

“It’s All Discursive!” Crossing Boundaries and Crossing Words with Rom Harré*

“¡Todo es discursivo!” Cruzando los límites y erosionando las palabras con Rom Harré

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ABSTRACT

Rom Harré is one of the most important figures in academia of recent decades. Born in New Zealand he developed most of his career in Oxford. Influenced by authors such as John Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Lev Vygotsky, Harré has produced his own and innovative approach to humanities and social sciences topics. His writings on philosophy of science have been focused on destabilizing the central doctrines of logical empiricism and positivism. However, his work has been not only influential in philosophy but also in other fields. This paper introduces his main contributions to psychology in general and social psychology in particular. It presents an interview with Rom Harré which outlines an approach to the author and his contributions to the social psychology crisis. Some key concepts in social sciences and in Rom’s own work are also addressed, and research lines he advises to follow in the next decade are examined. The interview depicts Rom Harré as a scholar who crosses the boundaries between different disciplines and places.

Keywords

Rom Harré; ethogenics; positioning theory; social constructionism; discourse analysis

RESUMEN

Rom Harré es una de las figuras más importantes en el mundo académico de las últimas décadas. Nacido en Nueva Zelanda desarrolló la mayor parte de su carrera en Oxford. Influenciado por autores como John Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein y Lev Vygotsky, Harré ha producido su propia e innovadora aproximación a las humanidades y temas de las ciencias sociales. Sus escritos sobre filosofía de la ciencia se han centrado en la desestabilización de las doctrinas centrales del empirismo lógico y el positivismo. Sin embargo, su trabajo no sólo ha sido influyente en la filosofía, sino también en otros campos. Este documento presenta sus principales contribuciones a la psicología de la psicología general y social en particular. Presenta una entrevista con Rom Harré que esboza una aproximación al autor y sus contribuciones a la crisis de la psicología social. Algunos conceptos clave en las ciencias sociales y en la propia obra de Rom también se abordan, y las líneas de investigación que asesora a seguir en la próxima década se examinan. La entrevista representa Rom Harré como un erudito que cruza las fronteras entre las distintas disciplinas y lugares.

Palabras clave

Rom Harré; etogénica; teoría de posicionamiento; construccionismo social; análisis del discurso

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Every morning, before Rom Harré enters his office, he carries out a simple but important activity. He has the daily habit of doing crosswords as a way to maintain brain activity. When we asked him about this habit, he answered that “There are two kinds of crosswords - ‘cryptic’ which involves solving a puzzle and ‘quick’ which involves finding synonyms. The second one is what helps to activate the word store, by first of all activating synonyms in the search for a particular word and secondarily, since the clues are related only accidentally by spelling, to search the lexicon at random.” Thus, to do a crossword is a great way to wake up the neurons using general knowledge, from math to literature, from history to sport. “So always start the day with a quick crossword,” Rom advised us. By following this advice, we propose this interview as a crossword exercise through which we activate a heterogeneous store of key words and topics related to Rom Harré’s work. With a number of concepts and ideas in mind, we talked with Rom about the work he developed during the crisis of social psychology, as well as about his current and future lines of inquiry. We conducted the exercise with the support of a number of colleagues; guests authors whose personal contact or professional work with Rom has allowed us to present him in a more intimate way.

Harré is a person for whom intellectual adventure is incompatible with prejudice and dogma. He is a professor and a scientist with a sensitivity and intelligence which allows him to see things that many others do not. Although he is a really difficult man to summarize, we start this interview introducing his main contributions to psychology in general and social psychology in particular. Next, we present an interview with Rom Harré. It crosses the borders of place, authors and disciplines, and is composed of four parts. In the first part -“Across (disciplines and places)”- we outline an approach to the author, from his multidisciplinary academic trajectory, to the different universities that he has worked in and visited during his career. In the second part, “Down (within a field): Social psychology in the seventies and eighties”, the discursive turn, social constructionism and positioning theory take the fore. In the third part, “Transversely (discourse,

power and selves)” we address key concepts in social sciences and in Rom’s own work. Finally, in the last part, we propose some “New lines for the future”. In that section we talk with the author about the future of research in social science and social psychology, and about the main research lines to follow in the next decade.

