135

Deconstructing Psychology's Subject

Edward E. Sampson

The Wright Institute

Psychology has uncritically adopted the individual person as its object of study without examining the concept and role of personhood within contemporary society and Western culture more generally. We examine three perspectives that challenge this familiar and unexamined object of our disciplinary inquiry: (1) Critical Theory's concept of the bourgeois individual as psychology's subject of ideology; (2) Poststructuralism's challenge to the concept of personhood as an integrated and self-present center of consciousness and action; (3) System Theory's alternative epistemology in which relations rather than entities have primacy. Each perspective introduces a concept of personhood that significantly differs from our present understanding of psychology's subject and that lays the foundation for a new subject of psychological inquiry: a multicentered, multidimensional subject.

It is almost a truism to suggest that a field of inquiry cannot meaningfully proceed without a general agreement and substantial clarity about its proper object of study. In spite of the many disagreements that continue to plague the field, the majority of psychologists appear to have reached a consensus that the proper object for psychological inquiry (i.e., psychology's subject) is the individual human person; whatever else it may do, psychology's task is to study the individual and to develop the laws of his or her functioning.

Needless to say, there is no comparable consensus concerning *what* aspect of the individual person the discipline should study: behavior, cognitive processes, neurophysiological processes, and so forth. And, there remain many disagreements concerning the methodologies that are required in order to ground psychology in the scientific tradition. Furthermore, while some of psychology's diverse subspecialities, for example social psychology, appear to emphasize something "more than" the individual person, they generally focus on the study of the effects of other individuals on *the individual* who comes under our scrutiny (e.g., Allport, 1968).

Although I could systematically review the textbooks and major publications in the field, I believe that there is no need to do so in order to confirm the assertions of the preceding paragraphs. I have deleted from this analysis references to those who argue that psychology's subject is the behavior of organisms, where organism includes species other than the human being. It is not relevant to the case I will develop to argue whether or not such works are properly within the purview of psychology. I am concentrating only on those

psychologies—by far the most dominant—for whom the individual person generally is assumed to be the right and proper object.

The Task

My aim in this essay is the critical analysis of the very familiar and taken-for-granted object of inquiry, the individual person that is psychology's subject. This probe is important because psychology's subject is not a simple fact that can be immediately apprehended as such, but is a social, cultural, and historical creation, that is, a mediated object. Let me be clear on this point. Personhood (or individuality) is not a *given* nor is it something earned as the final stage of successful socialization and development. Rather, it is a sociocultural product, mediated by the underlying principles and structures of a particular social system that define what it means (the concept) and what it is (the actuality) to be a person.

Psychology has implicitly assumed that the object of inquiry, the person, is a factual and self-evident entity with attributes about which psychology theorizes and empirically studies. While psychology in general has failed to examine this assumption, several authors from within and outside the discipline have questioned it. Some have presented intriguing cross-cultural evidence that introduces doubt into what otherwise has been taken-for-granted as self-evident and thus not warranting further consideration.

Geertz's Insights into the Status of Personhood

The cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973, 1979), in examining the cultures of Bali, Java, and Morocco, provides us with one of the few systematic accounts of the cultural foundations of the concept, personhood. His pioneering work in Bali, for example, introduces the Western reader to the "cultural apparatus in terms of which the people of Bali define, perceive, and react to—that is, think about—individual persons" (1973, p. 360). As Smith (1978) noted, the complexity and subtlety of Geertz's work do not permit one to present a brief summary of the documentation that supports his conclusions. The full text must be read in order to deepen our appreciation of the multiple ways in which personhood can vary culturally.

What clearly emerges from Geertz's examination of the Balinese "cultural apparatus" is the distinctively different way in which cultures place their unique accent marks around what we have heretofore taken-for-granted as a unitary, self-evident phenomenon. Carefully read Geertz's conclusion:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other

such wholes and against a social and natural backround is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (1979, p.229)

Geertz observes that the crux of the Balinese concept of personhood is their ". . . social placement, their particular location within a persisting, indeed eternal, metaphysical order. The illuminating paradox of Balinese formulations of personhood is that they are —in our terms anyway—depersonalizing" (1973, p.390). This depersonalized Balinese view permits us to appreciate better what Geertz describes as their concern with ritual and their fears about any individual spontaneity showing through their standardized identity.

