THE SOCIAL IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY:
COGNITIVE, POSTMODERN AND DISCURSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO INDIVIDUALISM

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STATEMENT

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Summary

This study evaluates the development of a discursive approach to social psychology in terms of this discipline's most pressing metatheoretical question: what is the relation between the individual and the social in social psychology? This question is illuminated through a discussion of traditional cognitive approaches to social psychology as well as postmodern critiques of the discipline, after which the discursive approach is introduced to address shortcomings in both these perspectives. The discursive approach incorporates a key insight of recent developments in the philosophy of language, namely that language is not primarily referential, but constructive of our experiences and relationship to reality. By taking seriously both the performative or rhetorical and the abstract-systemic characteristics of language, discursive social psychology addresses the traditional issues of individualism and the reduction of the social on two levels: first, as it is revealed in especially traditional cognitive approaches to social psychology; and secondly, as it supports a set of specifically Western cultural values that reproduce cultural and political practices and power imbalances. Discursive social psychology is subsequently presented as a definite advance with regard to providing richer conceptions of social-cognitive processes and the socio-cultural foundations of psychological phenomena. Despite this there are also important limitations that should be taken into account before discursive social psychology is imported to South Africa as a critical alternative: the focus on language goes along with a negation of the materiality and embodied nature of experience. Because experience cannot be pre-reflexively psychological meaningful, discursive social psychology remains to develop a theory of agency that indicates how criticism, resistance and change is possible.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie evalueer die ontwikkeling van 'n diskursiewe benadering tot die sosiale sielkunde in terme van hierdie dissipline se mees knellende metateoretiese vraag: wat is die verhouding tussen die individuele en die sosiale in sosiale sielkunde? Hierdie vraag word aangespreek deur eers te kyk na tradisioneel kognitiewe benaderings tot en postmodernistiese kritiek op die sosiale sielkunde, waarna die diskursiewe benadering bekendgestel word soos dit die tekortkominge in hierdie twee perspektiewe aanspreek. Die diskursiewe benadering inkorporeer 'n sleutel-insig van onlangse ontwikkelinge in die taalfilosofie, naamlik dat taal nie primêr referensieel is nie, maar konstruktief en medebepalend van ons ervaring van en verhouding tot die werklikheid. Deur beide die performatiewe of retoriese en die meer abstrak-sistemiese kenmerke van taal ernstig op te neem, spreek die diskursiewe sosiale sielkunde die tradisionele knelpunte van individualisme en reduksie van die sosiale op twee vlakke aan: eerstens, soos dit onthul word in veral tradisioneel kognitiewe benaderings tot sosiale sielkunde; en tweedens, soos dit 'n stel spesifiek Westers-kulturele waardes onderhou wat bydra tot die reproduksie van kulturele en politieke praktyke en mags-wanbalanse. Diskursiewe sosiale sielkunde word gevolglik aangetoon as 'n definitiewe vooruitgang wat betref die uiteensetting van ryker konsepsies van sosiaal kognitiewe prosesse en die sosiaal-kulturele grondslae van sielkundige fenomene. Ten spyte hiervan is daar egter ook belangrike gebreke wat in ag geneem moet word voordat diskursiewe sosiale sielkunde as kritiese alternatief na Suid-Afrika ingevoer word: die fokus op taal gaan gepaard met 'n negering van die materialiteit en liggaamlikheid van ervaring. Omdat ervaring nie pre-refleksief sielkundige betekenis kan hê nie, bly hierdie ontwikkeling se verstaan van agentskap in gebreke om te verduidelik hoe kritiek, teenstand en verandering moontlik is.

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Contents

Chapter *1*

Conceptualisation and outline of the study

1.1. Introduction

The past few decades have been witness to the growing stature of discussions around the nature of language in the philosophy and methodology of the social sciences[1]. These are discussions that raise concerns challenging the social sciences on epistemological, ontological as well as methodological levels. It therefore affects the core regions of social scientific self-understanding and subsequent disciplinary formations or identities. Of primary concern here is a shift from a conception of language as a purely referential or representational system, to one where language is considered to mediate our thoughts and experiences of reality. When followed through, this understanding of language threatens to implode the traditional scientific resorts of ontological essentialism and epistemological finalism, and to erode the appeal of research methods that try to ensure these.

Such notions might seem threatening and destabilising, but they are nevertheless taken on with great enthusiasm by critical social scientists. Subsequently, the "turn to language" in philosophy more generally (Van der Merwe, 1994a) can now be traced to various new forms of practice in the social sciences. These reveal a pervasive concern with language as a primarily non-referential, constructive system that displaces the burden of meaning from either a transcendental subjectivity or an already existent reality to the structure or functioning of language itself. Precisely how the structure of language carries and manages meaning – whether it is a structural or rhetorical accomplishment – is still, and will in all likelihood remain, a site of debate. For the moment it is enough to note that it is precisely the destabilising, seemingly threatening effect of such new conceptions of language that induce the excitement around their

extension into the social sciences as models for understanding social processes and the participation of individuals in social life.

Why is this so? The critical environment in which the social sciences have to justify its practices has radically changed in especially the latter part of the 20th century. It is no longer possible to separate epistemological concerns from more general political critiques of social scientific involvement in the production and reproduction of exploitative social practices. One useful way to explain this interrelated process is to embed it in the more generative framework of the postmodern. The postmodern can be initially defined as a general affirmation of difference and the irreducibility of local practices to grand theories or meta-perspectives, resulting in an ontological fragmentation and multiplication of what previously went unchallenged as human nature. Social scientific values that rest on foundational and universalistic assumptions can only be reproductive of particular ethnocentric ideas and practices. This general framework of the postmodern in effect created (or at least indicates) a reflexive and critical environment that allows the favourable reception of the "turn to language" as a possible source of theoretical models and methodological innovations in the social sciences.

This study has as its broad concern the evaluation of the role of language in the critique and the reconstruction of the social sciences in the light of metatheoretical as well as political concerns. However, this investigation will be on a more limited level: language will be questioned more specifically in the context of social psychology. In this discipline important contributions have been made in this regard, especially during the last decade. Since these have taken off quite strongly also in South Africa, it is time to critically evaluate the contributions made to social psychology in this country that draw from new understandings of language. In this regard it should be said that language has been imported into social psychology primarily under the name of discourse analysis. This seems to indicate first and foremost a research method, and since more than methodological innovation is at stake in this study, the more recent and integrative notion of discursive social psychology will be used instead.

This does not mean that there is one homogenous approach that characterises the turn to language in social psychology. Within the philosophy of language, as was already mentioned, different approaches to meaning and signification are developed. What is central though, is that language is seen as not primarily a referential system. Language is seen as *discourse*; a constructive medium. The implication of this, generally, is that focus on talk and text in social psychology does not give the researcher access to underlying cognitions or psychological states. Rather, psychological phenomena emerge from interactive and communal processes, and language plays a constructive role in these – even though is understood differently across traditions. Evaluating discursive social psychology entails both teasing out the contradictions emanating from drawing on different models of language, and relating it to more fundamental issues concerning the identity of social psychology as a discipline. Here the focus will be, as will be outlined in the following section, on the relation between the individual and the social in social psychology.

After the research question and objectives have been introduced, an outline of the different chapters will be provided. The final section of this chapter comprises of a brief description of the analytic approach taken in this study.

1.2. Research questions and objectives

In order to provide the introduction and critical discussion of discursive social psychology in this study with a definite focus (a specific research question), this new development will be read in terms of the most basic tensions that riddle any attempt to define the field. In this regard it is useful to be aware that there are innumerable definitions of social psychology, indicating that like all disciplines and fields of knowledge production, social psychology is a contested domain. Many stakeholders claim ownership of it, and the discipline is still starkly divided around conceptual, theoretical, methodological and geographical lines. However, all definitions of social psychology contain at least an implicit answer to the following dilemma: what is the relation between the individual and the social?

The relation between the individual and the social is the key metatheoretical debate in social psychology, and still remains a very relevant concern in the development of the discipline. For various reasons this question is usually confronted as a dichotomy: social psychologists traditionally had to choose either individual or society as unit of analysis. The most important reason for this state of affairs is that mainstream social psychology developed in the United States of America primarily as a sub-discipline of psychology. This subjected social psychologists to the metatheories guiding psychology as a whole, which was, in succession, behaviourism and cognitivism. The effect was that traditional or mainstream social psychology has opted for the individual level of analysis, which caused a seriously impoverished understanding of the social in social psychology.

While certainly still dominant, this image of social psychology has always been a contested one as well. Since the relation between the individual and the social is so central to any conception of the discipline, most new approaches see it as their task to counter the neglect of the social and the general individualism that characterise traditional (mostly cognitive) social psychology. In other words, discursive social psychology is not the first to make these claims and try and address them. To begin with, there have always been strong voices of dissent from within the folds of traditional social psychology itself. While the primacy of individual levels of analysis itself was accepted, these social psychologists disagreed with a growing detachment of social psychological research from real world problems. Amongst other things, they advocated more applied as opposed to laboratory research. More radical, in the sense that it leans to the other end of the individual-social dichotomy, are critiques feeding on the divide between psychology and the other social sciences, at least in the US. This divide has occasioned the parallel existence of *sociological* approaches to social psychology, seeing the structural and relational aspect of society as analytically prior to the psychological make-up of individuals.

What sets the discursive approach apart from both the above traditions of critique is that it is also strongly suspicious of traditional epistemological and ontological categories,

the value of rationality, and the universal application of theories. In other words, it seeks to develop a social psychology that sets itself apart from traditional conceptions of Western scientific practice. In this regard non-referential accounts of language enable a critique and reconstruction of traditional social psychology's individualism and its diminutive understanding of the social on at least two levels: first, as a metatheoretical shortcoming of cognitive social psychology specifically; and second, by seeing individualism not so much as a neglect of the social, but as a political investment in the value of individual subjectivity for the purposes of reproducing specific Western cultural practices.

In the light of this the following question can be asked of discursive social psychology: how does it address individualism and the reduction of the social in social psychology, and does it do so adequately? Does it manage to resolve the individual-social dualism in social psychology? These questions structure the conceptual space in which discursive social psychology will be introduced and evaluated in this study, and underlie the following specific research objectives:

- To provide a background to the problem of individualism as it affects the development of social psychology. Here the focus will be on the development of social psychology as a sub-discipline of psychology and the gradual rise of cognitive levels of explanation, as well as on points of intersection between social psychology and notions of the postmodern.

- To introduce contemporary debates about the nature of language and meaning and its extension into social psychology. The focus will be on the way language is used to account both for the failure of cognitive approaches to processes of meaning-giving and social interaction, and for the epistemological and political status of social psychology as a science studying individual participation in social life.

- To conceptually evaluate the adequacy of language as a model for a social

psychology of the postmodern, which is here conceived of as a social psychology that has the ability to account for the cultural patterning of behaviour and thought, the tenacity of particular cultural forms of life, and the ability people have to resist oppression and the politicisation of experience.

- To argue that discursive social psychology, due to an over-reliance on language as discourse, neglects the way experience is also pre-reflexively and non-discursively patterned; the effect of which is a conception of the relation between the individual and the social in social psychology that is blind to material and embodied aspects of social agency.

The above has been a fairly abstract outline of what the study will achieve. The next section does so more concretely by outlining the different chapters.

1.3. Outline of the study

As was made clear above, this study addresses language in social psychology in terms of the traditional concern about the nature of the relation between the individual and the social. In the first chapter this theme is historically reviewed in the light of social psychology's development as a sub-discipline of psychology. After indicating that this entailed forging a lasting schism between psychological and sociological approaches to the discipline, the development of the psychological tradition is traced further in the light of behaviourist and then cognitivist metatheories. The neglect of social levels of analysis that these lines of development entailed gave rise to a substantial crisis of confidence in the discipline during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Challenges to individualism and the social amnesia social psychology so clearly suffered at that stage are introduced, and it is argued that most of these traditional attempts to rid social psychology of its problems were failed. Critical discussions of social cognition and social identity theories clearly show that the reason for this is a continued dichotomy between cognition and society.

The next chapter leaves the traditional domain of social psychology behind to approach its crisis of individualism from the outside, so to speak. For this purpose the notion of postmodernism is introduced and critically applied to social psychology. Postmodern notions cast a radical doubt on scientific rationality, and see knowledge claims as culturally specific and socially reproductive. A brief description of the context of social psychology in South Africa shows that individualism does not simply imply a neglect of the social, but often functions to maintain relations of power. The question now posed is that if social psychology's individualism reveals itself as a geopolitical value and intimately responsive to social organisation, how should social psychology be taken further? A first attempt to answer this is to evaluate attempts to create a postmodern social psychology. The description of such developments show many interesting transformations, but it is argued that academic descriptions of postmodernism often resonate only with the life worlds of Western cultural elites, and that postmodern social psychologists often import notions from other social sciences rather uncritically. Both these lead to a social psychology that potentially has little of its own to say about important contemporary topics such as culture, identity and experience. The final section argues for a different approach to the postmodern: postmodernity should be seen as signifying cultural patterns and changes that fracture overarching Western meta-perspectives and universalist claims, and the aim should to develop a social psychology that can describe real instances of this.

These two chapters set the stage for a more systematic inquiry into the role of language in contemporary social psychology. The next chapter begins with a discussion of the shift from referential to non-referential understandings of language. The focus will be on two important approaches: analytic or ordinary language philosophy as spearheaded by Ludwig Wittgenstein; and post-structural transformations of Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics. After the general introduction these approaches are extended into social psychology. The first approach is applied on two levels. A concern for the performative dimensions of language use informs a radically different understanding of cognitive processes, which is illustrated with regard to categorisation and its role in the study of racist talk. Cognition is a contextually specific, rhetorical

achievement; it involves language as communicative action. On a second level this approach to language is also shown to destroy the epistemological foundations of cognitive mentalism, implying that persons should be seen as socially constructed. Post-structural models are now discussed for the different perspective they bring: discourses are abstract frameworks of meaning that determine individual instances of meaning-giving, and these are not consensually constructed but intimately related to power.

The chapter culminates, after these discussions, in an evaluation of discursive social psychology. To set this up two important conceptual notions is discussed that link performative and more abstract conceptions of discourse; or, that allows discursive social psychology to see individuals as both constructed through discourses and sophisticated and creative discourse users. These notions are reflexivity and ideology. The former accounts for the construction of meaning while the latter accounts for the way meaning stands in the service of power (Thompson, 1984). It is argued that by seeing the relation between the individual and the social as largely discursive and reflexive the material and embodied nature of experience is neglected. Discursive change does not inevitably lead to changes in experience or social conduct, and if this is not accounted for in a conception of agency there is little chance for discursive social psychology to adequately address the psychological capacity for resistance and change: something that this development takes very seriously.

In a concluding section recent developments in cultural psychology, cognition, and the resurgence of interest in Marxism in psychology are sketched as contexts where a more embodied social psychology can be developed, and where the appropriate position of language can be negotiated.

1.4. The metatheoretical imperative

Before moving on to the next chapter, it is necessary to make a few brief comments on the status of this text as a research project. The title already locates it: the approach

taken here is metatheoretical, not empirical. This goes against the strong empiricist tradition in psychology as a discipline and years of relative neglect of conceptual reflection on its own foundations. Recent developments in the philosophy of science, however, have made this an untenable position (Doyal & Harris, 1986). No observation is theory neutral, and it carries values that emanate from individual scientists, scientific institutions, and the geopolitical concerns of the Western world itself.

These developments have made it absolutely essential that psychological scholars engage in conceptual and metatheoretical reflection on the theories and research activities constituting their discipline. Luckily there are many indications that this realisation has taken root in the discipline of psychology. Examples are many: the launch of a journal such as *Theory & Psychology* about a decade ago; the founding of an *International Society of Theoretical Psychology* at about the same time; and perhaps most important, the creation of postgraduate programmes in what is now called theoretical psychology at various universities abroad.

While journals, degree courses and professional societies are good indicators of the strengthening and development of a particular new sub-field within a discipline, all new pursuits aren't necessarily relevant for all environments, and the question might be posed whether such seemingly esoteric activities can be afforded in South Africa. Certainly, there is no real development of theoretical psychology in this country, and the quest for relevance leads down other avenues: applied and action research, community interventions, programme evaluations. With regard to academic institutions and the degrees they offer psychology finds itself in a rather precarious position in South Africa: continued professionalisation might single psychology out as one of the few humanities or social sciences that will survive the onslaught of budgetary cuts and university rationalisations, but will it happen without compromising the substance and integrity of what we are teaching?

The view that informs this study in these regards is that metatheoretical work is even more crucial in South Africa (and other Third World contexts) than in the Western world.

The reason for this is simple: theories and knowledge claims are imported from abroad irrespective of their contextual relevance or their ideological baggage. Psychology has a long colonial history (aspects of this, as it relates to social psychology, will be discussed in a later chapter), and metatheoretical work in psychology can fulfill an important gate-keeping function. Only by scrutinising the imported products that psychology so easily takes over from America and Europe will make it be possible to resist them when necessary, and then perhaps finally contributing to a psychology that *makes sense* to apply to the problems and crises that are specific to this country.

NOTES

1. This chapter introduces the research question and relevant concepts, but is in itself not a literature review. Because the nature of the study is metatheoretical (see section 1.4) the claims that are made here will all be addressed, with full coverage and discussion of the relevant literature, in later chapters. For that reason only a minimum amount of references are used in the present chapter.

Chapter *2*

Locating *the social* in social psychology: a historical perspective

2.1. Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the representation and conceptualisation of the social in traditional forms of social psychology. Since the spectres of postmodernism and constructionist epistemologies have already been set in store in the previous chapter, "traditional" signifies here all those approaches that regard social psychology as a sub-discipline of general psychology, and asserts the individualised nature of psychological processes. It will further be argued that it is impossible to create a more social version of the discipline[1] without relinquishing the idea that psychological processes are ontologically individual. As will become clear, even the most progressive attempts to expand the traditional account of social psychology fail precisely here, by insisting that individual psychology is finally reducible to a self-enclosed cognitive system.

Traditional social psychology occupies a vast textual and institutional space. Since the chapter uses its development to argue for a particular position, and does not recount it for its own sake, a detailed or even representative history of its development and form will not be attempted. It is enough to restrict the discussion to a review of a few exemplary moments. The historical ground that is covered span the early foundations of social psychology as a sub-discipline of psychology, the period of perturbation (late 1960s and early 1970s) often referred to as "the crisis", as well as certain key developments after the crisis and up to the present. From these descriptions it will be argued that, despite many creative reformulations, social psychology's problematic reduction of the social persists as long as it sees the psychological as detached from cultural and historical process, and conduct and

experience as mere tokens of individualised and generic psychological structures and mechanisms.

The argument will be pursued along the following lines. First, a few brief comments are made on social psychology as a *sub*-discipline. Being caught between both sociology and psychology in terms of its disciplinary loyalties always invoked an academic censorship on how the social is related to the individual as a psychological subject in social psychology. While social psychology is now primarily identified as a sub-discipline of psychology, it is important to pay attention to its divided origins and development, since it alerts one to the fact that traditional social psychology's reduction of the social should not be ascribed only to the metatheoretical perspectives, behaviourism and cognitivism, that primarily provided its psychological form. Psychology and sociology themselves often upheld a strict segregation between the individual and the social, conceptualised as a self-enclosed and ontologically secure psychological subject, and the equally ontologically demarcated notions of society, structure and institution.

The discussion then shifts towards a consideration of what might be referred to in the light of the above as the "psychologisation" of social psychology. As was indicated, this proceeded in terms of academic psychology's most dominant successive 20th century metatheories, namely behaviourism and cognitivism. In both cases, no attempt is made here to provide a complete overview of behaviourist and cognitive contributions. The concern is mainly with the conceptualisation of the individual and the social as it manifests in exemplary instances of these perspectives in social psychology. Floyd Allport, often presented as the originator of social psychology as an experimental science, will be discussed as representative of the behaviourist contribution. His influence established certain core behaviourist notions to persist even after cognitive social psychology succeeded its behaviourist counterpart.

The eventual demise of behaviourism in social psychology made place for a cognitive perspective that gradually, partly due to its early onset compared with the rest of experimental psychology, transformed the former into a very progressive

branch of the discipline in the United States of America. Early cognitive social psychology is discussed here with reference to the import of Gestalt psychology to the USA by immigrant psychologists such as Mozafer Sherif, Kurt Lewin, Solomon Asch, and Fritz Heider. These Gestalt principles displaced the behaviourist orthodoxy in at least two ways relevant to the current discussion. First, it opened up the so-called "black box" and enabled the consideration of mental phenomena in accounts of social conduct. Second, it established the study of groups in social psychology as a scientifically legitimate pursuit. While especially the latter signalled an enlarged conceptualisation of the social in social psychology in those years, it was never central enough to last as a paradigm. The subsequent concern with cognition entrenched psychological processes once again as ontologically self-evident facts of individual mental life, so that the reduction of the social continued unabated under a cognitive metatheory.

The discussion then proceeds to a consideration of the various challenges to the reduction of the social from within social psychology itself. These challenges summoned force under the rubric of "the crisis" during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and its leitmotif became the foundation of a more *social* social psychology. The crisis will here be addressed as a purely internal affair, which means that attention will be given only to critiques that remained committed to a view of social psychology as a scientific sub-discipline of psychology. Within this general framework, however, the assessment of social psychology's crisis and proposed solutions also varied markedly, and these will be addressed accordingly.

By the late 1970s the crisis has largely subsided and traditional social psychology seemed to have weathered the storm. This can be illustrated most powerfully by the strong hold that the study of social cognition attained on social psychology during the 1980s and the 1990s. Social cognition refers here to the large-scale import of concepts and perspectives from cognitive and experimental psychology into social psychology. In this regard, social cognition is a thorough assimilation of social psychology into general psychology, an isomorphic fit that does not allow the explanation of social phenomena in any other terms than general psychological laws.

As such, social cognition represents one of the most complete identifications of social psychology with general psychology yet, and since it does not aspire to a foundational position in the social sciences, also the most debilitating and ignorant reduction of the social as an analytic category.

Although the talk of crisis did eventually succumb to the colonising stride of cognitive social psychology, its continued importance rests therein that it also created the space, conceptually as well as geographically, for the development of new approaches to the discipline. That is, approaches to social psychology that kept social cognition from attaining a completely hegemonic hold as a metatheory. The tradition of intergroup theory is a good example. Referring to the work accumulated under the rubrics of social identity and self-categorisation theories, it provided an important and progressive attempt to provide a more social social psychology. However, it is argued that it ultimately fails to do so convincingly, and the reasons for this failure most strikingly locates the dilemma of social psychology: the impossibility to overcome the schism between the individual and the social when it remains entrenched as an opposition between *cognition* and *society*.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of work in traditional social psychology now allows little other way of representing the individual than in cognitive terms, and neglects the notion of society, so it seems, for precisely that reason. Traditional social psychology, and it still occupy the core of the discipline, fails to implode the barrier between the individual and the social. All in all then, this chapter argues for the necessity to locate the discussion about social psychology, its reductionism and possible solutions, in a different context. This context will have to be one where the relationship between psychology and society itself is problematised.

2.2. Between sociology and psychology one must choose

Discussing traditional social psychology's reductive representations of the social without considering the relation between this discipline and others that also address the social, will result in a critique that is insensitive to the dynamics underlying the

formation of its identity. It is more than clear from the developmental history of social psychology that its identification as a sub-discipline with specifically *psychology* is far less natural or complete than is sometimes presumed. In fact, the identity and institutionalisation of social psychology had always been suspended between specifically *psychology* and *sociology* in terms of its loyalty to an overarching disciplinary orientation. It is therefore no misnomer to distinguish in this regard between a *psychological* and a *sociological* social psychology (Cook, Fine, & House, 1995; Farr, 1996; Stryker, 1997)[2].

Most expositions of the current form(s) of social psychology neglect to thematise and especially problematise this history of divided disciplinary loyalties. It is a neglect that diminishes a full account of *psychological* social psychology's reduction of the social, since it contests it only as a residual problem of prevailing psychological metatheories. However, the intellectual (or disciplinary) landscape in which social psychology developed itself often takes for granted a taxonomic distinction between *individual* and *society* as tropes around which the social sciences have to organise. Psychology and sociology, especially in the US, developed as two separate disciplines largely around these tropes, and because both developed also within an epistemological orthodoxy emphasising positivism and scientific foundationalism, *individual* and *society* were set against one another as mutually exclusive and ontologically contradicting levels of explanation.

The effect of this imposed division on the development of social psychology can be described as a form of academic censorship. It limits the explanatory reach accessible to any form of social psychology, since it has always to fix first its disciplinary loyalties by answering the epistemological question: *which is primary, the individual or society?* From the perspective of its psychological form, the individual is the only legitimate level of analysis, and the social should thus be conceptualised without transgressing the encapsulated notion of *society* as that which belongs "properly" to the discipline of sociology. It sets psychological processes and structures apart as ontologically secure from the contingencies of social history, and leaves little room for a conceptualisation of the social in

psychological social psychology involving more than processes of interpersonal interaction.

Very significantly, the division described above persisted (and persists) even through growing critiques of psychological social psychology's penchant for individualism and its general reduction of the social. It also disregards important debates in sociology about micro-levels of analysis and the significance of processes of interpersonal interaction (Turner, 1996). For this reason it is relevant to observe the maintenance of the division from both perspectives, especially since there is little in the history of the discipline that supports such a segregated institutionalisation. Not even rhetorically claiming for social psychology a "double birth" (Sherif, 1967) can hide the obviously enforced nature of the division. Sheriff was referring to the publication in 1908 of the first two textbooks bearing in their titles the words *social psychology*, written respectively by a psychologist (McDougal, 1908) and a sociologist (Ross, 1908). Using this date to indicate the birth of their discipline, social psychologists make these concurring publications share the burden of signalling a natural division between a psychological and a sociological social psychology (Farr, 1996).

Apart from the fact that it is a rather dubious move to assign the birth of social psychology to exactly the year in question[3], its rhetorical mandate is further superseded by the mere fact that social psychology functioned long after 1908 as an interdisciplinary pursuit. Large amounts of collaborative work, even when a search is confined to "contemporary" topics such as attitude measurement, fill the literature of the first few decades of the present century. Just as significantly, even in the 1920s PhD programmes in social psychology were hosted jointly by departments of sociology and psychology (Allport, 1968; Farr, 1996). More strict segregation only took effect during the 1920s, gradually, and then became the norm especially after the Second World War. This process will be elaborated in the next section from the perspective of psychology.

Currently, there are little traces left of these early collaborations, and even when scholars acknowledge the existence of two forms of social psychology, they present

their relation as unproblematic, and best left uncontested. Consider in this regard first how the editors of a recent volume of social psychological readings (McGarty & Haslam, 1997) position the sub-discipline and their own disciplinary allegiances from the perspective of psychology:

> Social psychology, for the purposes of this book at least, is a branch of psychology. It is concerned with those aspects of mental life which relate to social interaction and social phenomena in general. It is important to distinguish from the outset this type of social psychology (which is a branch of psychology) from another important and continuing tradition of social psychology which is a branch of sociology. This is really a separate tradition that approaches similar topics from a different direction. Sociological social psychology has its own textbooks and journals. (pp. 5 - 6)

The authors assign the division to the persistence of a tradition. Clearly, tradition is not invoked here as some historically contingent pattern. If that was the case, they certainly would not have accepted so timidly the institutionalisation of a *scientific* pursuit on a notion that signals no foundational divide. Further, just as no real explanation is given for this division between psychological and sociological social psychology, the former is located as the study of mental life as it relates to social phenomena without explaining the exact relation between mind and society. Rhetorically, then, the notion of tradition is invoked not so much to explain or even to describe, but rather to *guard* the division between psychological and sociological forms of social psychology.

While the above makes sense in terms of what was already said about the nature of the censorship as it affected psychology, it is interesting to see that not only psychological social psychologists guard their turf in these terms. Thus, apart from insisting on the epistemological primacy of the notion of society with regard to the explanation of social phenomena, sociological social psychology usually pays at least lip-service to the ontological reality of psychological processes as individualised

structures and events. In other words, more often than not such scholars also naturalise the division between the two forms of social psychology rather than to assert their position to the exclusion of the other, with the effect that the position of social psychology and the boundaries set up by academic traditions are once again left unquestioned. In this regard the following extract from a recent introductory textbook to *sociological* social psychology, developed from a symbolic interactionist perspective[4] (Hewitt, 1996), is equally revealing:

> Psychologists do not deny that social and cultural forces shape the environment within which such basic psychological processes as learning, cognition, or emotion take shape. But their main interest is in the processes themselves rather than in their social setting. As a result, psychological social psychologists make the *individual* their main unit of analysis. Sociologists, on the other hand, seek to describe and explain patterns of conduct among larger aggregates of people - groups, communities, social classes, and even whole societies. Without denying the importance of the mind or of processes that operate at the individual level, sociological social psychologists give priority to human association and make *society* the beginning point of their analysis. (p. 7)

Apart from defending the abstractions of individual and society as epistemologically and seemingly ontologically mutually exclusive domains, it presents their relation to each other with regard to social psychology as some form of benevolent division of labour. But surely, even if social scientific work could be divided as easily as is suggested in the extract, would we not expect a certain collaboration at some point, or at least a periodic coordination of research findings? In contradiction to the suggestion by McGarty and Haslam (1997) above, this would certainly occasion some shared journals and textbooks? To conclude, these tales of institutional divisions alert us continuously to the contest of faculties[5], so to speak, and should be kept in mind when embarking on any discussion of social psychology in its psychological form.

2.3. The psychologisation of social psychology

The discussion thus far indicates that social psychology's isomorphic identification with general or individual psychology should be seen as a deliberate process of "psychologisation". While this draws attention to the colonising effect of psychology on the construction of social psychology, it should not lead one to think the social was ever monolithically conceptualised within and across psychological metatheories. By reviewing behaviourism and cognitivism, it becomes very clear that the social has been extensively debated within psychological social psychology itself.

2.3.1. Behaviourism: the legacy of Floyd Allport

The development of scientific psychology in the United States of America is intimately related to the metatheory of behaviourism. With its empiricist concerns and its adherence to experimentation as the proper methodological posture enabling these, behaviourism was the ideal candidate for a scientific psychology at a time when the philosophy of science, at least in the Anglo-American world, dictated a natural scientific model of rationality and objectivity also for the social sciences (Doyal & Harris, 1986). But while behaviourism continued to dominate general psychology in the US for nearly five decades, it did not enjoy nearly the same longevity in social psychology. The latter were in fact established as a cognitive science long before the so-called "cognitive revolution" in general psychology took effect (Baars, 1986; Farr, 1996; Hogg & Vaughan, 1995). On the other hand, the influence of the behaviourist orthodoxy on social psychology should not be underestimated. In many ways, this influence was foundational and lasting, especially in the provision of social psychology's scientific *form* – for, while cognitivism enlarged the object field of social psychological research, it yielded to the same scientific prescriptions as behaviourism.