This is a conversation with one of the most important figures in academia of recent decades which was possible thanks to the collaboration of Rom Harré himself, who kindly agreed to answer our questions, and to the questions some colleagues sent to us while we were undertaking this interview. In trying to construct a collective memory through researchers that have collaborated with him in a number of ways we enjoyed the cooperation of different scholars. We acknowledge our indebtedness to the special guests that took part in composing this conversation: Adriana Gíl-Juarez (Universitat Rovira i Virgili), Carmen Huici (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia), Charles Antaki (Loughborough University), Eduardo Crespo (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Fernando Broncano (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Florencio Jiménez Burillo (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Ian Parker (Discourse Unit), Joel Feliu (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), José L. Alvaro (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), José L. Falguera (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela), José M. Sagüillo (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela), José Ramón Torregrasa (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Lupicinio Iñiguez (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Martín Mora (Universidad de Guadalajara), and Vicente Sisto (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso). Their contributions were very important in understanding and getting to better know Rom Harré’s trajectory. Many questions that appear in this conversation come from them, directly and indirectly.

Who is Rom Harré?

I remember once, Rom invited me to lunch at his summer home in southern Spain. I wanted to bring

a small gift in appreciation for the invitation. I had no better idea than to bring some kiwi plants. I found it nice that the grounds of his home had a flagship plant from New Zealand, his birthplace. We planted them together in his garden. One of the basic things in Rom’s philosophy is that we must start from the basics, from the praxis. To do things before analyzing and explaining them. Better still if they are shared.

José M. Sagüillo, Professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), helps us to introduce the figure of Rom Harré with this episode. We have in this description one of the clues to knowing Rom Harré, which is the key role of doing things together, from planting a kiwi plant to doing research. An important element in his career is the frequent collaboration with colleagues, which often culminated in joint publications. Sagüillo, who collaborated with Harré (Harré & Sagüillo, 2001), explains that Rom’s ability to interact, listen and propose ideas is an intellectual experience that has been influential in his own training and in many other researchers’.

The strong relation of collaboration between Rom and his colleagues and students has gone hand in hand with a journey he has made through different disciplines and places. Born in Apiti (New Zealand), Rom Harré studied chemical engineering, mathematics, philosophy and anthropology at the University of Auckland. After lecturing at the University of Punjab in Lahore, Pakistan, he took up a travel scholarship at University College, Oxford (UK). There he did postgraduate work under the supervision of the well-known philosopher of language John L. Austin (1911-1960), who introduced him to studies on language. Harré’s graduate thesis at Oxford was concerned with mathematics but also involved issues in philosophy of science. This latter concern became more and more important in Harré’s studies. In fact, he became a university lecturer in philosophy of science at Oxford. During the next years, Harré produced a comprehensive and revolutionary program in that field (Rothbarth, 2004).

Harré’s writings on philosophy of science have been focused on destabilizing the central doctrines of logical empiricism and positivism. However, his work has been not only influential in philosophy but also in other fields, including psychology. In that sense we want to recover the way another person who has collaborated with Harré describes him: Eduardo Crespo, Professor of Social Psychology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, regards Harré as an “explorer” in different realms. When he enters a new field, Crespo says, Harré begins to explore it in depth and introduces a non-conventional perspective within it. This is exactly what happened in relation to psychology in general, and social psychology in particular. Since his early work in psychology Rom Harré has been committed to the development of a reformed methodology for the discipline. This work began in the seventies, when Harré teamed up with Paul Secord to write *Explanation of Social Behaviour* (1973). In this book the authors aimed “to provide a systematic and unified theoretical account of the new ways of thinking about people, and the new methods of studying their behaviour” (p. v). The work developed by Harré and Secord highlighted the rationale and the deficits of the experimental approach to social behavior. However, as Schlenker (1977) has pointed out, it does not simply attack mainstream psychology, but offers a constructive critique and a coherent alternative. The proposal fashioned by Harré and Secord is a non-positivistic perspective called ethogenics. This A framework became a general theory on social life in later pieces of work (see Harré, 1977; 1979).

The word ethogenics comes from ethology, the study of animal behavior as it occurs in real environments (Harré & Gillett, 1994). The ethogenic approach is concerned with how a certain type of animal - who can report a point-of-view about their actions and that of others - generates socially appropriate acts. The genesis of meaningful and accountable social behavior is regarded in ethogenics as a cooperative achievement that can be studied by using a microsociological dramaturgical point of view. It means that social actions are regarded as a sort of staged performance occurring in sequences of happenings called “episodes”

(Harré & Secord, 1972). Within these episodes, people are seen as actors following scripts (Rothbart, 2004). These scripts are not considered the causes of behavior. From the standpoint of ethogenics, human beings are not passive responders to the contingencies of the natural and social world, but self-monitoring and self-directed beings who actively watch, comment and criticize their own performances. Self-direction according to shared meanings ascribed to a situation and the self-monitored following of rules and plans are considered as the processes involved in constructing social relations and actions (Harré, 1977; Harré & Secord, 1972).

