

A Critique
of the
Social Psychology of
Small Groups
&
an Introduction to a
Social Psychology of
the Large Group.

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INTRODUCTION

Positivism and Pragmatism underpin the North American school of Social Psychology. This has been well documented in the specialist literature on the subject.

This overweening bias has made Social Psychology into an ‘idiographic’² science, whereby individual facts gave room to wide generalizations of findings in the absence of a serious search for causal relationships. Social Psychology, consequently, has persistently focused on the analysis of the particular conditions affecting phenomena subject to its investigations.

In the absence of categories which it truly could call its own, Social Psychology developed in thrall to categories borrowed from the Natural Sciences, Physics in particular: that is why social psychologists will readily talk in terms of ‘dynamics’; ‘topology’; [hodology](#)³; the social ‘atom’; the ‘molecule’, and the likes.

The concept of ‘stimulus’ anchors psychology to the measurement of physical dimensions which almost by definition do not correspond to the specificity of the phenomena encountered in psychology. Thus frustrating any serious attempt of Psychology to overcome physiologism as well as to set itself up as a serious, independent science.

Given these constraints, Social Psychology has been reduced to a motley collection of incredibly narrow conclusions which never add up to anything but an indistinct cluster of data from which it is very difficult to extract any core elements. The following quote is just an example of the singularity of the facts of experimentation which crowd Social Psychology manuals. Quotes like these became so frequent and omnipresent that most of us became accustomed to think of them as “Social Psychology”:

“Thorndike (Thorndike, 1940)⁴ found that the group trumps the individual when it comes to solving a crossword problem, but not when it comes to drawing up a puzzle” (de Montmollin, 1964:48)

This notwithstanding, North American Social Psychology has managed to construct an entire conceptual architecture, subsequently echoed uniformly by

² pertaining to or involving the study or explication of individual cases or events (opposed to [nomothetic](#)).

³ A term introduced by Kurt Lewin to describe paths in a person’s ‘life space’

⁴ Edward Lee "Ted" Thorndike (August 31, 1874 – August 9, 1949) [American psychologist](#). His work on [animal behavior](#) and the [learning](#) process led to the theory of [connectionism](#) and helped lay the scientific foundation for modern [educational psychology](#).

Psychologists in the entire world. Virtually without questioning, this has become a trend which has ended up affecting vast sectors of society in most parts of the world.

In these pages we do not intend to analyse or contest the philosophical foundations of Social Psychology as practiced in the United States. Nevertheless, we do not sympathize with authors of Marxist leanings who will readily challenge those philosophical underpinnings, while accepting wholesale the particular results of experiments conducted in this mould. They seem to have been enthused by the sheer abundance of numbers, statistical data, graphs, curves, procedural samples and experimental designs which conjure up the illusion that, indeed, we are in the presence here of an actual Science.

We contend that accepting, one by one, the results of those experiments is tantamount to accepting, one by one, also the explanatory underpinnings of those phenomena which inevitably will lead to embracing the spin given, globally, to the discipline.

Even though the starting point may have been a profession of faith which distances itself from all traces of positivism and pragmatism, the end result of uncritical acceptance of individual experimentation facts leads, all the same, precisely to positivism and pragmatism.

Our interest in writing this book centres on finding a guiding thread beyond the amalgam of experimental data which adds up what we know today as ‘Social Psychology’.

It has definitely not been easy to penetrate the central core hidden within the array of individual facts, later used to put together an ideological construct in lieu of what genuine social functioning and transformation ought to be all about.

It has proved to be even more of a challenge to get even a glimpse of ‘another’ understanding of Social Psychology which does not pay lip service to the omnipresent “small group” concept and to the “dynamics” taking place within this “group”, invariably taken as the focal point of Social Psychology.

This book advances the idea that Social Psychology has grown and flourished more inside a political framework, rather than inside the framework of a scientific discipline.

In support of the above we offer a bibliographical analysis of the main concepts which are prevalent in the Social Psychology field. Those concepts reached far beyond the confines of Academic Schools of Learning or Research Institutes, to

become household practices adopted in the most diverse of social environments: training institutions, factories, schools, government and non-government institutions, social or sports clubs, technical cooperation programs, faith base communities and civil society organizations.

The coherence between the different concepts which amount to what we know as “Social Psychology” would suggest that, together, constitutes a system, and even a program that is political in nature.

In the first part of this book we offer a (re)presentation of said concepts, steering clear of personal interpretations, closely following the letter and the spirit in which the authors formulated them.

Included in this are contributions by Elton Mayo⁵ and Roethlisberger; examples of the bias toward ‘behavior’ in Social Psychology; the ‘group’-‘social organization’-society conceptual system; the contributions of Kurt Lewin⁶; of Moreno⁷ and George Caspar Homans⁸.

In the second part we offer a critical assessment of those concepts. We start with a general characterization of the Social Psychology field as practiced principally in the United States of America; a psychological critique and a sociological critique. We will demonstrate the ample superiority of the category of ‘*objectivized activity*’ over the ‘behavior’ category as an explanatory tool and we will also illustrate the possibilities opened up by the former when applied to social psychology, in particular when organically integrating concept of ‘the object’ (reality) into social psychology.

As demonstration of the significance of the incorporation of this category we will offer an attempt to re-interpret the Hawthorne experiments⁹ which will then lead us to an understanding of management from a viewpoint which is radically different from the ‘Human Relations’ in the Workplace¹⁰ one.

⁵ George Elton Mayo (26 December 1880 - 7 September 1949) was an [Australian psychologist, sociologist and organization theorist](#). Roethlisberger was one of his assistants. Fritz Jules Roethlisberger (1898 – 1974) was an American social scientist and management theorist.

⁶ Kurt Zadek Lewin (September 9, 1890 - February 12, 1947) was a [German-American psychologist](#), known as one of the modern pioneers of [social, organizational, and applied ‘small group’ psychology](#).

