusion that a motive is a cause of which we are immediately aware, a cause ‘seen from the inside’, or a cause experienced.— Giving a reason is like giving a calculation by which you have arrived at a certain result. (Wittgenstein, 1958, pp. 14–15.)

The learning of a grammar warrants the regulation and preservation of meaning. The core of any grammatical learning is not, however, strictly linguistic, but rather behavioral and practical. Even if a particular language has no words to say “I”, “reason/intention” and “cause/force”, it is likely to offer, in its many *life forms*, a repertory of production and comprehension codes that rule the functioning of bodily or symbolic expressions capable of accompanying and meaning a unique logic of agency. Obviously, it is possible that the interpreter of a non-linguistic expression makes a false inference relying on an over-interpretation which results in a “projection of intentionality” on a course of phenomena, whose chaining and sequencing was merely causal. The understanding of any expression requires the understanding of a life form. That is why the jocular formula—“if a lion could talk we could not understand him”—carries a deeper truth than firstly expected (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 190). As is self-evident, such incomprehensibility proceeds not from the irrelevant impossibility of access to the lion’s mental activity but from the fact that meaning resides in the logical texture of a life form that we, humans, *cannot* share entirely with lions. Therefore, a lion remains incomprehensible because of the logical idiosyncrasy of his life form. Understanding a life form is always a matter of degree, for it depends on the extent to which *my* life form shares the practical-logical processes of the *other’s* life form. In a fundamental sense, the *life worlds* of different *life forms* must overlap in part; or else the simple recognition of a life form as *other’s* differential mode of self-organization would be impossible. In *my* “grasping a native’s point of view” (Malinowski, 1925), understanding a neurotic person (Jaspers, 1913), or guessing an animal behavior, there is always a part of shared and a part of non-shared processes of being and meaning, grounded in a partly common and partly unique *life world*; that which justifies the quest for an eco- and bio-semiotics. Whitehead’s (1929) emphasis on creativity and

conrescence, Husserl's (1970) concept of *Lebenswelt*, Merleau-Ponty's (1968) metaphor of a germinal "chiasm" in sensibility, and Jonas' (1966) idea of freedom or selfhood as intrinsic to every life form, all point to the birth of meaning in *pre-subjective wilderness*, as it were. By the same token, they all maintain that for any living being the reality of grammar meets the morphodynamics of life and encapsulates the "desire" for meaning and the "desire" for a selving self. Nature and Logos as well as life and grammar must be regarded as continually fusing and co-evolving processes—otherwise they vanish. In this sense, once embedded in an actual self-becoming process, reasons and causes give semiotic shape to life, and constitute life strategies, in which meaning and being converge into creative transitions or "actual occasions" (Stenner, 2008; Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 211, *passim*). Grammatical constellations can be life strategies if they are instilled with autopoietic energy and if, therefore, produce themselves by producing what they signify. The touchstone of the actuality of a "grammatical" life strategy lies, however, in the self-transformational and self-transgressive force that converts "grammatology" into "experience", a field of emotional intensities, nexuses and vectors, that is, a future-centered organism in development.

LIFE, EXPRESSION, AND UNDERSTANDING: THE SEMIOTIC CYCLE

The surface syntactic privilege of the subject in most language games makes us hallucinate the omnipresence of "reasons" and postulate the primacy of the personal pronoun over the verb, as if the pronoun were the first force from which all language would follow and become a self-propelled stochastic process. Though pervasive as it may be, such symbolic primacy of the subject should not impede an alternative view on the order of dependence, namely an order centered on the prominent value of "action". This alternative order would entail the *syntactic declassification of the subject* and consider it as a simple "active verb complement" (Descombes, 2004; Tesnière, 1959). Thus, all syntactic relations might be reorganized by the category of action. Indeed, verbs are not ruled by subjects; verbs convoke subjects and these respond to them as complements. The conception of language under the perspective of a center of agentic gravity proposes a more radical transformation, the transformation of the general interpretive semiotics in narrative semiotics. As narrative competence and performance, *my* subjectivity or agency is a *simple semiotic potentiality*, whose actualization depends on the development of a vital relationship with a concrete life form. The efficacious semiotics is bio-semiotics, accomplishing the preservation of a pattern of meaning which unifies a process and makes it recognizable as a life phenomenon for a living being. The narrative grammar produces the agentic vitality of the narrative subject, whose essence lies in an autopoietic semiotic practice. It follows that the subject who expresses herself does not communicate any form of self-knowledge; she only actualizes a grammatical know-how. The essence of a narrative lies in its implying a *discursive flow*, because the emergence of meaning and "intelligence" requires the acting-out of productive imagination and discourse against formless matter, the acting-out of vital textures with their space-time and rhythm of compossible connections:

After he had said this, he left her as he did the day before.'—Do I understand this sentence? Do I understand it just as I should if I heard it in the course of a

narrative? If it were set down in isolation I should say, I don't know what it's about. But all the same I should know how this sentence might perhaps be used; I could myself invent a context for it. (A multitude of familiar paths lead off from these words in every direction.) (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 121).

One must observe in the logical dissymmetry between "reason" and "cause" that a "reason" does not suppose an infinite chain of reasons which would be accomplished by a continuous narration or by a narrative in progressive expansion *ad infinitum*. In fact, "reasons" allow one to grasp and generate the discrete, the discontinuous and even the hiatus, for their intelligibility does not rely absolutely on a regulative ideal of all-encompassing unity or totality. There is no logical need for a perfectly unified texture of reasons so that every new "reason" may enjoy vital efficacy. A "reason" tends to appear in ephemeral and local actualizations. Yet, it can reveal a relatively lasting or global effect of self-cohesion under certain stabilizing discursive circumstances. Produced by that self-cohesion, the epistemic (non-conjectural) certainty is always formed against a background of non-reason, an ultimate horizon of certainty which is not generated but spontaneously given as a common soil for further belief and understanding (the Husserlian *Boden* or *Urglaube*). This soil provides *background practical certainties* (Wittgenstein, 1969) that reside in the dynamic architecture of *life forms* and constitute the pragmatic condition for narrative meaning. The *force* of a *reason* derives from its quality of narrative operator and from its linkage with an actual life form: "What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 190).

Selfhood as hermeneutic application

Reason and *cause* furnish two generative matrices for practical self- and hetero-interpretation. On learning the possible uses of both semiotic tools, every interpreter becomes cognitively motivated to apply them to her "life". In this hermeneutic application, one can either *confound*, *distinguish* or *articulate* their difference and, by so doing, obtain various configurations of selfhood and agency.

One telling example of *confusion*, a symptom of psychopathology or of poetic spontaneity, can be found in the expression assigned to a dementially altered Nietzsche: "I apologize for the poor weather!", denoting a life form grounded in a peculiar ego-pananimism. This confusion contains the fundamental psychophysical belief that *my self* is a *force of nature* (or is embedded in the flowing of natural forces) which can "make rain and snow", and comprises a pseudo-agentic intentionality in the sense that its structure is essentially *pathetic*, that is to say, actions are interpreted as affections resulting from multi-determined webs and loops of events. At the same time, it must be emphasized that such *confusion* can assume many forms and has the merit of attacking solipsism and proposing an ecological ground for any reason that must always proceed from previous actions and affections linked with certain habits of meaning-assignment: "I wish to hear Brahms *because* it rains"; "I wish to hear Mozart *because* the sun shines". As for the *distinction* between reason and cause, its disciplinary practice consists in establishing two parallel equations: on the one hand, "personality-as-agency" equated with the grammar of free reasons and, on the other hand, "nature-as-objectivity" equated with the grammar of efficient causes (deterministic and probabilistic alike). This distinction assumes an irreducible dualism, validated by cleft

categories but invalidated by phenomenological analysis. Let us concentrate, consequently, on the most fruitful, complex and communal hypothesis which posits the *articulation* of explanation (*Erklären*) and understanding (*Verstehen*), be it vertical or parallel, horizontal or sequential-alternated.