Ethogenics proposes not only a dramaturgical approach to the genesis of social order. It also introduces a discursive methodology which is based on the examination of people's accounts. Thus, the main psychological technique in ethogenics is the analysis of both the social force and explanatory content of mundane speech (Harré, 1977). Rom Harré considers the study of discourse as a topic of study in its own right and as a key concept in social constructionism leading psychology to a second cognitive revolution (Harré & Gillett, 1994; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). With this in mind Rom Harré has played an important role in the discursive turn in social psychology. The pieces of work he has produced in this respect examine the local systems of rights and duties within which public and private acts are done during episodes of social action. The study of these moral orders is called 'positioning theory'. Positioning theory is a conceptual and methodological framework which is focused on how psychological phenomena are produced in the sequential development of human acts. The main assumption of positioning theory can be stated as follows:

The production of psychological phenomena in discourse depends upon the skills of the actors, the relative moral standing in the community and the storylines that unfold [...] The main implication of these three principles is that discursive phenomena are not regarded as manifestations of what goes on

"inside" the mind, but that they have to be represented as the phenomena themselves! (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 4)

Through ethogenics and positioning theory, as Eduardo Crespo explains, Harré follows a coherent way to do science. This way is far removed from positivist perspectives like that of mainstream psychology in the '70s and '80s. Harré's innovative theoretical and methodological point of view has been used in a number of important studies on everyday language use (see, for example his works on personhood, Harré, 1986; Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). His current research interests are concerned with emotions (Harré, 1994; 2002; Harré & Parrott, 1996; Belli, Íñiguez & Harré, 2010, 2014).

According to José Sagüillo when Rom Harré was around 65 years old he was very fit. Rom was making numerous transoceanic flights, driving one or two days to go to his house in Alicante (Spain) or taking care of his garden in Iffley Village (Oxford). At that time, one of his aims was to surpass the longevity of Karl Popper. Now he is certainly near to doing so. When we asked Rom about this anecdote, he answered:

Popper was important to me as a person who had made serious philosophical blunders, most of which came from his continuing to try to embed philosophy of science in a context of logic. He made no attempt at all to study the way scientists actually reasoned and supported or undermined each other's conclusions. As someone once said of Popper's falsificationism: he stood on the starting line shouting 'I've won'.

After a highly productive and creative career, Rom Harré is still in the race against positivism and in favor of new ways of understanding and doing science. He has retired from Linacre College, Oxford, UK. However, he perseveres in his studies on the symbolic and social dimensions of human behavior. He is currently Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Additionally, he continues life in Oxford as Emeritus Fellow of his college.

Across (disciplines and places): Well-known philosopher of science and psychologist, from New Zealand

Juan C. Aceros: In *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* (Harré & Secord, 1973) you state that "A normal human biological individual" is not necessarily associated with a "single or unitary social self" but with a "fairly consistent set of inner and outer responses to his fellows and to the social situation" (pp. 6-7). We are interested in asking you about the multiple identities associated with you, Rom Harré, as a scholar. During your career you have studied in depth and influenced a number of disciplines, so it is problematic defining you simply as a chemical engineer, a mathematician, a philosopher or a psychologist. Could you gather all this faces of Rom Harré in a "unitary social self"? For example, could you summarize for us the major milestones in your career and explain to us how you define yourself in relation to these milestones?

Rom Harré: I ceased to follow chemical engineering because I did not have enough money to finish the course. But I had done a mathematics degree in parallel and that gave me the opportunity to teach mathematics, which I liked doing very much. In Oxford my dissertation was on a method of ranking differential equations, but I met John Austin (the performative utterance man and the inventor of Speech Act Theory). Later by chance I met several social psychologists and realized that their work was primitive, taking no account of language as a medium of social interaction – in fact the most important medium. But I have kept lines of communication open with my former selves – I am President of the International Society for the Philosophy of Chemistry and keep in contact with chemical engineering; I teach computational modeling at Georgetown, a fairly mathematical discipline, and of course I do a lot of comparative linguistic work, between Spanish and English, and Japanese and English as contributions to social psychology.

Simone Belli: In a university library, it's possible to find your books in different sections, so when you enter a library in which section do you like to see your books? Do you have a favorite section or not?

RH: I expect to see my books in the psychology and philosophy of science sections. I am happy to see my work in either section. I think it is convenient but often not such a good idea to separate knowledge by area. Most of my work has involved borrowing from other sciences.