⁷ Jacob Levy Moreno (born Iacob Levy, [Bucharest, Romania](#), May 18, 1889; died [New York, USA](#), May 14, 1974) was a [Jewish Romanian-born Austrian-American leading psychiatrist and psychosociologist](#), thinker and [educator](#), the founder of [psychodrama](#), and the foremost pioneer of [group psychotherapy](#).

⁸ G C Homans (August 11, 1910 – May 29, 1989) was an American sociologist, founder of [behavioral sociology](#) and the [exchange theory](#). Homans is best known for his research in social behavior and his works including *The Human Group*, *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*

⁹ Hawthorne: more on this in Chapter I of this book.

¹⁰ Human relations movement (HRM) refers to the researchers of [organization development](#) who study the [behavior of people in groups](#), in particular workplace groups. It originated in the 1930s’ [Hawthorne studies](#), which examined the effects of [social relations, motivation](#) and [employee satisfaction](#) on factory [productivity](#)

In the third part of the book we propose a different Social Psychology concept accompanied by a demonstration of its applications in attempts to solve some of the most important problems affecting vast swathes of the population in economically dependent countries.

This concept was conceived and grew amidst real-life field experiences in a number of Central, South American and African countries by a group of social scientists working in technical cooperation programs for rural development, cooperativism and agrarian reform.

In the part dealing with field experiences, the data, such as they are, are not supported by the results rosters which normally go with the natural sciences. This is due, among others, to some obvious facts: one of these is that we have always and exclusively been (pre)occupied with (a) country's development processes which leave precious little time nor resources for research as we know it.

The conceptual tools which we used were crafted specifically to work with people with low level of literacy, and for a long time this did not allow us the opportunity nor conditions for the systematization of concepts and the methodology in a manner that could be presented in a scientific environment.

Last but not least, the blatant abuse of methods originating in the Natural Sciences by Social Psychology as commonly practiced has left us with a veritable allergy vis a vis the language of statistics and correlation coefficients.

Above all, at all times we have endeavoured to demonstrate that it is actually possible to arrive at certain conclusions which remain true to scientific repeatability criteria without, of necessity, having to rely on the language and methods of the Natural Sciences.

Those limitations notwithstanding we have wanted to open up these reflections to mainstream critique in the hope that this will lead to further attuning of the focus and that, eventually, they may motivate a Research institute to look into what we consider to be a promising Social Psychology research vein that should be further developed.

Ivan Labra

Chapter I

THE FOUNDERS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THEIR MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS.

The experiments of the Science Academy of the U.S. National Research Council at the General Electric “Hawthorn Works”¹¹

The contributions of Elton Mayo and Roethlisberger¹²

The Hawthorne experiments are compulsory subject matter for any social psychology, sociology, human relations, management or organisational development manual.

Before integrating them in the body of his studies, it is worth mentioning that Elton Mayo managed to solve the problem related to personnel rotation in a textile factory in Philadelphia, from which he concluded that the interest shown by the management in their workers, resulted in transforming them from a "cohort of disconnected individuals in a social group".¹³

The Hawthorne experiments covered distinct areas: The "Relay Assembly group", the "Second Relay Assembly group"; the "Mica splitting test room"; the "Bank Wiring observation room" and interviews among half of the almost 24,000-strong workforce. Later, experiments were conducted with a group of welders.

¹¹ Which resulted in what has come to be known as the ‘Hawthorne works’ effect

¹² As regards these experiments, we used reports that can be found in the following texts:

- Anzieu, D & Martin, J. (1971) *La dinámica de los grupos pequeños* –Kapeluz (=Small Group dynamics) (Exists only in Spanish and French)
- "Tratado de Psicología Experimental" 1965 Tomo 9, Editorial Paidós, (Spanish) (Digitalized [English version](#))
- Bogomolova, Nina 1973 “[Human Relations Doctrine, ideological weapon of the Monopolies](#)” Progress Publishers

Katz D & Kahn R L. 1966 “[The social psychology of organizations](#)”. Wiley, NY 489 p.

¹³ E. Mayo, cited by Anzieu and Martin in "La dinámica de los grupos pequeños" ed. Kapeluz; 1971, page 58.(Spanish and French texts only) (see supra n.2)

From these experiments Social Psychology developed important concepts, among others the "formal" and "informal" group. However, Mayo's, Roethlisberger's and their assistants' most important contribution was their observation that subjective factors influence the productivity of workers.

As is now well known, in the different stages of the experiments they successively managed to isolate the particular factors that influenced the material conditions around the productivity of workers, until they arrived at the conclusion that it was not the objective conditions that led to an increase or decrease in productivity, but rather subjective and psychological factors.

Out of the 21,000 interviews, carried out in the Hawthorne plant between 1928 and 1930, that lasted 30 minutes each, the literature on the experiments picks the case of a particular worker who comes to the conclusion that his bad relations with one supervisor were similar to those with his step-father. (Krech, 1962:297)

Here we have an observation which was given special status, individualized and highlighted to make it stand out from the others, without offering any reason as to why the researchers did so. One can only speculate that they found it important to provide support to prevailing psychoanalytical theory regarding early childhood "trauma" as causal agent of people's present behavior.

The literature also highlights the pressure that a group of workers puts on those colleagues who worked at a faster pace to make them to slow down, despite the fact that wage rises were related to rises in productivity.

From these kinds of observations, Roethlisberger concluded that workers reason with their "*sentimental logic*" whereas management operates on the basis of the "*logic of efficiency*".

The design of the Hawthorne experiments clearly had some built-in a-priorisms, among them the distinction between objective and subjective or psychological factors, equating subjectivity and with irrationality, and attributing irrationality and subjectivity to workers.