Floyd Allport's (1924) *Social Psychology*, a text to which Rob Farr (1996) refers as "foundational at least in relation to psychological forms of social psychology" (p. 98),

is indeed the exemplary account of the discipline's psychologisation in terms of a radical behaviourism. Allport defined social psychology as *"the science which studies the behavior of the individual in so far as his behavior stimulates other individuals, or is itself a reaction to their behavior"* (p. 12, emphasis in the original)[6]. By this definition, social psychology is firmly situated within the stimulus-response categories of behaviourism, and is only distinguished from general psychology by its focus on *social* behaviour. Social behaviour, in turn, was defined as "the stimulations and reactions arising between an individual and the *social* portion of his environment; that is, between the individual and his fellows" (p. 3; emphasis in the original). In other words, social behaviour does not differ qualitatively from behaviour as a general psychological unit, allowing the social its psychological impact only as an aspect of a more general taxonomy of stimulus conditions. Social psychology adopts a theoretical system that functionally reduces social phenomena to sequences of interpersonal interaction, approximated by individually encapsulated psychological mechanisms.

This reduction of the social comes through most clearly in the manner Allport (1924) asserted himself against the possibility of a scientific study of social groups[7]. Although he defined social psychology as the study of *social* behaviour, it became clear in the previous paragraph that this designation does not extend behaviour as an emergent psychological property of any construct larger than the organic unit of the individual. This implies that only *individuals* can lay claim to the property of behaviour, and that to assign behavioural agency to the group in a manner irreducible to the individual level of analysis amounts to basing a scientific claim on a logical fallacy. It has to be confronted by insisting on the intransigence of the individual as the analytic frame against which social phenomena are theoretically assimilated. Consider his own statement is this regard:

> There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely
> a psychology of individuals. Social psychology must not be placed in
> contradistinction of the psychology of the individual; it is a part of the
> psychology of the individual, whose behavior it studies in relation to

that sector of his environment comprised by his fellows. (p. 4, emphasis in the original)

With this emphatic denial of the psychological reality of the group, Allport (1924) most decisively established social psychology along individualist lines. This doesn't mean that he was interested in addressing only the isolated individual, and ignoring issues of broader social importance. In fact, insisting on the behaviourist reduction of social behaviour enabled him to imbue his social psychology with strong foundational claims: "Since all behavioral phenomena of groups are reducible to mechanisms of individual behavior in the social environment, the relation of social psychology to the disciplines which treat of these higher aggregates is a fundamental one" (p. 382). While Allport here acknowledged a social environment that is characterised by the configuration of individual behaviour into "higher aggregates", encompassed by constructs such as society, culture and organisations, these can only be studied independent of psychology in a descriptive manner. He insists that the social environment can be functionally reduced to the psychological (accumulated behavioural) effects of stimulus-response interactions, and indeed should be reduced in order to be understood scientifically.

Allport's work presents a rather radical casting of social psychology as a sub-discipline of general psychology. The eventual and lasting power of his influence on its development, however, does not rest as heavily on his foundational campaign and his orthodox behaviourism as it does on the more general parameters for social psychology he laid down. Most important among these was his insistence on the laboratory as the proper context for social psychological knowledge production[8]. Once this was accepted as a methodological truism, even theory that is less inclined to isolate the individual ended up reproducing a certain blindness to the importance of social context. Some of the other parameters he entrenched are the definition of social psychology as the study of largely interpersonal behaviour, the already mentioned idea that social psychology is completely patterned on and conceptually assimilated into the laws of general or individual psychology, and a view that the social is psychologically exhausted once interpersonal processes had been

accounted for. The persistence of these assumptions becomes clear when the shift to cognitive levels of analysis is discussed.

2.3.2. *Cognitive social psychology: the Gestalt tradition*

During the 1930s, and especially in the years directly following the Second World War, social psychology developed in important new directions. Apart from the gradual diversification of its object field, it also underwent a significant metatheoretical shift. The discipline started to rely strongly on cognitive explanations, and this well before the so-called "cognitive revolution" took effect in general psychology. This important development was largely due to the emigration of influential European psychologists to the US in anticipation of the Second World War. The names of Kurt Lewin, Muzafer Sherif, Solomon Asch, and Fritz Heider, all of whom are today considered as founders of modern social psychology, deserve special mention in this regard.

These scholars brought with them a metatheoretical approach in marked contrast to behaviourism, namely Gestalt psychology. Like behaviourism, Gestalt psychology developed in opposition to the introspectionism dominating psychology in the late 19th century. However, particularly due to its philosophical roots in rationalist philosophy and its concurrent rise with phenomenology[9] (Farr, 1996), it did not follow the rather stifling alternative of positivism and objectivism. This enabled the empirical study of various subjective mental processes, such as perception. Consider Turner et al.'s (1987) description of Gestalt psychology's basic approach to cognition:

> Gestalt psychology took it for granted that the whole was different from the sum of its parts; that the perceptual organization into an interdependent, 'dynamic' system produced new, higher order properties which were different from the properties of the individual stimuli and changed their character. (pp. 12 - 13)

In other words, any psychological explanation has to account for the active involvement of human mental functions – internal and generic organising principles– leading to a "psychological accumulation" whereby the brute objective given of a stimulus is transcended and only then achieves its psychological reality. Social psychology was immediately affected by this account of cognitive mediation. The mentioned Gestalt psychologists, once in the US, proceeded with research agendas often concerned with addressing *social* issues. Many of them, for example, sought psychological explanations for the transformation of European society into one characterised by racial and national hatred during the spell of two world wars[10]. Cognitive processes were theorised to account for issues such as the influence of group norms on perception, judgement and behaviour, and communicative processes of social influence such as propaganda (Hogg & Vaughan, 1995).

An important metatheoretical marker in this development of a cognitive social psychology was the refutation of Floyd Allport's individualistic dismissal of the psychological reality of the social group. The truism that "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" not only necessitated addressing mental processes, but had implications for how human interactions and relations should be theorised. Interactions and relations have to be seen as contexts that are emergent of psychological effects not reducible to behavioural responses elicited by the presence of an isolated stimulus – in this regard another individual. In other words, "we and they become a total functional system, perceptually and behaviourally, producing new whole properties such as slogans, values, standardized emotional experiences, etc., that take precedence over and change individual responses" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 12). Supra-individual categories such as groups make perfect sense, and are indispensable, within such a theoretical model.

The study of group processes was initially more important than the study of cognitive processes for their own sake, and represents an enlarged conception of the social in social psychology. Systematic concern with groups in social psychology dates from as early as the 1930s. An early classic in this regard was the imaginative experiment done by Muzafer Sherif about the formation of social norms. Sherif

(1935, 1936) used the autokinetic effect to create the illusion of movement with regard to a stationary light in an otherwise dark room, and asked his research subjects first individually and then in each others' company to judge the distance the light was moving. Since no independent frame of reference existed for such a judgement, it provided Sherif with the perfect opportunity to measure the influence of other people on such a task. His findings did indeed support the existence of emergent psychological properties related to group processes: individual judgements concurred towards a shared estimate after they had been exposed to the judgements of other people. What was established was a social norm. The central propositions emanating from this and related experiments with regard to the reality of the social group, is summarised by Turner et al. (1987):

> Through social interaction, group members created collective products such as norms, slogans, stereotypes, etc., which were internalized by and transformed the psychology of individuals. In other words, they argued that Allport's claim that there were only individuals failed to understand that the group concept was needed precisely to explain the nature of individuals. (p. 12)

This enlarged understanding of the social was further refined with Kurt Lewin's establishment of the Research Centre for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1944. Lewin and his associates studied phenomena such as group standards, leadership styles, group decision making, and group communication (Lindzey & Aronson, 1968). As was the case with Sherif, these were primarily pursued by means of laboratory experiments. In fact, Lewin's manipulation of complex variables in the laboratory setting is often seen as his most important contribution to social psychology and the social sciences generally.

An important effect of this adherence to the laboratory as the primary site for the production of knowledge was that focus had to remain on smaller groups; that is, collections of up to thirteen people, rather than on larger or more abstract collectivities or categories such as race, gender, nationality, or crowds. But the

practical constraints of the laboratory was not the only reason why social psychology primarily studied small groups. Much of the already mentioned research was commissioned by the military or by industry, and therefore had a strong pragmatic focus, geared towards application in those settings. The kinds of questions asked resided around how group *structure* and *cohesion* influenced the efficiency and goal effectiveness of small interdependent groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), issues of obvious concern to these sectors.

Aside from these methodological and applied constraints, there is no reason to believe that Lewin considered group psychology to be theoretically exhausted by studying small groups. His own empirical work reveals an ongoing concern with categories such as nationality and ethnicity, and with practical application more broadly emancipatory than merely providing for the military and industry (Lewin, 1952). It also shows a concern for *inter*group behaviour, not only for the internal dynamics of groups (Lewin, 1948). However, these were aspects of Lewin's work that receded into the background. One reason for this was that some of his most influential associates and students developed theoretical models and empirical operationalisations for group structure and cohesion that were more restricted than the general Gestalt perspective allowed. In this regard, two explanatory strategies were dominant. Lewin himself opted for the notion of *interdependence* to understand cohesion. He is cited by Turner et al. (1987) as having said:

> (I)t is typical of well-organized groups with a high degree of unity to include a variety of members who are different or who have different functions within the whole. Not similarity, but a certain interdependence of members constitutes a group. (p. 94)

Interdependence considers as motivation for human action the attempt to gain from others fulfilment of needs, whether these be material or psychological. It seeks to indicate the formation of groups in terms of the access it gives to rewards that are not possible outside its structural unity. Festinger and others have opted for the process that Lewin plays down in the above extract, namely *similarity*. People are

thought to prefer association with others who are similar to them in, for example, the views they hold. Here the focus on unique, context specific outcomes is hampered, and the group becomes a context where that which already exists is merely affirmed. It doesn't seem to be emergent of any psychological effects, except confirmation.

While there clearly are important differences between these theoretical approaches, one glaring similarity is of even greater concern to the present discussion. Both interdependence and similarity were usually operationalised as either liking or attractiveness. The restriction that this imposed upon the concept of the group is explained by Hogg and Abrams (1988):

> On the one hand, the stress on the group as a dynamic system of interdependent members strongly implies that there are properties of the group as a whole, such as cohesiveness, which cannot be reduced to mere interpersonal attraction, but on the other hand there is a theoretical failure to explain how attraction to the *group* could be generated by any process that does not ultimately boil down to inter*personal* attraction. (p. 98)

In other words, despite the many ingenious experiments that were conducted, no theoretical model that really did justice to the Gestalt notion of a group as a psychologically super-ordinate and dynamic system was developed. In principle, neo-behaviourist operationalisations of the social as mere processes of interpersonal interaction kept dominating the field. Aronson (1997) remarks that even interdependence theories were often still cast in neo-behaviourist terms. The theoretical and empirical task in was then seen as having to locate the external award serving as the motivation for particular behaviours. In other words, while notions such as social norms imply a psychological accumulation that cannot be accounted for by reducing explanation to either individual or inter-individual levels, this was never really metatheoretically followed through in the development of social psychology.

Unfortunately, the turn away from neo-behaviourist models proceeded by placing nearly all focus on the supposed internal dynamics of the individual cognitive system. The effect of this was that the study of group processes came to be relegated to be just a topic in social psychology, assimilated under a cognitive perspective approaching the status of a metatheoretical position. In the years concurrent with the gradual growth of the cognitive perspective in social psychology, group processes was further a topic that drastically receded to a marginal position in the discipline. Like all topics of scientific concern, the group went in and then out of fashion. In the early 1970s Steiner could indeed ask, "Whatever happened to the group in social psychology?" (Steiner, 1974).

As was said before, social psychology's cognitive development predated the cognitive turn in general psychology. While not yet having access to complex models of information processing and the architecture of mind, such developments were anticipated in attempts to explain the cognitive economy in terms of notions such as *consistency* (Hogg & Vaughan, 1995). All consistency theories and research hypotheses that build on them, assume that people actively try to minimise contradictions between their beliefs, their attitudes, and their perceptions of their own behaviour. A good example of a theory that builds directly upon the notion of consistency, is Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Festinger was a colleague of Lewin at the Institute, and after Lewin's death one of the most influential proponents of social psychology's development, making a big impact with his theories of informal communication (1950) and social comparison (1954). However, it was his development of cognitive dissonance theory, and his conducting the first, almost paradigmatic experiments based on this theory, that introduced into social psychology a thoroughly cognitive perspective.

As was said, dissonance theory is grounded firmly in the assumption of a cognitive economy directed towards consistency. In fact, Festinger (1957) concedes this by explaining his choice for the concepts consonance and dissonance over consistency and inconsistency as due not to fundamental reasons, but simply because of its

greater theoretical neutrality. He explains dissonance as a motivational factor in a cognitive sense in the following paragraph:

> In short, I am proposing that dissonance, that is, the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right. By the term *cognition*, here and in the remainder of the book, I mean any knowledge, opinion or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behaviour. Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent cognition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction. (p. 3)

From this general position, Festinger (1957) deduced the following two hypotheses:

1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.
2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. (p.3)

The experimental elaboration of these hypotheses nearly proved to be, as was already indicated, paradigmatic in social psychology during the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The reason for this was that it provided a perspective and approach broad enough to be applicable to almost all traditional domains of social psychology, whether it be group dynamics, interpersonal relations, attitudes, or social influence. The accumulation of experiments around these notions would itself warrant a survey of book length. For current purposes, however, it would be sufficient to refer to only one early and indeed exemplary set of experiments.

These experiments were conducted by Festinger and a colleague in order to study the effect of cognitive dissonance on the motivational power of an award in a situation of forced compliance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). For this reason,

Festinger had subjects do, one at a time, a very monotonous and tedious experimental task. Afterwards, and under the pretence that his research assistant was unavailable for the next run of the same experiment, he asked a subject who had just completed the task if s/he would care to stand in as assistant. Festinger informed this person that the experiment tested the effect preconceptions about a task had on a subject's enjoyment thereof. The new "assistant" had merely to inform the next subject that he or she had just completed the task, and had found it very enjoyable. This, of course, was a lie, and Festinger made sure of this by specifically choosing a subject as "assistant" who had already expressed dislike towards the experimental tasks. For this lie, Festinger paid certain "assistants" $1, and others $20. The results of these experiments were indeed startling: People paid the lesser amount became convinced of their own liking of the task to a much greater extent than was the case among those paid the larger amount. In other words, and in opposition to any neo-behaviourist preconceptions, the motivational power of the monetary reward was effectively inverted.

The explanation for this in terms of cognitive dissonance is fairly straightforward. Telling a lie causes a state of dissonance between two cognitions (between attitude and perception of own behaviour). When the person is offered a large amount in reward for this lie, the dissonance can be explained away by adding a third cognition, namely that the reward justifies or at least explains the telling of the lie. However, when the reward is small, it does not offer an explanation for the behaviour, and the dissonance caused is not reduced. In fact, the small reward *increases* the experience of dissonance, because it accentuates the contrary nature of the initial behavioural response. In order to reduce dissonance, then, the person changes one of the initial cognitions. Since it is easier to change an attitude than to pretend not to have acted as one did, the person changes the cognition about the level of task enjoyment. In other words, the person comes to believe that the task was more enjoyable than it actually was. Festinger's experiment showed that a greater reward is not always conducive to a greater psychological effect (attitude change, here). In order to understand psychological effects such as social influence, compliance and persuasion, it is necessary to highlight the cognitive processes that mediate their

occurrence. By disentangling such effects from the objective givens of specific stimuli and rewards, and thus from its immediate environment, the psychological is clearly being individualised by this theory.

The effect of this was that the social psychological subject, henceforth, was firmly situated as a perceptual agent, approaching the social world (that is, interaction with other people), as a detached theorist, spurred on by the general demands of the cognitive economy not only to achieve consistency in terms of own cognitions, but also imposing upon the perception of others a certain consistency and cognitive form, with regard to the understanding of their intentions, motives, traits and dispositions as these relate to their behaviour. The development in cognitive social psychology that did the most to furnish this picture of the individual as a cognitive-perceptual agent, and thus to secure the social as external to the psychological, was attribution theory. Having its foundations in Fritz Heider's (1958) psychology of interpersonal relations, attribution theory developed into the most forceful theoretical approach in social psychology during the late 1960s and the 1970s. The most important attribution theories were those of Jones and Davis (1965) and Harold Kelley (1967, 1972). Generally speaking, attribution theory concerns itself with the manner in which social perceivers attribute intentions, causes and traits in order to account for other people's behaviour. In Heider's formulation, it regards the person as a naive psychologist, theorising others' behaviour in terms of a basic distinction between internal and external causes.

Jones and Davis (1965) built on these basic ideas with the notion that perception of others is guided by the attempt to make corresponding inferences. This means that we attempt to draw from manifest behaviour conclusions about the underlying traits that cause them. Kelley's theory concerned itself more with the *kinds* of information and the modes of information processing that enable people to make causal attributions. Apart from distinguishing between internal and external observations, he theorised a difference between attributions drawn from multiple observations, and those based on a single observation. In the former case, the principle of covariation makes us draw on consensus, distinctiveness and consistency as relevant

information. In the latter, Kelley (1973) proposed us having causal schemata, underlying our perceptions as well-organised and cognitively represented theories and hypotheses regarding other people's behaviour.

To summarise, attribution theory as an approach to social psychology presents an image of interpersonal relations not based on mutual investment or reciprocal effects of any kind, as might be said to be the case in neo-behaviourist alternatives, but on the manner in which a perceiver approach and tries to solve a range of cognitive and explanatory tasks. Actual interaction recedes to the background to make place for the cognitive processes that precedes it. The focus of social psychology becomes thus thoroughly individual, with theories of cognition becoming ever more abstract and functionally individualised. Metatheoretically speaking, social psychology as it reveals itself in these developments explicitly studies a self-propelled and general cognitive economy. The social is, as in behaviourism, a stimulus condition – with the important exception that psychological processes are even further removed from that stimulus condition by addressing its cognitive mediation.

While cognitive social psychology was here presented as a gradual "inward turn" in terms of the discipline's metatheoretical location, it was also made clear that the preceding focus on groups never really equated to a social psychology that was at any stage "social enough". Leaving aside even the specific theoretical restrictions discussed, the notion of the group as it was conceptualised with Gestalt principles still severed its psychological dimensions from any account of its structural or institutional formation and position within the broader context of society. In this, the division between psychology and the social sciences discussed earlier becomes clear once again. It should come as no surprise then that social psychology's relation to society became an issue on more than one level at about the same time as its cognitive focus became pervasive. This turn of events is discussed in the next section.

2.4. Crisis...

Up to this point, social psychology was described primarily in terms of its undervaluation of the social and its consequent individualist metatheory. At the end of the 1960s, this individualism encompassed social psychology on all levels of its identity as a discipline: it created the mould in terms of which the individual was conceptualised as a cognitive-behavioural psychological subject; kept a very circumscribed image of the nature of social reality in play; predetermined what could pose as legitimate research questions; and also informed the methodological technologies that would warrant such research with scientific status. It will become clear towards the end of this chapter that much has stayed the same in social psychology in this regard, and that its mainstream heads for the next millennium with the same concerns still in place. But however unresolved, this does not mean that social psychology's reduction of the social went completely unchallenged within the discipline. Attempts to redefine the relation between individual and the social are equally part of the discipline's history.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, social psychology was overcome by a self-critical affliction borne out of concern with its form and identity as a discipline. Referred to as "the crisis" in social psychology (Elms, 1975; Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991; Parker, 1989a), these years witnessed the proliferation of challenges to traditional social psychology, all somehow questioning the relevance of its knowledge claims or practices of knowledge production. While these challenges brought social psychology face to face with its relation to society, the concerns were not exclusively focussed on the metatheoretical level described earlier. In other words, society was not necessarily addressed as an index of the social. Society rather became a concern in terms of the discipline's silence on social issues at a time when student activists and civil rights movements forcefully challenged the social order. It thus seemed as if the increasing focus on individual cognitive processes exacted a price in return, namely a neglect of the contexts of human action and experience. For many at the time, the isolated site of the laboratory served as the primary metaphor not only of social psychology's silence on issues of

power and oppression in the real world, but its active participation in the reproduction of such a social order (McGuire, 1967; Ring, 1967 Tajfel, 1972).

Yet, there also was a deeper, more metatheoretical critique of social psychology taking root at the same time (Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Strickland, Aboud & Gergen, 1976). Although directed towards different aspects of the discipline's apparent shortcomings as a social science, this gradually growing tradition of critical studies depended on the institutional space provided by the crisis for arguments that took social psychology to task on a more fundamental level. For this reason, even though the crisis is now a historical commonplace in social psychology, it also remains a much contested concept (Burman, 1996; Morgan, 1996). Accounts of the crisis still maintain substantial differences in how it should be diagnosed, as well as in the significance it should be afforded within the development of social psychology at large. More traditional approaches, for example, see the crisis as contained within the clearly delineated historical period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As such, it is represented most often as a developmental phase in the teleological sense of mediating growth to a greater scientific maturity. This perspective is aptly demonstrated in the recollection of Berscheid (1992): "Twenty-five years ago, social psychology was experiencing growing pains" (p. 8)[11].

Critical traditions on the other hand, and the current study is certainly located here, employ the crisis rhetorically as a position from where a *continued* problematisation and reconstruction of social psychological endeavours are possible. In this use of the concept, the crisis has never been resolved, and is developmental only in the sense of being generic for approaches to the discipline that challenge the foundational pretensions of traditional social psychology. As was already indicated, this rhetorical use is grounded in actual critical events during the late 1960s and early 1970s – and in that sense is no *more* rhetorical than the traditional use. The critiques that are of interest to this study build up directly to the debates around language and discourse that will be discussed in a later chapter. The interesting thing here is that social psychology's problem was very accurately diagnosed in this early critical work, but that it was never successfully addressed. In fact, it brought

social psychology to the brink of considering the formative role of language in its understanding of the nature of the relation between the individual and the social, but a complete acceptance of its implications had to wait until later.

Within traditional social psychology, at the time of the crisis, diagnoses of the discipline's perturbation were confined mainly to issues such as the following: a perceived triviality of topics; the problem of generalising findings from the laboratory to real-world contexts; questions of ethics (especially the issue of informed consent); and the validity of findings based primarily on data received from college and university students as research subjects (Allport, 1968; Sears, 1986). In other words, the focus was on "procedural" concerns, remaining on the level of methodology and research design. As far as the reduction of the social was concerned, it was assigned to the neglect of real-world contexts in the design, interpretation and application of social psychological research. These concerns, and the way they related to social psychology's "posture" and not its metatheoretical foundations, are summarised well by Gordon Allport (1968):

> ...(M)any contemporary studies seem to shed light on nothing more than a narrow phenomenon studied under specific conditions. Even if the experiment is successfully repeated there is no proof that the discovery has wider validity. It is for this reason that some current investigations seem to end up in elegantly polished triviality – snippets of empiricism, but nothing more. (p. 68)

However, more than being the optimistic manifestations of growing pains, dependent for its resolution on procedural refining and theoretical invigoration, the crisis in social psychology also provided a critical site from where the metatheoretical and geographical (American) hegemony of traditional social psychology could be seriously challenged[12]. Critical reflection in social psychology began to disentangle itself from psychological metatheories and positivist philosophies of science, and covered ground that were startlingly new in the discipline. For example, some argued that analytic attention should be on the subjective accounts subjects give of

their actions, rather than upholding the empiricist ideal that take as relevant data only observable and objectifiable patterns of human behaviour under regulated conditions (Harre & Secord, 1972). Related to the above, the image of the person as a passive behavioural agent was seriously contested in favour of a more hermeneutic conception of the individual as an active, creative and meaning-governed agent (Shotter, 1975). A third example is Kenneth Gergen's controversial and influential thesis that social psychological knowledge should be seen as historical description, and should "largely be considered the psychological counterpart of cultural norms" (Gergen, 1973, p. 318).

These contributions do not stand isolated in terms of the developmental trajectory of critical social psychology, and they were directly taken up by the later turn to language. It is in this sense very informative to look more closely at the forceful challenge to the reduction of the social that these ideas were part of. The focus will here be on the dislocation of the geographical hegemony of American social psychology in the name of a self-consciously mobilised *European* tradition. European social psychology, from the outset, defined itself in opposition to the individualism and reduction of the social characterising American approaches. In this sense, it was spearheaded by the leitmotif of developing a more *social* social psychology. There were of course fundamental critiques of the discipline that were *not* European, and the European tradition is in no way homogeneous. However, as a broad tradition it exceeded in terms of moving from critique to reconstruction, and the alternative approaches to social psychology developed in its sway became very popular in most English speaking academic contexts outside the US: South Africa being no exception (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991; Painter & Theron, 1998).

Many different explanations for this deliberate European attempt to provide a more *social* social psychology could certainly be forwarded. For example, European social psychologists were often more interdisciplinary inclined. Here it is important to remember that behaviourism had little impact on psychology in Europe, and that the strict distinction between psychology and the other social sciences did not exist. It was therefore possible for theoretical ideas to migrate across disciplinary

boundaries, just as it was possible for philosophical ideas to receive social scientific attention. Apart from this, European social psychologists also viewed social phenomena from the perspective of two successive world wars, experiencing firsthand the influence of social events on individual lives. Whatever the reasons were, European social psychology directly addressed the censure that was so strongly part of social psychology's identity in the US. To summarise, European social psychology is characterised by

> the view that social psychology can and must include in its theoretical and research preoccupations a direct concern with the relationship between human psychological functioning and the large-scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it. (Tajfel, Jaspers, & Fraser, 1984, p. 3)

In this manner the crisis of relevance was placed firmly before the door of any form of conceptual and methodological individualism, while in turn relating the latter directly to the American hegemony over the discipline. Because the conceptualisation of the social in American social psychology informed both an inadequate understanding of the psychological dimensions of social phenomena, as well as of the social dimensions of human behaviour and psychological processes, European social psychology sought a better theoretical understanding of "the interaction between the human individual and his social context" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 12). Such a re-conceptualisation of the relation between the individual and the social had further to be accompanied by a broader conceptualisation of the latter, so that the social in social psychology would encompass "social inequalities, political violence, wars, under-development or racial conflict" (Moscovici, 1972, p. 21).

Simply asserting the incorporation of such large-scale social processes into the discipline's conceptualisation of the social would obviously not suffice if it remained unclear precisely how the psychological subject should be treated as participant in such phenomena. In this regard, social psychology has to relinquish its focus on the individual as an isolated and epistemic subject, knowing the world and acting upon

it in terms of processes and information or knowledge unrelated to other people. The French social psychologist Serge Moscovici (1972) took this task to heart, and his critical and reconstructive comments remain among the most lucid to be read in all the crisis literature. According to Moscovici, social psychology limited itself severely by neglecting to see society as involving the individual on a level that does not allow a reduction to co-presence induced in a laboratory, or abstracted into a mathematical aggregate. This meant that "despite its technical achievements, social psychology has become an isolated and secondary science" (p. 62) – for what account of social life excludes norms, rituals, and other aspects of social history?[13] Moscovici's response to individualism in social psychology is quoted in some detail below:

> Acceptance of these views led to the neglect of some fundamental aspects of social phenomena. Society has its own structure which is not definable in terms of the characteristics of individuals; the structure is determined by the process of production and consumption, by rituals, symbols, institutions, norms and values. It is an organization which has a history and its own laws and dynamics that cannot be derived from the laws of other systems. When the "social" is studied in terms of the presence of other individuals or of "numerosity", it is not really the fundamental characteristic of the system that are explored but rather one of its sub-systems – the sub-system of inter-individual relationships. The kind of social psychology that emerges from this approach is a "private" social psychology which does not include within its scope the distinctiveness of most of the genuine collective phenomena. It can therefore be argued that, for reasons which are partly cultural and partly methodological, the systematic perspective in social psychology has not been truly concerned either with social behaviour as a product of society or with behaviour *in* society. (pp. 54 - 55)

The last sentence here deserves particular attention, since it illustrates the extent to which social psychology would have to reformulate its own identity in order to answer

creatively to the challenge of becoming "more social". It goes without saying that traditional social psychology did not address "behaviour as a product of society". Both behaviourist and cognitive social psychology explicitly held on to different understandings of behaviour. In the former, behaviour is the product of responses to discreet stimuli, reducing society itself to the accumulated product of interpersonal interactions. Cognitive social psychology, in turn, understands behaviour as mediated by information processing: society might provide us with information, but our responses are determined by how we make sense of it, and these processes are individual.

But Moscovici also states that individualist social psychology neglects "behaviour *in* society". This is a somewhat different charge, and one that directly address social psychology on the metatheoretical level. If he conceded that social psychology does in fact address behaviour in society, it would imply two things. First, that social behaviour can be detached from a social context, and secondly, that while social psychology erred in not explicating the social contexts of behaviour, its basic understanding of social behaviour was intact. To distance himself from such a dualism of individual and social, he challenged the idea of social behaviour as constituting the focus of social psychology. Social psychology is concerned rather with symbolic activity, which means that the structural reality of society is always already implied in any understanding of human conduct. The individual has to give meaning to and derive meaning from a social world in a way that is not exhausted by accomplishing a perceptual task, or by weighing up the presence of other people from the vantage point of a purely individual cognitive calculus. His conception of such a social psychology is very clear in the following working definition (Moscovici, 1972):

> The central and exclusive object of social psychology should be the study of all that pertains to *ideology* and to *communication* from the point of view of their structure, their genesis and their function. The proper domain of our discipline is the study of cultural processes which are responsible for the organization of knowledge in a society,

for the establishment of inter-individual and intergroup conduct which creates a common social reality with its norms and values, the origin of which is to be sought again in the social context. (p. 55)

This was a remarkable conception for its time, and brings social psychology to the brink of considering the formative nature of language. The idea that social psychology should study information as organised and represented on a cultural level, clearly steers away from information as a purely mental content. Also, when this organisation and representation are postulated to operate on the level of ideology, transmitted communicatively, and responsible for the construction and reconstruction of a particular social reality, it is a small step to considering language both in a structural and performative sense.