SB: We can say that you are a scholar who crosses the boundaries between disciplines, living in more than one field at a time. You are also spending your time in more than one physical place. In fact, you are originally from New Zealand, but you have visited a number of different countries, and you stayed for a long time in the United Kingdom, mainly in Oxford. We would like to know more about your life in Oxford. According to a conversation with José M. Sagiüillo, "academic and cultural life in Oxford is an important part of the life of Rom and Hettie [Harré's wife] and, vice versa, there is no important event in Oxford at which they are not present." What can you tell us about what represents the University of Oxford for you and your life, as well as for psychology and philosophy? What are the main differences from other university contexts?

RH: Oxford still preserves the idea of a community of scholars, but from many different fields in one's own college. In this way departments are not so important as a common part of one's life. Colleges are small and have an intense social life as well as many cross-disciplinary conversations. I also appreciate the fact that Oxford is 800 years old and that I am just a very small part of the history of the place. I have done a good deal of work with linguists and anthropologists in my college, enabling me to keep a distance from academic psychology which has become trapped in a faulty methodology and a primitive metaphysics.

JCA: Your constant movement between different places and institutions brought you in contact and collaboration with scholars all around the world, including the Spanish-speaking countries. You have visited universities in South America and Spain. We would like to ask you about how the relation with all these different places impacted you and your work. Particularly, could you tell us something about your close relationships with the

Hispanic world? How the Spanish-speaking countries received your work and, moreover, influenced your career?

RH: I visited Spain first in 1958, and immediately became interested in the land and the people. I began to study Spanish and in 1965 bought an ancient finca in the hills behind Alicante. After 10 years the restoration of this beautiful place was complete. I also began to give lectures at Spanish universities and to teach courses at Santiago de Compostela, as my ability in the language improved. I became fascinated by the way that Catholic Spain had taken over and absorbed so much of Moorish Spain. My wife and I travelled all over the Spanish land, Granada, Merida, Barcelona, Madrid, Avila, etc. When urbanisation began to surround our house with ‘casitas baratas y feas’, we sold our casa de campo. But we return to Spain somewhere every year. I also visit many places in South America, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, and especially Peru, where I have given a course at Universidad Caeyetano.

JCA: After your retirement from Linacre College you joined the Psychology Department of Georgetown University. Could you share with us the reasons that led you there and the kind of work you are currently developing? In a recent interview you said that your work is now focused on “the role of emotion displays and how emotion words are related to them” (Dierolf, 2013, p. 82). This concern is not new in your career, why are the emotions becoming more and more important in your work in Georgetown?

RH: I joined Georgetown because I was offered a post there, and wished to continue my work – one has two jobs in Oxford – as college fellow that continues in another form after the job of university lecturer has ended. I found the atmosphere very congenial – particularly the philosophical interests of Dan Robinson and the personalism developed by Jim Lamiell. Later other people joined the department with similar interests, people such as Ali Moghaddam and Jerry Parrott. Moreover if I had to work abroad because of retirement rules in Oxford why not work in one of the most interesting cities with amazing theatre, museums and music? I am

now much more interested in the role of moral concepts in psychology, and have been one of those developing positioning theory with Ali Moghaddam (see, Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010; Moghaddam, Harré, & Lee, 2008), the study of how rights and duties are assigned to people and how these assignments influence the way they act. But throughout my time at Georgetown I have worked on ways to accommodate neuroscience into psychology without leading to the reduction of the latter to the former. I think that my recent work on the task-tool metaphor has opened a way forward. Studies of emotions, I believe, are not so much a different branch of psychology as an aspect of lives where meanings and biology interact with our sense of moral right and wrong. To be angry is to display a judgment that something wrong has been done to one and one has the right and maybe even the duty to protest!

3. Down (within a field): Social Psychology in the seventies and eighties

JCA: In 1972 you published *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* with Paul F. Secord. This is the year we can say that the social psychology “crisis” began, and you played a relevant role in it. With this in mind, we want to ask you how did you become interested in social psychology and what led you to be involved in the discursive turn in social psychology?

RH: I became interested in social psychology by accident. I was asked to share in a course on scientific models and one of the talks was given by Michael Argyle, a charming man, about models in social psychology, but it was more or less logical nonsense. That year Stephen Toulmin visited Oxford and invited me to support him when he gave a talk to social psychologists. They understood nothing and presented the most naïve views. I decided to spend that summer reading up on the literature on social psychology and became more and more appalled. By chance I was assigned to mentor a visitor, Willard Day, editor of the journal *Behavior*, a disciple of Skinner. Again I was astounded at the simplemindedness of what he took for granted. He invited me to visit him in Nevada and there I

began discussions with Paul Secord who was seeking a better way in social psychology. I was struck by the simple fact that no social psychologists had thought to take account of the way that most social interactions were created by the use of language and symbols. The experimental methods they had devised did not resemble the methods of physics and chemistry at all and they were supposed to be the justification for calling what they did a science! I had a good grounding in linguistic philosophy from my supervisor John Austin, and from Gilbert Ryle and Peter Strawson, so it was easy to transfer some of this knowledge to trying to create a properly scientific psychology with a method and a metaphysics that was commensurate with the phenomena that were being studied, like social facilitation, friendship, the attribution error and so on. Secord and I decided to write a textbook for better ways of doing things and we also started a journal, the *Journal for the Theory of Social Psychology*, which continues to flourish.