This can clearly be deduced from the different reports on the experiments and, certainly, from a far from negligible historic fact mentioned by Gustave Le Bon in '*The Psychology of Peoples*' (Le Bon, 1974), where he makes a distinction between "rational logic" which operates in the exact sciences and "sentimental logic" that informs the actions of the people.

As a consequence of this definition, human relations policies at workplace management developed with a heavy emphasis on the need for workers' psychological treatment, so as to lessen emotional tensions assumed to be prevalent among them, with the added use of group therapy or collective psychological activities mediated by the mass media.

A considerable part of management resources in contemporary capitalist enterprises is directed at improving the "psychological environment of the group" with the aim to make social interaction more tolerable. These include: the setting up of workers' groups which are at ease with each other; the creation and diffusion of an enterprise's "image"; the development of a sense of ownership and of belonging to one "big family" in the workplace.

Hence a variety of measures directed at workers' sentiments; their state of mind; their "innermost feelings" and sundry "unconscious factors".

The main means by which to act upon subjective factors is communication. This includes the following forms: communication of the foreman with subordinates; workers among themselves; the need for mass diffusion of "the image" of an enterprise in order to generate a sense of group belonging and identification with images created by ad-hoc advertising bodies.

Talks, seminars, meetings and group dynamics are specially developed.

An important aspect in this communication strategy is the creation of a feeling of being participants in the management of the workplace, even if this does not have any foundation in reality¹⁴.

The importance of these findings can be appreciated when we take a closer look at the Psychological Warfare programmes of the United States Army. The use made of the different concepts like the differentiation made between the subjective and objective factors; the identification of irrationality with subjectivity and the use of communication to create images; reached proportions that their creators never imagined.

1. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY'S BEHAVIORIST SLANT

¹⁴ *Workers have to accept what the enterprise wants, and the impression needs to be created that it is they who have adopted or helped in the adoption of the decision*" cited in Bogomolova, Nina 1973 "Human Relations Doctrine, ideological weapon of the Monopolies" Progress Publishers. This cross references with L. Baritz 1960 : "[The Servants of Power: A History of the Use of Social Science in American Industry](#)" Wesleyan University Press pages 187-188.

The copious specialized literature is full of examples that illustrate the behaviorist character of Social Psychology as practiced in the United States of America tradition.

There is nothing new or surprising about this statement.

The concept of '*behavior*' is so widespread that, on the surface, it would appear as though there were, apparently, no other way to express what it means to be human.

The same is true for the terms "*Stimulus*" and "*Response*". These three conceptual categories together have become inextricably part of current psychologist parlance, whether or not their theoretical and methodological position is, as is often the case, de facto anti-behaviorist.

To be able to analyse the implications the use of these concepts has for social psychology, we thought it opportune to include some quotations that exemplify the influence of the behaviorist stance on social psychology:

*"In the case of the objective Stimulus-Response (S-R) relationship between an individual and their peers, we were faced by a concept that was not radically new, nor an essential principle that could not be applied to non-social situations. The whole difference rests on the fact that other persons, too, are stimulated and react in a way that shows that the S-R relation between the individual and their social objects is reciprocal in nature."*¹⁵

"In principle we can view any interaction between two or more subjects in which the action of one individual is a response to the action of the other as a form of stimulus". (Krech, 1962:19)

It would appear that there is no major epistemological debate on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of applying these concepts to the field of Social Psychology. Debates of that kind, in any case, just can not be found in the literature.

Any discussion of what the possible consequences of using behaviorist language in Education programs, social Communication or, for that matter, Development issues, is even less likely.

This lack of critical reflection has led to the direct application to Social Psychology of experimental methods prevalent in the Natural Sciences, and to

¹⁵ Dashiell, quoted by G. de Montmollin "*Social Interaction in small groups*" in: Piaget & Frawley Op. Cit, page 10.

the explanation of social facts with concepts taken from natural science disciplines.

This, in turn, has led to the creation of artificial Laboratory situations where arbitrary tasks, which have no value in themselves, only take on importance for the purpose of setting up an experimental situation.

"the task assigned to subjects is but a pretext to give a realistic sheen to a laboratory situation and to create an occasion to demonstrate the interactions." (de Montmollin, 1964:11)

‘Stimulus – Response’ terminology thus leads to the adoption of methods which allow for their measurement. From there on, Social Psychology gradually got imprisoned in laboratories which conveniently provided conditions favorable to such measurements, while actual field situations, which offered no such possibilities of explanation, were left to one side.

The need for laboratory work dictated the number of subjects that could participate in such experiments. This is what G. Montmollin is referring to when she pointed out that ...

Experimental research in laboratory conditions, was carried out, for understandably practical reasons, with small groups that never exceeded 15 persons. There were two further reasons which, in the course of the investigations, happened to reinforce and confirm this [small group] option: a) reason from a psychological perspective: in order to get a an overall view of who else is in the group and in order to be able to enter in a reciprocal interaction with each one of them, the subject should not be faced with number of persons that exceed their capacity to understand the whole; that is the reason why his social field (of interaction) must remain restricted to what amounts to a small group". (de Montmollin 1964:13)

Little by little social psychologists came to define Social Psychology as the study of the social behavior of small groups of individuals that get together the pretext of the performance of a task. They are then presented with certain stimuli and their responses are registered.

Lewin (Lewin, 1951) embraced eclecticism when he stated that social psychology should not be defined according to the conceptual framework used for problem analysis, but in function of a particular array of problems which can be analysed using different categories, independently from the conceptual universe from which they originate.