2.5. ...and beyond

In this section, certain key developments in social psychology "after the crisis" is addressed. What is of interest here is the fact that social psychology still finds itself with the same dilemma, namely of how to sufficiently conceptualise the social and its relation to the individual. It therefore becomes important to understand why responses to the crisis were not entirely successful. The developments addressed here represent both the traditional and critical responses to the crisis discussed in the previous section.

At the beginning of the 1980s the crisis was considered to be over from the perspective of traditional social psychology. As Leon Festinger (1980) wrote at that time, with an air of almost hopeful anticipation: "The malaise is probably over" (p. 238). This sense of well-being related closely to the fact that traditional social psychology had a largely procedural understanding of the crisis, and held the conviction that adherence to better techniques, a more coherent and pervasive metatheory, a broader subject base, and also some application to real-world problems would divert the crisis as a challenge to its integrity. The context for such an integrated social psychology was provided for by the development of the cognitive

metatheory in experimental psychology, informing the tradition of social cognition. Social cognition erupted onto the scene not only as a new *topic* for social psychological investigation, but as a fully fledged metatheoretical approach (Augoustinos, 1995). Throughout the 1980s and up to the present it maintains itself as the dominant form of social psychology.

It became clear in the previous section that more critical responses to the crisis sought to break down the analytical barrier between the individual and the social. Here the focus will be on the tradition of intergroup theory. Intergroup theory is a shorthand for the social identity tradition developed by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues at the University of Bristol during the 1970s, as well as its extension into self-categorisation theory by John Turner during the 1980s (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982, 1995; Turner et al., 1987). As one of the most popular products of the European approach to social psychology, intergroup theory can be said to have spearheaded the search for a more social version of the discipline (Turner & Oakes, 1986, 1997). Its achievements and also its apparent failures serve as good indicators of the direction social psychology has to follow in order to finally address the problem of individualism.

2.5.1. Social Cognition

Social cognition as an approach designates the generalisation of the assumptions of experimental cognitive psychology to social psychology. Broadly stated, this means that cognitive social psychology is recast in terms of the principal metaphor of the human mind or cognition as an information processing system (Baars, 1986). Social cognition, however, does not resemble a radical departure from early cognitive social psychology, and stays within the parameters defined especially by cognitive dissonance and attribution theories. In other words, rather than a revolution within social psychology, it rose to the occasion as the primary form of cognitive social psychology's *reification*.

The differences that do exist between early cognitive social psychology and its latter form in social cognition, is one of degree. Social cognition, bolstered by the industrious development of experimental psychology, has access to a richer vocabulary according to which cognitive processes can be charted. The minutiae of information acquisition, storage and retrieval, both structurally and procedurally, are intricately theorised in cognitive psychology, and social psychology is readily fitted into the scheme it provides. As such it is formulated from the assumption that the "study of social knowledge (its content and structure) and cognitive processes (including acquisition, representation and retrieval of information) provide a key to understanding social behaviour and its mediating factors" (Macrae & Hewstone, 1995, p. 535).

Social psychology remains theoretically subsidiary to general psychology, because structurally and procedurally social knowledge is modelled to fit a pre-given and abstracted mental system. In the words of Ostram (1994), "the social cognition approach is based on the assumption that constructs relevant to cognitive representation and processes are fundamental to understanding all human responses, regardless of whether those responses are social or nonsocial in nature" (p. ix). What designates social psychology as *social* then, is not a characteristic of the basic mechanisms of cognition, but rather of what is cognised. As was the case in early cognitive social psychology, the social is reduced to the stimulus condition that the presence of other people provides. Only, in the elaborated vocabulary of social cognition, analytic focus is even less on actual interactive events, and nearly exclusively on mediating, asocial cognitive processes. If the social is the context of intrinsically individual processes, this context is further reduced to merely its mental representation.

This all-consuming concern with intra-individual processes and states is aptly demonstrated by the contemporary focus on the all-purpose construct of the schema. Schemas are conceived of as knowledge structures, coherent representational grids consisting of information stored in the long-term memory, specifying "both the attributes associated with a particular stimulus domain and the interrelations among

those attributes" (Macrae & Hewstone, 1995, p. 536). In terms of social cognition, schemas are necessary because they enable people to make sense of their stimulus worlds; they provide one with, as it were, working hypotheses regarding all possible behavioural sequences, perceptual stimuli, judgements or events. As such, schemas may be designated as individual or social. Social schemas encompass other people, the self, or sequential social activities or events. Schemas are purely individualised structures that help a miserly individual along on its isolated quest in a social world. This isolation sees the individual in much the same role as the romanticised scientist: as such, the "social lives of individuals flow from how they perceive, hypothesize or reason about each other" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 13).

This inflation of the cognitive system and its resulting vocabulary merely reproduces the individualism of early cognitive social psychology. Gradually, however, some social cognition researchers are beginning to realise this. They understand that the question, "whatever is social about social cognition?", cannot be answered adequately with vacuous statements such as: it has a social origin, a social content, and it is shared[14]. Such statements cannot breach the problem of the reduction of the social in social psychology, because they imply formulations of the social that are already inadequate. Structurally, social knowledge remains an isolated individual possession. Procedurally, the image of cognition is equally privatised, and often theorised in terms of an adaptive perceptualism. This makes recourse to statements about shared knowledge worthless, because the "shared goods" can only be thus designated afterwards; that is, not as interactive product, but as correlated perspective.

The realisation of the above limitations brought a slight tempering of the arrogant affirmations characterising the approach in the early 1980s, and a more earnest look at the disservice it might be doing our understanding of social life[15]. In this regard, it is revealing to read the statement of one of the founding figures and popularisers of social cognition, Susan Fiske (here with a colleague, J-P Leyens):

(S)ocial cognition research adopts a non-confrontational view of

society from the perspective of the individual. That is, it ignores group
conflicts and group membership and concentrates on the essentially
asocietal individual. We would add that this individual is a
nonstigmatized White male member of the silent majority. In other
words, this person has no reason to believe that anyone worth
considering differs from himself in any important ways. The ideal
society to which this individual belongs is composed only of
individuals like him, and it is bad taste to encapsulate people in
specific groups because supposedly everyone is essentially the same
if one looks hard enough. (Fiske & Leyens, 1997, p. 96)

They acknowledge here not only the epistemological shortcoming of not addressing
the societal dimension of individual lives, but explicitly address the historically
specific values that have accompanied social psychology's individualism. These are
values that itself testifies to the societal dimensions of the perceptions, behaviours,
knowledge, and identities of traditional social psychologists. However, even though
this a surprisingly critical reflection coming from one of the champions of social
cognition research, it merely repeats the drift of the critical comments made by
people such as Tajfel and Moscovici a quarter of a century earlier. Critically, it
seems as if traditional social psychology is reinventing the wheel. In the cited text,
Fiske and Leyens see a possible way out for social cognition in collaboration with
intergroup theory. This is an act of acknowledgement after many years of ignorance
about non-American approaches to the discipline. Yet, whether this will provide a
way out of social psychology's dilemma, depends on whether intergroup theory itself
succeeds to do what they set out to.

2.5.2. Intergroup theory

As was already indicated, the designation "intergroup theory" (IGT) is used here in
reference to a broad approach to social psychology with social identity and social
categorisation theories as its cornerstones. Both these are complex theories to
which justice cannot be done in the present context, but a brief description is very

valuable for this discussion. The reason for their relevance is largely the fact that it reworks the social in social psychology from the vantage point of a basic cognitive metatheory. In other words, it asserts a continuation between basic and social cognitive processes, and therefore sees the psychological as ontologically individual. Yet, it is situated by its protagonists in clear opposition to social cognition, and rightly so. Consider a statement by Hogg and Abrams (1988) in this regard:

> (T)he approaches differ markedly in their understanding of the term "social" in social psychology. For social cognition it simply means "people", so judgement, perception, memory and so on, become social only to the extent that they concern people. There is no theoretical treatment of emergent properties of social interaction – such as shared perception, norms, and so on – or of group membership as a psychological state with specific and unique effects. For social identity the entire analysis rests precisely upon the theoretical analysis of group membership. (p. 88)

IGT thus returns to the neglected traditions of group dynamics and intergroup studies, in a general attempt to "rediscover the group" in social psychology (Turner et al., 1987). However, unlike traditional approaches to the group, it facilitates this return by trying to safeguard it against reducing the psychological reality of the group again to mere processes of interpersonal attraction. Groups are conceptualised as informing psychological states that are irreducible to intra- and interpersonal levels of analysis, and directly related to the structural reality of society. For this IGT draws on a conception of society as a constellation of different social categories that stand in conflicting power relations to each other. In themselves, however, these categories are mere statistical entities, and do not explain the involvement of people in them. IGT sets out to explain how they are internalised and determines behaviour, or, how "the individual becomes part of a social group and a social group becomes part of the individual's self-concept" (De la Rey, 1991, p. 44).

The self-concept assumes a central role in this theoretical system, since it makes it

possible to relate basic cognitive processes to societal structures. According to IGT, the self-concept is a cognitive schema, a knowledge structure filled with propositions about the self, and in this regard can have both individual and social content. Individual content simply refers to unique personal attributes and personality traits, and is called the personal identity. Social content, in contrast, derives from the knowledge of belonging to particular social categories, consists of categorically specific attributes, norms and behavioural patterns, and is called the social identity. The number of social identities that an individual might have is only limited by the amount of groups they belong to. What is important is that the social identity, by representing the social group in the individual mind, underlies social behaviour that is irreducible to intra- or interpersonal levels of analysis.

The structural distinction between individual and social identity is the first step in the direction of relating cognitive processes to higher (more social) levels of analysis. The second step is made by drawing a further theoretical distinction, namely between interpersonal and intergroup behaviour. Interpersonal behaviour occurs when a person interacts with someone else in terms of his or her personal identity; that is, they interact as individuals. Previous approaches to the psychology of group belonging were theoretically limited to interactions on this level, as was indicated earlier in the chapter. Intergroup behaviour, on the contrary, occurs when two people interact as representatives of particular social groups; that is, in a context where their social identities are salient and point towards attributes, values and behaviours that are assimilated from a social category. See Hogg (1995) in this regard:

> For example, talking with a close friend about a mutual acquaintance
> would most likely render a particular personal identity salient and
> cause one to consider oneself and one's partner in terms of that
> identity. Talking with the same close friend about the outcome of a
> sporting contest if you support opposing teams would very likely render
> the interaction an intergroup one based on definitions of self and other
> in terms of opposing supporters' groups. (p. 556)

The shift from personal to social identity is contextually effected. Such contextual events might be fairly mundane, as the above example, or much more pervasive. If one thinks about apartheid South Africa, it is clear that the racialisation of society made it very difficult *not* to act in an intergroup manner. But whether the context is mundane or historically entrenched, the psychological processes that make any shift from an interpersonal to an intergroup event possible. These processes should be more closely described, because they are in fact the real linchpin attaching individual to society within IGT. While there is a minor difference between social identity and self-categorisation theories with regard to the description of the structure of the self-concept[16], they agree that social identity is cognitively represented as knowledge of the self, and involves a mediation of the individual and society by means of the process of categorisation.

In other words, where the process of social identification encompasses all "the psychological processes involved in translating social categories into human groups, in creating a psychological reality from a social reality" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 17), these processes are invariably private, perceptual processes, even in a system where society is taken seriously for its psychological import. By insisting on the cognitive process of self-categorisation as central to the shift from interpersonal to intergroup interactions, society can be theoretically assimilated without compromising the psychological ontology. Categorisation is indeed theorised as a general cognitive-perceptual process, driven by an adaptive economy, that attains a sociological dimension only when it is directed towards situating the self in opposition to others; in others words, when social identities are formed and evoked as self-categorisations.

In this, IGT builds on categorisation research done by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in the early 1970s, giving rise to what is now referred to as the "minimal group paradigm" (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971)[17]. In these experiments, they wanted quite literally to establish the minimal conditions that would incite intergroup bias. They involved a number of British schoolboys to participate in studies that

only adds historical substance but is necessary in order to make accurate predictions concerning specific instances of stereotyping: one needs to know the macro-social context in order to predict how individuals will behave in specific situations. (p. 77)

IGT thus reveals a clearly intended social scope, and is an advancement over traditional cognitive approaches. Yet, it is not without serious internal contradictions. While the focus on social causality, social justification and social differentiation seems invoke Moscovici's ideal of social psychology being the study of communication and ideology, such social processes will have to be subsidiary to more basic processes of signification. The true mediation between the individual and the social is not forged on the level of negotiation and systems of knowledge that exist and are represented beyond the individual, but in the individual cognitive system itself – in the basic mechanisms that situate the individual as a perceptual, private subject, able to make sense of the world and to belong to groups without the intervention of other people. The problem with this is that it is unclear why one would hold on to a model of the person as a perceptual miser, when the most important aspects of social behaviour seem to rest on processes of negotiation and *shared* or *distributed* significations?

There is thus a clear tension between knowledge as finally a perceptual process, and not dependent on society, and knowledge as a societal product. Unfortunately it is a tension that, by insisting on the individualised nature of psychological processes, makes it impossible to follow leads that will enable a consideration of people as psychologically part of social life by processes that are not driven by a cognitive economy. Of course, this will invoke the question of whether such a project is still a psychology at all. These contradictions have been picked up extensively by critics of the approach in the last years, but will not be discussed here. They are debates that create the environment for the arguments that will be pursued in this study, and will therefore be addressed in all the following chapters. Suffice to say that even here, after such a thorough attempt to rid social psychology of its key metatheoretical concerns, the opposition between cognition and society threatens to abstract the

individual to the detriment of social psychology's understanding of social life.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter a history has been sketched of social psychology's struggle for an identity as a discipline. It was argued that such an identity will always begin with or end in a resolution to the problem of the relation between the individual and the social. Because of social psychology's uncomfortable relation to psychology and sociology, and due to its acceptance of cognitivism as a metatheory, this problem was usually addressed in terms of a reduction of the social.

Quite a strong critical tradition within social psychology invested great amounts of energy into rectifying this individualism and reduction of the social, because it threatened, ever since the late 1960s, to make social psychology a rather trivial pursuit. Yet, success in this regard cannot be seen as entirely convincing. The question inevitably arises whether social psychology should be a psychological concern, accompanied with an even deeper question: what precisely, culturally or socio-historically speaking, is the relation between (Western) psychology and individualism?

To address issues such as these, the focus will have to be shifted rather radically. For one, it is necessary to leave behind the history of social psychology as such, at least for the moment. The answers, so it seems, do not reside there. But where will they be found, and how will they be addressed? How should the question regarding social psychology's crisis be reformulated? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. One cannot simply refer to social psychology as a *discipline*. It is usually afforded only *sub-disciplinary* status of psychology and sociology respectively. But because this tendency will be problematised and critiqued in this chapter, the notion of discipline is used to indicate social psychology – except, of course, where its relation to psychology and sociology is explicitly discussed.

2. This distinction will only be used in the present section. In the rest of the chapter, all references to social psychology refers to its psychological form, except when stated otherwise.

3. It is of course a fallacy to assign to any scientific discipline an exact origin. Things are always more complex than such a practice will suggest. Of course, certain dates are highly significant, but they are significant usually relative to the current position a particular historian is taking. Therefore, in social psychology, other investments and values can easily find other (and earlier!) dates to indicate its "birth". For example, the simple experiments done by Triplet in 1896 are often referred to as the first of its kind in social psychology (Hogg & Vaughan, 1995), serving as a reference point for the experimentalist. For those more socially inclined, the crowd psychology of Le Bon can be an equally legitimate date of birth, as can the social psychology courses George Herbert Mead presented from 1899 - 1922 (Farr, 1996). In fact, there is no reason why the dates cannot be pushed back altogether, to the Greek rhetorical tradition (Billig, 1987).

4. Symbolic interactionism is an approach to sociology that had traditionally argued for the importance of issues surrounding agency and activity in a tradition often more disposed towards the study of larger structural aspects of social life. The origins of symbolic interactionism is in Mead's work, and as was noted above, and he explicitly articulated his work as a *social psychology*. Rob Farr (1996) rightly indicates Mead as one of the fathers of social psychology, and as one of its strongest theoretical minds. He sees in Mead a very powerful example of a social psychology that is not tied down by either the concerns of psychology or sociology, but that is a social science discipline in its own right. Considering this broad perspective and the quality of the theory, it is a tragedy that Mead has been so neglected by psychological social psychologists.

5. The allusion here is of course to Immanuel Kant's discussion of the relation between philosophy and other faculties, such as law and medicine (Culler, 1983). Here it indicates simply a general division between different fields of knowledge production, especially in academic contexts.

6. Many of the classic texts in the social sciences of course abound with sexist language. The usual acknowledgement and disclaimer (sic) will not be used here, but the problematic nature of the language is, indeed, noted. Also, when quoting American sources, different spelling conventions are often encountered, for example "behavior" as opposed to "behaviour". The original spelling will be kept.

7. Allport aimed this behaviourist denial of the social group at a very specific theoretical tradition, namely Le Bon's hypothesised group mind, later taken up and extended by McDougal (Hogg & Vaughan, 1995). The group mind theory had rather good fortunes in the history of the social sciences, since even Freud used it to developed his account of group phenomena (Farr, 1996).

8. This was of course not his own idea. From 1890 onwards, psychology in the US developed as a laboratory science, a characteristic that had an important impact on its relation to the other social sciences. In fact, the circumscribed focus on the human organism and its psychological processes under laboratory conditions were in line with psychology's desire to be a biological rather than a social science (Danziger, 1990).

9. Which is in marked distinction to the philosophical roots of behaviourism, namely Lockean empiricism and the logical positivism of the Vienna circle.

10. The influence of war on the development of social psychology is a story in itself (Farr, 1996). Consider the following account by Muzafer Sherif (1967). This Turkish psychologist clearly situates his own concern for social psychology in his experiences of war and forced migration:

> As an adolescent with a great deal of curiosity about things, I saw the effects of war: families who lost their men and dislocations of human beings. I saw hunger. I saw people killed on my side of national affiliation; I saw people killed on the other side. In fact, it was a miracle that I was not killed along with the hundreds of other civilians who happened to be near the invasion points the day Izmar (Smyrna) was occupied by an army, with a blessing of the victorious Western colonial powers at the end of World War I...
>
> At that early age I decided to devote my life to studying and understanding the causes of these things. Of course for some years I did not know how to go about it, but I started reading whatever I could lay my hands on about history and social problems. By the time I came to the United States for graduate study, I had firmly decided that my life's work would be social psychology.

What is remarkable about this passage, is to sense the social consciousness guiding the work of one of social psychology's pioneers. It also stands as an accusation against a social psychology that has lost so much of this realism.

11. This rhetorical use of the crisis as involving the maturation of social psychology is quite pervasive in the literature. Coats and Feldman (1996, p. 8) write: "If social psychology was born at the turn of the century and reached adulthood in the 1940s, its first midlife crisis came in the 1960s". In accounts such as these, little is conceded in terms of approaches to social psychology that did not follow the traditional trajectory. They are simply ignored.

12. In this chapter the focus is only on the popular distinction between European and American approaches. This does not mean that other forms of geographical hegemony was not also critically addressed. More specifically, both European and American approaches can be seen as Western approaches, which beg the question about social psychology in the former Soviet republics, in Eastern countries, and of course in Africa. The practice of exporting social psychology to non-Western contexts will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter.

13. Moscovici (1972) often expressed his disgust in the individualism of American social psychology in no unclear terms. For him, individualism was more than merely a defective metatheory: it carried with it a particular complex of values that set individuals up in the ideological sense of being self-determined, responsible and ethical. In his own words: "This 'social psychology of the nice person' was to me then – as it still is today – offensive in many ways; it had little relevance to what I knew or had experienced" (p. 18).

14. This debate, and elaborate explanations for the solutions only mentioned here, can be found in Nye and Brower (1996).

15. The use of arrogance to describe the initial posture of social cognition in social psychology is not an over-statement. In the mentioned text the author asks himself the question whether social cognition is sovereign in social psychology. His answer? "Of course it is (p. xi)", which he follows up by saying: "Indeed, it is easy to imagine a future in which there is no longer a need for a separate *Handbook of Social Cognition*. The *Handbook of Social Cognition* will become the *Handbook of Social Psychology*" (p. xii). Even accepting that people are entitled to their views, in science as in every life, statements such as these reveal a remarkable ignorance towards the diversity of social psychology, and the radical difference between many recent developments and social cognition research.

16. The difference referred to here can be explained in the following way: "Where social identity theory seeks to explain intergroup discrimination in terms of a need for a positive social identity, self-categorization theory shift in self-perception from self-categorization in terms of personal identity to self-categorization in terms of social identity" (Turner, 1995, p. 502).

17. This research again has its roots in earlier experiments in perception by Tajfel (1957).

Chapter 3

Reconsidering the subject: Social psychology, postmodernism and identity

3.1. Introduction

This chapter continues to describe social psychology's grappling with the relation between the individual and the social, and its struggle, at least from the perspective of psychology, to redeem itself of the individualism that accompanied so many of its traditional solutions. As became clear in the previous chapter, there is no easy solution to this metatheoretical dilemma, especially if discussion remains locked inside the metatheoretical confines of general psychology. The focus in this chapter will therefore no longer be on the crisis as an affliction completely internal to social psychology itself. It is explicitly related to upheavals and perturbations, crises indeed, characterising the intellectual climate in Western spheres of cultural production at large.

This shift in emphasis is not a rhetorical strategy unique to the argument developed in this text, and is prefigured by developments in critical social psychology ever since the 1980s. In an important publication a decade ago, for example, Ian Parker and John Shotter (1989) stated that "the crisis is not to be found just in the theories and assumptions of social psychology, but in a whole set of 'crises' to do with the very character or context of western intellectual life" (p. 1). Ian Parker (1989a) repeated this in another publication by saying that "the continuing crisis in social psychology is part of a broader cultural and political crisis" (p. 64). Dowd (1991) similarly claimed that the crisis in social psychology relates to "structural transformations and associated cultural shift(s)" (p. 188) in Western society and culture. Within such a

perspective individualism is not treated as a conceptual blemish on social psychological theory as such. Social psychology, as part of the psychological sciences more generally, owes its theoretical and institutional space to more general societal requirements regarding the regulation of the specific structure of Western self-understanding, giving individualism a normative value in the development of this society. These statements will be elaborately addressed in the remainder of the chapter. For the moment it is enough to realise that the crisis in social psychology cannot be separated from crises of colonialism, development, and rationalism; and as will become clear in the following chapter, a crisis of representation.

Locating social psychology in such a framework has the following effect. The discipline is revealed as intimately responsive to social and cultural processes. It is argued that social psychology's crisis is not so much one not of a *reduction* of the social, but of a complicity with the normative patterns and strategies that have characterised the social organisation of Western culture and its value-spheres in colonial contexts. In order to address this strategic relationship between social psychology and the structure of individual subjectivity in Western cultures, the current discussion takes its cue from Roiser (1997) when he says that "the crisis in social psychology should be viewed as part of the crisis of modernism, heralding the advent of postmodernity" (p. 96). Drawing on the rhetoric of postmodernism in this discussion might seem a confounding strategy: it certainly is an often vague and over-determined concept (some would say it is not a concept at all). This, however, does not mean that the notion of the postmodern has no heuristic value in discussing issues relating epistemology to society and culture. For all its vagueness postmodernism is a pervasive theme in recent social science debates, and using it in this context allows a synchronisation of critical discussions that could otherwise easily stay locked behind disciplinary doors. The guiding theme in all postmodern ideas, as will become clear in this chapter, is a rejection of key Enlightenment assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge.

But using the notion of the postmodern is relevant for another reason, one that is more specific to social psychology and the current study. Postmodernism is often extended beyond its critical use to delineate new forms of theorising and engaging in social research. To state it differently, a strong case is being made for postmodernism as social theory. It is especially in the social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, as well as new hybrid discipline's such as gender and cultural studies that postmodern knowledges are being developed. Although not as pervasive, this has also been attempted in social psychology, setting postmodern social psychology up as having untied the shackles of individualism, and being a discipline truly receptive to the fragmented and often dislocated nature of experience and knowledge in contemporary society. To conclude, the postmodern is not only used to challenge social psychology's relation to society. It also sets the parameters of a reconstructed, post-individualist social psychology. One of the aims of this chapter is to evaluate the idea of a postmodern social psychology, and to see if what is on offer indeed reconstructs social psychology in a way that makes it relevant to the South African context.

The argument will be presented in the following way. The first section contains a conceptual clarification of the notion of the postmodern as it is employed in this chapter. Its currency is traced in both popular and academic discourses, with the focus specifically on how postmodernism extends its aesthetic connotations to become a critical and reconstructive index in the social sciences. In doing this, the concept of *postmodernity* is disentangled from that of *postmodernism*. This is a useful distinction in the current context, since *postmodernity* is continuously used as a sociological designation referring to the characteristics, experientially and institutionally, of a late-capitalist, post-colonial and information society. For some these changes are foundational enough to warrant a qualitative change in the way the social world is theorised. In as much as such changes also extend to the structure of subjectivity and the nature of self-understanding, theories like these are informative for social psychology and its struggle to theorise the relation between the individual and the social.

Following this, postmodernism in its critical sense is explicitly related to the social sciences. By way of discussing a general erosion of objectivity and rationality in the philosophy of science, the position of the social sciences is explained as one where concerns with epistemology and knowledge cannot be divorced from ideology and power. The history of psychology in South Africa illustrates this clearly. Social psychology developed in this country with a liberal agenda that seemingly served as a corrective for a blatantly racist psychology. With its response to the problem of race relations in terms of variables such as attitudes, stereotypes, and social distance, it implicitly challenged Apartheid as a solution. South African social psychology, with its focus on intergroup relations rather than theory building, was also "more social" than its US counterpart. This is further accentuated by the later popularity of the social identity approach in South Africa. The postmodernist critique, however, claims that this liberalism also reveals infusion of knowledge with power. It elevates the individual cognitive subject and abstracts it from its social environment. As a case study, the history of social psychology in South Africa illustrates both the limits of the traditional models already theoretically introduced in the previous chapter, and the nature of postmodernism as a critique of the social sciences.

While the previous section takes the postmodern on for its critique of the social scientific and thus the social psychology project, the next section addresses postmodernism as a vehicle for reconstructive approaches to social psychology. The focus is on whether it is possible and feasible to speak of the development of a postmodern social psychology, and for this reason a few formulations of this idea will be evaluated. Central to these formulations is a general dismissal of the traditional psychological subject by describing the social as itself post-individual in its organisation. People are understood to participate in the social no longer as centralised experiential agents, and therefore the focus of analysis should be on the social processes that support and sustain contingent forms of person-hood. Unfortunately, such claims are often simply adopted from postmodern theory, and not from independent studies of social life. It is argued that this inevitably limits the

construction of a social psychology that is relevant to the South African context. However, this is not indicative of a detached scholasticism in postmodern social psychology. Postmodern theory itself is often colonised by disciplines that allow little conceptual space for social psychology as a *psychological* contribution to the understanding of social life.

In the final section, then, the question is asked whether it is possible to develop a social psychology of the postmodern, rather than simply a postmodern social psychology. This theme is discussed around instances of cultural and identity politics in South Africa. It seems as if the study of identity and multiculturalism requires more sophisticated accounts of how identities are embodied, sustained, challenged and changed by social agents than is made available by postmodern theories. The chapter therefore culminates in an appeal of sorts for a social psychology that will have the conceptual tools necessary to address social issues in the South African context. How such a social psychology might look will be the theme of the next chapter.

3.2. The postmodern: conceptual clarification

Attempting to define the postmodern is perhaps ultimately a self-defeating project. One reason for this is that the postmodern owes its currency precisely to a realisation that signification is ultimately problematic; that it plays itself out in a system where things and words are continuously severed from each other. Stated somewhat differently, the postmodern conjures up a crisis of referential thinking, the sort of thinking that is necessary to delineate the definition of a concept, that enables theoretical reason, and that assumes the reflexive ability of the human being to scientifically describe its own being. This section takes on the complexities and fuzziness of discussions around the postmodern, attempting to set up at least a provisional mould for discussing social psychology's entrapment in larger crises. In order to do this, the postmodern is approached as a conglomerate of specific terms

and their correlates, namely postmodernism (as opposed to modernism), and postmodernity (as opposed to modernity).

It is in the guise of *postmodernism* that the postmodern has its widest popular resonance. Functioning largely as a stylistic or aesthetic concept describing characteristic features of developments in literature, the visual arts, music and architecture, postmodernism signals a break with artistic modernism (Olivier, 1994). Artistic modernism was characterised by various features, one being the privileged position enjoyed by art and the artist as creative genius, providing an alternative (aesthetic, moral) gaze into the nature of character, society and human relationships. The conditions of possibility for this should be sought in the gradual differentiation of the field of cultural production from other fields of production (Bourdieu, 1993). Within this field the artist assumed the position of an agent of supposed creative genius, providing modern artistic production with the further characteristics of an avant-garde, the proliferation of new forms of artistic expression, and the priority of artistic intention over standardised expressive form (Harvey, 1990).

Postmodernism, on the contrary, introduced new sensibilities about artistic expression and the role of the artist. Although postmodernism is also characterised by a proliferation of expressive form, its production is no longer tied to the intentions of a creative genius or to the programmatic notions of an avant-garde (Olivier, 1994). Works of art seem to defy coherent meanings and individual intentions according to an arbitrary and regressive logic of perpetual stylistic recycling and pastiche. This is accompanied by a deconstruction of the oppositions between "high" and "low" culture, or "serious" and "popular" art, introducing an apparent acceptance of consumerism and repetition[1]. In this way postmodernism also undermines the critical, constructive and moral posture of modernist art by retreating into a self-referential world of surfaces without depth; making it at times irreverently playful, and at times nihilistic, non-resolving and open-ended. To conclude, postmodernism undermines the received notions of art itself with "a brutal aesthetics of squalor and shock" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 64).