SB: As part of your engagement in the social psychology crisis, you were invited to an academic event in Spain. It was in Santander in 1981, a Symposium on Contemporary Social Psychology (Ibañez, 1982; Torregrosa & Sarabia, 1983) in which other leading figures of social psychology were present, including Herbert Kelman, Henry Tajfel, Tomás Ibañez and Sheldon Stryker. During this event, you explained the conflict between positivist and experimental approaches in social psychology, defending your proposal for an ethogenic approach. José Ramón Torregrosa, host of that event and professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, remembers that Henri Tajfel opened a dynamic controversy with you from a European social psychology stance and from his research on intergroup relations. Probably, Torregrosa said, it was common practice in Oxford to debate in this way, but it was the first time in Spain that a debate like that had happened in social psychology. For Torregrosa, your participation in this debate was like a “hammer of heretics”, but against positivists. Maybe, Tajfel perceived you as an intruder in social psychology, because you were coming from the philosophy of science, or probably Tajfel perceived the danger of

this criticism for his theory and for social psychology. Could you share with us some memories about this dispute? In your opinion, what this debate meant for the social psychology crisis at that point?

RH: It was less a dispute between Henri and I (we were very good friends) but a culture clash. I was pointing out some simple statistical fallacies which are still made in social psychology, confusing the extensive and intensive designs. I gave my talk in Spanish and Henri replied in French. Not everyone understood what was going on – it was a typical Oxford debate. But it violated the rules of Spanish academic discussion. Bernabé Sarabia was chair and stopped the meeting. I explained to Henri what the trouble was and he and I decided to walk out arm in arm! From a scientific point of view Henri never understood that the *ceteris paribus* condition which can be more or less fulfilled in physics and chemistry and which is a necessary condition for experimental studies (as opposed to observational) can never be achieved in psychology. The empirical method must be observation and analysis! His background was not social psychology but journalism.

JCA: Now let's speak about social constructionism. The emergence of this perspective in social psychology came with an epistemological challenge of the traditional way of doing psychology. But, beyond this challenge - shared by all social constructionists - a variety of social constructionist perspectives exist. As you stated in *Positioning Theory* (Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999, p. 2), social constructionism “is a rather loose term for a variety of anti-nativist positions in general psychology theory”. You place your own work within this loose category. Could you explain to us the particularities of your constructionist approach? In what sense it can be considered different to the perspectives sustained by authors such as Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter or Ian Parker?

RH: Cultural psychology, which I think is the best camp for me to belong to, is based on the psychology of Lev Vygotsky, the cultural/historical/instrumental approach. I differ from my colleagues in that I think there is a proper place for neuroscience as the study of the material tools we use to

perform cultural tasks. Such sciences as neuroscience and neurochemistry as well as geography and climate change are not just attractive stories promoted by the social influence of their practitioners. They are studies of the ground base which has to be interpreted by people in order to act and which is the source of psychologists' studies of repertoires of meanings. I am also profoundly sceptical of the idea of social reform by structural change – as Ali Moghaddam and I have argued many times, it is the discursive practices of people that are the core of regimes, malevolent or benevolent (Harre & Moghaddam, 2012; Moghaddam & Harre, 2010). If you want to change the social world you must change the discourse practices that shape it!

JCA: During recent decades the original strength of critical and discursive social psychology seems to have been diluted. Maybe you do not completely agree with this idea, since in a recent interview you stated that “What has continually been on the rise in the last 10 or 15 years is (...) discursive psychology, focusing on language use in everyday life.” (Dierolf, 2013, p. 83). And, of course, an important number of psychologists are using alternative and suggestive viewpoints, close to discourse analysis and social constructionism. However, apparently mainstream social psychology has not been seriously affected by these perspectives. Considering all this, and picking up on a question from Vicente Sisto, Professor in Social Psychology at Universidad Católica de Valparaiso, we are curious about your perception on what you called the Second Cognitive Revolution (Harré & Gillett, 1994). How do you visualize the evolution of discursive perspectives in psychology? What current perspectives and practices have come to your attention? What is the present and future of the Second Cognitive Revolution?