The same eclecticism can be found in Moreno who pointed out the following:

“First there was behaviorism¹⁶, then psychoanalysis¹⁷ and lastly Gestaltism¹⁸, and now what I have called actism¹⁹ or actionism²⁰ (action methods, action techniques, action tests and research on actions) together with psychodrama and sociodrama²¹ performing the role of its major interpreters. But in some way, each one of these stages is included in the following one: behaviorism, psychoanalysis and Gestaltism meet each other in actionism and continue to grow in their own sphere. Actionism is a synthesis and not a starting point: the dog in Pavlov’s experiment²² (behaviorism) and the patient lying on the couch (psychoanalysis) reappear as actor-creator who moves and gesticulates in the performance of psychodrama: both of them are present here, notwithstanding the fact that they are separated in the primordial act. In all of these there is something new: the dog of the laboratory and the patient on the couch are turned into actor in a situation”. (Moreno, 1963)

This alliance between behaviorism and Freudianism, identified by Moreno, is characteristic of the past and present development of Social Psychology. It further characterizes Advertising, the Mass Media and Education while embracing the most important aspects of social life.

As we we may be aware, the "behavior" category omits, by definition, the existence of an internal moment which mediates the stimuli and the responses. All the same, the existence of psychological or subjective processes is so overwhelmingly evident that we cannot continue ignoring this psychological phenomenon. This difficulty is solved without any form or shape of scientific or epistemological discussion. It is solved simply by stamping the expression "subjective behavior" on it, which, for sure, must be a contradiction in terms, but which does not seem to pose the slightest problem for an essentially pragmatist stance.

In the same way, the simple expedient of aggregating the terms “behavior” and “social” into the “social behavior” combination, seems to have been sufficient

¹⁶ the belief that behaviors can be measured, trained, and changed.

¹⁷ method of psychological therapy originated by Sigmund Freud.

¹⁸ psychotherapeutic approach that focuses on insight into gestalts in patients and their relations to the world.

¹⁹ an excessive emphasis on social action, activity, or change in lieu of continuity, stability, and permanence.

²⁰ A psychotherapeutic technique that utilizes dramatization and role-playing to identify and remedy intergroup problems and conflicts.

²¹ A psychotherapeutic technique in which people are assigned roles to be played spontaneously within a dramatic context devised by a therapist.

²² Pavlov is famous is the "conditioned reflex" (or in his own words the *conditional reflex* he developed jointly with his assistant Ivan Filippovitch Tolochinov in 1901.

ground for turning the latter into a legitimate 'Social Psychology' study subject.

As will be seen later, this lack of epistemological reflection, disguised by the adoption of conceptual methods borrowed from the natural sciences, assumes a specific function in determining the role of social psychology in a social context.

The "behavior" concept does not only characterize Psychology as it is practiced in the United States. For the Soviet author Kulikov, the psychological phenomenon continues to refer to something "internal", uncognizable²³, comprehensible, only when elucidated by external indicators:

“As the socio psychological phenomena manifest themselves objectively in quite distinct external reactions, social psychology phenomena, as manifested by people, can be studied using these objective reactions. This would be knowledge that is not direct, but which is mediated by internal socio-psychological phenomena, which may not be immediately discernable in the minds of people. The researcher does see, not the psychological phenomenon (this is not possible), but the external objective revelations of the person’s actions, conduct and other reactions. From external observations the researcher can deduce the psychic phenomena. This would apply to the other persons as well.” (Kulikov 1980:90)

2. THE CONCEPTUAL SYSTEM: ‘GROUP – SOCIAL ORGANISATION – SOCIETY’

The "group" concept occupies pride of place in Social Psychology. That is why it is difficult to imagine a social psychology that does not use the "group" concept.

There are several definitions linked to this concept, but the differences are not substantial and sooner or later the essential characteristics converge:

"A psychological group may be defined as two or more persons who meet the following conditions: (1) the relations among the members of the group are interdependent, that is to say, each member's behavior influences that of the others; (2) its members share an ideology that is to say, a set of values, beliefs and norms which regulates their mutual behavior". (Krech, 1962:395)

²³ incapable of being known

The common characteristics of the various definitions of the "group" are relations of face to face communication and interconnectedness between the members. The difference between Western authors and Eastern European social psychologists is that the latter add activities, carried out in common, to what characterizes the group. However, this does not suffice to differentiate them from their United States colleagues who also happen to use the concept.

Once this category has been defined, USA Social Psychology goes on to develop the concepts of "*Social Organization*" and of "*Society*", treating them as if they were mere aggregates of the concept "group":

"A social organization can be defined as an integrated system composed of mutually inter-related psychological groups which derive their structure from the aim to accomplish a previously established objective. A political party with its many local clubs, its leader, its friendship circles, etc, is clearly a social organization. So, too, is a factory with its Trade Unions, its local meeting places and up and including baseball teams." (Krech, 1962:396)

Note should be taken of the fact that, by and large, and starting from the Hawthorne experiments, the subjectivist premise was maintained in the various formulations of social psychology. The linkages between individuals inside the group are presented as subjective in nature: the communication between them as well as the flow of affection uniting them. In the same vein, small united groups form the basis of the social organization.

On the basis of these concepts, Social Psychology increasingly started concentrating on the Small Group.

Bernard DeVoto, in a foreword to Homans, puts it this way:

Moreover, Mr. Homans points out, the only historical continuity of men in society is that of small groups. Trades, guilds, religions, classes, nations, empires, cultures, civilizations have been disrupted, broken and extinguished, but through every social disintegration small groups have survived. We know of no society that does not contain them. Small groups have survived the destructive forces. The fact is so striking as to suggest that the small group is the basic social unit. The structure of society may be built of just these bricks"? (DeVoto, 1959:xii)

As we have already seen, historical continuity is assured by the small group. To this can be added reasons taken from empiricism that cause social psychology to

focus on the small group so as to be able it to meet the needs of experimentation.

3. KURT LEWIN' S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.

After serving in the Kaiser's Army in the First World War, Kurt Lewin became lecturer at the Psychological Institute of the University of Berlin. During his lectures, Lewin would give his ideas free rein, making frequent use of blackboard graphs to better express them.

This way of lecturing led to the formation, together with his students, of a group that used to meet in the evenings at the '*Schwedische Café*' across from the Institute until the early hours of the morning. During these sessions they would let their thoughts wander freely²⁴.