This cognitive style of “articulation” reflects a motivating belief that fortifies the adherence to *self-efficacy*, according to which the increase of cognitive self-possession favors a proportional increase of self-control and self-transformation abilities. It would make possible the enjoyment of more power and, thereby, the attainment of more intentional sovereignty and causal hedonism. Thanks to the semiotic work of “articulation”, which conjoins semantic dualism with syntactic monism, *my* self-interpretation oscillates *strategically* between the grammar of reasons and the grammar of causes, seeking for an optimal intelligibility within the system of I-phenomena, that “I, s/he or it which makes me do and makes happen in me”. Some connections in this system belong to a series of facts causally explainable, while other connections are interwoven in narratively understandable biographies. One may conceive of some vital elements that are *more* intelligible through explanation or through understanding (elements that demonstrate a kind of preferential inclination to one or other interpretive grammar), whereas other elements seem to benefit from the same level of intelligibility in both grammars. Under a meta-interpretive angle, one recognizes that every subject develops her self-theory—having recourse to the double regime of explanation and understanding—in order to describe the paradigmatic transitions in her epistemology of self-interpretation. How can I *understand* or *explain* the fact that I consider this vital passage incomprehensible? Why do I regard this event X as being without reason but flowing inexorably from a knowable cause? Or instead: Why do I believe that *now in face of Y* to interpret myself through self-explanation *makes not enough sense*? Why do I find compelling the recall of those emotions synchronous with episode Z as an *epistemic warrant* of the feeling of self-understanding? These questions are always implicitly or explicitly at stake in the process of symbolic self-interpretation.

In the permanent strategic *shift* between “explanation” and “understanding”, accomplished by *my* self, if competent in both methods, it is expectable that such reinforcement of selfhood translates into semiotic transgression and invention which produce a new kind of valuable “biosemiotic diversity”. Equally, selfhood lives by symbols that must be identifiable and recognizable. So, the coefficient of transgression goes hand in hand with the symmetric coefficient of semiotic preservation and conservation which enhances “biosemiotic diversity” with “biosemiotic compatibility” (patent in the “symbiotic” relationships between users or inhabitants of the same symbolic ecosystem). The “articulation” allows for a *strategic appropriation* of the powers of each game which can destabilize the pre-established games in order to test their elasticity or to perform and rehearse any novelty opening up new styles of playing or even new games. The practice of multiple games expands the player who embodies, in the last analysis, the concept of incomputable force (or indomitable agentic patterns of possibilities). Nevertheless, the strategic and metacognitive expertise does not elucidate entirely the articulation between different games. There is also an unintended *pathetic and practical dimension* at play that must be highlighted. The “player” moves typically from “reasons” to “causes” under various affective dispositions which express themselves semiotically, for instance in the ambivalence of reasons, in the frustration of the coherence expectancy between reasons and actions or in the lack of reasons (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 88). At any rate, whenever a reason shows a high degree of

inertia, it is vanquished by the dynamics of the cognitive habit of perceiving the ascending genealogy or archeology of causes. The uncovering of causes appears as a last semiotic resort that might signify an experience of learned self-loss. Another possibility not to be neglected is the following: the “player” believes in the ontological and epistemological value of causality as the most powerful binder, the cement of the universe. So, she only retains from reasons their predictive power regarding action, and hallucinates a quasi-mimetic relationship between reason and cause as the very essence of a reason, despite the singularity and the non-necessity of the causal force of reasons. The player strategies move from reasons to causes whenever the predictive power of “reasons alone” diminishes, as is noticeable in the case of reasons reconstructed through narrative retrospection or through moral reassessment of action (Freeman, 2009). The linkage of causes and reasons—and the shift between them—respond to a rational passion for unity and continuity, as conditions of intelligibility. Semiotic invention is the key operation that converts simple intelligibility into *self*-relevant “truth”, whose prime mode of constructive expression consists in self-storying.