RH: I believe that all the essential work has been done, both theoretically and in the provision of many very high quality studies, for example the recent volumes on positioning theory studies, such as *The Self and Others* (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003) and there are many other of such projects by others, particularly cultural psychology and the dialogical account of the self. One should note

the increasing number of textbooks for teaching the theory and empirical techniques of qualitative psychology, which includes narratology, discursive psychology, Vygotsky studies and much more. Why these advances have not swept across psychology has institutional rather than intellectual reasons. A certain paradigm has become entrenched in the profession including easily carried out studies with a small number of students and other volunteers, and the use of statistical packages to analyze the results. This work is almost uniformly bad science, but publications like this in a flood attract what is called “impact”, that is citations by people doing the same thing. Until we abandon impact for insight, psychology will, in the large, continue to generate shelves full of descriptions of artifacts of a faulty method. The step forward is simple: give up events and causes and turn instead to meanings and rules and story-lines. I am fortunate in that I do not need a “career” so I can do work that I think is of importance and is carried out with something like the methods of physics and chemistry and so deserving of the accolade “science”, as if that is what matters, alongside the feeling that one has done good and honest work!

4. Transversely (discourse, power and selves): Some things that we do with words

JCA: Your contribution to the renewal of psychology is not only close to social constructionism but also to discursive analysis. In that sense you recover the heritage of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Austin, as authors such as Michael Billig or Jonathan Potter did. You share a strong anti-cognitivism with these later authors (Antaki, 2006), as well as the focus on the study of psychological matters in discourse (Harré & Gillett, 1994; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). However, you have developed your own approaches to these issues. In relation to that, we are interested in the differences between your form of discourse analysis and others such as discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In the same vein, Charles Antaki, Professor in Social Psychology in Loughborough University,

would like to know what you think about conversation analysis (CA), and whether it is consistent with your form of discourse analysis.

RH: I am much in sympathy with what Potter and Wetherell have proposed and illustrated. They have brought psychology as a scientific conversation to be studied into the field of discursive practices. That does not relieve us of the duty of displaying our first-order conversational studies such as positioning theory as scientifically respectable and the possible basis for action. Of course to study positioning and its processes one must be occupying a position, as having a right and a duty to do so and so on. Stop the hierarchy where it is convenient! That there is always another level there does not undermine the lower order studies. CA in the classical format floats free of context and meaning into a purely formal analysis of the flow of discourse – it can be put to use in limited ways by tying it tightly to narratology – the structure of a conversation is more than turn taking etc. but is the unfolding of a story, with characters, parts to play and plots to develop, so we need Greimas and Propp to complete the discursive methodology. Of course within the dramaturgical model “persons are performed”, but in genres that are acceptable in their communities. Try something else too far a way from what ordinary folk do and the men in white coats come for you.

SB: In relation to your rejection of the existence of psychological phenomena which are autonomous discourse, Ian Parker, director of the Discourse Unit, is interested in knowing what you have to say about the unconscious. As Parker reported to us, some years ago you were working with a follower of Heinz Kohut (1913-1981), so we suppose you are familiar with psychoanalytic theory stances. In *The Discursive Mind* (Harré & Gillett, 1994) you state that the unconscious is comparable with the “inaccessible mind” in cognitive psychology. In that sense, you said: “Freudian psychology and cognitive psychology share the assumption that ‘important things’ about human cognition were not accessible even to the person in whom they were happening” (p. 11). Could you tell us more about the unconscious?

RH: The important aspect of the “unconscious” is how we come to think that there is any such thing. The basic phenomena are simple – a discourse flow is interrupted and resumed again and seems to have progressed along some pattern of cognitive acts or emotional states and processes in the interim. But if we take the embodiment of people seriously there must be a bridge between one moment and the postponed next moment within the conversational flux. It is convenient to call that unconscious processes but should not be taken as an invitation to metaphysics. We need to interpret that moment as bridged by the cognitive process that would have occurred had the person been acting out the whole story-line. In other words, the unconscious is like a language, as Lacan once said. Though I am not sure he meant it in this simple straightforward way. How memory is involved in all this requires one to consider what memory is – and it is surely not simply recollection of the past! To make a memory declaration is a move in the discursive process, and positions are essential aspects of it.

SB: Amongst the numerous critiques of social psychology, your work captured the methodological critique of the emerging ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism and introduced political activity in every psychological theory position you took. In that sense, you claimed: “... every writer on psychological theory owes an explicit account of the political consequences of his position to his readers” (Harré, 1979). Twenty years later, you and van Langenhove (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) elaborated this political effort produced by discourse with the concept of power to shape certain aspects of the social world. For this reason, Ian Parker also wants to ask you about power. However, could you think again about that issue in relation to positioning theory? Could you tell us something about how power is articulated in the discourse and about the conditions in which people are positioning themselves and position power in discourse?