One of the ideas that emerged from those café chats would become the basis of the Bluma Zeigarnic²⁵ experiments, the conclusions of which came widely to be known as the "*Zeigarnic effect*" (Hilix,1974)²⁶

Later, Lewin fled to the United States to escape Nazism, where he worked for the United States National Research Council and the US Strategic Services Office, an organization with "responsibility in the fields of respectively covert and overt psychological operations".²⁷

The research he carried out during this period was of great import to the interests of the USA during the Second World War. The USA Economy could not sustain the massive consumption of high quality meat, which made it necessary to change consumer preferences and habits towards the eating of liver, kidneys and other offal. With this in mind, he changed the focus of his research to social change.

In a similar manner, his skills were called upon to convince holders of treasury bonds not to cash in on them when they expired, to prevent the Treasury ending up holding all this liquidity while at the same time reducing liquidity held by consumers.

²⁴ Called "the Quasselstrippe", or the 'ramble on and talk freely group'

²⁵ Soviet psychologist Bluma Zeigarnic found that the human brain becomes preoccupied with things that are not closed.

²⁶ the tendency to experience intrusive thoughts about an objective that was once pursued and left incomplete.

²⁷ USA Army, 1965, "[Service Rule FM. 33-5 – Psychological Operations](#)" p3

All these changes had to be effected without coercion to maintain the democratic image of the USA tradition of government.

It is in the crucible of these experiments that what came to be known as "*Group Dynamics*" was born and which Lewin further developed in his conceptual system.

Notwithstanding his *Gestaltist* stance, which led Lewin to coin ideas around the maintenance of balance within a structure, he used the psychoanalytical notion of "*psychic forces*", including, even, the idea of "*catharsis*" applied to the emotional change taking place inside a group confronted with a change in behavior.

Lewin does not contest the concept of "behavior". He wants, rather, to enrich the study of the conclusions derived from that concept. His findings are marked by the heavy use of the Natural Sciences to further explain his ideas. He uses the terms "*genotype*"²⁸, and "*phenotype*"²⁹, and "*hodological space*"³⁰ doubtless looking for an analogy derived from odometrics (hodos = road, metron= measurement). He used the "*Jordan Curve*"³¹ borrowed from Mathematics, to represent "*vital space*" and lifted references from Einstein, which allowed him to develop his concept of "*the Field*". The expression "*dynamics*" comes from Physics while the expression negative and positive "*valence*" is borrowed from Chemistry to indicate attraction or repulsion. From Physics is also borrowed the idea of "*vectors*" in order to indicate the "*forces*" that intervene in the "*psychological field*" of an individual.

As already mentioned, Lewin derived his main ideas from his experiments with changing North American consumer habits on the basis of numerous analogies from the natural sciences.

At the start of a behavioral change process, the group is said to be in a state of "*quasi-static balance*":

*"A state of equilibrium between forces of equal intensity and opposite in direction". . . "is the most general definition of resistance to change. An increase in strength of opposing forces does not modify the balance, but leads to a rise in tension in the group".*²⁰ (Anzieu, 1971:68)

²⁸ The genetic makeup, as distinguished from the physical appearance, of an organism

²⁹ The observable physical or biochemical characteristics of an organism

³⁰ 'hodological space' is based on the factual topological, physical, social, and psychological conditions a person is faced with on the way from point A to point B

³¹ A Jordan curve is a plane curve which is topologically equivalent to (a homeomorphic image of) the unit circle, i.e., it is simple and closed

²⁰ Anzieu and Martin, "Dynamics in a small group", Ed. Kapeluz, 1971, page 68.

Sometimes the changes in the behavior of the groups acquire the character of "the objectives of the social changes", as in, for example:

*The objective of effecting social change will affect the "nutritive" standards of consumption, the living standard, the type of relations in a group, the productivity in a factory or the productivity of a pedagogical group. It is very important that the social standard, that has to be changed, is not just one "thing" but a "process"... In other words the "level" of consumption of those who are of friendly disposition or the productivity, must be of a character, that is an aspect of an ongoing process.*²¹

In order to affect "social change", conceived of in this way, Lewin used a method by which, in a first "initial resistance" is overcome by the "decrystalizing" or "un-freezing" of the behavior targeted for change.

This can be achieved by means of strengthening the forces favorable to change, but due to the increased tension that this can lead to, it is advisable to weaken the forces that oppose change through a discussion in group.

He discovered that it was easier to change the behaviour of an individual within the small group than to change the behavior of an individual outside the group.

First there is tension is created that is directly proportional to the emotional involvement that individuals have in relation to the problem. In these cases he accepted that a "catharsis" was necessary.

*"Allport³² described the "catharsis" that was necessary to do away with prejudices. In order to break the shell of complacency and the spirit of hypocrisy, it is necessary sometimes to deliberately provoke some form of emotional shock".*²²

Later we will see how the sociodrama technique, developed by Moreno, was adapted so as to fit exactly into the needs of the scheme as proposed by Lewin.

Once the "unfreezing" has been achieved, the "change"(moving) step follows: that is the phase of the installation of the new behavior.

²¹ K. Lewin, "The almost fixed social balance and the problem of permanent social change" in "Organisational Development" of Margulies & Rana, Ed. Diana, 1974, page 91.

³² Gordon Allport (1897-1968) was one of the first psychologists to concentrate on the personality

²² K. Lewin, ibi: 96. where he speaks of "Allport's catharsis and reduction of prejudice".

Once this result has been obtained, too, the consolidation of the recently acquired behaviour, referred to as “freezing” or “chrySTALLIZATION”, follows. This step ensures the consistent continuation of the new behavior and the spreading of it to other small groups and to the society at large. As can be seen in:

“The relationships that happen in small groups in laboratory conditions can immediately be applied to real-life groups, in workshops, schools and neighbourhoods. The small group thus becomes the "shock laboratory" that allows the overcoming of resistance to change, and to provoke structural evolution in society at large (factory, consumer market, and public opinion)” (Anzieu & Martin op cit:67)

That is the way in which "Action Research", now widely in use in Popular Education and a number of technical Development Co-operation programs, was born.