However, in contrast with the empirical and proof-oriented character of causal knowledge, the function of narrative self-interpretation is axiological, ethical and aesthetic, pursuing and prosecuting the “good form”, the pregnant Gestalt, which achieves a desirable *symbolic self-refiguration*. A life story is a symbol which produces what it means. Though ephemeral, its psychological truth is absolute and constitutes the strongest mode of efficiency and efficacy of practical reason. The truth of *my* life story lies in its free vectorial form as a dynamic blazing of paths, a meta-stable embodied inscription, which is always situated in an inescapable onto-ethical horizon, and presents itself as a proactive quest and self-projective orientation. Being one and multiple, *I cannot unify who I am, I cannot identify myself as agent, unless I know how to structure the process of my life as a narrative development toward a higher good, that is, as a “moral space”* (Taylor, 1989).

The desirable “good narrative form” constitutes a cultural *prefiguration*, a meta-narrative semantic schema which provides the canon of all narrative (emotionally constructive) configuration and the criterion of a refiguring self-assessment of lived life (Ricoeur, 1983, pp. 105–162). With the autobiographies that give shape to a cultural meta-narrative of “agentic self”, like Augustine’s, Rousseau’s or Goethe’s, with the lives of great self-heuristic and self-zetetic characters, like Ulysses or Abraham, Don Quijote or Joseph K., that add substance and paradox to the unstable construal of selfhood, and with all daily micro-narratives that punctuate social co-ordinations, every self-interpreter composes a morphological spectrum of good, desirable, narrative forms. These bio-semiotic formations expose the unity of life and grammar, by nurturing every nascent self with a cultural library of myth-biographical figures which typify the narrative possibilities of a meaningful life; a “good life” being thus a life worth telling.

Doubtlessly, there is no “agent” without autobiographical awareness, but an autobiography comprises inherently a “self-ideology” or “myth-biography” on the optimal narrative sequence. And hence follows an organic body of form and matter, cognition and memory, poiesis and mimesis. The six elements of tragedy, expounded in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and redescribed by Burke (1945) and Ricoeur (1983), show a *stabilizing systemic permanence*, while new semiotic configurations, explored by life and art, are massively perceived as de-structuring, abnormal and teratological. The “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (Lyotard, 1979) has a deep self-interpretive impact on the (de)valuation of certain biographical configurations. Take, for example,

the narrator of *Anna Karenina* by L. Tolstoi who confesses his dogmatic belief in a certain platonism regarding the cristallized *eidos* of a “good narrative/life” when he asserts that: “*All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way*”. In line with this platonic reasoning, every self should find her only mode of composing a perfect texture, a self-Gestalt, or else loose herself irreversibly in myriad modes of tearing the self-text. The figures of fracture and crisis become, evidently, the most significant operators of narrative opening and closure. On perceiving a fracture or a crisis, the narrative intelligence suffers a traumatic shock and paralyzes. Intelligence becomes a *pathos*, hostage of self-skepticism and self-irony; it is the *kairological pathos* which invites one to the acting out of narrative self-rewriting in face of the possibility of nonsense. *A contrario*, “*Croire que je peux, c’est déjà être capable*” (Ricoeur, 2001, p. 90).