RH: Power is a relation between persons in which in very many dimensions one may have taken charge of the fate of the other or others. When we look closely at how it is established it seems to emerge in the course of certain kinds of discursive

practices. People become trapped in webs of paper work for example, and at certain nodes in that web are people who make decisions. Or perhaps they don't actually make decisions but find that decisions have somehow already emerged from the conversation. What about the power exerted by force? The agents of that force are also trapped within discursive practices, such as those of the Mafia families, the US Marines, those deciding on the pay of the workers, and all that. It's all discursive! However rights and duties to make use of certain discursive practices is a key issue – who has the power to excommunicate someone, to order water boarding and a duty to pay taxes, to be kind to animals and so on?

SB: Your idea of fluid positioning in discourse where positions can and do change, because there are not fixed roles, and are used by people to position themselves or be positioned in the discourse was pioneering in social science. For this reason, I would like to return to Judith Butler's (1993) concept of performance that I've worked on with you at Georgetown University (Belli, Harré & Iñiguez, 2010). This concept is indebted to John Austin's speech acts, particularly the perlocutionary act, and for this reason is not so new in the field of linguistics. For example your positioning theory contemplated this question, and of course, Wittgenstein, with spontaneous linguistic articulation, had already presented something similar to this. From a linguistic perspective, what do you think about the genuineness of many poststructuralist approaches to the study of the self that have appeared in recent years?

RH: There is a long-running problem with "the self". Clearly the self in one sense is generated as a social object, that is as a nexus of social relations, by the use of pronouns and forms of address. But if we turn to the deeper concept of person (and follow William Stern, for example, or Peter Strawson) we realize people are the basic entities of the social/psychological world. But surely, you say, they are embodied? Yes, but what are those bodies but tool-kits and also, most importantly, sites for people – a house has an address and is occupied by people going about their meaningful and rule-governed and

normative interactions. We as people have several selves – our point of action in the world, our beliefs about our lives and our capacities and vulnerabilities, and the way we are seen with respect to these matters, especially the moral aspects, by others. Mostly we develop these beliefs in our lives with others, so the idea of a dialogical self makes very good sense. It is the very product that Vygotsky saw as the outcome of our passing through various stages of the Zone of Proximal Development helped on by those more competent in our culture than we ourselves are. But the dialogical sense of self is not a person! People are the core entities both morally responsible in degrees and morally protected.

Solutions? New lines for the future

SB: In *Psychology for the Third Millennium: Integrating Cultural and Neuroscience Perspectives* (Harré & Moghaddam, 2012) there appears the idea of hybrid psychology. Eduardo Crespo thinks that hybrid psychology is not a delimited concept, but is a meta-area to arrive at another new area. From the point of view of a "hybrid psychology" it is possible to claim that the social context also matters in neuroscience. We also can argue that we need to introduce discursive analysis in the study of the mind (Harré, 2010). Without taking into consideration the discourse-in-context we have a type of science that forgets where the subjects live and produce their thoughts and actions. For example, the case of sex differences in the structural connections of the human brain (Ingallhalikar *et al.*, 2013) that has generated a large debate in recent months. Where do you think the debate will be moved to in neuroscience and social science in the coming years?

RH: We already have the main framework for introducing the social and historical context into psychological research in the work of Lev Vygotsky. We need to develop further the study of interpersonal cognitive processes and collective emotions, decisions and so on. This would follow naturally from taking up the idea that an important medium of cognition and memory is conversation. If there are differences in the organization of the brains of those who live mainly in a collective psychological

context from those of loners this may be only of passing interest since the key studies will already be situated in collective contexts. However, there is a paradox or something like it to be faced. We can never complete a psychological research programme because the phenomena we are trying to map and the language with which we are doing this is continually changing. The dog cannot catch its tail but is always hopeful of doing so. Over the centuries we will generate a sequence of “psychologies” that will need interpretation because the ways of thinking and the language and other symbolic means will be ever changing. We take this for granted in studies of religion – Latin is not the language of modern Christian thought but unless we understand it we will not be able to understand the great authors of the Middle Ages. Recent studies of Shakespeare’s plays sensitive to the vastly different world view and taken-for-granted beliefs have led to very different readings of those psychologically profound works.