If these briefly sketched stylistic and aesthetic distinctions exhausted all the implications of the postmodern, it would be difficult to account for its insistent and critical incorporation into the social sciences. Both have been elaborated, however, to stretch beyond exclusive reference to artistic production and to address shifts in the modes of cultural production more generally. In this sense modernism does not only refer to artistic sensibility in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but to the whole system of values and beliefs which prepared the cultural environment in which such conceptions of artistic production and appreciation, as one aspect of a modernising world, were in the first place possible. This expanded conception of modernism should be described against the background of what is referred to by historians of Western culture and society as the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Consider the following statement by Steven Seidman (1994) in this regard:

> At the heart of the modern west is the culture of the Enlightenment. Assumptions regarding the unity of humanity, the individual as the creative force of society and history, the superiority of the west, the idea of science as Truth, and the belief in social progress, have been fundamental to Europe and the United States. (p. 1)

Building as it were on the European Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, "an educated elite, expressing supreme confidence in the power of reason, attempted a rational analysis of European institutions and beliefs" (Perry, Chase, Jacob, Jacob, & Von Laue, 1994, p. 403). In this regard the achievement of the natural sciences, establishing a sense of rational order in the physical universe, was seen to enable also a rational analysis, and in fact a rationalisation, of human institutions. The Enlightenment age is characterised, amongst many other things, by the development of important values and ideas such as the following: the undermining of the legitimacy of traditional value-systems and cosmologies in favour of the certainties of objective scientific inquiry based on the assumed rational capacities of the human subject; the idea that society should be rationally ordered in terms of the

institutionalisation of morality into a general rule of law; and the values of individual freedom, liberty, equality and accompanying notions of human rights, institutionalised in the idea of a nation-state functioning as a democracy.

If the notion of modernism is seen as a correlate to Enlightenment ideas and values about the nature of the world and human subjectivity, modernity is often used to describe the de facto societal and cultural changes that accompanied it. Briefly, modernity can be described by mentioning the development of capitalism and market economies, the industrialisation of human labour and economic activity, the process of rapid urbanisation, the incredible achievements of science and technology and its radical transformation of the life-world, the spread of democracy and nationalism, and the bureaucratisation of the state and other large institutions. These features refer primarily to modernity in an institutional sense, but it is just as important to keep in mind the experiential dimension of life in such a context. Featherstone (1989, p. 199) in this regard views modernity "as a quality of modern life inducing a sense of the discontinuity of time, the break with tradition, the feeling of novelty and sensitivity to the ephemeral, fleeting and contingent nature of the present."

Such a description might go some way to capture life in the modern cosmopolitan cities and urbanising areas of the early decades of this century, but it hides the fact that no description of modernity can be limited to the effects it had on Western society. An integral aspect of modern Western self-conception, fuelled by the already mentioned beliefs in human reason and the emancipatory effects of scientific and economic development, was the idea of its superiority to the non-Western world and its inhabitants. This provided the justification needed for the many practices of Western expansionism, imperialism and colonialism. The subsequent transformation and recruitment of various non-Western contexts into extensions of the modern world produced societal and experiential features that were clearly different from those in the Western centres, but that should still be studied and understood in terms of the logic and practices of the project of modernity.

It is in relation to this inflation of the concepts of modernism and modernity to describe the features of the formation and global dissemination of Western culture, and the inevitable idea of its own superiority, that also *postmodernism* expands its original currency as relating only to artistic sensibility (Lyotard, 1984). From its onset the project of modernity was a troubled one, and the seeds of discontent were very often the ironic products of processes of modernisation itself. In this regard at least three examples can be mentioned. First, the experience of cultural diversity added to making Western values and assumptions relative, or less secure (Featherstone, 1995). Second, the World Wars contributed much to discredit Enlightenment ideals by effectively shattering the idea that technological innovation would teleologically lead to a state of world stability and prosperity. Third, colonialism did not lead to a simple process of cultural assimilation. Rather, it ignited many violent struggles against the hegemony of Western culture, providing force to arguments that see modernity and modernism as intrinsically oppressive and exploitative of cultural others (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1976).

These actual problems with the project of modernity concurred with challenges on a more intellectual level. Relevant here is the rise of critical voices in philosophy and cultural studies in direct opposition to Enlightenment reason. Postmodernism as a cultural and intellectual disenchantment with the modern project is in this way rooted in philosophies dating back to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and draws together recent philosophers such as Heidegger, Adorno, Derrida and Foucault (Olivier, 1994). All these figures were or are concerned with either deconstructing metaphysics and Enlightenment reason to show its aporias and internal divisions (Heidegger, Derrida), or with revealing the oppressive and disciplinary cultural logic of specific practices of modernity (Foucault, Adorno)[2]. Therefore, in both artistic and intellectual spheres postmodernism signals a sensibility of discontent, a crisis in the moral foundations of modernism. In the realm of the social sciences, as will become clear in the next section, this would erupt into a crisis of confidence that has an epistemological and political foundation.

The above paragraphs, however briefly, delineate the ways in which the interlocking concepts of modernism, postmodernism and modernity will be used in this chapter and the remainder of the study. The concept of *postmodernity* is a more difficult and contested one in social theory (Bauman, 1992; Lash, 1990). Its problematic status can be explained as a disagreement amongst social theorists about whether the critical sensibility of postmodernism reveals a fundamental and discontinuous social and cultural shift in the structure of Western society. Recall the description of the centrality of Enlightenment ideals in Western society by Steven Seidman (1994) a few pages earlier, and compare that to his following statement:

> This culture is now in a state of crisis. Signs of cultural turmoil are everywhere: the resurgence of religious fundamentalism, in the declining authority of key social institutions, in the enfeeblement of western political ideologies and parties, and in the cultural wars over literary and aesthetic canons and paradigms of knowledge. A broad social and cultural shift is taking place in western societies. (p. 1)

Antagonists to the idea of postmodernity claim that such shifts can still be explained as outcomes of the modernising project, and do not necessarily indicate any structural discontinuity. Defenders on the other hand want the notion to do precisely such conceptual work. They argue that the social and cultural shifts taking place are fundamental and discontinuous enough to warrant its description as a condition of postmodernity (Harvey, 1989). In this way postmodernity is introduced to social theory as the socio-cultural correlate on institutional and experiential level of postmodernism, following the same pattern as the earlier discussion about the relationship between modernity and modernism. This means that postmodernism, both as a broad cultural and more specific intellectual climate, is not a contrary sensibility forged only in the realm of ideas. It has to be discussed in the light of material aspects of current trends in social and cultural life.

What are the social and cultural changes that proponents of the notion of postmodernity refer to? There are quite a few, but the following will give an adequate indication of its intended empirical scope. First, there are presumed economic changes. Traditional capitalism seems to develop into an age of post-industrialism and consumerism. It is argued that the decentring of industry in this sense creates pockets of existence where the primary principle of economic participation is not based in production, but in consumption. Not only goods are consumed; we find ourselves continually in an information society where images and ideas attain great value. Secondly, there is the rapid development and acceleration in the field of information technology. If we take theorists such as Vattimo (1992) and Baudrillard (1995a) seriously, mass media and the Internet saturate of our lives with other views and potentials, subverting the idea of reality itself[3].

As will become clear, postmodern attempts to redefine social psychology buys into these perspectives quite strongly. Notions of postmodernity in fact provide a paradigmatic instance of the social, leaving the discipline to formulate the way it will study individual lives in these terms. Later in this chapter the question will be posed whether the critical and reconstructive gains of this theoretical alliance opens social psychology up or closes it to a study of South African instances of social change. Sticking to the scheme at hand, in South Africa spheres of life that might be deemed pre-modern, modernising, and already postmodern intersects in interesting ways. Partly due to the political past of this country, these processes are further corroborated by the country's re-entry into and embracing of the global economy. It will become very relevant to reflect on how postmodern theory, imported as it is from abroad, manages these intersections between different spheres of life.

Before moving on, one more feature of the postmodern and especially the notion of postmodernity remains to be addressed. Are there distinguishable experiential correlates to the social changes that supposedly characterise the condition of postmodernity? Whether one accepts the idea of postmodernity as indicating fundamental change or not, the basic experiential tenets of life in a consumer

oriented, information saturated and culturally pluralising society is captured particularly eloquently by Willie van der Merwe (1994a):

> ...(T)he distinctive existential impact of the informational, electronic and mass-media revolution we are living through at the moment, with its very real effects on people's experiences and perceptions of the fundamental categories of time and space, the displacement or sublimation of reality by a hyperreality or simulacrum of images within a self-referential and self-perpetuating system of simulations, the general loss of a sense of self-autonomy, belonging and an integrated self-identity, an awareness of the relativity and locality of norms and values, and accordingly a resurgence of interest, attachment and allegiance to immediate localized communal identities, and the paradoxical, simultaneously bewildering and exciting experience of the continuous dispersal of meaning. (p. 194)

How these features play themselves out in the experience of different strata of the South African population is an interesting social psychological question. But before such a question can be answered, social psychology should be addressed once more.

3.3. Knowledge and exploitation: locating science

What are the implications of all these descriptions and distinctions for social psychology, and specifically on the problems in social psychology discussed thus far? To answer this question the social sciences, and in fact science as such, should first be addressed in the light of the challenge of postmodernism. In this section it will become clear that scientific activity is a (Western) cultural phenomenon, and that postmodernism has indeed profound implications for its self-understanding[4]. Social psychology's crisis thus immediately is set within the context of a bigger one.

3.3.1. Postmodernism and scientific reason

The postmodern critique of the Enlightenment addressed above challenges also the scientific benchmarks of objectivity, rationality and the growth and accumulation of knowledge. It reveals a scientific complicity with modernism and the modernising project. When extended to the social sciences, this means at least two things. First, social scientific knowledge claims cannot completely escape the charge of epistemological relativism, making them not universal descriptions of an independently existing reality but normative formulations of local values and perceptions of reality. Second, social scientific knowledge production and application emerge as integrally involved in the construction of modern cultural forms, as well as its maintenance in diverse institutions and contexts (Doyal & Harris, 1986; Rosenau, 1992; Van Niekerk, 1992).

Before addressing the social sciences any further, it is useful to keep in mind that postmodernism challenges science *as such*. In fact, the postmodern problematisation of the *natural* sciences is a good place to start teasing out its implications for a general critique of scientific reason. The natural sciences, as was already indicated in the previous section, occupy a privileged position in modernist discourses and in the project of modernity itself. Its method itself was thought to provide grounding for a world-view free from religious dogma and mythological world views, promising to liberate people from unquestioned authorities by providing the appropriate procedures for attaining objective, universal knowledge. As Rosenau (1992) expresses it:

> Historically, science attacked the arbitrary authority of church and monarch, both of which based their legitimacy on theology. Modern sciences established its reputation on objectivity, rigorous procedures of inquiry, the material rather than the metaphysical. Science, in turn, came to claim its own monopoly of truth. Its authority expanded and superseded that held by its more irrational and arbitrary antecedents.

(p. 9)

The traditional image of science as one of accumulation and progression further coincided with the teleological idea of a linear history. As such, science was seen as the perfect vehicle for the constitution and organisation of the modern world. This followed from its undeniable ability to transform the world technologically, as well as from its perceived capacity to provide the model that would also make the scientific study of human institutions and behaviour possible. The cultural standing of the natural sciences today, with its technological tokens in abundance all around us, is a testimony of its success on many levels. But if the postmodern sensibility cannot deny the almost complete colonisation of the world by science and technology, it certainly challenges the modernist assumptions that underlie and accompany them. For one, even though the traces of scientific enterprise are everywhere, it never produced a world free of conflict, struggle and poverty. Even more important is the realisation that the natural sciences themselves do not comply with the positivist ideals it held forth as model for the social sciences. Postmodernism reveals these to be romanticised images encapsulated in an ideal perspective that is ultimately out of touch with the reality of scientific practice, institutions and outcomes.

Indeed, 20th century philosophy of science was characterised by much closer attention to the reality of scientific *activity*, and started to acknowledge both the subjective investment of the scientist and the influence of scientific ownership and institutionalisation on the nature of knowledge claims. One of the first to register this erosion of an ideal image of scientific rationality in the natural sciences was Karl Popper (1980), who responded as philosopher especially to developments in theoretical physics: the work of Albert Einstein and later quantum mechanics made it very clear that natural scientific observations could not be disentangled from theoretical perspective and the process of measurement. But while Popper was certainly not a relativist in any postmodern sense, later figures such as Thomas Kuhn (1970) and Paul Feyerabend (1975) entertained thoroughly relativist positions on the growth and production of knowledge. Nigel Pleasants (1997) provides a good

description of the corrosive effect of these developments on the current image of the natural sciences:

> Natural science is no longer seen to provide certain knowledge, nor formulate universalistic laws from which its explanatory and predictive powers supposedly derive; and its success is seen to depend more on its social and institutional organization than conformity to a special methodological logic. (p. 145)

In short, rather than providing the benchmark for truth and certainty scientific activity may itself be studied and situated sociologically and anthropologically. It carries with it all the concerns, preconceptions and structures of perception characterising Western culture, rendering its rewards variable, historically contingent, and open to ideological concerns of all kinds. This vulnerability derives first from the *regulative* impact of institutionalisation on the activities of scientific communities. Scientific questions are not only dreamt up by scientists, but are often driven by the concerns of specific institutions, such as the military, governance, health care or education. More important to a postmodern reading, however, is the *constitutive* impact of historically and culturally specific frameworks or *paradigms* on scientific knowledge claims. Kuhn's (1970) conception of the scientific paradigm provides the classic articulation of how historically and culturally specific preconceptions contribute to the constitution of scientific objects, objectives and subsequent knowledge claims[5]. Consider Van Niekerk's (1992) description of the Kuhnian paradigm:

> A paradigm is for Kuhn a disciplinary matrix or research tradition that has its origin in certain key examples of scientific work, resting on implicit, often very tentatively delineated conceptual, methodological and ontological assumptions. Such paradigmatic scientific achievements provide, for a particular time and within a particular field of enquiry, the models for what are deemed scientific problems, research techniques and possible solutions. A paradigm is not a set

of clearly articulated rules, values or procedures, but rather a field of reference made up of implicit assumptions to which a community of inquirers have committed themselves and are accepted by them as authoritative. (p. 62, my translation)

To summarise, epistemological relativism affects the integrity of science regardless whether it studies natural or social phenomena. The natural sciences cannot and do not provide the blueprint for objective knowledge claims. Similarly, the social sciences are not exempt from ideological investment only by adhering to positivism. The discussion will now return to the challenge of postmodernism in the social sciences specifically, since there are important differences that set it apart from the natural sciences. The social sciences are by definition not concerned with "natural" phenomena, but with phenomena always bearing imprints of human activity (such as scientific enquiry itself). This entails that not only the perspectives and methodological logic guiding the social sciences are open to historical readings, but indeed the objects of its enquiry itself. One way to illustrate this clearly is to discuss it as a problem of participation (Pleasants, 1997).

As is clear in Kuhn's understanding of the natural sciences, sociological accounts of natural scientific practice focuses on the effects of the participation of the researcher in a community of researchers, guided by a paradigm. Such participation has constitutive effects on knowledge production. However, in the natural sciences there still exists an ontological distance between the scientific subject and its objects of study. In order words, the subject does not participate as such in the realm of its objects. The social scientist cannot claim a similar ontological distance: she is faced with the problem of a *double* participation. Not only does she participate in a community of scholars and the institutionalised structures of her discipline; she *also* participates with or in the objects that she studies. In other words, no one studies social life and experience without having lived and experienced social life.

One of the curious effects of this is that social scientific knowledge claims are often reflexively fed back into society, so that object fields start to resemble social scientific discourse – rather than the other way around. Anthony Giddens (1984) has shown this process at work in the way theories of society historically led to changes in the nature and organisation of society itself. He refers to this process as a double hermeneutic, and it is a clear indication of the power the social sciences have to shape and pattern social structures and social experience. Social life is never static. It changes over time, and the social sciences contribute to these changes. This constitutive power of social scientific knowledge claims makes it necessary to address them not only as forms of Western ethno-theory, but in the context of ideology; understood here as representations and practices that substantiate relations of power in a given social system.

In this regard postmodernism realises that social scientific objects do not simply have their cross-cultural correlates in other environments under different names. Social science, having as it does its roots in modernist forms of social organisation, presents us not with democratically constructed knowledge claims, but with institutionalised and programmatic vocabularies provided by specialists. Scientific specialists are positioned in delineated sites of knowledge production that take the form of disciplined fields, and the vocabularies they contribute to are geared towards the regulation and construction of cultural forms. The focus of postmodernism in this regard is thus to reveal the complicity of the social sciences in the regulation of individual lives and social groups for the specific purposes of modern societal organisation; in contexts such as organised education and labour. In other words, the practices of the social sciences are not dislocated as much as it is located by postmodernism.

3.3.2. Postmodernism and the psychological sciences

The obvious question now is how postmodernism locates the psychological sciences in particular? What does it say about individualism that extends the discussion

beyond a review of social psychology's own metatheoretical choices, as was focussed on in the previous chapter? Central to the postmodern critique of the psychological sciences in general, and social psychology in particular, is the premise that its individualism coincides with the validation of individualism in Western culture at large. This validation has little to do with the historical importance of persons, but with the organisational and developmental requirements of the modernising world. The processes of modernisation already referred to in the previous section (such as the birth of democracy, capitalism, and notions of freedom and responsibility) assume an active human agent possessing an individualised subjectivity, and psychology provided the vocabulary and techniques to enforce and regulate this. This means that psychology's individualism was never a completely innocent mirroring of a local (Western) self-understanding or ethno-theory. Psychologists were situated as the specialists *producing* a particular subjectivity, and in this way earned their validated social position precisely by contributing to the installment and extension of social power. This is illustrated in the following account by the prominent sociologist of the psychological sciences, Nikolas Rose (1989a):

> The vocabularies of the psychological sciences have made two distinct but related contributions to social powers over the last century. First they provided the terms which enabled human subjectivity to be translated into new languages of government, of schools, prisons, factories, the labour market and the economy. Second, they constituted subjectivity and intersubjectivity as themselves possible objects of rational management, in providing the languages for speaking of intelligence, development, mental hygiene, adjustment and maladjustment, family relations, group dynamics and the like. (p. 106)

It is clear from the above that what is spoken about and brought into the reach of government by psychology is first of all a Western individual, with particular focus on those of them who inhabit the urbanised Western cultural centres. This interrelation

between psychology's subject and the subject of the modernising world at the time when psychology emerged as a discipline is further elaborated in the following extract from Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers (1996). They argue that the Western construction of the person was already in place as a site of political intervention, and that psychology owes its development to its conceived power to provide the means of such interventions:

> A psychology which emerges within Modernism can then easily be seen to have laid upon these new citizen-individuals a similar set of psychological essences. Thus the person was held to be, as a self-contained individual, inhabited by, or possessed of, personality, attitudes, intelligence – just as they were by rights and responsibilities. In this way psychology never (as it is purported to have done) took on the task of discovering these traits in more or less accurate ways. Rather, its task was to recover or uncover them, into an area of governmentability – where they already operated as specific, political constructions of the person-citizen. (p. 28)

However, the proximity between modern socio-political organisation and psychology's investment in the individual has its most obdurate implications *not* in Western societies, but in the Third World (Gilbert, 1986, 1989; Holdstock, 1981). If restricted to an epistemological discussion postmodernism would seem to imply that knowledge claims generated in Western contexts are not *valid* in Third World contexts. In terms of the arguments already presented however, it is clear that postmodernism claims it is not validity but regulation that is often sought after in the social sciences. In the Third World, due to the nature of its political relationship with the West, issues like the regulation of people and the politics of citizenship had always been and still are problematic areas. As is the case with other social sciences, the transportation of psychological knowledge and practices to the Third World must be seen as part and parcel of Western expansionism, imperialism and colonialism (Nicholas & Cooper, 1990)[6]. To state it crudely, its primary concern was

not with the empowerment or even the understanding of indigenous peoples, but with their administration and positioning in the colonial system. Consider the following statement by Bulhan (1993):

> Psychological research in Africa has had a scandalous genesis. And its genesis was indeed colonial. That the study of African psychology is to this day markedly monopolized by Euro-Americans is not so much a consequence of a genuine interest in the African as in fact another working of colonialism. (p. 1)

Colonialism of course does not have only one history. From a South African perspective it is necessary to discuss psychology with explicit reference to Apartheid (Rex, 1984; Webster, 1986; Welsh, 1975). Critical psychologists agree that psychology in South Africa reflected at many different levels the "maintenance, elaboration and justification of apartheid" (Jansen, 1991, p. 3). Apartheid involved the implementation of policies that enforced the formalised segregation of people in terms of their racial characteristics, but its development cannot be seen as simply caused by racism. South Africa experienced a process of rapid modernisation in the early twentieth century, and these processes gave impetus to the institutionalisation of a racism that had already existed. In order to understand the role of psychology in this process it is useful to refer to the rise of industrial capitalism and the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism in this country.

While there are interesting debates about whether racist or capitalist ideologies were most important in the development of Apartheid, this study accepts that it was an outcome of many social forces. It was the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, especially, that fuelled the development of industrial capitalism and a rapid urbanisation in this country (Van Onselen, 1982). Although disrupted by the Anglo-Boer South African War at the turn of the century, these processes picked up once again, and by the 1920s South Africa was an established industrial force. The industries, and especially the mines, created a huge need for cheap manual labour.

Up to that point a large number of white South Africans were farmers, and many black people either lived in rural areas on self-governed homesteads or were working on white farms. For various reasons such as drought and the promise of cash earnings in the cities, white farmers and black migrant workers began to satisfy this need for industrial labour (Fullagar & Paizis, 1986; Louw, 1997).

Urbanisation and industrial labour presented social problems of their own. First, people not fit for work due to disabilities had to be detected and regulated. The government for example passed a Mental Disorders Act in 1916 and started providing facilities for people that were thought of as mentally disordered and defective (Louw & Foster, 1991). But this was a small problem compared to the so-called "Poor White" question. In the early decades of the century a growing section of the urban underclass was white and Afrikaans. This rebelled against the then already firmly entrenched ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism, and also posed the threat of a class alliance between these white people and their black socio-economic counterparts. A huge amount of energy had been invested in the 1930s and 1940s to address the "Poor White" question, with considerable input from the social and human sciences (Louw, 1986).

The above is perhaps an arbitrary snippet from the political history of South Africa, but it serves as a useful framework for understanding that it were socio-political concerns such as these that provided the space in South Africa for the importation of psychology. This importation was initially spearheaded by the practice of mental testing. Consider the depiction by Don Foster (1993):

> Psychology as a separate discipline was only established in the 1920s. The impetus of its development came from the rise of mental testing and concern about the 'menace' presented by the 'discovery' – from about 1913 – of a category of people known as mental defectives. It was a time of intense class-ordering in the new South African union and the great political worry at the time concerned a

potential class alignment between the emerging black and white proletariat in the cities. Thus problems of class-ordering, labour, 'race'-thinking (informed by social Darwinism), mental deficiency and crime were all intertwined. (p. 68)

Psychology in South Africa immediately started providing knowledge that facilitated the governing of the black person. Psychological testing, "so it was argued, provided the possibility of scientifically ordering the population of a country, rationalizing allocation of resources and opportunities" (Louw, 1997, p. 238). More specifically, psychological testing seemingly provided proof that black people were mentally inferior to Europeans. This helped to legitimate racist practices such as imposing wage differences between white and black labourers, since black people were not seen as capable of performing skilled labour. It also eventually legitimated the provision of inferior schooling and training systems for black people, supposedly necessitated by their inferior intellectual abilities. Quite clearly then the belief in the accuracy of knowledge attained from the measurement of black intelligence was not a misguided attempt to know more about black people. It was, for that time, a sufficient rationale for the establishment of a governable black subject and for a racially segregated society. Consequently, there was no real investment in the black individual *as individual*. They simply did not matter enough, and the generalised psychometric figure was sufficient to regulate the development of South African society.

These remarks clearly indicate the political investment of early psychology in South African society, but do not specifically implicate the notion of individualism. In fact, the regulation of black people was first crudely collectively focussed, with too little investment in their individual mobility and political and economic participation to give individualism power as an ideology in this context. Before long, however, this would change. From the early 1960s, and especially during the 1970s, the regulation of black people required not only intervention in labour and education, but in the regulation of a mounting resistance to Apartheid as well. Black resistance, especially

in the guise of the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s, emerged as a powerful attempt to create an alternative black identity or subjectivity. While government response to the rising resistance was primarily militant, basically creating a police state, it was also accompanied by other more ideologically driven strategies such as beginning to support the fostering of a black middle-class. The necessity to invoke individualism and the role of psychology in this regard is explained by Jansen (1991):

> (T)he black middle class would develop a vested interest in the capitalist formation and support it politically. An essential aspect of this was the production of black intellectuals who would organize the social hegemony of the black middle class – hence the importance of education. The new education strategy of the ruling classes was encompassed in the De Lange Report in 1981. The most important functions of (educational) psychologists, psychometric testing and counselling/guidance, were central in the meritocratic educational system envisaged in the report. These functions were to give 'scientific' flavour to the ideology of individual merit. (p. 62)

Jansen (1991) argues that if black people bought into the idea of individual merit it would have defused challenges to a system that oppressed people as a collectivity. But if one accepts the importance of psychology in this regard – being itself now the guardian of that illusive idea, merit – it is further also understandable that the intensification of this ideological strategy would create the desire to specifically produce black *psychologists* (Jansen, 1991). In a critical postmodern sense such people were elected to become the guardians of a Western model and way of being, and of its appropriate forms of subjugation[7]. They were envisioned as more than the guardians of merit; they were to be the very personification of merit itself:

> The black psychologists were part of and were intended to reproduce
> a black middle class committed to 'free enterprise'. Psychology had

been singled out because it carried individualism and subjectivism to the extreme by throwing the person back onto her/his own feelings, values and attitudes, while the social context was ignored. (p. 63)

At this stage it is important to state that this history of political complicity cannot be explained away as a case of the *abuse* of knowledge. In other words, racism in psychology is not reducible to the racist intentions of a number of South African psychologists. Even though there were and are cases of this as well, the issue here is with a more fundamental complicity between psychology as a science and the structure of the Apartheid society. Psychology is described as involved in the reproduction of relations of power in social spheres. The naturalisation of such power relations hide specific Western concerns, of which individualism is an important ingredient. The postmodern critique thus argues that traditional Western psychology, due to its fundamental individualism, will *always* assist in the reproduction of social power – even when the intention of the researcher is contrary to this. Psychology provides the researcher with a frame of reference that cannot fully register the impact of the social.

These claims can also be illustrated with reference to the history of psychology in South Africa. The use of psychological knowledge for racist ends has always been challenged by a liberal humanist tradition in the discipline. It is further precisely this tradition that provided the context for the development of social psychology in South Africa. Liberal humanism in South African psychology was academically institutionalised mainly at English-speaking universities, and can be traced back professionally to the establishment in 1961 of two different psychological societies – divided over the inclusion of black members (Louw, 1987). Since liberal humanism relies on the notion of the primacy of the individual – in this way itself making an important ideological contribution to the development of capitalism and democracy – it remains a problematic stance in contexts of political oppression.

Before turning to the emergence of themes in South African psychology that can be

described as social psychological, consider as an instance of the problematic nature of liberalism the work of Simon Biesheuvel (1943, 1952, 1962). This psychologist is often regarded as a champion of liberalism and anti-racism in South African psychology, and he opposed very strongly the scientific merit of studies that supposedly demonstrated the intellectual inferiority of black people (Louw & Foster, 1991)[8]. This he did by claiming that psychometric tests were not cross-culturally standardised and therefore could not be used to ground such claims (Biesheuvel, 1943). While he was correct in this claim he did not challenge the possibility and meaning of comparison as such, or in any way reflected on the inherent racist investments of the testing empire. This belief in scientific rationality and blindness to the institutional embedded nature of all knowledge claims is rendered especially problematic when Biesheuvel's own scientific practice and position is brought into the picture:

> From 1941 - 1946, Simon Biesheuvel, regarded as one of South Africa's foremost psychologists, was an officer in the Aptitude Test Section of the South African Air Force. This intellectual was also the founder and, since 1946, the director of the NIPR. It was this hegemonic apparatus's function to provide selection services for (white) personnel in the army, for (white) administrative trainees in the iron and steel industries, and for (African) mineworkers in the gold mining industry. (Jansen, 1991, p. 59)

The NIPR referred to above was the National Institute for Personnel Research. Through the development of many psychological tests (e.g. the General Adaptability Battery), it pursued the quest for productivity amongst the South African workforce (Fullager & Paizis, 1986). But the application of knowledge here is clearly equally regulative and racist. Stating it differently, it carries little weight to say that blacks are not necessarily intellectually inferior when the practice and context of psychological testing simply echo and corroborates a racist social environment. It is a blindness to social structure that is endemic of psychology's individualism and is central to any

postmodern critique of the discipline.

Did the liberal tradition in South African social psychology give rise to the same forms of social amnesia? The previous chapter argued that even the most deliberate attempts in social psychology to make the discipline more social failed whenever the discipline held on to a (cognitive) psychological metatheory. This indeed plays itself out in the history of social psychology in South Africa. As was already indicated, social psychology took root in South Africa within a general liberal framework. While the dominant political ideologies saw the solution of intergroup tension in enforced racial segregation, liberal psychologists deemed it necessary to address (especially white) attitudes and prejudices. This liberal approach to intergroup processes led to the importation of social psychological themes to South Africa, even if not the importation of social psychology as a theoretical discipline (Louw & Foster, 1991; Foster, 1999).

The debt in this regard was initially to traditional US approaches, a pattern of influence that was corroborated in the 1950s by the professional visit of two very prominent US social psychologists, Gordon Allport and Thomas Pettigrew (Louw & Foster, 1991). This visit firmly established the study of attitudes and contact theory as important concerns of South African social psychology, to be accompanied especially by research guided by the theory of the authoritarian personality. The following paragraph by Foster (1993) is informative of these developments:

> Apart from early work on mental testing, psychological research has been dominated by three areas: race attitudes, the authoritarian personality, and the contact hypothesis. All three areas are informed by a single, broadly liberal framework: the 'race-relations' position which postulates prejudice as the cause of the problem. In this framework relations between groups are assumed to be determined, or at least shaped, by the attitudes one 'race' group holds towards other 'race' groups. (p. 70)

Quite clearly then social psychology in South Africa immediately shared the individualism of its US counterpart. This did not go unnoticed, especially as many influential South African social psychologists were well aware of the European challenges to traditional social psychology discussed in the previous chapter. During the 1980s then, the crisis in social psychology became a crisis also of social psychology in South Africa. As was indicated in the previous chapter, this crisis challenged social psychological metatheory without problematising its status as a Western cultural practice. The continued importation of social psychology from Western to non-Western academic markets was therefore not itself made problematic, leading to social psychologists in this country refashioning the discipline in terms of answers to the crisis created elsewhere – with developments happening especially around the tradition of IGT (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991; Campbell, 1993).