Homo sapiens fabulans: onto-phenomenology of action

The intelligibility of life is not a given, but a constructive labor, a vital task, that seems to be rooted in a “drive” (*Trieb, conatus*), naturally *explainable* (Damasio, 1999; Gazzaniga, 2006), towards narrative self-understanding which is reactivated by any catastrophe, abrupt qualitative change, able to disfigure one’s narrative self-image, and threatens to destroy the writing studio itself. If at any point the world is no longer inhabitable as an “intelligible fable”, then *homo sapiens fabulans* fragments and abandons the poetic endeavor (MacIntyre, 1981). Semiosis without poiesis brings about a monologue of repeated, voiceless, disembodied, signs. Only poiesis, as a self-performing art, can transform semiotics into bio-semiotics. Pure semiosis is confined to the naked corpses of signs, and the passage from semiotics to effective semantics is only launched by the living uneasiness of a *self-experiencing and self-experimenting I*, whose bodily intensities and imaginative connections merge together making drafts out of drafts, and composing a temporal landscape. Absolute nonsense, tangible in disconnected atoms of now-images and in lifeless signifiers, destroys the possibility of selfhood, for it jeopardizes all possibility of an onto-phenomenological solidarity within the moving triad: event/action, actor/character and author/writer. With the interruption of a unifying drafting labor, the “multiphrenic self” (Gergen, 1991) is no longer a poetic polyphony and regresses to the barbarian age of selfless *inarticulacy* and mute *process*, age of agraphy and alexia. The experience of the blind mechanics of tragedy and randomness, assigned to an exogenous increasingly unpredictable causality, may feed the (para-suicidal) belief in a meta-narrative of nonsense and self-dispossession. Moreover, it can dissolve the narrative competence, thus being selfhood confined to an amorphous, speechless, discontinuous *thisness*, to the passivity and silence of a blank neutrum, to the brute ontology of events. This brute *neutrum* evokes Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) meta-phenomenological concept of *wild being* and *wild meaning*, redefined in a narrative vein by L. Tengelyi (2005, pp. 29–30) to signify the *continuous emergence of a dispossessed meaning* which structures and de-structures the always fragile narrative unification of a life. Such dispossession means not only that action and narration begin always *in medias res*, and therefore without a truly original spontaneity, but also that the *course of action* is permeated with events that constrain agents to answer them. Meaning-construction would be virtually infinite for infinite “minds” and “texts”, but it is actually finite, because every actual, conditioned, *selving process* possesses limited poietic energy and limited capacity of transcendence in order to (re)constitute her

objectified signs and her lived instants. In other words, something cannot mean *everything* (see Eco, 1994).

Once engaged in a narrative performance, the *telling I*—and here *telling* does not exceed the *tale*—must decide what is (in)comprehensible and/or (un)explainable and cannot dodge this task of self-epistemological decision-making and meaning-construction (Velleman, 2009, p. 205). Continuously on the brink of gross performative contradictions, the *telling-and-the-tale-I* must also decide whether she believes or not in the power of agency and how to live the consequences of that (un)belief. Feeling, imagination and belief generate hybrid truthmakers in the phenomenological production of selfhood. The phenomenology of self-efficacy conjoins those *qualia* and maintains the conviction of being cause or effect, active or passive principle, although this phenomenology is patently fallible, there being two possible major flaws: 1. to feel that my *intentional reason* is the force or efficient cause of a certain somatic, motor or physical effect, when such is not the case, due to the ignorance of the true exogenous cause that has simultaneously provoked effects on me and on the contiguous space; 2. not to feel the causal objective force of my reason/action, when it is the case, due to the lack of a conscious representation of the causal link (Wegner, 2002). Illusion of control and selfless automatisms constitute two usual fallacies, but the fundamental fallacy consists in believing in the ultimate proof-value of phenomenological data, for these data have the onto-epistemological status of ambiguous signs that require close interpretation. The evidence of their presence and intensity dissimulates their congenital ambiguity. In a surface semantics they have the value of an irrefutable truthmaker deixis (*index veri et sui*). Yet, for a deep semantics, at the level of cognition which infers and assigns relational functions, those *qualia* demand great interpretative discipline. As a matter of fact, those contingent elements of sensation cannot aspire to the high status of pure transcendental elements of which one could *a priori* affirm that this *I feel* accompanies necessarily the performance of a self-determined causal power that initiates a new series of events in the world. Instead, they are *impure* elements that can accompany or not accompany the self's action. Furthermore, they may result from learning processes and form an undifferentiated complex of sensations, emotions, imaginations, and beliefs.

The most primitive layer of this “I feel”, necessary but insufficient to infer my “I do (and make happen)”, resides in the awareness or feeling of bodily effort. In this regard, there is a multi-secular inspirational strand of thought which values the positivity of somatic self-affection, whose key concepts include namely: Spinoza's (1677) “effort of being or persevering in one's being (*conatus essendi vel in suo esse perseverandi*)”, Maine de Biran's (1807) “feeling of effort (*sens de l'effort*)” and Merleau-Ponty's (1945) “synthesis of bodily awareness (*synthèse du corps propre*)”. These concepts work out a constitutive unity between self/hetero-efficacy and self/hetero-determination which demonstrates the nonsense of believing in any *causa sui* taken as absolute spontaneity. Reason-as-cause can only be felt in a very unstable way as a “somatic marker” (Damasio, 1994), an “authenticating feeling” of authorship (Wegner, 2002, pp. 326–327). In sum, the passage from “I feel” to “I do” and “I make happen” is possible but uncertain. Other passages are involved in this labyrinth of discontinuousness which encompasses the grammar, the phenomenology and the ontology of action.