SB: You have dedicated a large part of your career to the study of emotions (see Harré, 1986; 1998). This is an issue that can be influenced by your hybrid theory. This approach recognizes a three-fold set of conditions of emotion: a physiological component, a cognitive component, and a social component. As a result, the complexity of the study of emotions becomes evident. This complexity can increase if we consider the current contexts in which emotions are socially displayed. In recent years, online communication and the Internet have probably introduced a different grammar of emotion, a new emo-grammar where researchers return to discover the important role of emotions in communication between users. Probably the complexity of emotions is represented by the complexity of the language in this online communication where users don’t use body and facial strategies to express them. Taking all this in mind, where do you think the study of emotions will be focused in the coming years?

RH: Do not forget the vast increase in video presentations – a new iconography of emotions must surely be the focus of new studies – we have extensions of discourse also into twitter and other instant responses and displays. But the most important is

the pictorial content of Facebook and similar nets, with the ever-present possibility of recording how someone looks at a precise moment.

JCA: In recent years, we have observed a growing number of social researchers engaged in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and, concretely, in investigations inspired by the actor-network theory (Latour 1988; Callon 1986; Law 1986). STS approaches offer new understandings of science and technology in action, but they are not restricted to such an issue. They also propose an innovative ontology of the social in which symbolic but also material entities occupy a key position. Using such an ontology as a base, STS scholars point to the limits of discourse in the understanding of social order and social action. What do you think about this emerging area and how is it possible for you to understand the social in this context?

RH: There are two different kinds of material entities of interest – first material objects which play a part in our lives through the meanings with which they are endowed by people – monuments, flags, cars, food items and so on. There is another kind of material entity of great and growing importance, the prosthetic devices that can be used instead of a body part or brain organ to carry out some tasks. The simplest cases are garden and kitchen tools but there are all the machines that enhance or replaced human powers – for instance the prostheses created for injured soldiers and accident victims. (Even dialysis machines are taken into a person’s life as quasi persons – some research on this in London a few years ago.) However, an important principle cannot be lost sight of – the meanings given to machines and machine states are dependent on the meanings that exist in the society in which they appear. I do not think that a completely new meaning can be created by building a machine – though existing meanings can of course be transformed in practice. I don’t know what actor network theory covers – but if we are talking about any combination of concepts in which “semiotics” has a part then this must be a social approach – there can be no asocial meanings. Wittgenstein made this point very clearly – there can be no private language (meanings) whether it be subjective or objective in an isolated space.

JCA: Recently you wrote an interesting book on the use of animals as tools in laboratory contexts (Harré, 2009). Crespo suggested to us that with your pioneer spirit, you could enter the STS field, exploring it and making relevant contributions from a non-conventional point of view. What do you think about this?

RH: My *Pavlov's Dogs* book was intended to be philosophical-technical rather than moral. I added a short chapter at the end suggesting ways in which moral aspects of the use of animals as apparatus and instruments could be discussed. Maybe when I can catch some leisure I'll follow Eduardo's advice.

SB: Eduardo Crespo and I remember the meeting with you and how you organize your research with your collaborators and graduate students. We have assimilated some practices that you have taught us. For this reason, Eduardo Crespo said that your work as trainer of junior researchers is remarkable, you represent a great teacher. John Austin was very influential in the development of your own understanding of psychology. What did you learn from him as a student and what did you learn from him as a professor and supervisor of many student dissertations? In your early career what was important for you and what do you think is important for a junior researcher today?

RH: Austin was the cleverest man I have ever met, so any sort of interaction with him required one to be alert. At the same time he was a superb supervisor because he took great trouble to understand what one's project was and how one had gone about it. He did not like philosophers to undertake historical studies, that is studies of the work of some other philosopher – philosophy should be a study of problems not people. Of course one learned from philosophers of the past but re-presenting or going over their work was not the best way to use their insights. And above all be very clear in what you want to say – he used to say that it was always best to make more distinctions than less.

JCA: We want to close this interview by paying tribute to other authors and researchers who were important in your career and life; we are thinking of people as different as Vygotsky or Wittgenstein. Could you tell us what they taught you, how they

influenced your thinking, and how they may influence future social researchers?

RH: I suppose I have learned from Lev Vygotsky that the idea of the isolated human being is a myth – cognition, emotion and all the rest of the way we live can only be in the midst of a virtual or actual community. At the same time Vygotsky's emphasis on practice – meaningful action towards some goal and in contexts of local norms and standards – has been of equal importance to me. And that of course brings me to how much I have gained from studies of Wittgenstein's writings. Though they never met, these two thinkers led me along two converging paths to a common ideal of psychology as a collective-instrumental-historical discipline continually in interaction with analytical and critical philosophy.

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