Bond's Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Others have introduced a view that parallels Geertz's. In a fascinating paper examining attribution concepts among a Chinese and American sample Bond (Note 1) suggests that "the construct of individual behavior may be non-existent" (pp. 3-4) in certain human groupings. Bond questions the Western view in which individuals spend much of their time trying to uncover the causes of behavior (as attribution theory seems to imply). He observes that in those cultural groups without well defined concepts of the individual-as-such, "What need would they have had to develop a naive theory of personality? The attributional functions . . . of providing explanations and enabling predictions could be easily fulfilled without reference to individual personalities" (p. 4). Bond's data, comparing Chinese and American samples in Hong Kong, finds a generally higher use of collectivistic than individualistic analyses among the former (also see Bond, Leung, and Wan, Note 2).

Gadlin and Rubin on the Interactionist Debate

In their critique of the person-situation controversy in psychology Gadlin and Rubin (1979) also raise serious questions about the "stability and coherence" of individual personality as an attribute of the individual-as-such or as a feature of societal history: "The individualized person represents a particular epoch within the history of personhood, not the basic social unit or the primary biological category" (p. 221).

The person-centered position maintains that stability and cross-situational consistency is an attribute of individuals. The situationist view maintains that situation-specific patterns are critical and thus there is significantly less cross-situational consistency than the former position suggests. According to Gadlin and Rubin however, it is not a matter of which position is absolutely true, or even whether a conceptual integration of the two opposing viewpoints in terms of some form of interactionism is better; rather, the debate turns on the

changing historical relation between person and culture and thus on the meaning of the very concept, person.

Gadlin and Rubin employ Riesman's (1950) distinction between an inner-directed and an other-directed social character in order to develop their own thesis. The inner-directed character represents an earlier historical epoch and reflects the person-centered position in which cross-cultural consistency reigns. The other-directed character represents the situationist position of the modern era in which behavior varies as a function of where and with whom one is located. In other words, the shifting emphases in psychological understanding, from person to situation, reflects the actual historical shift in the social definition of individuals from inner to other directedness.

And what about interactionism? For Gadlin and Rubin, this attempt to integrate conceptually two different historical types fails insofar as it treats the matter abstractly and separate from the social and historical context in which personhood is defined:

> It is our position that the person-situation controversy reflects essential and conflicting features of sociopsychological reality; that the controversy cannot be resolved merely by clarifying conceptual confusions, because the confusions reflect persistent qualities of the person's situation in contemporary society. (p. 218)

Whether we agree with or take exception to their analysis, its underlying point is central to my own probe of psychology's taken-for-granted subject. What Gadlin and Rubin suggest is that the basic concept of the person is a historical and mediated creation; that what we take-for-granted as the object of our inquiry cannot be grasped as though it were merely a substance or entity that exists out there awaiting our study.

Additional Contributors to the Inquiry

Two relatively recent papers by major figures in the field of psychology (Pepitone, 1981; Sarason, 1981) also introduce a position that challenges the taken-for-granted status of psychology's subject. Sarason, for example, argues that one of the central problems with American psychology is its naive rootedness in the notion of the self-contained individual: "American psychology, invented in and by American society, went on to invent its subject matter: the self-contained individual. The necessity for reinvention is at hand" (1981, pp. 835-836).

In reflecting on the history of social psychology, Pepitone (1981) echoes the several preceding critics, describing the *individuocentric* position that characterizes much if not all of social psychological inquiry: that is, adopting the individual as the only reality and as the fundamental unit of analysis, and individual dynamics as the source for all social and cultural dynamics. This

describes the bias towards individualism and the opposition to relationism that is a central theme both of the society of the United States and of the brand of psychology it has spawned.

A recent cross-cultural analysis (Hofstede, 1981) indicated that the United States was the most individualistic of 40 nations sampled. It should not be a surprise, therefore, to witness American psychology adopting an American frame for study, one that emphasizes this highly individuated "bounded universe" of which Geertz writes, without however seriously examining the very nature of its concept of personhood. In a sense, we have employed Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am" without ever opening to inquiry the "I who thinks". Our task, therefore, is to undo (deconstruct) what thus far has been done.