In the wake of the Lewin experiments, the authors Bavelas, Koch and French went on to work in the textile plants of the Harwood Manufacturing Company where they achieved notable productivity increases through the use of the small group discussion method.

Later on, Lippit and White developed the classical Leadership style experiments. The category “*Leader*” can be added to those we have already referred to previously in that it is integral part of the North American social psychology methodological toolbox for influencing, completely and coherently, people’s social conduct by means of ‘*Leadership Training*’ programs, the detection and neutralizing of informal leaders, the spread of a number of games which go under the name of “*Group Dynamics*” etc.

4. MORENO: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OR SOCIOLOGY?

In the literature on the subject one notices a distinct disregard of Moreno's theoretical positions with a tendency to identify him with a set of techniques such as the sociometric test, the sociogram, pshycodrama and sociodrama. What is more, ‘sociometrics’ is directly associated with the ‘sociometric test’, even though any of these have little to do with Moreno's true thinking on the subject.

Some Western social psychology manuals simply dismiss Moreno's theoretical positions, referring to them as a "messianic irritant", which ought to be set aside in favor of a proper analysis of the techniques.³³

On the other hand some Eastern European manuals, make a distinction between "false theory and methodology" and the importance of its techniques. (Kulikov, op cit:103)

From our point of view it is a mistake to study the techniques and methods of an author without looking at the context in which their work developed, the problems and the objectives that motivated them.

Given the fact that psychodrama, sociodrama and the sociometric test techniques are sufficiently widely known, it would be of interest to us to study Moreno's theoretical concepts, his preoccupations and the problems he sought to resolve.

It is possible that many of his techniques are being used without the users knowing exactly what they were created for, and, on top of that, without the creators being fully aware of the range of results that they could obtain from them.

We will later turn to Moreno's concepts the way he himself proposed them. These concepts are particularly interesting now, given the global context, with its institutions and the importance of the mass media, which have the capacity to implement the underlying, clearly political aspirations that led Moreno to develop his methods and techniques.

In his book "*Who shall survive?*", he starts with the analysis of the development of the Social Sciences in the last two centuries where, in his opinion, three main currents can be identified: Sociology, Scientific Socialism and Sociometry". (Moreno, op cit:11)

While Sociology proceeds to systematize the product of the whole of the Social Sciences, Scientific Socialism wants to provoke a proletarian revolution and Sociometry defines and measures the individual as a social being" (Ibid)

From this perspective he characterises sociology as an ideological and intellectual product of the Bourgeoisie we only know too well from the French Revolution. Let's look at the following excerpt:

³³ Jean Maisonneuve, "*Sociometrica y Estudio de Relaciones Preferenciales*" IN: Piaget & Fraisse "*Tratado de Psicología Experimental*" (transl: Sociometry and the study of Preferential Relations" in "Study of Experimental Psychology) Piaget & Fraisse, Ed. Paidós, 1969:271 (*Original in Spanish- no known English version*)

"We have already said that the French Revolution spent its practical energy on the emancipation of the Bourgeoisie and its theoretical energy on the institutionalisation of sociology." (Moreno, ibid)

A bit further he goes on to point out the difference between sociology and scientific socialism, which he considers to be alternative disciplines before which one has to take an option:

"In the hands of Marx and Engels and Lenin, scientific socialism was turned into as a rigorous a system of revolutionary science and historical interpretation as was sociology by Comte and Durkheim".(Moreno, ibid)

He concludes his hypothesis on the development of the divergent directions which the social sciences have taken in the last centuries:

"The first consequence of this hypothesis would consist in considering Marx exclusively as the founder of Scientific Socialism, and then to see him as one of the founders of Sociology along with Comte and Prudhon, an honor that he himself surely would have rejected.

This hypothesis allows us to see with more clarity the profound split and radical divergences that separate sociology from revolutionary socialism. If one classifies Marx under the "sociologists" label, one may well be suspected of wanting to quietly conceal the sharp differences and divergences that radically differentiate, both in theory and in practice, these two historical tendencies" (ibid:12)

Faced with this choice, Moreno defined Sociometry as the most complete expression of Sociology:

I believe that North American sociology was at its best when it arrived at its pinnacle in Sociometry and its related disciplines. For the first time social science in the USA showed its collective originality in sociometry" (ibid)

Placing sociometry well within the Sociology discipline or at the pinnacle of the development of Sociology is quite remarkable. Notwithstanding the fact that Moreno appears prominently in Social Psychology manuals, it would appear that he himself does not take any notice of this. Further on, he adds new elements which may convince us that sociometry, which includes group dynamics and many other contributions by authors, who are usually classified as social psychologists, is indeed part of Sociology.

In Moreno the social psychology conceptualizations relating to the group concept as the base unit of Society, based on repulsion and attraction, seem to crystallize:

"Social units" he writes "are, before anything else, systems of preference, of mutual attraction and repulsion". (Maisonneuve, op cit:90)

Moreno tried to penetrate into the interior of the group, figure out its internal structure and the interrelationships between members, by an array of theories:

"1- The "tele" theory; 2- the spontaneity theory; 3- The Social atom theory; 4 - The communication network theory; 5- The actor 'in situation' theory (in situ)." (Moreno op cit:21)

He criticises the deviations in the arguments of the classical experiments of Social Psychology, some of which he qualified as "artificially set up" or "badly constructed", because the analytical basis of the experimenter left a lot to be desired... As an example of these deviations he qualifies the work of Lewin, Lippit and White, on Leadership styles, as a "trick"(p25) founded on erroneous premises. He refers to Lewin's experiments in the following way:

"Lewin made two mistakes: first of all, his failure to conduct a sufficiently rigorous investigation of the situation from the sociometric point of view. Sociometrics has shown that the group possesses a dynamic structural unity. This has to be taken into account when it comes to establishing the equality of the two groups which are to submit themselves, respectively, to each of the regimes. As this equality has not been sufficiently established, the experiment lacks a solid base. And here is Lewin's second error: the role of authoritarian leader could as well be given to a person more apt to be in charge of a democratic outfit and the role of the democratic leader would be better suited to a group under an authoritarian regime: we are totally in the dark about this point. In other words, the allocation of the roles that are most important for determining each of the two climates, was done, before anything else, without engaging in the necessary selections and classifications and without preparing the actors for their respective roles, which, all the same, were assumed to be absolutely necessary preconditions" (Moreno, *ibid*:25)

At the centre of his preoccupations was the development of a strategy for mass psychological treatment. He viewed Christianity as a form of mass psychotherapy, that medical techniques, by comparison, could not compete

with, and he himself even proposed a strategy that had the re-harmonizing of inter-personal relationships at heart.

Armed with these intentions he developed therapeutic techniques (psychodrama, sociodramas and role plays) trying to overcome sublimation, the "psychoanalytical confession", suggestion and coercion, in favor of spontaneity and creativity, the ultimate expression of which was to be found in God. (Op cit:53)

He conjured up the possibility that, by using these principles and procedures, it would be possible to build a society in which:

“The different groups (and their constituent elements), were so well organized, and so well attuned to each other, they would form a durable and harmonious "republic". (Op cit:42)

Apparently it was with this aim in mind that he developed Sociodrama, which amounts to collective psychotherapy in which ‘the patient’ is the audience attending the performance. A sociodrama consists of putting on stage a particular conflict a particular social group is experiencing, which causes problems in the functioning of the group and anguish in individuals. When the audience is made to face this conflict in the form of a staged play a great amount of anguish is released, which has the effect of causing a sense of well being. Sociodrama was not conceived for a social group’s conflict resolution purposes, but rather for inducing a liberation from the anguish experienced by the audience who recognize the what they are going through in the staged play. It also achieves a release of spontaneity in the individual otherwise restrained by social strictures.

Nevertheless, Moreno did not have much success in sociodrama having a genuine bearing on real-life situations:

“After having staged numerous sociodramas, somehow disembodied from the real-life situation in which these conflicts were taking place in day-to-day events, Moreno attempted to make them happen, as it were, ‘on stage’, during certain collective actions (strikes, demonstrations). It is not difficult to see the practical difficulties presented by such an endeavour”. (Maisonneuve, op cit:99)

His proposals were very comprehensive, including social revolution. He was definitely convinced that by giving free rein to spontaneity and using his techniques, social revolution could ensue:

“A social revolution takes the whole of humanity as a subject of experimentation. If it were possible to, at the same time, actively participate in that revolution while observing it from the outside, too, this would be a good starting point for the study of revolutions ‘in statu nascendi’.” (Moreno op cit:39)

“I have been playing with the idea of experimenting with revolutions. Actually, they appear far richer and more promising for the future of science than setting up grandiose sociological systems or any amount of academic critique of revolutionary movements. It would appear far more useful to me to set up small scale revolutions than to attempt wholesale subversions” (Moreno op cit:47-48)

“In the course of experiments on a micro scale I have come across numerous problems which had been studied already in the context of large scale revolutions: the stadium of an idea, the propaganda stadium, the stadium of violent action; the various types of social revolution, the Christian brand of ‘introverted action’ with minimal social implications; the Marxist concept of ‘extrovert action’ with profound upheavals in its wake, and, finally, the total revolution brand as proposed by Sociometry. (In the Marxist revolution, only the working classes march forward while the bourgeoisie holds back). .

The crucial problem that needs to be considered by leaders is to gauge to what extent the masses are disposed to take action, disposed to accept the new order: how to mobilize the spontaneity of the masses, how to get them to spontaneously collaborate with the tearing down of the reigning order. To prepare the masses for action, it is indispensable to put into effect certain liberation methods (‘warming up’ – the English term used in Moreno’s original text was inserted here - Note of the translator). Sociometry has insisted on three principal realization categories: the creativity category, the spontaneity category – the masses shake off their torpor and are motivated to turn the envisioned ideal into reality; and the liberation category which makes the prophet or the leaders, as well as the masses, feel that they are ready for action”. . .

“. . .The success of a revolution appears to me to be linked to three main conditions: a) the intensity of the pressure exerted by the social groups in as far as they represent the historical forces impinging on the ongoing situation; b) the degree of contamination of the smallest functional units in society, of the atomic structures, by the spirit of political revolution and the degree of integration into the revolutionary

organization. c) the elasticity of the sociometric “intuition” of the leader of the leaders of the revolution which allow them to gauge the importance of the sociodynamic forces, which, at the immediate present, are at work in the midst of the interested population” (Moreno, op cit:48)

From our viewpoint, it is not possible to de-link the whole context of issues which constituted Moreno’s concerns from the techniques that he devised to bring his proposals to fruition.

Compared to other social psychology authors in the USA, the value of Moreno's thinking, is the directness with which he presents Social Psychology as an alternative with respect to scientific socialism. This seems to have been clearly formulated in the first pages of his book with the English title "[Who shall survive?](#)"³⁴.

We do not have any antecedents to do proper justice to the theme: this work would not even pretend having them. But if we put together Moreno’s analysis of the different stages of the outbreak of violence, his concerns about “experimenting with revolutions”, and the massive application, for example, of sociodrama on a national scale in the context of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, in the years 1979-1983, we cannot but conclude that, at the very least, this points to a remarkable coincidence

In Latin America, Sociodrama had been adopted by a variety of institutions dedicated to ‘Popular Education’ as one of the means to ‘conscientize’ the agrarian masses about their problems.