The previous chapter presented the argument that IGT remains caught up in a perpetual and circular recycling of individualism, and that this seemingly accompanies its insistence on being a *cognitive* social psychology. The value of postmodernism in this instance is that it breaks away from purely metatheoretical concerns and challenges science rather as a vantage point in the elaboration of modernist social forms. No matter how contrary to these the intentions of IGT's proponents are, its insistence on intra-individual cognitive explanations has the following effect: it corroborates the political primacy of the individual, and this, even though in line with liberalism, blinds social psychology to the real mechanisms that reproduce social order. The South African social psychologist Don Foster (1993) can subsequently critique IGT for taking

> ideologically constituted 'groups' as unquestioned givens, and in so
> doing assists in reproducing such groups. Second, the assumed
> causal chain, that mental entities in peoples' heads cause subsequent
> group relations, is questionable. Third, the 'race-prejudice' paradigm

tends to ignore factors such as ideology, politics and class. (p. 71)

These critical remarks clearly indicate a theoretical neglect of the social. By stressing the political primacy of the individual it is indeed possible to maintain that cognitive social psychology, like other expressions of cognitivism, functions as ideology (Sampson, 1981). Its corroboration of individualism provides the rhetorical structure needed for accounts that place the blame for the lack of social and political mobility on individual victims of political inequality and oppression themselves. This is a very dangerous situation, and it is unfortunate when a social psychology that desires to address these societal ills falls prey to the continuing contribution of its knowledge claims to the justification of oppression. Unfortunately, neither social cognition nor IGT can be overlooked on these charges (Henriques, 1984; Michael, 1989).

This critique can be illustrated with a South African example. Susan Lea (1996) conducted an interesting piece of research into explanations and justifications for racism at the University of Cape Town. She used psychology students who were knowledgeable of social cognition research and IGT as interviewees, and asked them to discuss the issue of race with her. In this manner she focussed on these social psychological traditions as explanatory systems away from their formal scientific settings. Her results showed that people found it possible to justify certain racist claims by making use of these social psychological ideas. In other words, it became quite clear that the *science* of social psychology, and specifically these theoretical traditions, "continues to provide racists with arguments which support the existence of races and the legitimation of racism" (Lea, p. 183).

In this section postmodernism was applied to social psychology in a critical sense. It should be clear that postmodernism is not itself a theory or a body of propositions. What was brought to bear on social psychology was a general sense of crisis in scientific self-understanding, usually extending into a realisation that science does not function independent of politics. Rather, the very structure of its rationality is

geared towards the normative rationalisation of forms of life. As part of the psychological sciences social psychology was formed as a discipline around the notion of an individualised psychological subject, and in this way served the regulation of individuals in the formation of the modern world. In a Third World contexts, namely South Africa, the psychological sciences contributed unequivocally to the maintenance and justification of Apartheid. However, postmodernism does not only problematise the abuse of knowledge by scientists who have racist ideas. It attempts to politically locate scientific rationality as such. In this regard it was shown that the critiques levelled against social cognition and IGT in the previous chapter readily extends to the reproduction of social inequalities. Its individualism, rooted in its insistence on an intra-individual cognitive economy, has ideological effect.

This leaves the following questions unanswered: what should remain of social psychology? Does it make sense to still insist on a social *psychology*? What happens to the individual in the analysis of the social world? Questions such as these will now be addressed.

3.4. Social psychology without a subject

The confrontation with postmodernism in social psychology is revealing of things that the mainstream would do well to pay attention to. For one, theoretical and empirical languages are never absolutely transparent and value-free in their depictions of a supposed reality. Indeed, they are often intricately wound up with the socio-political naturalisation and ideological reproduction of culturally and historically specific vocabularies *as* reality. For the scholar who takes more than merely a passing interest in these challenges it becomes necessary to indicate how social psychology should develop to get away from its metatheoretical and political problems. In the light of what has been said thus far, confrontations with postmodernism should ideally take the discipline in a post-individualist direction.

In itself, however, such a statement is rather vacuous. It is unclear if it would mean that social psychology should dispense with the concept of the individual altogether, and what exactly the repercussions of such a step would be on epistemological and empirical levels. On the other hand, if it does not compel social psychology in this direction, it certainly necessitates a complete re-conceptualisation and repositioning of the individual subject in its enquiries. This is an equally difficult and uncharted task and introduces the relation between the individual and the social with renewed force, rather than alleviating it. It seems that whatever direction is taken makes a pressing question of whether it still makes sense to speak of a social *psychology* in contexts where we wish to address the nature and knowledge of personal lives in social worlds.

How than can the notion of the postmodern be used to reconstruct social psychology? A first step towards answering this is to pause for a moment at answers already provided by other social psychologists. For quite a few eminent critical voices in the discipline postmodernism serves now also as a springboard for the formulation of non-individualist and politically challenging approaches to social psychology (Dowd, 1991; Liu & Liu, 1997; Roiser, 1997). Consequently there now circulate a range of recognisable *postmodern trajectories* that supposedly provide the shape for a critical refashioning, rather than merely a deconstruction, of social psychology's disciplinary identity.

However, it is precisely when postmodernism is used to reconstruct social psychology and so exceeds its critical guise that it becomes problematic. Postmodernism is now a powerful cultural signifier, and its currency extends to nearly all contexts of critical thinking and cultural self-reflection, whether these are academically sanctioned or not. Since it is so pervasive in its critical posture, as well as being generative for the elaboration of new understandings of society and human interaction, it becomes difficult to address the limits of its applicability in very circumscribed theoretical discussions – such as the nature of the relation between the individual and the social in social psychology. This inflated currency should alert

social psychologists to be critical and to evaluate the applicability of the reconstructive vocabularies they owe to traditions of postmodernism.

What makes this even more difficult is the fact that social psychology does not enter the debate about postmodernism on terms that are equal with many other disciplines. Simply stated, some disciplines lay more claim to the concept than others – they are so positioned in the academic field that their formulation and use of postmodern vocabularies have greater authorial power than social psychology[9]. Social psychology's lesser stake in this regard relates to its being part of the psychological sciences, a phenomenon that will be addressed in greater detail in the next section. The effect of this is very often a disproportionate amount of critical reflection on social psychology compared to other disciplines that also develop in postmodern directions. In fact, critical social psychologists often subscribe rather *un*critically to the authority of especially philosophical and sociological interpretations of the postmodern, using the formulations they offer of experience and social life to fill up the void they see in their own discipline. This phenomenon will be very clear in the few trajectories that will be described below, and sets the *next* section up as a reformulation of the relation between social psychology and the postmodern.

Susan Condor (1997) captures the power and even vehemence of critical self-reflection in social psychology very clearly in the following extract:

> Psychology, with its history of racism, sexism, heterosexism, with its insistence on the ultimate reality of the self-contained individual, with its technologies for the scrutiny and the self-regulation of the individual subject, with its modernist pretensions to scientific expertise, is not a platform from which we wish to speak. (p. 112)

But social psychology, or so the postmodern sensibility will have us know, leave us with less than a platform from which to speak. It also leaves us with very little left to say about individual and collective life in the context of contemporary patterns of

social (re-)organisation and change. For many social psychologists postmodernism provides itself as an alternative gaze, one that accumulates from available theoretical traditions a vocabulary that replaces the seemingly redundant remnants of traditional social psychology. It is in these contexts that some critics claim that postmodern discourses in themselves "capture *more* of what is happening in social interaction and experience than academic social psychology" (Parker, 1989a, p. 136), resulting from "a growing boredom with current psychological knowledge" (Kvale, 1992a, p. 10).

The elaboration of postmodern trajectories for social psychology nearly always takes as point of departure the supposed erosion of the legitimacy of an essentialist ontology of the individual person. As Steinar Kvale (1992b) asserts, the "question arises as to the status of psychology as the science of the individual when the individual has been dethroned from the centre of the world" (p. 40). What should be clear is that this erosion is more than an *epistemological* challenge to social psychology: it sees the erosion of individual subjectivity, the idea of a self-contained psychological subject, as an effect of historical changes in the structure of Western culture and society. Just as social psychology developed as a disciplinary apparatus that had to contribute to the installment and regulation of the form of subjectivity required by the development of industrial and democratic states, it now loses its value precisely due to comparable changes that require less unified and self-enclosed ways of being (Henriques, Hollway, Venn, Walkerdine, & Urwin, 1984). In other words, the figure of the Western individual that so plagued the development of social psychology is not simply exposed for being culturally relative; it is also seen as historically under threat in its own contexts of creation. The social psychologist Edward Sampson (1989) describes the implications of this realisation for social psychology in the following manner:

> ...(S)tudying the individual makes sense under the historical conditions of modernism, in which the individual became the central unit and organizing principle of society... It is my contention that the

age of individualism has already moved off centre stage for Western, industrialized societies and is rapidly being replaced by a more functional unit. Quite simply, understanding the individual *qua* individual is no longer relevant to understanding human life. (p. 916)

Leaving aside for now the more functional unit of analysis that Sampson alludes to, it is clear that he agrees that the crisis of social psychology should be redefined as "a crisis of the problematic nature of the self in the contemporary (post) modern world" (Dowd, 1991, p. 196). Social psychology should take heed of the nature of the changes affecting the postmodern world and align its own practices with these. However, since the changes are so often seen as ending the era of the individual, and since social psychology is understood as existing by grace of a social system structured around an individualised agency, some critical scholars claim that it cannot align to these changes and remains a useful practice. Such social psychologists readily claim that the concerns of social psychology "may just as well be carried out by other disciplines, such as anthropology, literary criticism, communication and media research" (Kvale, 1992b, p. 47). These disciplines are more relevant, simply because they do not depend upon the notion of the individual. As far as this registers as a developmental trajectory for social psychology it might be referred to, in the words of Susan Condor (1997), as "emigration fantasies". The place to be doing valuable social studies is elsewhere.

More creative perhaps is a trajectory one may refer to as "experiential democratisation". According to Sampson (1991) for example, the postmodern social psychologist should come to terms with the fact that her discipline provides no universal descriptions of human nature. Rather, it circulates culturally specific notions and leaves uncharted many other legitimate formulations of human nature and forms of self-understanding. What is more, these other models of the person, so to speak, are not only marginalised and ignored in social psychology, but in the cultural texts and practices that reproduce Western society at large. These claims relate to the realisation in the previous section that social psychology owed the

relative stability and rationality of its knowledge claims to its complicity with reproductive social power.

Sampson (1991) continues to say that social psychology should set itself up with a radically new epistemological and political posture. It should direct itself at those places where groups, cultures and subcultures resist the theoretical models that are imposed on them, and assert the integrity of their own experience. Of course, there are many such groupings, not only non-Western: women, homosexuals and the disabled are but a few of the marginalised within Western society itself. The involvement of social psychology here should not be in the service of truth but in the service of change. This means that social psychology will not formulate expert knowledge claims, but rather function as the midwife for the stories and narratives that make up the diversity of cultures and that had hitherto been structurally denied recognition by society.

Susan Condor (1997) summarises this approach in the following way: "The task for Western psychologists would no longer be to inform other people about the 'facts' of their psychology, but rather to analyse the processes by which indigenous constructions of self function in the life of the community" (pp. 114 - 115). In other words, a postmodern social psychology concerns itself not with knowledge as the search for elusive universals, but with knowledge as local achievements in world- and self-making. Politically speaking the epistemological and empirical task of the social psychologists is to "give voice", a gesture that means social psychology literally becomes again an (open) platform from which to speak. As Sampson (1991) expresses it himself, social psychology undergoes

> a kind of epistemological or experiential democraticization: that is, an effort to democraticize the bases of human self-understanding by establishing a greater equality of 'voice' in setting forth the very terms by which human experience, knowledge and meaning are framed and understood. (p. 275)

A trajectory that relates closely to the above can be described as "experiential transformation". This approach acknowledges that the form of individual life is deeply rooted in contemporary social conditions and processes. Where modernity fixed our sense of identity in individualist vocabularies and practices, postmodernity somehow changes the experiential conditions that inform our sense of self and identity, because it transforms the life-world in ways that concretely destabilises the unitary individual being of a passing era. No longer can the stuff of psychology (emotions, intentions, personality) be seen as unitary processes issuing forth from a consciousness that exists prior to culture or forms of social relatedness more generally.

According to some social psychologists, and the most notable here is certainly Kenneth Gergen, this does not demolish social psychology but rather present it with a different task. Gergen (1991) begins by analysing the nature of changes that characterise the postmodern world with regard to human self-understanding and experience. For his analysis he draws extensively from developments in information technology. Because things such as electronic mail and air travel make it increasingly easy to maintain multitudes of relationships and other media such as television and the Internet make us always more vulnerable to meanings and practices other than our own, we are saturated by others and by the knowledge that our ways of life are very relative and contingent. The social and cultural frontiers that encapsulate our experiences and sense of self are shifted further back:

> ...(S)ocial saturation brings with it a general loss in our assumption of
> true and knowable selves. As we absorb multiple voices, we find that
> each "truth" is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of
> compelling alternatives. We come to be aware that each truth about
> ourselves is a construction of the moment, true only for a given time
> and within certain relationships. (Gergen, 1991, p. 16)

Consequently, we are also presented with the possibility of the self or of identity as a personal and reflexive project, something not prefabricated, but made up in relationship with others. The important fact for Gergen is that this possibility is the experiential correlate of a new socio-historical phase: that of postmodernity. He does not shy away from postulating that social psychologists should now study a new form of consciousness, namely the postmodern consciousness:

> With the spread of postmodern consciousness, we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling, and faith in progress. In their stead, an open slate emerges on which persons may inscribe, erase, and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding, and incoherent networks of relationships invites or permits. (Gergen, 1991, p. 228)

Because Gergen maintains that selves and identities are never substantially given or projected from an isolated cognitive capsule, he stays clear of an essentialist ontology of the person. Selves and identities are products of relationships and therefore require an ontology that takes account of this (Gergen, 1995). For Gergen dialogue and conversation are the proper units of analysis for social psychology, because it is here that the relational events that are generative of persons take place[10]. This also leads him to reconsider the role of theory in social psychology, and therefore the identity of social psychology as a discipline. The theoretical task of social psychology cannot be simply descriptive or accommodating as was the proposition by Sampson in the above paragraphs. Apart from telling it like it is, Gergen maintains, social psychology should also tell it like it might become – the nature of individual participation in social life, that is (Gergen, 1982, 1991). Because social psychology has the ability to contribute to the nature of self-understanding in a community, it should assist in the construction or the making available of models that would be more suitable for life in a rapidly changing Western society. This generative view of theory entails that social psychology's knowledge constructions

feed directly into eventual cultural form:

> ...(O)nce we have fashioned a "picture of the self", we have essentially charted the parameters within which all further questions can be asked. We have also established the kinds of meanings that will be communicated to the society, and that will contribute to the cultural future. (Gergen, 1991, p. 25)

As such, social psychology becomes again an important intellectual pursuit. As Gergen (1985b) explains in another context, social psychology assumes a

> critical role in the intellectual community. To the extent that the generation of knowledge is a social process and the social psychologist is committed to an understanding of such processes, then social psychological inquiry does not parallel that of the physicist, chemist, historian, or economist, for example; rather, the social psychologist could become indispensable in elucidating the grounds upon which physical, chemical, historical, or economic knowledge is based. (p. 548)

This trajectory differs from the previous example in that it does not stop short at creating the narrative space for other subjectivities, but in that it sees social psychology as itself capable of creating subjectivities that will result in a society where we will be better suited to live with difference, with relationships that do not share a cultural core or creed. This of course does not contradict the call for experiential democratisation, but adds to that idea. Both redefine social psychology in a manner that seemingly rids it of its modernist preconceptions, making it suitable for a postmodern world. Of course, being suitable for a postmodern world cannot and may not only mean that social psychology fits into prefabricated theoretical notions of postmodernity. It has to mean, amongst other things, that it can be exported from the Western cultural and intellectual centres to the non-Western world

in order to contribute to the understanding of social and individual phenomena there. In other words, it has to be able to engage empirically in what is theoretically captured by the notion of postmodernity.

Is this achieved by these three trajectories? Each of the three trajectories mentioned have important failings. Saying for example that other discipline's are better suited to study social processes neglect the fact that all knowledge has political dimensions, and that other social sciences certainly were also in complicity with the modernising project. What is more, it risks presenting postmodernism as a reified set of propositions that leaves unquestioned the particular socio-historical and academic locations that gave rise to them. Social psychology then ends up accepting social scientific descriptions of postmodernity as a ready-made conceptualisation of the social. In the next section it will be explicitly argued that social psychology and indeed the social sciences in general gain little from resolutions offered in the form of emigration fantasies, but it already becomes apparent in the other two trajectories discussed.

The idea of experiential transformation, as is proposed by Kenneth Gergen, is limited in at least two ways relevant to the current discussion. First, Gergen seems to describe and capture only the experiences of one category of contemporary society, namely the intellectuals. Insofar as intellectuals, and here the notion is generative for academics, artists and the educated elite in general, are reassessing their position in society and reflexively engaging in the formation of new identities, the notion of the postmodern certainly has value (Bauman, 1994). However, for social psychology to elevate as a rule the experience of one group of the society is not acceptable. It does not tell us at all how the postmodern impinges on people who live in the Third World for example; people with no access to the systems of communication that Gergen describes and bases his argument on.

The trajectory here referred to as experiential democratisation might seem to come closer at providing an understanding of social psychology in a multicultural context,

and therefore better suited to conceptualise the nature of the social in social psychology in the light of an understanding of postmodernity. For this reason it will be looked at more closely in the next section, where it will be argued that it misses important dimensions of both identity formation and the nature of the cultural patterning of behavioural form.

3.5. A social psychology of the postmodern?

It is clear that the trajectories described above reveal the creativity of social psychological responses to the postmodern, but that they are also problematic. The reason for this is that they confront the postmodern as it is defined by other disciplines, rather than studying its empirical manifestations independently. On the surface this might seem laudable in an academic environment where the value of interdisciplinary work is endorsed. However, rather than bolstering it limits interdisciplinary work, since social psychology fails to elaborate and contribute its own responses to what the postmodern might mean in terms of the structures and processes of individual lives in social, cultural and historical contexts. Added to this, social psychology ends up importing the blind-spots that other discipline's bring to the study of postmodernity.

The current section takes these concerns further for two reasons. First, if approaches to the postmodern in other social sciences are critically addressed, it becomes clear that there are indeed certain blind-spots. Since many of these relate once again to the difficulty of conceptualizing the relation between the individual and the social, it is argued that it is premature to abandon the idea of a social *psychology*. The second reason has to do with the role of the postmodern in the remainder of this thesis. The next chapter will introduce and evaluate discursive attempts to elaborate a postmodern, post-individualist social psychology. The current discussion therefore seeks to elaborate a conception of the postmodern, and of the notion of postmodernity in particular, that will serve as background for the remainder of the study. Because it is still argued that the postmodern provides a

useful framework for reconsidering social psychology as a social science, even though the trajectories discussed have certain shortcomings, it is necessary to enhance the framework that will be used.

In a recent critical discussion Gavin Kendall and Mike Michael (1997) compared social psychology's response to expositions of postmodernism with that of sociology. This was their conclusion:

> In social psychology, grapplings with post-modernist ideas have been mostly focussed upon redefining (and decentring) the identity of the discipline. However, this stands in partial contrast to other treatments of the post-modern, especially in sociology. There we find in addition to a concern with epistemology and methodology, a parallel effort to map out the *reality* of the post-modern in relation to a range of social and theoretical issues. (p. 14)

This development in sociology provides a valuable comparative model to evaluate social psychology's orientation towards the postmodern. The development in sociology to which Kendall and Michael are referring was by no means accidental. Now already more than a decade ago, sociologists started expressing their concerns with what they regarded as the uncritical import of postmodern ideas into their discipline. They claimed that while the debate about postmodernism provided valuable dividends, it could not replace empirical sociological work altogether. Featherstone (1989), for example, said that the uncritical importation of postmodernist ideas from philosophy and literary theory specifically occasions "a particularly restrictive notion of experience – that which appears in literary sources and is so designated by intellectuals" (p. 199). He continued to say:

> Thus while learned references to the characteristic experiences of post-modernity are important we need to work from more systematic data and should not rely on the readings of intellectuals. In effect we

should focus upon the actual cultural practices and changing power balances of those groups engaged in the production, classification, circulation and consumption of post-modern cultural goods... We must relinquish the attraction of a post-modern sociology and work towards a sociological account of post-modernism. (pp. 200 - 201)

The same critique can now be raised against recent developments in social psychology. The question is of course whether social psychology, especially in the light of its many metatheoretical problems, has any reason to resist the authority of already existing descriptions of postmodernity and postmodern subjectivity – and whether it has the authority to add anything useful to these discussions. This can be affirmatively argued for by addressing instances of postmodernity as it affects the political and experiential aspects of contemporary patterns of living, and then not only in the Western world. The interrelated theme of multiculturalism and identity politics is a useful framework in this regard, since it is both academically in vogue and radically affects life in a post-Apartheid South Africa. In order to understand the notion of multiculturalism in the light of discussions about modernity and postmodernity, consider the following depiction by Van der Merwe (1997):

Multiculturalism... refers to the paradoxical nature of the present, globalising late-modern or "postmodern" culture. On the one hand there can be no doubts that the cultural "forms of life" of modernity which developed out of the European Enlightenment – for example, democracy, market economy, science and technology – have expanded and will continue to expand globally. The result of this globalisation of modernity is the transformation and equalisation of the everyday existence – the "Lebenswelt" – of all peoples of all cultures. *But, perhaps contrary to what might have been expected, this globalisation of modernity is accompanied by a heightened awareness of and attachment to particular cultures and culture-specific values. The process of globalisation is not a process of cultural*

homogenisation but of increasing fragmentation and pluralisation. (p. 75, my emphasis)

Closely related to this is the realisation that political struggle should be conceptualised in an appropriate manner, leading to the popularity of the notion of identity. Discussions of identity, seen as a socio-cultural rather than a psychological phenomenon, have flooded the social sciences in recent years. As it is used to describe the nature of political claims, the patterning of experience, and thus the relation between the individual and the social (Glick Schiller, 1994), identity became every bit as popular as the notion of class, for example, was earlier (West, 1994). This popularity is also not limited to academic discussions abroad: consider the following from a recent research proposal published in the monthly bulletin of the National Research Foundation's Division for Social Sciences and Humanities (Bornman, 1998):

> The discourse of identity has spread rapidly within the academic world where it has become the primary medium for understanding and explaining the relationship between the personal (subjective) and the social; the individual and the group; the cultural and the political as well as the group and the state. (p. 1)

Therefore "most academics concur that aspects of identity are fundamental to understanding the processes that link the individual and personal experience to large-scale and political processes" (Bornman, 1998, p. 1). At this stage it might seem as if the state of social theory simply corroborates the postmodern trajectories for social psychology that was introduced in the previous section, especially that of Sampson (1985, 1988, 1993). However, identity in itself can hardly account for all there is to the cultural strategies and patterns that both reflect and create the condition of postmodernity. Mala Singh (1997), for example, states that the social sciences are faced with explaining how "psychological and political processes at individual and communal levels intersect to explain why people become receptive

or vulnerable to being organised around specific notions of identity at specific times" (Singh, 1997, p. 121). Identity related phenomena should be explained in terms of their social constitution and the psychological processes involved in political organisation.

Closely related to discussions of multiculturalism and identity in contemporary social sciences and philosophy is a concern with the development of a postmodern social ethics (Bauman, 1995; Lash, 1996a, 1996b). Crudely stated the concern here is with finding the most appropriate manner in which diversity might be acknowledged and even celebrated, while also diverting the conflict so often imminent whenever it is allowed to flourish in a society. Postmodern ethics is often envisioned as a celebration of difference, a generative openness to "the Other" that finds its point of departure in a radical realisation that the self is not a unitary essence, and always already inhabited by "the Other". These are exciting and interesting debates, but also in need of social scientific contributions that will ground it in richer accounts of how difference is resisted and exclusive accounts of identity maintained. Consider in this regard the following critical comment by Scott Lash (1996b):

> The problem is that most postmodernist writers on ethics – such as Bauman, Derrida and Levinas – only address the element of deconstruction, of ambivalence or difference, while ignoring the dimension of groundedness, the dimension of forms of life. (p. 91)

Part of these neglected dimensions have to do with the extent of the cultural patterning of behaviour, affect and understanding. As approached by the social sciences and philosophy, postmodern ethics cannot be divorced from important discussions about epistemology. Since the possibility of intercultural understanding or intercultural dialogue and negotiation of meaning is at stake, debates hover between an epistemological relativism that claims different cultural experiences are not communicable and incommensurable, and debates that say it is possible to translate from one form of life to another. The aim is not to debate these issues

here. In fact, Lash's critique implies that these issues are not only epistemological in nature, and require a deeper understanding of the strategies of culture. Consider Van der Merwe's (1997) claim:

> (T)here will always be a point, both in our intercultural philosophical endeavours and in our societal life, where we will stumble upon the incommensurable – not because of a supposed mutual exclusion of our cultures or the impossibility of intercultural communication and understanding, but because our culturally embedded values defy even our own understanding, justification and explanation. (p. 77)

A postmodern ethics then, just as the understanding of processes of identity politics, requires deeper understanding of how culture manages to impinge on human life. It therefore, in asking what ties us up in our culturally circumscribed behavioural forms, also involves more than asserting and celebrating difference, as Sampson (1991) for example implies. All these social and intellectual phenomena discussed in this section effectively invites a social *psychology* to the fold of social studies. This is not to say that any unitary individuality will be theorised. The sociologist Alain Touraine (1995) provides a valuable formulation of the location of a social *psychology* in the cultural sphere of postmodernity. He acknowledges the socio-cultural genesis of modern individuality, but then asserts that this individuality still poses certain questions of a psychological nature: "Mass society requires individualistic actors, but the capacity to be an individual and an actor requires long-terms references, identification with a tradition as well as the capacity to use techniques and languages" (p. 15).

While the above paragraphs are intended as a defence of social psychology as it confronts postmodernism and the conditions of postmodernity, it was not made clear why sociology, for example, cannot study the mentioned aspects of individual embeddedness in culture on its own terms. In one sense it certainly can: the aim of this section is not to naturalise disciplinary boundaries or to claim that culturally

circumscribed phenomena have ontological correlates on a psychological level. What is argued however is that a social psychology remains a useful pursuit, precisely because of the way that it problematises the relationship between individual and social. This is clearly still an important conceptual dilemma even in theories of the postmodern. What is important here is that the traditional division between psychology and sociology not only negatively affected the former. Sociology itself developed as a discipline with a rather impoverished account of the individual. As Lynch (1992, p. 285) says, "whether designed to be passive or active, the 'agent' or 'actor' in a sociological theory is an abstraction." Social psychology might yet become the useful bridge between the psychological and other social sciences it once promised to be.

A final but very interesting concern is why sociology is allowed to play such a prominent role in the development of theories of postmodernity? If it also suffers a reductionism related to modernist disciplinary formations, why is not problematised to the extent psychology and social psychology are? If the severe segregation of sociological and psychological perspectives is indicative of a "pathology of knowledge" (Moscovici, 1993, p. 9), this pathology also makes itself felt in contemporary postmodern approaches. As Moscovici (1993) continues: "We live in an age of economics and sociology. Our natural inclination is to explain any kind of phenomenon in terms of economics and sociology. If needs be, we carry this to the point of absurdity" (p. 3). This inclination clearly reveals itself in theories of postmodernity, where sociological and economic explanations are elevated to account for most of the transformations it entails.

The general poverty this brings to an understanding of individual participation in social and cultural life can be illustrated by revisiting the sociology of scientific knowledge. The sociological accounts of science that have fed into the postmodern turn in the social sciences often leave unquestioned the role of the scientist as an active and involved agent, in a manner which mirrors the placid subjectivity ascribed to social actors generally. As Pleasants (1998, p. 144) describes it: "Neither the

accounts of scientists themselves, nor those of their philosophical 'underlabourers' were able to withstand this new sociological scrutiny". This translates for Pleasants into a "sociological hegemony" (p. 144) or a "sociological imperialism" (p. 144), "portraying scientists as 'sociological dopes'" (p. 149). The challenge for a social psychology of the postmodern – whether it wants to study postmodernity as a set of social and cultural shifts or the spread of ideas itself – is clearly to overcome this reduction of individual agency without receding to its own traditional reduction of the social.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter set out to place the crisis in social psychology in a larger intellectual and cultural framework. In order to do this the notion of postmodernism was introduced and applied to social psychology. It was argued that its reconstructive use is somewhat limited, and that social psychology would do well to move in directions that will enable it to provide independent contributions to our understanding of the conditions of postmodernity. The direction that social psychology should take will have to be post-individualist, but should also provide a language that better describes individual participation in social and cultural life. It is here that the philosophy of language itself becomes useful, and it is to this that the discussion now turns.

NOTES

1. The work of the artist Andy Warhol comes to mind here. Recall the way he presented as works of art repetitious images, such as his famous painting of the cans of Campbell's soup.

2. Both the ideas of Derrida and Foucault will be introduced in the next chapter. For valuable introductions to Heidegger and Adorno, see the book on European movements in philosophy by Richard Kearney (1995).

3. Baudrillard is an extremely popular figure in intellectual circles. Often referred to as the "high priest" of postmodernism, his work is characterised by intriguing analyses of the "signscapes", so to speak, of modern Western society. For example, he wrote a popular book about the significations surrounding end-ist fantasies and thoughts associated with the coming of the new millennium (Baudrillard, 1995b).

4. This implicates, as will become clear, both the natural and the social sciences. In this section themes from both will be addressed to attain an understanding of the nature the postmodern critique against science, and thus knowledge and truth, in general.

5. The notion of paradigm will be revisited in the next chapter, when language is introduced in terms of discourses: frameworks of meaning that determine what can and cannot be thought and communicated. What here constrains activity within the circumscribed domains of scientific disciplines will then prove to structure social life – and individual participation in it – in general.

6. Studies about the history of psychology in South Africa have been few and far between. There are indications, however, that this is changing. A very useful way to throw light on the history of psychology is by doing content analyses of published material. In this way trends (what is being researched?; where is it done?; who is doing the research?; etc.) are revealed, and one can get a clear indication of important shifts in the discipline. For a broad overview of the themes and concerns that have characterised South African psychology from 1948 to 1988, see Seedat (1998). Another overview, focussing on the themes of race and relevance in the *South African Journal of Psychology*, is provided by Durrheim and Mokeki (1997).

7. This shouldn't be read as implying that all black psychologists were mere pawns of the Apartheid regime. For a contrary indication, just think about the important critical work of N. Chabani Manganyi (1973, 1981, 1991), who was the first black clinical psychologist to be trained in South Africa.