In the grammar, there is no licit passage from an understanding to an explaining self-interpretation. Both semiotic games as such are disjunctive: reason cannot signify cause. In the phenomenological field, that passage exists; it appears to be there but—like all

epiphanies—contains a hallucinatory structure. In the absence of metaphysical certainty, the agent enjoys a moral certainty of various degrees. The quality of this moral certainty depends, firstly, on the subjectively or intersubjectively constraining force of *my* psychosomatic evidence, and, secondly, on the subjective and intersubjective quality of *my* narrative co-production. The phenomenological ambiguity comes from the subtle chiasms between action and affection, between selfhood-otherness-thinghood, and between meaning and its epigenetic ecology. Finitude imposes to *my* selving relationships some particular configurations of determination and co-determination that are hardly discernible or computable. There is neither absolute activity nor absolute responsibility, but simply relative activity and responsibility, for one cannot identify absolutely self-determining centers of agency. Whenever “something” resists as incomprehensible in my experience, a detour through explanation may, then, be the best way towards an enhanced self-understanding. However, in this case, if *I* master the distinction between the understandable and the explainable, then *I* am also responsible for the manner in which my responsibility is semiotically structured. A second-order responsibility can emerge here: I become responsible for conceiving myself as capable or incapable of being responsible.

At last, in ontology the passage must be possible. This paradoxical alliance between the apodictic and the problematic—“*must be possible*”—calls for a prudential stance, according to which the logical possibility of multiple disjointed and concurrent worlds (like Leibniz’ world of representations and world of motions) cannot be declared as nonsense *ex cathedra*. The hypothesis of a perfect ontological cohesion offers the highest degree of intelligibility. “Manyness in oneness” is a metaphysical landscape that appeals strongly to the desire of knowing as its final panorama. In fact, despite their semiotic irreducibility, reasons and causes may be valued as extrinsic denominations, and differential cognitive perspectives, to approach the same real efficacious forces, whose discrimination would lie solely in the contingent varieties of descriptive and interpretive constructions. Reasons and causes may signify differently, and yet merge entirely in one and the same ontological poesis. Thus, Davidson’s “anomalous monism” (2001, 2005) can be reconciled with the principle of deep dynamic continuity and affinity which is the bedrock of all intelligibility within the whole community of being and becoming.

To conclude, semiosis is the structural motion of signs, with their virtual infinity of possible patterns of motion and connection, such as the pattern of causes and the pattern of reasons. Poesis activates semiosis for actual living purposes; therefore, transforms its geometry into a dynamic event, and its anatomy into a physiological process. When a subject becomes a competent player of diverse semiotic games, she becomes, by the same token, a competent self, that is to say, an autopoietic agent, who continuously instills energy into the fabric of language and, thus, recreates herself by recreating the texture of experience.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Research funded by a post-doctoral grant (FCT/MCTES).

Theoretical Psychology: Global Transformations and Challenges

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Cover photo courtesy of Johanna Motzkau.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

International Society for Theoretical Psychology. Conference (13th : 2009 : Nanjing, Jiangsu Sheng, China)

Theoretical psychology : global transformations and challenges / editors, Paul Stenner ... [et al.].

Selected proceedings of the thirteenth Biennial Conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology titled: 'East, West, South, North: Challenges and Transformations in Theoretical Psychology', Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, May 15-19, 2009.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-55322-240-8

1. Psychology—Philosophy—Congresses. I. Stenner, Paul

BF38.I55 2011

150.1

C2011-900955-2

Canada We acknowledge the financial support of
the Government of Canada through the Canada
Book Fund for our publishing activities.