5. THE TASKS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY ACCORDING TO HOMANS.

George Caspar Homans is sufficiently well known for his contributions to the study of groups which he collected in "[The Human Group](#)" (Homans, 1959)³⁵

In this book, on top of the description of the results of his studies on small groups, Homans expands on what, according to him, are the tasks of Social Psychology. For analysis purposes we offer below Homans’ final speech, which

³⁴ “Who Shall Survive?” has since been published, and can be read online on:

<http://www.asgpp.org/docs/WSS/WSS%20Index/WSS%20index.html>

³⁵ http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OmZWELrvPnKC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

can be found in the part entitled "Democracy". The train of thought as apparent from the speech is the following:

- The North American way of life is not a total failure.
- At the very least, Democracy has turned out to be a valuable invention.
- By "Democracy" is meant the form of government found in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Let us see the following quote:

"We do not use the word (democracy) here in the sense of "rule of the people". That gets us into questions of the location of sovereignty in a nation. Sovereignty, which is another word for authority, does not lie in any one element or organ of a nation but in the social system as a whole. Nor do we use it in the sense of "democratic way of life". That, as we have said, gives aid and comfort to the dictators by letting them say that they are "as democratic" as anyone else. So loose is the meaning of democracy in this sense that no one can prove they are not. We use the word here to mean the complex of governmental and legal institutions common to such nations as the United Kingdom and the United States: representative and parliamentary government, universal suffrage, the secret ballot, the habeas corpus, trial by jury, and the various freedoms named in the Bill of Rights" (Homans, op cit:464)

The aim of the institutions that Homans refers to is to guarantee that the norms that govern a small group can be expressed at the level of the society as whole. Looking at a sequel to last quote:

"Note how all these devices are addressed to the problem of maintaining, at the level of a nation if not of a civilization, the values of the small group. The election of executive officers and representatives aims at maintaining for the nation the method of choosing leaders that is characteristic of the small group." (ibid)

Further on in the text, he says that despite the value of democracy, it, in itself, does not solve the problem of social conflict.

"If social conflict does not go too deep, representative government provides a method for deciding the issues, with much salutary release of emotion. We are all ready to accept a large amount of

verbal violence in our politics. Our tolerance for it is high, and we admire a man that gives and takes hard knocks. But if conflict goes deep enough, as the United States once learned, and as the communist propagandists know well, democratic methods do not lead to peaceful resolution of conflict but to civil war. For democracy to survive, the members of society must enjoy some area of consensus, supported by the informal contacts of daily life, by formal communication networks, and by common ideals” (op cit:465)

As we have seen, the problem that continues to persist, despite the gains of democracy, is that of social conflict. Going deeper into the roots of social conflict, Homans visits the factory, but discovers that, in this environment, the methods of representative democracy do not allow the discharge of emotions through a healthy dose of verbal violence:

“No one has seriously suggested that production schedules in a factory should be determined by popular vote or even that the factory manager should be elected. And yet in these vast areas the tensions of modern civilisation are being generated.” (ibid)

This situation being as it is, in order to safeguard society from the ravages of social conflict, the norms governing the small group need to be observed at the level of the central leadership of society. Social psychology is therefore to be entrusted with the task of studying and systematizing these guiding norms, so as to help in generalizing them.

“At the level of the small group, society has always been able to cohere. We infer, therefore, that, if civilization is to stand, it must maintain, in the relation between the groups that make up society and the central direction of society, some features of the small group itself. [...] The problem will not easily be solved, but one step we can take in the beginning is to learn the characteristics of the human group” (op. cit:468)

As it can be seen, facing the threat of civil wars provoked as a consequence of the generalization of the conflicts which take place in factories, to which it is not possible to apply the rules of parliamentary democracy, the conceptual body which we now know as ‘Social Psychology’, as it was developed essentially in the United States of America, is, for all intent and purposes, a political program geared to the preservation of the way the United States, Great Britain and others governed along the similar lines.

For Homans it was indispensable the development of a discipline which concentrates on the study of small groups, the analysis of its norms and the way in which they function, and that this model be spread out to society at large.

This, he explains, is how Social Psychology came to dedicate itself **exclusively** to the study of small groups and the creation of communication techniques and social action dedicated to the extension of these norms to the most diverse possible of social sectors, including for example poor small farmers and other strata of society whose social relations are entirely foreign to them.

What we would refer to as "the tasks" of Social Psychology has been adopted in its entirety by the vast majority of social psychologists, many of whom are attracted by the great variety of experiments, even though they may be in fact divorced from their origins and their intentions.

Among the motivations the literature ascribes to Kurt Lewin, and which led him to study "Leadership Styles", rank also the style of government of his adoptive country, in stark contrast to that under Nazism:

Kurt Lewin. . . "values the democratic ideal of nations opposed to dictatorship: in groups that are managed democratically there are far less tensions, whereas aggressiveness is discharged gradually, rather than being allowed to accumulate to produce the oppressive apathy to destructive outbreaks, as tends to happen in groups that are managed either in an authoritarian way or where there are no rules whatsoever (laissez faire). The democratic group, because it reaches so much easier an internal balance, is so much more constructive in its activities. From that perspective, Group Dynamics appears to offer a reply to the double question which afflicts the defenders of democracy: how was it possible, psychologically speaking, for a collective phenomenon like Nazism to emerge? And how can, psychologically speaking, such collective phenomena be avoided in the future?" (Anzieu & Martin, op. cit:67)

The problem of national unity in the United States, the need to unite the fractures left by the American Civil War explains Moreno's view, as well as the success and the rapid expansion of psychometry in that country. Literature abounds with quotes that clearly show the political role assigned to Social Psychology in the USA, let alone the fact that some of its most outstanding protagonists worked for the Strategic Services Bureau of their country.

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