8. This work was done specifically in response to the research around intelligence by M.L. Fick (1939). This psychologist was instrumental in the standardisation of the first intelligence tests for South African conditions, and also used his research to "prove" that black people were intellectually inferior and in fact not "educatable".

9. Sociology is in fact a good example of this. Many of the most prominent theorists of the postmodern nowadays are affiliated to the discipline of sociology. In this regard just refer to Bauman

(1992, 1994), Featherstone (1989) and Lash (1990). Apart from Kenneth Gergen (1991) there are but a few psychologists (or social psychologists) that really enjoy a warranted voice in these intellectual debates.

10. Dialogue and other relational terms hinting on the role of language have become very important in psychology. This will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter *4*

Discourse, culture and experience: Critical reflections on language in social psychology

4.1. Introduction

The table is now set to take on seriously the challenges posed to social psychological theorising by contemporary developments in the philosophy of language. While these challenges can be addressed on many different levels, the focus will remain here on the nature of the relation between the individual and the social, still the major site of struggle for social psychology's identity as a discipline. Where the previous chapters have traced attempts to breech this metatheoretical dilemma from two quite distinct vantage points – the metatheoretical constraints imposed by (especially cognitive) psychology and the geopolitical formation of psychology as a discipline – this chapter will focus on how an explicit focus on the role of language sheds new light on both these perspectives, while locating the discussion specifically in the context of the development of a critical social psychology in South Africa.

The reference in the last sentence above is of course to the development that has already been introduced as discursive social psychology. Drawing from non-referential accounts of language, discursive social psychology indicates an integration of empirically and socio-politically driven concerns around a social constructionist understanding of psychological phenomena as emerging from discursive processes. This integration (the unitary notion of a discursive social psychology is itself a rhetorical move that hides a considerable amount of intellectual labour) is however not without complexity and contradiction: the notions of discourse that have been introduced in social psychology often differ substantially, especially with regard to the position of the individual in relation to the production of meaning. It is one of the

challenges of this chapter to differentiate between these approaches while at the same time indicating their integration into a discursive approach.

The scope of discursive social psychology can best be understood in terms of the discussions in the preceding chapters. In order to account for meaningful human activity and the interrelation between cognitive and societal processes, and thus to break down the rift between cognition and society, the ground covered by especially intergroup theory is revisited. Language use is now employed to provide a better account of cognition and processes of meaning-giving such as categorisation. But it is not only the domain of cognitive social psychology and its metatheoretical constraints that is revisited. By focussing on how language is constitutive of subjectivity and psychology as such (including here its disciplinary status), the geopolitical nature of social psychological knowledge claims is also dismantled. As this relates to the discussions about the postmodern in the previous chapter, it is necessary at this point to note that the paradigm shift in the understanding of language, from one that sees language as merely a referential system to one that sees it as constitutive of human experience and reality, is itself often cast as part of the postmodern turn. The turn to language accompanies the crises of rationality, positive knowledge and modernisation as *a crisis of representation*. However, it will here be discussed as an independent development, or rather set of developments, that have histories in philosophy and linguistics quite distinct from discussions of the postmodern.

The main objective of this chapter is of course to provide a *critical* evaluation of discursive social psychology in terms of the way it addresses the relation between the individual and the social. Here the use of non-referential accounts of language is of great concern, and it will be argued that language does in fact not provide the best grounding for a social psychology that has to study individual lives as they are enmeshed in the social, cultural and political realities of contemporary South Africa. The reason for this is that although it clearly achieves a more social account of cognition and experience, and although it seemingly resolves challenges of intellectual colonialism by endorsing a constructionist understanding of social psychological

phenomena, discursive social psychology makes itself guilty of another reduction. It sees the relation between the individual and the social as patterned only on the level of the symbolic or the reflexive, leaving the material and practical involvement of individuals in the world largely unaccounted for. The effect of this, quite simply, is that social psychology still falls conceptually short of really understanding the nature of oppression and the vistas open for resistance and social change on a level that takes seriously the social and cultural dimensions of experience. These are serious claims, and to sufficiently flesh them out the chapter will be structured as follows.

Since language forms such an integral part of the developments in social psychology discussed here, the first section will map the philosophical shift from referential to non-referential accounts of language. One of the interesting aspects about these developments is that they take the form of what appears like a philosophical or intellectual Zeitgeist: shifts to non-referential theories of language occurred independent from one another both in terms of intellectual tradition and geographical location. However, this does not mean that these traditions agree on how language should be understood as a constitutive medium. In this section the focus will fall on two such traditions that have proved of particular importance to social psychology in recent years. The first is the tradition of analytical or ordinary language philosophy, here represented by the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein; and the second the post-structural accounts fed by Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics.

The three sections following this description map out the development of a discursive social psychology along these philosophical lines. This way of breaking up the terrain might be somewhat artificial, but it provides valuable insight into what language *does* in social psychology on different levels. First to be discussed is the ordinary language approach as it was spearheaded by Wittgenstein and his philosophical heirs. In social psychology this is elaborated to provide theoretical and empirical correctives to many of the concerns riddling the development of traditional cognitive social psychology. This is illustrated in terms of the development of a rhetorical approach to categorisation by the social psychologist Michael Billig, and its relevance particularly to research on racism in South Africa.

Second on the agenda is the way analytic or ordinary language philosophy goes further to challenge the notion of information processing as a metaphor of the human mind. In its place a social constructionist view of mind and of the person in general is proposed. These developments have greater resonance with postmodern debates in that it clearly locates itself as critical of the ontological assumptions of traditional social psychology. Rather than seeing psychological phenomena as rooted within a unitary individual, it sees it as localised cultural achievements. While many of these debates focus more on the reconstruction of cognitive psychology as such, it is definitely social psychologically relevant. Most importantly it shows that individual psychology is a derivative of a prior social psychology rather than the other way around.

This focus on the social construction of the person provides a link with post-structural accounts. From this perspective it is not the use of language that is of vital performance, but language conceived as an abstract framework of meaning, or a generative system that carves up the world into particular categories, possible objects and subject positions. In other words, it precedes the actual use of language and determines what can legitimately be said and thought. Here it is especially the work of French philosopher and historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, that has been extremely influential in social psychology. His accounts of the relation between power and knowledge embellish a view of discourse that has exciting political implications.

The following section is more concerned with the integration of these approaches and the way a discursive social psychology addresses the relation between the individual and the social in social psychology. In this regard two notions are especially relevant: that of reflexivity and ideology. While reflexivity is used to account for the nature of meaning and the way experience is socially produced and patterned, ideology is used to account for the naturalisation of experience when the particular meanings that frame a form of life are actually reproductive of power relations in a society. Together these notions promise to abolish the existence of a dichotomous relation between the individual and the social. Rather, the relation is dialectical, in that it is both in and

through language that subjectivities are located and have the power to challenge those constructions.

The chapter then moves on to critically evaluate the claims made in the name of a discursive social psychology. In this regard it is argued that since the exclusive demarcation of psychological phenomena as belonging to the discursive order makes it impossible to see experience as also pre-reflexively and non-propositionally patterned: the immersion in a form of life is always, on the psychological level, reflexively mediated. This is a problematic stance, because it makes it difficult to understand the tenacity of experiences and forms of conduct, as well as the nature of the agency that will occasion social change when particular cultural patterns are deeply ingrained.

This study has as its aim only a critical introduction of discursive social psychology. There is therefore no systematic attempt to rectify on a conceptual level the limitations that are identified here. In the concluding section, however, a few suggestions are made to open possible avenues of exploration in this regard.

4.2. The turn to language in twentieth century thought

Twentieth century philosophy is characterised by a pervasive, even obsessive concern with language. References to the linguistic turn are now commonplace in philosophy, referring to the way different traditions of thought, in largely independent fashion, have stumbled upon the realisation that language is not the transparent vehicle of thought and experience it was traditionally understood to be. Rather, language increasingly revealed itself as an obstacle that should be accounted for in terms of its mediating and even constitutive role in thought and experience (Van der Merwe, 1994a). This gradual realisation exceeded the internal transformation of philosophy and also caused a "changing of the guard" in both the philosophy and practices of the social sciences. It would in fact be justified to say that the preoccupation with language and its constructive nature is one of the most decisive features of the contemporary state of academic debate in the social sciences and the humanities.

The linguistic turn in philosophy hinges on a few general assumptions. These assumptions are best presented in contrast to traditional images of language adhered to in philosophy ever since early Greek thought. First, language does not passively represent thought and experience, but has a constitutive role in our thought and our experience of reality. In some recent approaches, as will become clear, language is in fact attributed with the *construction* of reality[1]. Second, and related to this, language is not a collection of names or a nomenclature. This implies that the meanings of words are not entirely external to language itself – they are not based in an objectively known reality, nor in the conceptual projections of a self-present and self-reflexive mind. The meanings of words are to a large extent internal to the logic of the linguistic system, or a function of their contextual use. Third, with language no longer seen as primarily referential, and the self-evident nature of thought and experience suspended in terms of a constructionist logic, our epistemological relation to reality becomes dependent upon interpretation (Ricoeur, 1979; Van der Merwe, 1994a).

To relate these general comments to the discussion of social psychology it will be useful to introduce two specific traditions of philosophical reflection on language. First of these is the approach of analytical philosophy and its concern with ordinary language, spearheaded and here represented by the influential work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The second is that of post-structuralism, or to draw the net somewhat wider, all those approaches that feed from the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure. This model of language will be discussed here alongside its post-structural reformulation by Jacques Derrida. While these traditions and scholars are adequate exemplars of the process under discussion, namely the shift from referential to non-referential understandings of language, they are also more than this. Discursive social psychologists actively engage their ideas in theoretical discussion, making them important and explicit reference points in the development of recent developments in social psychology.

The discussion will begin with Wittgenstein. This philosopher started his career within the framework of logical positivism, where the nature of language and meaning became an important topic in the context of understanding scientific rationality (Pears, 1985). Because scientific knowledge was paradigmatically confined to sense data, language had to have the ability to mirror empirical reality without adding to or taking anything away from it. Because ordinary language itself is far from perfect as a referential vehicle, logical positivists attempted to identify the core laws of logic and to produce mathematical or ideal languages suited for scientific knowledge claims. Wittgenstein's earliest work (Wittgenstein, 1961) can be read in this context, since he explicitly set out to determine through logical analysis the exact boundaries or limits of the meaningful use of language. Stated differently, he wanted to delineate the relation between language and experience in order to understand how it is possible for language to refer to things in the world, or to have a referential or representational function.

This philosophical project was guided by the assumption that meaning has a universal and logical structure, and that its relation to language is thus transcendental. Because this relation is transcendental, it is possible to determine the limits of meaningful language through a purely philosophical reflection on logic. This focus on the transcendental preconditions of the constitution of meaning clearly reveal a traditional understanding of language as transparent; language merely carries a structure that exists prior to it. In fact, Wittgenstein's early philosophy can be seen as an attempt to justify the traditional view of language within the context of factual discourse, which almost inevitably implies scientific language. To summarise in the words of Van der Merwe and Voestermans (1995):

> Wittgenstein attempts to justify these traditional assumptions by reducing language, through a rigorous logical analysis, to the essential structure or 'logical grammar' which makes the constitution of meaning – and therefore the reference of language to experience – possible. (p. 30)

Many philosophers considered the product of Wittgenstein's labour a brilliant philosophical justification for the positivist programme of logical empiricism in the sciences (Kenny, 1973; Pears, 1985). Brilliant it certainly was, but it was also marred by a fundamental flaw that would make the shift to a non-referential account of language necessary. Wittgenstein (1961) described language as a totality of propositional symbols that provide logical pictures of facts or possible facts in the world. In other words, there is (or should be) an exact pictorial correspondence between the elements of a sentence or proposition and that which it depicts. It is this correspondence that makes any linguistic product meaningful. The critical consequence of this is that many language acts we encounter in our everyday lives cannot really be said to be meaningful, and thus fall outside the domain of scientific knowledge – since "the only experience expressible or describable by means of language are actual or possible perceptions of actual or possible empirical facts" (Van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995, p. 31).

It is thus clear that Wittgenstein's early inquiries assumed that language was a purely referential system, and that this made it possible to impose upon it the requirement of a transcendental logical form when applied to the rational scrutiny of scientific knowledge claims. However, while many philosophers and others bought into this analysis, Wittgenstein (1987, 1988) realised that his theory of language was clearly self-defeating. Developing a theory that sees meaningful language as consisting of propositions that picture objects or facts in the world is itself a linguistic statement or language act – one that cannot itself make claim to being meaningful. Since it is impossible to verify such a view of language with reference to any sort of (possible) fact in the world, it must be dismissed as an unverifiable metaphysical speculation, and always beyond the threshold of rational (scientific) knowledge. The implications of this insight were immense in the subsequent development of Wittgenstein's thought and Western philosophy at large. As Van der Merwe and Voestermans (1995) state it:

> By default the book on a whole history of naïvety with regard to the
> functions of language in our experience of the world was finally and

> effectively closed by showing that the function of language cannot and
> should not be reduced to that of *representation*. (p. 32)

Wittgenstein's "mistake" indeed created a huge philosophical shift, and it is very interesting that he himself became an important actor in the working out of its philosophical implications. In the critical commentary on his work this gave rise to the common distinction between his early and later philosophy (Kenny, 1973; Pears, 1985). Just as the early philosophy resonates with the logical empiricism that fed into behaviourism and certain strands of cognitivism, the later philosophy is closely related to developments in psychology and social psychology. It is used explicitly to give form to a discursive social psychology on at least two levels. First, Wittgenstein's analytical turn to the ordinary use of language rather than studying a supposed transcendental and logical grammar, with the subsequent notion of language-games, paved the way for a more socially and interactively embedded conception of cognitive processes and meaning-giving in general. Secondly, Wittgenstein wasn't unaware of debates in psychology in the early and mid twentieth century, and in fact commented quite extensively on these (Wittgenstein, 1988). He developed in this regard a clear and coherent critique of cognitive mentalism and notions of mind and consciousness as individual and abstracted from socio-cultural processes.

Before these aspects of his thought are explicitly translated to the development of discursive social psychology (in following sections) it is necessary first to explain the structure of Wittgenstein's later reflections on language. Although the later philosophy is often depicted as radically different from the early, it was in fact guided by the same concern: namely, to understand and account for the burden of meaning that rests on language. How is it achieved, and how can it be evaluated? The critical difference between the early and the later philosophy is that he chose for a new point of departure, one that didn't assume language to be transparent and meaning to be determined by a fixed essence or transcendental identity. Because ordinary language is clearly meaningful at least in the sense that it successfully facilitates communication between people, philosophy should abstain from imposing upon it the transcendental question. Philosophy should rather investigate the constitution and negotiation of

meaning in various communicative contexts and restrict itself to the task of clarifying misunderstanding. This clarification should obviously only proceed in terms of the contextually determined logic that guides the meaningful use of words.

Wittgenstein himself led the way in this by studying *de facto* instances of language use, showing that meaning is governed by relatively stable and coherent patterns of meaning-giving to which he referred as language-games (Wittgenstein, 1987, 1988). Religious language, for example, with all its concepts, statements, metaphors and symbols, constitutes a language-game that differs in terms of its requirements for meaning from the language-game of science. One language-game cannot be judged from the perspective of the other, for each carries its own criteria for meaning and truth (Pears, 1985). Therefore, meaningful communication is not achieved in terms of a universal grammatical logic, but according to a "depth grammar" that is unique to the particular language-game. This "depth grammar" can be described as "a set of publicly accepted rules or culturally determined conventions which govern the use of language within that language-game" (Van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995, p. 33). These conventions are further not present in the language-game as fixed conceptual identities. Rather like the members of a family resemble one another without there being one exact and essential feature that link them, so the uses of words in a language-game resemble one another. A word like forgiveness, for example, will display a complex pattern of use not reducible to an essential meaning.

The idea that the meanings of words, utterances or other speech acts are to be found in the analysis of their *use*, and that this is governed by rules that are conventional rather than transcendental, had a huge impact on social psychologists who were disillusioned by traditional social psychology. This influence, as will become clear in subsequent sections, is however not confined to Wittgenstein. Analytic philosophy developed under the influence of his later ideas, and the focus on ordinary language and non-referential functions of language flourished immensely. One example is the work done by J.L. Austin on performatives (Austin, 1962). Apart from this, other functions of language such as metaphor, rhetoric and narrative are now studied in many contexts, also for the part they play in the language-games of science and

philosophy (Taylor, 1996). In conclusion one could say that Wittgenstein's legacy is tied up with a concern for the action orientation of language: its ability to constitute and construct and not only represent things and facts in the world.

Although also a non-referential approach to language, post-structural accounts and uses of language differ in important ways from the tradition discussed above. These differences are accentuated by the fact that the two approaches developed independently both geographically and in terms of their intellectual precursors. The term post-structuralism is used here to refer to all those developments in especially French philosophy and social science drawing on the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), but that is critical of the positivist programme of structuralism that was the latter's immediate application in the social sciences (Kearney, 1995)[2]. Even though those who are referred to as post-structuralists differ fundamentally from each other, it would be impossible to understand any such figures as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes without reference to the influence of the structuralist grammar of Ferdinand de Saussure (Kearney, 1995).

As a tradition of thinking about language and social reality post-structuralism contributed in important ways to contemporary developments in social psychology. In some circles, for example, Foucault's definition of discourse provides the paradigmatic instance of the unit of analysis in social psychology (Parker, 1992)[3]. More generally, post-structuralism embellishes a view of language that does not limit its constructive capacity to ordinary use, but that extends it to frameworks of meaning that precede and determine our seemingly individual and voluntary use of words. This emphasis, which in fact implies that the realities, social relations and identities we experienced as natural are in fact textual, enable a political critique of power and domination within a society. Whatever meanings our experiences are submerged in are not only conventional achievements; they are ideological achievements that serve the reproduction of skewed relations of power in society.

In order to understand the implications of the last paragraph for social psychology it is necessary to first address the logic of De Saussure's structural linguistics. De

Saussure's model of language informed a view of reality as radically *textualised* (Culler, 1976, 1982). Starting out by saying the basic element of language is the linguistic sign, he goes further to say that the sign should be sub-divided it into a *signifier* (a word) and a *signified* (a concept). In terms of a traditional conception of language as nomenclature, this would not be such a radical idea: it could simply have meant that the signifier serves as a name for a concept that has an existence outside of language. However, De Saussure immediately refutes this traditional image of language by postulating what he referred to as the *arbitrary nature of the sign*. On the most basic level, the sign is arbitrary in the sense that no signifier can have an intrinsic link with a signified. For example, there is no intrinsic reason why the thing on which this sentence is typed should be called a "keyboard" and not a "qwerty".

More fundamentally still, the arbitrary nature of the sign also implies that language articulates its own categories and concepts, and does not just name a pre-existing field of concepts and categories in an arbitrary fashion (Culler, 1976). This can be illustrated quite simply with reference to the problem of translating between languages. The mere existence of different languages already confirms the first dimension of the arbitrary nature of the sign. What is called a "keyboard" in English, for example, is called a "sleutelbord" in Afrikaans. However, translation is rarely as straightforward as in the above example. When we are confronted with another language, we are regularly also confronted with conceptual fields, or categorisations of the world, that differ from the concepts and categories that characterise the representation of reality in our own language. Jonathan Culler (1976) explains this basic principle very well:

> If language were simply a nomenclature for a set of universal concepts, it would be easy to translate from one language to another. One would simply replace the French name for a concept with the English name. If language were like this the task of learning a new language would also be much easier than it is. But anyone who has attempted either of these tasks has required, alas, a vast amount of proof that languages are not nomenclatures, that the concepts or signifiers of one language may differ

radically from those of another. The French "aimer" does not go directly into English; one must choose between "to like" and "to love". "Démarrer" includes in a single idea the English signifieds of "moving off" and "accelerating". English "to know" covers the area of two French signifieds, "connaitre" and "savoir". The English concepts of a "wicked" man or of a "pet" have no real counterparts in French. Or again, what English calls "light blue" and "dark blue" and treats as two shades of a single colour are in Russian two distinct primary colours. Each language articulates or organizes the world differently. Language do not simply name existing categories, they articulate their own. (pp. 21 -22)

Culler (1976) then summarises this as implying that "since there are no fixed universal concepts or fixed universal signifiers, the signified itself is arbitrary, and so is the signifier" (p. 23). The implication of the linguistic principle of the arbitrary of the sign, and especially the implication that the signified itself is arbitrary, is that the idea of meaning as uncontaminated by language is immediately overruled. It also makes it possible to understand another dimension of De Saussure's model, namely his distinction between *parole* and *langue*. With this he distinguishes between individual utterances or language use and an autonomous, self-regulatory system of rules which govern the meaningfulness of linguistic signs and thus of individual instances of language use. Because signs are arbitrary it does not make linguistic sense to study *parole*: if the conceptual and categorical demarcations that guide signification in a language are not anchored in an extra-linguistic realm, it must somehow be conjured up by language itself. In other words, meaning precedes the experiential encounter of its speakers with the world and therefore necessitates an account that is restricted to the level of *langue*. De Saussure accounts for such a production of meaning by describing language as a differential system. That is, the meaning of signs resides in their differences from other signs within the system. De Saussure (1974) discusses this point in the following manner:

...(I)n all cases, then, we discover not ideas given in advance but values emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond

> to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not. (p. 117)

Culler (1976) explains the same idea with reference to the sounds that make up a particular signifier in the following extract:

> The noises made can vary considerably (there is no essential property which they must possess) so long as they do not become confused with those of contrasting signifiers. We have considerable latitude in the way we utter *bed*, so long as what we say is not confused with *bad, bud, bid, bode; bread, bled, dead, fed, head, led, red, said, wed; beck, bell, bet.* (p. 27)

In itself this theory of language already destroys the traditional conception of reality as appearing to consciousness independent of language, and ushers in a notion of reality as itself textually constituted. The structuralism to which De Saussure was committed was however still characteristically positivist (and modernist) in its intended scientific scope. Its aim was nothing less than the laying bare of the complete structure of meaning in a given system at a given time. Post-structuralism, in stark contrast, is based on the premise that meaning can never be *present* in a way that will make such a project possible, and that interpretation is therefore a much more complex task. This can be illustrated in terms of the influential reworking of De Saussure's theory by Jacques Derrida (1967).

If meaning is the product of differences within the system, and if the sign is arbitrary to the extent that signifieds aren't locations outside of language, then the distinction between signifiers and signifieds largely becomes artificial. Because all linguistic elements are differential values within the system, signifieds are just signifiers seen from a different angle – they lose the essential referents that would make them less textual and that would warrant its substantial distinction from signifiers. This also

means that every signified can in turn be the signifier of another signified, which is a process that can go on indeterminately. In Derrida's account the signified, and thus the last resort to a reality outside of language, is deconstructed; all that remain are chains of signifiers (Culler, 1982). In post-structuralist theory the arbitrary nature of the sign is taken to its extreme to mean that language never signifies its own exteriority; or, as Derrida (1982) would have it, there is nothing outside the text.

The fact that language continuously folds back upon itself does not mean it is a closed system. While structuralism would still have supposed such a closed system, and therefore the possibility of assuming a fixed hermeneutic position, Derrida's deconstruction of the relation between the signifier and the signified effectively showed that meaning not only is the product of difference, but that it is always deferred. Because a signified is always yet again a signifier to something else, the process of signification is itself always a simultaneous arrival and departure of meaning. The retrieval or tracing of meaning is always suspended according to a (non)logic Derrida calls *differance* (Culler, 1982; Derrida, 1982)[4]. Any attempt to create a fixed hermeneutic position, or a final interpretation, will yield only the traces of signifiers and signifieds that are yet again the trace of new signifiers. Language is thus fundamentally open, and meaning is always undecided. This undecidability of meaning makes signification also a site of struggle; it always calls forth both processes of construction and deconstruction.

It is not necessary to dwell further on the complexities of Derrida's reading of other post-structural developments at this stage. For the remainder of the study the important principles arising from structuralism and post-structuralism in terms of seeing language as a non-referential system can be summarised as follows. First, meaning is a systematic and not an individual affair; and second, because it is a function of the system, meaning is indeterminate. Together these have had important and interesting ramifications in the social sciences. Paul Ricoeur (1979) formulates it nicely when he says there is a shift from seeing social reality as the referent of language to seeing it

as a system of codified signs; if the various orders – economic, family, political and religious – can be held to be systems of communication governed by structured laws like that of language, then it is no longer possible to say that signs are of sociological origin; one must say, rather, that society is of semiological origin. (p. 261)

These ideas have found fruitful ground in fields such as sociology and anthropology from as early as the 1950s. Yet, it is only recently that (social) psychologists have seriously started incorporating into their discipline. The reason for this reluctance has to do with the currency of individualism in traditional social psychology. Language as is theorised from a post-structural perspective decentres the human subject: individual experience and the notion of the person must itself be seen as textual effects. In other words, semiotic analyses are inevitably not performed on an individual level of analysis, but on a broad social or cultural level. The rise of postmodernism in social psychology has obviously changed this resistance in some circles, and post-structural ideas are looked upon by some to provide a solution for the crisis in social psychology.

These descriptions of language have been very brief, but will serve an important function in the remainder of this chapter. They provide the background and structure for the discussion of the development and various dimensions of discursive social psychology. It is to this that the discussion now turns.

4.3. Discourse as doing

In this section the incorporation of language will be discussed not in terms of the concerns of postmodernism, but in terms of the initial individualism that was indicated in traditional approaches to social psychology. The political dimensions of knowledge production addressed in the previous chapter are bypassed for a moment, and the focus placed once more on cognitive social psychology. It is argued that performative accounts of language and meaning-giving facilitates an understanding of the individual as an active agent of meaning without falling into the trap of reducing social processes to individual cognitive ones. When the focus is placed on what people *do* with

language it becomes clear that meaning-giving is an interactional, contextual and contradictory process.

When discussing cognitive social psychology earlier in this study, it was argued that it does not get away from its individualist reductionism. This reductionism, as became clear in the earlier discussion of attribution, is closely related to a cognitive perceptualism: by setting the individual up as a perceiving subject cognitive processes are theorised as ontologically divided from social interaction. Human cognition is an isolated, private and natural process, functionally serving the processing of information that is not itself dependent on social processes. If this is brought to bear on the topic of this study, the relation between the individual and the social, then it is clear that social psychology perpetuates an ontological distinction between *cognition* and *society*. What is more, this distinction persisted even in intergroup theory's attempt to make social psychology more social.

The first response to the above dilemma in this study was to investigate cognitive accounts for their ideological effects, and to show the value of individualism as socially constructed and politically reproductive in Western and non-Western contexts alike. While this challenges the discipline of social psychology very deeply, its implications are not as simple as to warrant a mere dismissal of the relevance of meaningful human action as unit of analysis in the study of social life. It is therefore necessary to find better conceptions of what occurs psychologically when individuals engage in actions such as remembering, categorising, attributing, judging, disclaiming (Edwards, 1996). This becomes possible once it is acknowledged that cognitive perceptualism depends on language being treated as a transparent medium for thought. A different understanding of social cognition and meaning-making in general emerges when language is encountered as non-referential and performative in the sense established by Wittgenstein and his heirs.

That traditional cognitive social psychology draws from a theory of meaning assuming language to be transparent and referential reveals itself forcefully in the methodological form that most of its inquiries take. Social psychology is traditionally

described as the discipline that studies social thought and thinking. Although this can only be revealed in language, it is not language itself that is addressed; the unit of analysis is of course an internal process, namely cognition. Language is thus social psychologically informative, but since the methodological task of the cognitive social psychologist is to move *through* language to underlying cognitive processes and structures, language should for this very reason be made transparent. Consider the technology of the questionnaire as an example. It is constructed by de-contextualising and generalising individual propositions, so that they can be presented to a respondent as a circumscribed set of statements to which s/he can respond in an equally circumscribed manner; to a set of items that already enclose within itself a universe of possible psychological meanings. The assumption of the transparency of language is thus the theoretical and empirical linchpin that enables the extension of cognitive psychology into social psychology, and ensures social psychology remains a mere subdivision of general or individual psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Discursive social psychology[5] attempts to undermine these traditional assumptions while still seeking to provide an adequate account of meaning-making processes. It does this by saying social psychology cannot assume language to be transparent without allowing for serious theoretical, empirical and methodological reductions. As Edwards and Potter (1992) makes it clear, the "understanding of everyday practices has been deformed by a combination of methodological prescription and a failure to theorize language as the primary mode of social activity" (p. 12); or, as Potter and Wetherell (1987) write, the "failure to accommodate to discourse damages their (traditional social psychologists) theoretical and empirical adequacy" (p. 1). In order to breach these reductions the focus in social psychology should shift from a formal focus on cognition to the study of discourse, which is here understood to be language as social action. Focussing on the *use* of language in this way enables the discipline to still address traditional constructs such as attribution and categorization, but now conceptualises these as *discursive processes*, and therefore as contextual and rhetorical *achievements* (Billig, 1991, 1995; Edwards, 1996; Haste, 1994). In the words of Edwards and Potter (1992):

(R)ather than seeing such discursive constructions as expressions of speakers' underlying cognitive states, they are examined in the context of their occurrence as situated and occasioned constructions whose precise nature makes sense, to participants and analysts alike, in terms of the social actions those descriptions accomplish. (pp. 2 – 3)

Categorisation, or social categorisation as it is often referred to in order to locate it as a social psychological concern, provides a useful example for fleshing out this dimension of the discursive approach. The categorisation of the social world, locating people as other or part of an in-group, will always play an important part in any attempt to understand intergroup processes and identity politics in general (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). In traditional social psychology categorisation is theorised as a basic intra-psychic cognitive process that only becomes social when it is directed towards a stimulus domain that comprises of other people. What discursive social psychology does, on the level that it is addressed here, is to challenge the application of cognitive levels of explanation to social thinking – but without taking on explicitly the metatheoretical claims of cognitivism itself. It in effect wishes to loosen social psychology from issues in general psychology by maintaining that categorisation can be addressed more thoroughly as a feature of social thinking when its discursive rather than its information processing status is taken into account. In other words, when categorisation is seen as something that people *do* with language in communicative contexts.

The idea that social thinking, and in this instance categorisation, is something people achieve in and through language, and that this implies an interactive or social rather than a perceptual account of the achievement of meaning, is of huge importance for discursive social psychology's attempt to address the dilemma of the relation between the individual and the social. One such attempt by a social psychologist to move from a perceptual to a discursive understanding of categorisation will now be discussed, namely that of Michael Billig (1985, 1987). Billig locates his discussion of categorisation within the context of research on prejudice, an important tradition of social psychological research and theorising. The cognitive (information processing)

revolution in psychology had an interesting effect on the study of prejudice. While earlier approaches, such as the work on the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), saw prejudice as a cognitive style that should be distinguished from tolerant thinking due to its rigidity and inability to accept ambivalence and difference, information processing accounts made prejudice a natural and general characteristic of all thinking. This remained part of social psychology and infiltrated social cognition and intergroup theories as well, causing Billig (1985) to lament that the concept of *tolerance* all but "slips from the social psychological agenda" (p. 80).

Billig (1985) indicates that categorisation as conceptualised in cognitive social psychology plays a crucial part in the abovementioned shift. In this regard he identifies four themes that clearly describe the role of categorisation in the discipline. First, categorisation is seen as a basic element or a building block of all thinking. In other words, when interested in the bestowal of meaning on the social environment categorisation cannot be passed by. Billig (1985) quotes Tajfel (1981) as saying that "social categorization lies at the heart of commonsense, everyday knowledge and understanding ... it is central in social life" (p. 81). Second, the process of categorisation involves the simplification and subsequent distortion of the stimulus field. Since it is a function of a general cognitive economy driven by limited information processing capacity, the social perceiver is always prone to do an injustice to what he or she perceives. Third, and related to the above, categorisation leads to the inevitability of stereotypical thinking about other people. Finally, if stereotypical perception is a natural response, prejudice cannot be anything else than inevitable, at least to a certain extent. That is, resulting from a particular model of human thinking, there is no conceptual room for any other type of thought but that which is prejudiced.

The issue of debate here is not whether people are normally prejudiced or tolerant and open towards other people. The problem is that prejudice is seen as inevitable, natural, and thus emerging as a completely individual constriction on social perception. It completely ignores that antagonism between social groups has its base

in historical and ideological phenomena, and that social groups themselves aren't natural but constructed. In reality people do not arrive at their derogatory stereotypes in isolation from other people, but by sharing a discursive space and interests in particular meanings with other people. Moreover, and it is this that Billig makes very clear, even when people do engage in prejudiced thinking, this thinking is not severely rigid. In order for statements to be meaningful they have to comply with rules of a communicative context, and will always reveal contradictions, disclaimers and other rhetorical devices (Billig, 1991). Standard questionnaires, being as they are premised on the consistency and often rigidity of thought, miss something very important of how individuals really make sense of their experiences.

Billig (1985) proposes an interesting theoretical advance in the study of categorisation (and prejudice) that overcomes what he calls a bureaucratic model of thought: categorisation always has a dialectical counterpart, namely particularisation. He explains this notion in the following manner:

> If categorization refers to the process by which a particular stimulus is placed in a general category, or grouped with other stimuli, then particularization refers to the process by which a particular stimulus is distinguished from a general category or from other stimuli. The term "particularization" would cover the process by which an individual stimulus might be extracted from a category or by which it is distinguished from the category in the first place; above all it covers the processes by which a particular stimulus is treated as a particular or "special case". (p. 82)

Because traditional perceptual accounts cannot explain such flexibilities in thinking, and must see categorisation as a natural process divorced from the particular demands made by the communicative context, it is necessary to find a better conception of this process. It is here that Billig suggests language might be useful. Language forms an integral part of the process of social thinking, and it does not carry with it the perceptual and functional constraints imposed by the traditional cognitive

models. In his own words,

> although perceptual schemes may simplify information, it is not clear
> that linguistic categories must do so. Thus language can be used to
> both simplify and to enrich; similarly, language can be used to
> categorize or "lump together" particulars, but it can also be used to
> particularize and to argue for special cases. (p. 85)

In other words, taking into account that it is in and through language that social thinking happens, Billig argues that language itself provides a better model for understanding what is traditionally studied as social cognition. Empirically speaking this means that it would be more productive for social psychology to focus on the "actual categories of language, rather than the inferred categories of perception" (Billig, 1987, p. 135). How do people manage to bestow meaning on the world by carving it up into parts, and what is it that they achieve when they do it? This opens social psychology up immensely, because the actual categories of language are negotiated between people, have a historical genesis, and resonate with ideological themes that naturalise the particular configurations of intergroup relations, status and power in a society[6]. Potter and Wetherell (1987), in their important introduction to discursive social psychology, provides a good valuation of Billig's contribution to the study of social categorisation:

> Instead of seeing categorization as a natural phenomenon –
> something which just happens, automatically – it is regarded as a
> complex and subtle *social accomplishment*. ...(T)his work emphasizes
> the action orientation of categorization in discourse. It asks how
> categories are flexibly articulated in the course of certain sorts of talk
> and writing to accomplish particular goods, such as blamings and
> justifications. (p. 116)

The conversational, performative and argumentative nature of categorical talk is neatly illustrated in a research project by South African social psychologist Kevin Durrheim

(1997a). He makes explicit use of insights gained from Billig as well as Potter and Wetherell in an analysis of an interview with a right-wing spokesperson, Koos Vermeulen. In the extracts used here Vermeulen comes out in support for the assassin of then Communist Party leader, Chris Hani. The interview was conducted just after the Hani assassination in 1993, and the flexibility of the subject's thought-in-action is a good example of why discursive social psychologists choose to study talk itself, rather than trying to make language transparent in order to locate and study supposedly consistent cognitive and affective formations.

Consider Vermeulen's response to a question by the interviewer regarding his identification with Hani's assassin:

> *Vermeulen:* I'm not for any person to be assassinated. I think with talking we can do a lot, but then on the other hand we must keep in mind that the ANC want to talk and they want to er war, and there is no way for both of it. There's no room for both of it. (p. 755)

What is displayed here is an emphatic categorisation: there is a difference between talking (negotiation) and warring (armed struggle), and in no way can these categories be blurred. The ANC discredit their legitimacy in the eyes of Vermeulen precisely by blurring these categories. The interviewer, however, responds to this answer by Vermeulen in a challenging manner. He confronts Vermeulen with his own (Vermeulen's) double talk, his own blurring of categories:

> *Leslie:* But then the person you're supporting killed, assassinated people, or assassinated Mr Hani. Um and that is not talking. (p. 755)

The contradiction is clear enough: Vermeulen professes talking (non-violence) as a solution to political concerns, and also categorically states that one should make a clear choice either for negotiating or for violent struggle. However, at the same time he supports the assassin of Chris Hani. Does he then not support the assassination of Hani as well, and thus the necessity of armed struggle? It is Vermeulen's counter

to the challenge by the interviewer that is really interesting and demonstrates the flexibility and argumentative nature of thought – and in the same instance thus the impossibility of separating social thinking from the use of language.

> *Vermeulen:* Right, the fact is that one should look at a motive, at a background of a person. The person that killed Mr Hani was someone that fled communist tyranny. He was a victim for the best part of his life of communist tyranny and it's logical that in a time of despair anyone of those people feel more threatened than anyone else and he would go for the chief of the Communist Party. (p. 755)

What Vermeulen does here is, in terms of Michael Billig's theory, to particularise in order to defend the integrity of his initial position (Durrheim, 1997a). Hani's assassin can make claim to an exception on the rule because for psychological reasons he felt himself personally victimised by what Hani stood for, namely communism. As Durrheim (1997a) states, "the situation of dialogical interaction moves along, the relations between speaker, audience and content change and new kinds of thinking are called for" (p. 755). What discursive social psychology claims is that the richness of these shifts and their contextual and rhetorical effects are lost when they are abstracted from their contextual and rhetorical form. What is to be gained by moving from a confrontation of the performance of thought to some supposed hidden world of information processing? If one keeps in mind that such a move in any event violates something of the function of language and nature of meaning itself, then it is certainly understandable why discursive social psychologists profess the study of language itself. It is between people that the micro-politics of meaning emerge, not in a perceptual cocoon.

These examples illustrated what is the most basic level of the incorporation of language into social psychology; it sets the discipline up as having its focus the "action orientation of talking and writing" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 2). This recognition of the rhetorical and performative aspects of language, and thus of the situated and emergent nature of social psychological processes of meaning-making, has therefore

as its most basic and first dimension the importance of disentangling social psychology from cognitive psychology, both theoretically and empirically. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) states, "the point is that analysis and explanation can be carried out at a social psychological level which is coherently separable from the cognitive" (p. 35). It was made clear that this level is language and its contextual and rhetorical contexts of use; that is, language as communicative act. As a summary, consider the following statement by Edwards and Potter (1992):

> (W)hen we study such discourse, rather than discovering in it how people represent, understand and remember events, what we find is an indefinitely variable range of situated versions and stories, accounts and glosses, descriptions and formulations, the best sense of which is achieved by examining them for their pragmatic placing and interactional orientations. (p. 17)

4.4. Language, mind, society

The above depiction of discursive social psychology does not mean that it *merely* disentangles itself from the traditional cognitive metatheory; that is, as if it leaves unquestioned the assumptions of cognitive psychology itself. Had this been the case it would have serious implications for an understanding of the disciplinary identity and position of social psychology. By implication individual psychology would still exist somewhere apart from social psychology as a foundational and ontological repository of psychological phenomena, leaving the question regarding the relation between individual and social unresolved.

Thus while it is certainly true that discursive social psychologists at times refrain from taking on cognitive psychology on a conceptual level, this is often an instance of pragmatic bracketing rather than a philosophical agreement with the dominant paradigm. Certain general problems are acknowledged with regard to the cognitive metatheory, but set aside in order to focus on the practical and methodological aspects of discursive analysis itself. As Edwards and Potter (1992) make it clear, they

"bracket, or set aside, the issue of reductionism and origins in favour of an orientation to method and analysis" (p. 19). But not all discursive social psychologists choose to remain on this level of critique – in fact, even the mentioned authors in other contexts have provided strong foundational critiques of cognitive psychology and the ideal of an individual psychology as such. In this section discursive social psychology is described from this angle, where the philosophy of language provided the impetus for foundational critiques of cognitivism and mentalism and the individualism they entail.

In this regard the focus will remain on Wittgenstein and his application in psychology. A shift from a referential to a non-referential model of language denies psychology any fantasy of retreating into a notion of mind and meaning-making (cognition) that is centralised, functional, and operating according to formal laws and symbolic or propositional representations. The reason for this is that the notion of mind, which is so characteristic of cognitive psychology and underlies the analogical description of cognition as information processing, is, once again, only possible when the transparency of language is assumed. Thus even though cognitive processes are not directly observable they can be treated as if they exist within individual minds, as long as they are made observable through operational definitions. A neglect of the constructive nature of language therefore underlies an empiricism that assumes observation to be theory neutral, which in turn makes it possible for the psychological sciences to locate its ontology on the level of mental substances and processes.

When the referential model of language is challenged it becomes difficult to maintain that the concepts of psychological language really refer to discreet entities or processes in the mind. According to Wittgenstein's (1987, 1988) later understanding of linguistic meaning as socially and conventionally bound up in language games, as was already discussed, we discover the meaning of words by learning their currency within a specific speech community. As Michael Billig (1997) states: "We learn how to use words such as 'table' and 'chair' by observing how these words are used: in this way, we learn the appropriate language-games, in which such words are used" (p. 39). Linguistic meaning is regulated, in other words, by public criteria. The important insight that Wittgenstein (1988) himself came to in this regard is that words

invested with psychological meaning, such as "remembering" or "understanding", also owe their meaning to the accomplishment of socially produced criteria. What counts as an instance of "understanding", for example, cannot be related to inner mental acts or representations. Wittgenstein (1988) exposes this traditional fallacy with the following seductive little "exercise":

> Say a sentence and think it; say it with understanding. – And now do not say it, just do what you accompanied it with when you said it" (para. 332)[7].

It should be clear quite quickly that this is impossible. It is impossible to engage in mental activity without engaging in language. And language (and meaning) is a public or social phenomenon. In terms of this Wittgenstein challenge a mentalistic theory of meaning and thus locates mind (and cognitive events) in the public or social domain. He shows compellingly that when we think, inevitably *in language,* "there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought" (Wittgenstein, 1988, para. 329). Cognitive psychology buys into mentalism due to the fact that it neglects a basic feature of language, namely that it is not primarily referential. In terms of seeing the individual agent of meaning as an information processing system, the lesson to be drawn from Wittgenstein's critique is that "we don't first process information (in our heads), and then act according to the forthcoming instructions"; in other words, there is no "dual processing of information" (Durrheim, 1997b, p. 179).

Before continuing to further draw out the implications of this for social psychology, consider another example. The sociologist David Bloor (1983), in an important study of the implications of Wittgenstein's thought for the social sciences, narrates the following thought experiment:

> Point to a pencil and say "tove", suggests Wittgenstein. What does "tove" mean? Does it mean "pencil", or "brown", or "thin", or something else? The only way to find out is to put the isolated act in the context of a protracted exercise in classification which begin to sort the world

into "toves" and "non-toves". This is how we should explain the meaning, and this is what enables us to say something determiate, rather than nothing, is meant by the word ... The significance of a piece of pointing behaviour taken in isolation is indeed difficult to discern, but that is not because it is hidden in the mind, but because it depends on the surrounding activity. Its meaning is perfectly open to view, it is on the surface, but it is spread out over time and shared with others. (p. 13)

Again it is made clear that meaningful conduct cannot be abstracted from a social interactional context. Cognition is always located and the achievement of meaning takes place outside, not within us. The full implications of these ideas for psychology in general has translated into what many now refer to as social constructionism (Burr, 1997; Danziger, 1997a; Gergen, 1985a; Girishwar, 1993; Harre, 1987; Jordaan, 1993; Potter, 1996; Shotter, 1993a). Being a metatheoretical alternative to positivism and empiricism, social constructionist thought takes seriously the challenge that psychological concepts are social products. In other words, as Durrheim (1997a) explains, "the relationship between what is, and what we say what is, cannot be evaluated in terms of accuracy, truth or correspondence, for there are no independent things in the world which are merely pictured by words" (p. 130). But while this is an epistemological challenge to the science of psychology, what does it have to say about its ontology? The fact remains that there are individuals and that they do act and make sense of the world. How should this be accounted for if psychology cannot locate it within an essentialist ontology?

It is in answering this question that social constructionist developments have their most interesting implications for the psychological sciences, implications that directly involve a focus on language. If mind and cognition are de-centred from the individual to the conversational nature of interpersonal and cultural life, psychology should concern itself not with imposing its own language-games but rather "provide an account of psychological 'objects' (e.g. mind, intentions, reasoning, etc.), human action, and social practice by showing the 'conditions of possibility' within which they

are imbedded" (Durrheim, 1997b, p. 181). These conditions of possibility are primarily linguistic: they are the language-games and depth grammars Wittgenstein (1988) describes. Stating it differently and to make the link with the previous section clear, they are meaningful frameworks that function as sources from where particular individual speech acts are made possible. Psychology itself, since it traditionally assumed its own language-games to be simple truths, adds to this background against which people negotiate meaning. Such a focus can thus encompass a critical reflection on the way Western psychology found its language[8] (leading back to the discussions in the previous chapter), as well as refurnish psychology as a science that studies multiple constructions of persons and meaningful actions in different contexts.

In other words, in so far as there can be an ontological base for psychology as a science of persons, this should be sought in language. As Harre and Gillet (1994) states, "discursive phenomena, for example, acts of remembering, are not manifestations of hidden subjective, psychological phenomena. They *are* the psychological phenomena" (p. 27). John Shotter (1993b), another important social constructionist psychologist, agrees that reality is conversationally constituted and maintained, and follows this up by saying that "an understanding of anything psychological is an understanding of the role of language in human affairs" (p. 73). The developments in language discussed in this chapter thus underlie a discursive model in which the significance of discourse transcends the study of performance to an ontology "in which utterances, interpreted as speech acts, become the primary entities in which minds become personalized, as privatized discourses. In this ontology, people are locations for discourses, both public and private" (Harre & Gillet, 1994, p. 36).

The above remarks should make it clear that the relation between general and social psychology undergoes a radical shift. No longer is it possible to see social psychology as a derivative of a general psychology that is located within an isolated individual. Rather, the non-referential nature of language de-centres psychology to be social first, and only then individual. Psychological phenomena are emergent properties, and discursive processes can be used to explain the social construction of individual

persons as particularised vantage points of experience. Kenneth Gergen (1985b) subsequently accounts for the disciplinary identity of social psychology as psychological science in the following way:

> When the implications are fully elaborated, it becomes apparent that the
> study of social process could become generic for understanding the nature
> of knowledge itself. Social psychology would not stand, in this case, as a
> derivative of general psychology. Rather, the latter would be viewed as a
> form of social process. (p. 556)

Taken together the last two sections have traced the implications of analytic or ordinary language philosophy (with the focus on Wittgenstein) for social psychology. The discussion in this section specifically made it clear that the introduction of language in social psychology adds to the empirical shifts already described, setting it up as a completely different disciplinary formation. Before the success of these discursive developments in accounting for the relation between the individual and the social can be addressed, however, post-structural accounts should be discussed.

4.5. Discourse and power

Think back on the example of Koos Vermeulen (Durrheim, 1997a) used earlier in this chapter. In order to achieve his rhetorical move of slamming the ANC for doubletalk while he himself simultaneously professes negotiation and supports the assassin of Chris Hani, he provides a *psychological* explanation of the assassination. The plausibility of this account, and that which makes his move possible, is a function of the commonsense understandings of individual psychology that circulate and permeate our culture. In other words, psychological knowledge in this case forms a significant background that makes possible certain identities, meanings and social events. In a society where the psychology of people is narrated in a different manner one could well imagine this rhetorical move not being possible.

The developments discussed thus far have focused on language in its rhetorical and

performative sense. The fact that meanings however do not emerge without a prior background that guides, constrains and enables what can be said and thought necessitates a focus on what David Bloor (1983) calls "the contribution that society makes to our knowledge" (p. 6). As was made clear in the discussion of social constructionism this aspect of meaning was well provided for by Wittgenstein's notion of language-games, which implies treating language not only as located performance, but as constrained by a history of use. However, when it does focus on the prior resources that people draw from, Wittgenstein's work still reveals a limited account of power: language-games are consensual domains, and there is no questioning of who is favoured by particular patterns of signification, and who is made silent in turn. The subsequent organisation of social psychology around the conceptions of language discussed thus far therefore often neglects the political nature of social life (Parker, 1996a; 1996b).

It is precisely this dimension, the relation between discourse and power, that is added by post-structural approaches to language in social psychology (Henriques, Hollway, Venn, Walkerdine, & Urwin, 1984; Parker, 1992). As was made clear earlier, post-structural theories of language see it as a larger, more abstract signifying system that makes individual usage derivative of the internal logic of the system. It is therefore not concerned with what individuals can achieve with language, but with how language itself constructs subjectivity, experience and possible patterns of social interaction. In the discussion of post-structural views of language it was further mentioned that Michel Foucault occupies an important position in this extension to social psychology. Indeed, from the angle of post-structural theory Foucault's influence on the development of a discursive social psychology rivals that of Wittgenstein. His work provides a valuable example of the impact of a post-structural view of meaning on the relationship between social scientific knowledge, individual subjectivity and the reproduction of power relations in society.

It is outside the scope of this study to provide a detailed introduction to Foucault's work. However, some brief comments will suffice to show how post-structural conceptions of discourse differ from what was discussed up to this point, informing a

social psychology not interested so much in how individuals construct social reality through language as in how language positions individuals and patterns their experience. Foucault (1982) saw as his own intellectual project "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (p. 777). Such a history is not made up of discreet and arbitrary events, but structured by significant shifts in the epistemological configurations dominant in particular eras[9]. This can be illustrated in terms of, and Foucault indeed focuses on, the development of the human sciences. Since language is not transparent and rather constructs the world as a textual domain (remember his Saussurian heritage), the birth and growth of the human sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries contributed something very significant: it ushered in the individual human being as itself an object of human understanding (Foucault, 1972). The human sciences (and especially psychology) did not *discover* the hidden depths of the psychological subject. It constructed the individual being *as* a psychological subject.

The appearance of discovery and truth that emanate from the human sciences depends on overarching epistemological configurations that precede and make possible particular disciplinary formations. These configurations – Foucault (1972) called them "epistemes" – function like Saussure's notion of *langue*: they are not to be equated to actual scientific statements but rather exist as abstract conditions of possibility for a range of possible statements regarding a range of textually demarcated objects. What is more, they also determine and delineate a range of places from where it is possible to speak, to be referred to here as subject positions. Foucault's notion of "epistemes" differ from Kuhn's (1970) notion of paradigm in that these configurations not only determine the discursive space and regulative activities of the human sciences; they reveal themselves in all discursive activities and social practices, giving rise to a pervasive textual matrix from which particular forms of subjectivity emerge.

In his later writings Foucault (1977, 1980) became more concerned with the role of power in discursive practices. The construction of the person that emerged from the discourses of the modern era correlates with a subjectivity that is regulated and

subjected to societal scrutiny in a very unique way: the modern subject is *self-regulatory*. In order to understand this it is important to grasp the unique way in which Foucault conceived of power and its relation to knowledge (and thus to the human sciences). In this regard Ian Parker (1989b), who played a big role in introducing the ideas of Foucault to social psychology, provides a good description:

> Power is usually thought of as the exercise of the will of one social actor over others. This model of power is most appropriate, according to Foucault, to the period up to the end of the eighteenth century. After that date the growth in population, and the concentration of economic production, had reached the point where "disciplinary" power became dominant. This is a type of power that operates independent of the intentions of individuals. The first model of power can be thought of as "sovereign" power. The second is relational – "disciplinary"... The character of disciplinary power is masked by the invitation that modern discourse makes to us to assume full responsibility for our acts and intentions. (pp. 61 – 62)

This invitation that Parker refers to is present in many different discursive practices in contemporary society: practices such as certain forms of therapy, advice columns in newspapers and magazines, and television talk shows. What they all have in common is a confessional structure (Foucault, 1981). The implication of this for a discipline wanting to study individual lives and identities in social worlds is that it should always look for the configurations of power/knowledge or *discourses* that predetermine and structure human experience in all contexts where individual subjectivity is at stake. Along with this it should analyse the effect the continuation of these discourses has on the maintenance of relations of power in a society. Consider the following explanation of the relevance of Foucault's approach to discourse studies for social psychology (Burman, Kottler, Levett, & Parker, 1997):

> Foucauldian discourse analytic approaches allow us to connect directly with issues of power and subjectification. These approaches help us

address how we are made into selves that speak, how we *experience* the self as if it were an individual enclosed thing, and the way in which modes of disciplinary apparatus govern us. They are also particularly useful for examining the circulation of psychological talk through culture. (p. 2)

The differences between such an approach to discourse and the developments discussed earlier is clear. What is at stake here is not the rhetorical use of language, but a conception of discourses as abstract frameworks of meaning that are transcendental to individual instances of language use[10]. In this regard discourse as a unit of analysis for social psychology has also been referred to as generative social languages (Durrheim, 1997a) and forms of institutionalised intelligibility (Wetherell, 1998). The notion of institutionalisation here is very important, because discourses are not seen as consensual domains but structures that ensure the maintenance of power. As this notion of discourse plays itself out in social psychology, activity, agency and experience retain less currency, which leads to another important difference. This is, namely, that post-structural approaches show little concern for attempts to establish better conceptions of mind or cognition. Because meaning is not an individual achievement, it is not important to understand meaning-making processes on the level of individual participation in social life. More interesting is how notions of agency as a location of meaning is socially constructed and what purposes they serve. These differences are clearly illustrated in the following post-structural formulation of the study of identity in psychology (Gergen & Shotter, 1989):

...(T)he primary medium within which identities are created are not just linguistic, but textual: persons are largely ascribed identities according to the manner of their embedding within a discourse – in their own or in the discourses of others. In this way cultural texts furnish their "inhabitants" with the resources for the formation of selves. (p. ix)

Since social psychology itself is so intimately related to the currency of modern constructions of the person it should be of no surprise that post-structural approaches

would invest a lot of energy in studying the circulation of psychological talk through culture; and the political effects of such talk. However, power relations are also maintained in cultural texts other than that of social psychology and the human sciences in general, so that critical social psychologists from this perspective can turn their critical analyses towards these as well (Ibanez & Iniquez, 1997; Tolman, 1995). While there is of course no reason for such critical activity to be *social psychological* as such, social psychology provides a useful category of recognition when the topic of study is the relation between psychologised subjects and social reproduction.

4.6. Readdressing divides

The obvious question now is how these developments around language fare in addressing the divide between the individual and the social in social psychology? In the context of this study, as is clear by now, this question should be addressed on at least two levels. First, how does a discursive approach address the metatheoretical difficulties of accounting for the production of meaning, which is the traditional domain of cognitive social psychology; and second, how does it bridge the divide between social psychology as a Western practice and its application in the non-Western world? In other words, does it provide the raw material for a social psychology of the postmodern as it was discussed in the previous chapter? A social psychology with the ability, for example, to study the currency of identity in contexts where experience is politicised. Or, one that has the ability to describe in full the way culture impinges on the form of social conduct.

Before evaluating how these metatheoretical divides are bridged, this narrative first needs to negotiate a few divides of its very own devising. The presentation of discursive social psychology here in terms of different levels of the incorporation of language was useful in order to link developments in social psychology to broader intellectual debates. However, in reality the lines of influence aren't nearly as clearly defined. While there are studies that generally focus more on the use of language and others that are more concerned with discourses as abstract frameworks of meaning (Wetherell, 1998), most discursive studies do not comply with these as is.

In other words, they very rarely operationalise themes from the philosophy of language in any linear way. What is more, there have been interesting debates and a definite synergy between the different traditions, something that is especially beginning to characterise discourse studies in South African social psychology (Levett, Kottler, Burman, & Parker, 1997). One reason for this is that discursive social psychology is less concerned with intellectual purity than it is with critical application especially in contexts of oppression, struggle and social change.

However, more conceptual concerns obviously also play an important role in this developing synergy. In themselves the different approaches to language discussed above cannot address the issues that this study is grappling with, and their importation into social psychology does not lead to an automatic resolution of the limitations of cognitivism and postmodernism alike. First, post-structural accounts often make themselves guilty of a blunt dismissal of subjectivity, leading to accounts of social action that is hopelessly deterministic. The same critiques that were raised against postmodern accounts in the previous section count here as well, and there is in fact a whole literature of criticism against the deterministic trends in Foucault's work that social psychology cannot ignore (Fairclough, 1992; McNay, 1999). Second, work around the social construction of mind, although providing a valuable background, does not explicitly address social psychological concerns. In other words, even if we should agree with its account of the relation between language, mind and culture, we are still left to develop from there a proper social psychology. Third, the notion of discourse as action discussed as the first level of language introduction also has certain apparent shortcomings. Even though it moves away from seeing cognition as self-enclosed, it still works with an all too voluntaristic account of meaning. Meaning emanates from micro-contexts of language use, which can give rise to just another incarnation of individualism, in that it may blind the social psychologist to the structural constraints imposed on people's lives (and their talk).

But if discursive social psychology is most successful when it integrates the performative and post-structural paradigms of language in social psychology, some discussion is still needed to understand how this explicitly allows the discipline to

address the relation between the individual and the social and to disentangle itself from the colonial or imperialist tendencies of Western knowledge claims. In this section then the incorporation into social psychology of discourse on two levels will be addressed: as both indicating abstract frameworks of meaning and the performative, rhetorical dimension of language as it emerges in everyday interactions as the principal form of meaning-making. This integration often reveals itself better on the level of empirical investigation than in theoretical reflection, and therefore a few South African studies will be used as illustration. In this regard Kevin Durrheim's (1997a) study used as an example in earlier sections could be referred to once again. While Durrheim clearly focusses on the rhetorical and argumentative moves made by the speakers, their situated cognitive achievements, he locates this within the generative social languages that make them possible. In other words, an analysis of discourse as rhetoric and argument, although important, cannot be social psychologically complete when ideological and historical themes, belonging in this case specifically to Apartheid South Africa, is not addressed at the same time.

Another example that also analytically treats social agents as both cognitively sophisticated and socially constrained is the study (also mentioned earlier) Susan Lea (1996) conducted around psychology students' talk about "race". In this study students actively drew from social cognition and social identity theories to account for "race" and racism. These theories, due to their scientific status, provided them with the footing to present themselves as non-racist while offering accounts that naturalise and take for granted the current status quo, thus in fact discursively reproducing racist practices. Because racism is constructed as biologically and cognitively inevitable, and because this construction is scientifically warranted (however the respondents may have misrepresented these theories), racial segregation seems like a natural and viable solution. While the theories themselves functioned as generative social languages, their tenacity had also to be related to the history of Nationalism in this country.

The work by John Dixon and his colleagues (Dixon & Reicher, 1997; Dixon, Reicher, & Foster, 1997) on the social construction of space in post-Apartheid South Africa is

also a good example of the tendency under discussion. Dixon investigated White people's reactions to phenomena such as informal settlements (Dixon & Reicher, 1997; Dixon, Reicher, & Foster, 1997) and integrated beaches (Durrheim & Dixon, 1998). In these studies he focussed foremost on the rhetorical construction of arguments and accounts that have racist effects but are so presented that the speaker disqualifies him or herself from racism. He also made it clear, however, that such effects aren't purely rhetorical in the sense that speakers are cognitively unconstrained: they are only possible against the background of ideological configurations and traditions such as liberalism, environmentalism, family values and the historical constructions of race and space in South Africa.

Alongside the dual focus on "abstract" and "situated" discursive practices, there is also a general adherence in discursive social psychology to critical realist positions with regard to social institutions and the structural relations of power within them (Parker, 1992). This should not be seen as a psychological realism, in the sense that psychological phenomena emerge or exist extra-discursively[11]. It is rather an attempt to stay clear of any understanding of discourse that remains blind to the materiality of oppression. Stating it differently, it is an attempt to stay clear of seeing the constraints imposed on subjectivity (and thus on cognition and behaviour) as being only textual. Even though discursive social psychology gives primacy to language when accounting for the emergence of psychological phenomena and subjectivity itself, it never pretends that this takes place within an environment where relations of power are not materially institutionalised and imposed. A recent edited volume of discourse analytic studies in South African social psychology (Burman, Kottler, Levett, & Parker, 1997, p. 8) makes this very clear when discourse is described as referring to

> language-in-action, to sets of social practices that are linguistic, but more than "merely" linguistic. We take discourse to mean frameworks of meaning that are realized in language but produced by institutional and ideological structures and relations. (p. 8)

Before moving on to look more closely at how this dual focus on discourse is

conceptually accounted for, a few words in summary. Once the above definition of discourse is accepted the object of study for social psychology is no longer to chart the strategies of a solitary cognitive system. Rather, it has the task of teasing out the "structuring effect of language, and of connecting institutional power relations with talk" (Burman et al., 1997, p. 1). The interpenetrating nature of the two broad approaches to discourse in social psychology can now be explained as follows. While the emergent, situated and conversational nature of social cognition and meaning-making is acknowledged, it is not seen as completely voluntary in its force of signification. Meanings are determined also by larger signifying systems and various material constraints, usually theorised as belonging to social structures and institutions. In a certain sense the development of discursive social psychology is in itself an experiment in addressing the traditional division between the individual and the social, or between subject and society. Burman et al. (1997) sums it up nicely:

> Discourse work inside and outside South Africa refuses the traditional distinction between individual and society: language constitutes who we are, constructs the positions we occupy, is the medium by which we interact with other people and understand ourselves. (p. 7)

This being asserted, however, social psychology is still left with the difficult metatheoretical as well as analytical task of accounting for the way social structures are instilled in language, and how subjective experience is structured or patterned discursively without reducing the social agent to a mere pawn of social forces. Stating it differently, discursive social psychology needs to indicate how individuals engage in the production and circulation of meaning without presuming the primacy of individual intention, and for this it makes extensive use of the notions of reflexivity and ideology (Durrheim, 1997b; Parker, 1992). One of the interesting things about how reflexivity and ideology are employed in accounting for the generation of meaning and the way social agents are situated and involved in this process, is that they stand in a double relationship to each other. In a sense they are employed to work both with and against each other: they work together in providing for an ontological account of individual experience and its political determination in a social constructionist

framework, and against each other in the sense that reflexivity also enables, as an epistemological grasp on meta-discourse, resistance to ideology and other forms of power as they are naturalised in particular political (or politicised) contexts.

The role of reflexivity and ideology in discursive social psychology should now be examined further, beginning with the former. Kevin Durrheim (1997b), in a recent defence of social constructionism in South African social psychology, provides a good description of its role in the production of meaning:

> Social constructionism maintains that meanings are produced by a process of reflexivity. If we want to understand the meaning of "shooting", for example, instead of representing an accurate picture of what is happening, we reflect on a set of actions from within a frame of reference (i.e. a "language game" or discourse) ... Being imbedded in a particular "form of life" (e.g. supporting the apartheid government or the liberation movement) makes available certain discourses which lend meaning to objects and events. (p. 180)

It is quite clear in the above that there is little distinction between the production of meaning on two levels: that of the social scientist wanting to understand social life, and that of the social agent as his or her experiences emerge as meaningful in the context of a particular form of life, which is always culturally and historically situated. The notion of reflexivity therefore not only designates the epistemological posture of a social constructionist metatheory, but also points the way towards what is ostensibly a discursive ontology. Invoking objective discursive and material structures to explain how particular behaviours, positions or identities attain their subjective meaning for participants in a social world is in itself to explain the nature of human experience. As such, reflexivity reveals to the social scientist the meanings that propel subjects along the particular psychological trajectories made available by a form of life; but because it reveals the constructed nature of things it is also the principle that enables new meanings to be generated, and thus to reconstruct the dominant forms that identity, experience and conduct take on in a particular form of life. This principle, the active,

reconstructive agency, also has to apply to both the social psychologist and the social agent. Before this critical and reconstructive agency is addressed however, it is first necessary to account for why dominant discourses are often so tenacious, and for this it is necessary to introduce ideology.

Because the rhetorical and performative production of meaning in conversations and arguments are overridden by larger and more abstract regimes of signification, and because people experience their actions and cognitions as authentic and true – thus do not always achieve the reflexivity that allows the recognition of meaning as constructed and culturally determined – the mediation between conversational or argumentative utterances, institutional structures and relations, and discourse conceived of as "generative social languages" is further often captured by the introduction into social psychology of the concept of ideology (Billig, 1982, 1991; Parker, 1992)[12]. By acknowledging both the institutional tangibility of the social and its more malleable semiotic circulation in discourses, the notion of ideology extends its theoretical usefulness in social theory by re-describing social cognition as the rhetorical penetration of utterances by societal commonplaces, understandings and values.

This strategic introduction of ideology is especially useful in contexts where social psychology wants to understand intergroup relations, racism, and the politics of identity against the background of the (re-)production of power relations in a society (Parker, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In Apartheid South Africa, for example, legislation dividing the population into different races treated all African people as belonging to one category. While this revealed an ignorance about the different ethnic and linguistic identifications that existed in South Africa, the category of being black was materially imposed and subsequently structured the experience of the greater part of South Africa's population. This became a political and experiential reality to such an extent that the development of a politics of identity around being black (this was of course not limited to South Africa) became possible, as the Black Consciousness Movement clearly showed. Even though the category "black" was thus socially constructed by an oppressive system around the ideologies of racism

and capitalism, amongst others, it was finally rhetorically taken up to struggle against dominant discourses and material conditions.

The implication of this for a social psychology of the postmodern is first that it is impossible to reduce real historical categories to perceptual ones, since this hide their constructed nature, the historical changes they undergo, and the way they structure and are structured by human experience. Secondly, it is equally impossible to reify constructed categories to such an extent that it excludes consideration of the way they are brought to bear on reality in the ongoing acts of signification individuals engage in. Had this not been the case it would have been difficult to provide social psychological explanation for how being "bureaucratically" and ideologically identified as black from outside could become an important subjective social identification against an oppressive system. Social agents participate in the construction, reconstruction and tenacity of particular experiential forms. Ideology, understood here as meaning in the service of power (Thompson, 1984), clearly relates material conditions and institutional power relations with talk and rhetoric. It is thus a useful way (with reflexivity) to sustain a discursive ontology that does not subsume to voluntary conceptions of the production and circulation of meaning, and acknowledges the culturally encapsulated nature of conduct and experience without removing a critical conception of agency.

The social processes of the construction and reconstruction of experience in and through language should now be clear. Being constructed as the subject of experience and assuming the position of an agent of change are both discursive effects, even though they are dependent on different conceptions of discourse. In other words, being made part of a form of life and moving about within it is achieved in and through language, which means psychological life is both transcendentally and rhetorically constructed, but always social and never reducible to an interior of private thoughts or mental processes. Discursive social psychology, by approaching "individual experience as socially constructed" (Burman et al., 1997, p. 7), attributes to language an all-encompassing role as model, both epistemologically and ontologically. This means that subjectively belonging to a form of life, assuming

certain behavioural patterns or, as Pierre Bourdieu (quoted in Wacquant, 1992) formulates it, "schemes of perception and appreciation" (p. 14) as natural and authentic, is ultimately the product of being positioned within a discursive order. This is the reason why, according to Burman et al. (1997), a focus on discourse can for example "illustrate the way racial and sexual categories are not simply imposed, but are lived out by their subjects as 'true' for them" (p. 3).

But truth as such, indicating the grasp of a reality beyond discourse, ceases to be a concern of discursive social psychology (Durrheim, 1997b). Its conception of the discursively constructed and ideologically encapsulated nature of psychological life ventilates in an energetic affirmation of social psychology as geared rather towards social change. The discursive social psychologist attempts to deconstruct dominant discourses and representations that sustain oppressive power relations. In this context, *ideology critique* entails reflexively detecting the guiding themes, images and rhetorical strategies that make particular meanings compelling, and keep them in play. Stating it differently, reflexivity is positioned as an analytic lever against the closure of ideology where it concerns the production of meanings and the reproduction of social practices. As Durrheim (1997b) says: "Reflexivity is employed here to produce new meanings by showing how taken-for-granted, everyday and scientific objects are embedded in certain 'regimes of truth'" (p. 181). Unmasking the working of ideology as it stands in the service of power, then, will reveal the constructed nature of the material conditions shaping any form of life, and provide the space for the elaboration of new discourses. It is in this sense that reflexivity work *against* the effects of ideology on the flow or circulation of meaning. To summarise:

> What, however, is the point of overturning convention and deconstructing truth? In short, it has political aims of disrupting the oppressive and exploitative effects associated with institutionalized discourses and forms of life. Discourse analysis is a critical enterprise, a form of ideology critique. It does not aspire to truth, but to change. (Durrheim, 1997b, p. 181)

It is clear that discursive social psychology provides sophisticated perspectives on the nature of psychological phenomena, experience in general, and sees its maintenance and change as always a function of social processes. While it privileges social levels of analysis in this manner, it also claims to have a balanced approach to social agency. This it does primarily by saying psychological phenomena are themselves not private entities, but properties that emerge from social processes. Experience, meaning, change: these are always social achievements. For the same reason, psychology being an emergent and not private and universal reality, discursive social psychology also heralds the death of the intellectual imperialism so characteristic of the modern era. By focussing on the construction of meaning and the patterning of experience and conduct in a given context implies that Western theoretical and conceptual models will not be forced on situations where they do not apply.

Is it thus possible to conclude that by turning to language social psychology has found its appropriate postmodern form? In order to evaluate this it is useful to stay with the notions of reflexivity and ideology: its success in addressing the relation between the individual and the social revolves to a large part around whether the power granted the discourse analyst through this focus on reflexivity is echoed (to stay with the model of language!) on the experiential level of the social agent.

4.7. Discourse and its discontents

This description of discursive social psychology as a critical alternative shows clearly why it would be so popular, especially in South Africa, at a time when concerns with culture and multiculturalism, identity and identity politics, as well as the politics of experience more generally, are increasing among social scientists and philosophers in this country (Singh, 1997; Van der Merwe, 1997). In this regard one cannot deny that much of social psychological life is indeed illuminated by the focus on discourses, practices of signification, and the study of ideology. So, for example, can we explain categorisation and identification as discursive achievements related to larger configurations of meanings and practices, rather than as centralised mental processes. This can, amongst other things, provide challenging descriptions of how

identity-categories are ideologically charged and politically mobilised in the South African context – leading not only to interesting readings of historical trends but also of the unfolding cultural and political landscape that is present day South Africa.

Concerns related to identity politics, multiculturalism, power, exploitation and transformation, in whatever discipline they are pursued, require an understanding of the moral and political capacities of individuals as well as the patterning of their experiences and responses by larger social systems. Discursive social psychology, as was made clear, conceptualises the relation between the individual and the social, and the cultural form of human conduct and experience more generally, as by and large *discursively* patterned. In other words, both the hold that forms of life attains over people's self-understandings and behaviours and the power they have to challenge discourses or representations that help sustain forms of life – especially when these are oppressive – are theorised on the level of discursive processes. As Ian Burkitt (1994) explains, since social reality is seen as the "product of conversation or discourse ... this also determines the power of individuals as individual persons" (p. 7).

While people certainly display the ability to create new discourses or representations, the cultural form of conduct and experience are often also very tenacious, and seemingly lingers on despite reflexive attempts to challenge it. Social relations (think specifically of the reproduction of gender and racial relations) often stumble over the impervious nature of acquired tastes, habits, ways of seeing and meaning-giving. Particular social positions or identities are deeply imbedded in experience, and understanding the limits imposed on reflexivity (whether these be material or also discursive) challenges the social psychologist on at least two levels. First, it is necessary to address the processes by which particular discourses, at a particular time and place, become compelling. The social world is clearly home to many and often conflicting frameworks of meaning, and it is therefore necessary to understand the forces that solidify certain understandings and interpretations so that they begin to seem natural. Secondly, if the social psychologist wants to understand insidious patterns of conduct and experience, it is further necessary to reflect "on why it might

be that the use of alternative discourses does not lead automatically to alternative social forms" (Parker, 1992, p. 37). In the context of this study this the more important challenge. While the first can be empirically addressed by imbedding discursive studies in interdisciplinary frameworks, the latter clearly pose a conceptual challenge to how the relation between discourses, the process of meaning construction, and experience is understood.

When challenged with understanding the lingering on of practices, behaviours and even feelings after discourses have changed and people have been brought to reflexive realisation of the way they are discursively located (or storied, as constructionist and discursive approaches to therapy would have it), it is *experience* that poses the greatest conceptual challenge. Since the cultural patterning of experience can evidently outlast the constructions and constraints of discourses, it becomes necessary to ask once again what it means to say that experience is socially constructed? Formulating this somewhat differently, the social achieves a grip on human experience that differentiates it from the textual resources from which it is paradigmatically constructed; and whether *ideology* is the adequate concept to describe and explain this phenomenon depends ultimately on where the materiality of a form of life is located.

It was already made clear in the previous section that discursive social psychologists do not treat discourses as free-floating and immaterial. This is made clear again by Ian Parker (1992) in an interesting attempt to address precisely the above mentioned dilemma by considering "the material resources which make discourse possible" (p.1) In this regard he identifies alongside physical coercion and the material organisation of space also the

> habitual, physical orientation of the individual to discourse of different
> kinds ... the way a speaking body is engaged in action as it follows the
> tracks of dominant representations of the world. The behavioural aspects
> to patterns of speech and 'reading' of texts is ingrained habit. The real
> body, bent in a variety of postures of deferment and position in different

discourses, is such that only a shock, a break can release the potential for the development of new possibilities. (p. 39)

The introduction here of the human body is very relevant to this study[13]. Human beings are inevitably embodied, and the body is implied in all action and experience on a level that cannot be reduced to the biological only (Stam & Mathieson, 1995). Think about gender: its socially constructed nature points beyond anatomical differences to involve the body also in the way girls are taught to walk and sit differently from boys. In this regard Parker (1992) goes as far as saying that the human body itself is a material resource that enables and constrains the production of discourses, and that its relevance to experience cannot be explained by recourse to language alone. This is an important contribution, but the question remains whether this real body is sufficiently theorised to overcome the problem of experience in a social psychology where its construction and political determination are paradigmatically discursive and ideological? In other words, what is the status of the body, psychologically speaking?

Since a discursive ontology necessarily precludes experience and behavioural organisation as also pre-reflexively and non-propositionally patterned, any reference to the material resources that make discourse possible, even when these also strategically involve the human body, has to be theorised as an institutional property, relayed from there to the acting subject via the inter-penetration of cognition and ideology. The social is deemed *materially* objectified on an individual level only as a second instance. The first has already been achieved via discourse in the form of the implementation of a belief-system or the development of discursive repertoires. Discourse might thus be said to provide *psychologised* form that only afterwards instils itself materially in the form of an *embodied* arrest. There is an ontological distance between psychology as a symbolic or reflexive system, and the materiality of the body. The body might be an object of discourse and the site of material oppression and regulation, but it can have no real experiential currency: in Foucauldian (1977) terms the body is docile, a carrier of meanings rather than itself involved in the production and circulation of meaning (Sampson, 1996; Scott & Stam, 1996; Voestermans, 1995).

Such a conception of the body, a place where discursive meanings and their material correlates collide on an individual level, might arguably provide a useful enough account of the tenacious nature of conduct and experience even when it outlives discursive change. Yet, it provides no positive account of the way individual powers of articulation, to reflexively challenge ideology, might effect a *transformation* of embodied arrests. The reason for this is of course that transformation would imply some form of individual grasp, however limited, on the production of meaning. Since the giving and taking of meaning is a paradigmatically reflexive and propositional affair, and since individual participation in this process has subsequently been theoretically limited to the discursive, individual agency exclude the body as itself involved in the construction and reconstruction of experience and conduct in general. However, given the fact that the naturalisation of experience is not only a reflexive process of propositional assimilation or an ideological feat of subjectification, and that agency is only theorised in terms of reflexivity, it remains unclear how resistance and change is possible from the perspective of the social agent. Yet, discursive social psychology invests a lot into making precisely such claims: consider the following statement by Burman et al. (1997):

> ...(F)irst, here is no safe retreat into authentic experience to escape the insidious regimes of truth that institutions construct; but, second, such institutions and their powers of regulation and evaluation are no longer accorded so absolute a determination of our action as to make resistance hopeless. (p. 2)

It is certainly so, and this is one of the gains of social constructionist ideas in general, that there is no such safe retreat: experience is inevitably socially constructed and patterned. However, merely asserting the power of agency against overt institutional determinism does not in itself explain the nature of agency and the psychological and social possibility of resistance against oppression; or how the social actor should imitate the (reflexive) powers and capacities that the discourse analyst indeed assumes for him- or herself. The question that remains to be answered by discursive social psychology, but that it is barred from answering precisely due to the way it makes use of language, can now be formulated as follows. How is it possible, if

capacities and psychological powers remain on a reflexive level, and the social individual remains a reader of texts or a semiotic path-finder (however habitually this occurs), to challenge embodied arrests that are themselves not sufficiently explained through the illumination of discourses and representations?

Before returning to this question in the concluding section the reduction of the materiality of social conduct and experience in discursive social psychology should be accounted for, and its effects be weighed. Recall in this regard that discursive social psychology warrants its critical voice around two things: first, that it provides a more adequate account of the meaning-giving process and social action in general than traditional cognitive social psychology; and second, that it minimises the reproduction of Western assumptions and values in non-Western contexts of knowledge production. Just in terms of what was presented as discursive social psychology in this chapter, it should already be clear that the approach has been at least partially successful in taking social psychology beyond certain traditional impasses. The focus on the constructive aspects of language use has provided a more sophisticated and social account of meaning-giving, while social constructionist and post-structural approaches have located psychological phenomena as cultural constructions and so answered to the challenge of postmodern critiques. Together these approaches have gone a long way in fending of the nagging reduction of individual agency by seeing the individual as a discourse user as well as a subject of discourses.

Yet, while it certainly gave rise to a more social version of the discipline, discursive social psychology has also to confront the fact that it does not explain the relation between the individual and the social as also pre-reflexively and non-propositionally patterned; with effects that have been outlined in the preceding paragraphs. What seems to be *epistemologically* at stake in this reduction is a failure to distinguish between the experiential domain of the actor and the descriptive domain of the observer. In other words, because the social scientist understands and can make sense of social phenomena only against the background of what he or she confronts as cultural texts, propositionally made available in discourses, reflexivity is also assumed to be the only mode of experiential involvement of the social actor in that same environment. Baerveldt and Verheggen (1997; see also their 1999) explain this

as follows:

> ...(W)e fail to distinguish between the phenomenal domain of the acting individual, rooted within his or her bodily constitution, and the descriptive domain of an observer who recognises the behaviour of individuals to be socially patterned. In such an indiscriminative context, observed social structures too often come to be identified as autonomous forces or entities, existing outside of, or independent from human actors. As such, those reified structures are in turn easily be confused with the dynamics, processes and mechanisms that actually fashion human action. (p. 1)

This epistemological assumption reveals and reproduces Western intellectual or philosophical dilemmas that have always existed alongside the individual-social dichotomy: mind vs. body; symbolic vs. material; cognition (reason) vs. emotion (feeling)[14]. While discursive social psychology thus provides more social and more sophisticated accounts of social thinking and meaning-giving, and manages to problematise the intellectual imperialism of traditional approaches to a great extent, its value is also curbed by neglecting to account for important aspects of the social construction of experience. What is more, this neglect itself reveals Western assumptions and values. Discursive social psychology is thus limited as a social psychology of the postmodern in at least one important sense. Because the materiality of practices is seen as only reflexively instilled on the level of experience, it remains blind to important aspects of constructed and changing life-forms, as well as the nature of resistance to change.

4.8. Conclusion(s)

Sufficiently addressing these shortcomings in discursive social psychology will require metatheoretical and empirical work that is beyond the scope of this study. However, it will not be completely satisfactory to simply abandon the discussion at this point by asserting that the debate around social psychology, and especially social psychology in South Africa, is still open. This final section, therefore, will indicate possible directions for further work around the questions that have been raised throughout this

chapter and study as a whole. Before proceeding it should be made clear once again that these critiques are not in any sense a dismissal of the development of discursive social psychology as such. The development of discursive social psychology is tremendously useful and is still under way: one of the key characteristics of this approach is its willingness to take the challenge of deconstructing social psychology's Western and academic biases seriously. The developments that are suggested are therefore not a turn away from discourse and discursive social psychology, but a way of taking the debate about the role and the place of language in social psychology further. This is a crucial debate, especially for psychology in the Third World, since it raises once more the important questions about subjectivity and agency, meaning and experience; and oppression, resistance and change.

In the previous section the following question was asked: how is it possible, if capacities and psychological powers remain on a reflexive level, to challenge embodied arrests that are themselves not sufficiently explained through the illumination of discourses and representations? This question arose with the realisation that discursive social psychology pays insufficient attention to the nature of human embodiment. The way forward seems to imply the development of a conception of social practice that sees the involvement of the individual in society, and the cultural form of experience and conduct more specifically, as also governed pre-reflexively. In other words, the description of cultural form should be disentangled, in part at least, from notions of discourse, so that its constitution can be shown as achieved also outside the reflexive domain.

Quite clearly then, social psychology should move away from pursuing social agency only as a dialectic between being a discourse user and being positioned by discourses, and address embodied activity and the patterning thereof in social relations (Jost, 1995). This is, unfortunately, a bigger challenge than it might seem at the outset. It doesn't make sense to simply say that the embodied nature of human activity should be introduced to social psychology -- for in itself, what would this mean and what would guard it from receding into yet another form of individualism? In the remainder of this section three contexts for the development of a "more embodied" social psychology will be sketched. The first is provided by cultural psychology. Here

the relation between culture and embodiment has been a focus point during the last few years (Voestermans, 1995), a development that reveals its relevance when the implicit theory of culture in discursive social psychology and social constructionist understandings in general is unpacked a bit.

By focussing only on discursive and argumentative processes in the construction of social life, discursive social psychology portrays culture effectively as comprising merely, like a bag, the depositions of negotiated meanings, social representations, and clearly demarcated norms and rules with regard to the regulation of behaviour (Voestermans, 1992, 1997). It is an understanding of culture that elevates its discursive above its practical aspects; it neglects to think of culture as activity. Voestermans (1991) describes this received notion of what culture is, and, importantly, the role of ideology to keep it there, as follows:

> ...(A) somehow *propositionally* and *argumentatively* organised system of ideas on a par with all sorts of idea systems. Culture thus understood becomes something in people's heads or something to be tapped from "discourses". Defined this way – we leave aside the colloquial use of the term in order to designate a large human group with distinctive features – culture turns out to be a subset of ideology. (p. 338)

This echoes the critique developed in the previous section: discursive social psychology, through its focus on ideology with regard to the regulated nature of experience and strategies of domination, bars any conception of the social as pre-reflexively – working directly on embodied structures and capacities – constructing and patterning experience. A richer theory of culture provides a context where such understandings of experience and conduct can be elaborated. Reflect on gender again in this regard: while discursive accounts will always accompany and frame the shaping of behaviour (how you walk, sit, eat or talk, for example), it is not the accounts themselves that make particular ways of interacting become "second nature" and recurrent. It is the embodied patterning itself, and the interactive activities engaged in to foster and regulate it, that provides the groundwork, so to speak, for subsequent gendered subjectivities. It is this dimension of culture and its patterning of experience

that needs to be incorporated into discursive work in social psychology.

If the practical, active aspect of individual participation in social life is acknowledged, there is also no reason why cognition itself should be seen as an entirely ideational process. Recent developments in cognitive psychology (although marginal) have criticised cognitivist and social constructionist accounts alike for the way cognition is theorised without accounting for the active *embodied* engagement of persons with the world (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Sheets-Johnstone, 1990, 1992; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991)[15]. Consider the following statements by Sacha Bem and Fred Keijzer (1996) in this regard:

> Knowledge seems to be wrought exclusively in language. Because language is so dominant in human cognition and psychology, it seems to be the only medium by which humans have relations with the world. Classical cognitivism as well as social constructionism convey the impression that language is indeed the only medium of knowledge. For the one "the language of thought" and networks of propositions constitute the all-cognitive code. The other, first, reduces cognition, and psychology as a whole, to a discursive epistemology; everything – actions, emotions, schizophrenia, child and mother's love – is exclusively constituted in discourse ... Our cognitive relation to the world does not consist in language alone. As already suggested, cognition is a collective name for a number of tasks or functions. For instance, all kinds of actions, such as grasping, walking, crying, enjoying, belong to our cognitive management of the world. (p. 458)

Of course, the focus is here more formally on cognitive structure, not so much on the content of cognition; in the latter case the discursive approach still has a great advantage over cognitivist accounts, as was already indicated in this study. However, discursive social psychology would do well to engage in debate with these developments in cognition, in order to flesh out a conception of the material involvement of persons in cultural practices.

Finally, the recent resurgence of Marxist themes in psychology must be mentioned (Agoustinos, 1999; Billig, 1999; Foster, 1999; Parker, 1999). While these developments are perhaps principally aimed at informing a psychology that will be receptive to oppression and struggle in a world order where the market economy, globalisation and the like are ideologically naturalised, yet occasions massive unemployment, poverty, environmental decay and other forms of social suffering[16], Marxism also offers a lot on the level of metatheory. Its dialectical-materialist understanding of consciousness and subjectivity has perhaps been underplayed by its political uses in the past, but it remains a valuable contribution to social theory not yet adequately investigated by social psychology. In a recent discussion of Marxism in social psychology, and the possible gains it offers over especially discursive models, Don Foster (1999) made the following claims:

> Furthermore, while psychology still remains predominantly "lost in thought" in its cognitivist mainstream, Marxism gives primary attention to "sensuous human activity, as practice". It is these understandings of persons that modern psychology has lost. While the emphasis upon practice (or praxis) has to some extent been recovered by discursive psychology, giving attention to what language does, achieves or constructs, the Marxist ensemble of social relations sees human activity involved in more than just speaking, writing or reading, core activities though these may be. Sensuous activity involves also planting, reaping, building and digging (producing) and holding, touching, loving (reproducing) the means of our existence. (pp. 345 - 346)

How these perspectives should be meaningfully introduced to social psychology in South Africa will have to remain a question. If the limitations of discursive social psychology and constructionist thought in general should teach one thing, it is that psychology (human experience and meaningful action, not the discipline as was the subject of this study) cannot be studied from scholarly heights. Reflexive work, and a metatheoretical study such as this, has a definite function in indicating conceptual dead-ends and possible new areas of exploration, but it cannot substitute the necessity of empirical work and the development of theory from the bottom up.

Therefore, a social psychology of the postmodern, as it designates current transformations on social, cultural and indeed experiential levels, will only be developed as a dialectic between these metatheoretical frames and a direct involvement in the study of actual forms of life. Reflexivity and ideological critique will always be necessary to ensure that theoretical traffic does not become too heavy with notions that are epistemologically and politically suspect, but it will be less than useful for providing a final answer to how people's lives are patterned in the ways they are; how those lives are actually lived or merely beared; or how they are challenged and changed.

In conclusion then, this study can alert social psychology to the necessity of locating the currency of individual lives within the cultural arrests and sudden shifts that characterise postmodern conditions – that is, the world as consisting of forms of life not reducible to Western forms, especially with regard to the models that we use to understand them – but it can only precede the studies that really will begin to achieve that.

NOTES

1. An early classic in the development of social constructionism, indeed the book that made the idea popular, was of course Berger and Luckmann's (1971) *The social construction of reality*.

2. De Saussure's influence is an interesting one. The book on which it is based, *Course in general linguistics* (1974), was not written by him. It was compiled, after his death, from student notes.

3. Foucault's contribution will not be discussed here, but in a later section.

4. This principle is central to Derrida's philosophy, but is hard to grasp in English translation. It signifies both "to differ" and "to defer" (Culler, 1982). This is of course a useful way to summarise the central properties of meaning as Derrida sees it.

5. For the sake of discussion the notion of discursive social psychology will be used in each of the following sections, even though it will become clear later that discursive social psychology usually draws from different traditions of theorising language, rather from just one.

6. The role of ideology in discursive social psychology will be critically discussed in a later section.

7. Since Wittgenstein wrote his later work as numbered paragraphs, it had become an accepted practice to refer to specific paragraphs rather than to page numbers when discussing this work.

8. This notion of psychology "finding its language" is borrowed from Kurt Danziger's (1997b) study, *Naming the mind: How psychology found its language.*

9. Foucault's career is often divided into structuralist and post-structuralist phases (Kearney, 1995). In the former he held the idea that different "epistemes" correlated with clearly delineated temporal blocks. In this regard he identified amongst others the Renaissance, the Classical Age, and Modernity (Parker, 1989b). Since his more post-structural ideas discarded of such over-determined notions of historical change, it will not be discussed here.

10. "Transcendental" is used here not in the metaphysical sense of that which is spiritual or supernatural, but in the philosophical sense of that which is preceding, or that which functions as the condition of possibility for something else.

11. The realism-constructionism debate is one of the most important in recent theoretical psychology. In this regard see the exchange between Greenwood (1992) and Harre (1992).

12. Ideology has for quite long been ignored in social psychology, even though it is a central concept in social theory (Foster, 1991). The history of this concept is complex and will not be discussed here. For good general introductions see Larrain (1979) and Thompson (1984). For an introduction to specific ideological traditions and their relevance for understanding South Africa politics, see Esterhuyse, Du Toit, and Van Niekerk (1987). For a discussion of ideology in South African psychology, see Foster (1991) and Hayes (1989).

13. There is a definite upsurge in theoretical consideration of the body in psychology and other social sciences. While psychoanalysis and phenomenology were for a long time the only traditions that treated the body as more than a biological organism, recent publications have addressed the social and cultural dimensions of the body from diverse angles (Stam, 1996). In this regard psychology follows in the steps of important work done in social theory; for example, Synnot (1993) and Turner (1984).

14. Pierre Bourdieu (1983, 1988) provides related analyses of what he sees as a scholastic or intellectualist fallacy pervasive in the social sciences. In his 1998 he formulates it as follows:

> Picturing all social agents in the image of the scientist (of the scientist reasoning on human practice and not of the acting scientist, the scientist in action) or, more precisely, to place the models that the scientist must construct to account for practices into the consciousness of agents, to operate as if the constructions that the scientist must produce to understand and account for practices were the main determinants, the actual cause of practices. (p. 133)

15. Here is another case of geographical divisions bedeviling psychology. An activity approach to human cognition is not really new: it has always been a characteristic feature at least of Russian psychology (Vygotsky, 1978).

16. As I write these final sections two news events bear witness to what may seem small challenges to the contemporary globalisation of the market economy: first, the riots in Seattle on the occasion of a meeting of the World Trade Organisation; and secondly, the burning of cocoa beans in the Ivory Coast by farmers protesting market exploitation by the West. Theoretical reflection in academic settings often seem and often are very far removed from such events, but it is exactly to break down these barriers that *social psychology* should reflect on itself in these times.

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