Summary of the Three Challenges

In my judgment, three key challenges to the individualized concept of personhood have been introduced from within the Western frame itself (I exclude works such as Capra's (1975) which build on an Eastern model). These three positions will provide us with a more critical understanding of personhood.

First, critical theory (e.g., Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) understands the person to be socially and historically mediated and hence invariably to be a complex product of a given time and place. The notion of the *bourgeois individual* as a creature of the modern era and as the basis for psychology's subject is central to our own inquiry. The key quality of this bourgeois individual, however, is that while he or she appears to be a "bounded universe" with important powers of self-action and choice, in fact, this is an illusion, an ideological facade serving particular social interests. In other words, in the analysis of critical theory, psychology's subject is a subject of ideology and thus psychology serves that ideology in its perpetuation of this kind of subject.

Second, recent intellectual movements in Europe, begun in the mid-1950's and centered around structuralism, introduce a related, but different pathway to guide our own inquiry. Beginning in the 1970's in France, this has taken a new turn, aptly named poststructuralism. The writings of Derrida (1974, 1978, 1981) will introduce us to this movement and its key task: the deconstruction of the dominant framework of all Western metaphysics since Plato. This deconstructive task involves undoing the very concept of *center* and of a self-present author, that Geertz among others describes as having dominated the Western worldview. Derrida stands at the crest of a wave to which Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Heidegger have contributed. That wave casts grave doubts around the entire concept of a subject-who-is-at-the-center-of-

action-and-control, and thereby leads us to question what has become a part of our own taken-for-granted backround.

Critical systems theory, initiated in part by the analyses proposed by Dewey and Bentley (1949) and further developed by others whom we will consider, introduces the third framework to guide our inquiry. Within its purview, ontological primacy is given to relations rather than to entities. Insofar as we understand psychology's subject to be an entity from which relations spring rather than as relations out of which mediated entities emerge, we will find in the critical systems model a serious challenge to our existing ways of understanding the proper subject of psychological inquiry.

The Bases for the Concern

There are several reasons why I believe it is important for psychology to take this critical theoretical stance towards its heretofore generally unexamined subject. In the first place, it is only by viewing a familiar object through comparative lenses that we become better able to see and to understand what we have been studying these many years. In the long run, only when there can be an *examined* core of assumptions about the object of psychological study—rather than the unexamined core that has existed—can the discipline hope to make progress.

Needless to say, however, there are other important reasons for undertaking this probe and deconstructive task. The concept of person that exists within a given culture is not some alien element of that culture, nor something external that has been tacked on to an otherwise finished fabric. Psychology's subject is derivative of a particular civilization, undoubtedly highlighted and honed into even greater detail by the particular demands and necessities of certain contemporary social and economic forms. This subject not only emerges from the total societal fabric, but serves to sustain that very fabric.

In one form or another, the contributors to the deconstructive task that guides my essay have found reason to question the humanity and survivability of the core culture and civilization from which the familiar and unquestioned concept of personhood has sprung. The transformative designs of these co-deconstructors, therefore, are not merely in the service of advancing our knowledge, but more importantly, of advancing our possibilities for survival and wellbeing.

The rationale for "seeing" psychology's subject differently is based on the hopes that this vision will give rise, not only to a new view and different kind of psychology with a new and different kind of human subject, but also to a new and different kind of civilization whose structures, institutions, and practices no longer give lie to this vision but represent its truth and reality.

To be blunt and somewhat simplistic, the "bounded universe" is a concept

whose time has passed, if it ever really did exist. A new concept deriving from and contributing to a new underlying material reality is essential if human survival and wellbeing are to be more than words spoken while the ship sinks slowly.

The Bourgeois Individual:
Psychology's Subject as Ideology

Geertz's (1979) decsription of the Western concept of personhood as a "bounded . . . universe . . . a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action" (p. 229), provides us with a helpful summary of the concept of the bourgeois individual, as developed more fully by several key theorists of the once flourishing Frankfurt Institute (e.g., Adorno, 1967, 1974; Habermas, 1973; Horkheimer, 1972; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; Marcuse, 1964, 1966, 1968). One must approach this definition with the touch of irony it warrants, however, in order to appreciate its meaning for the critical theorists of Frankfurt. As Adorno (1974) observes, "Measured by its concept, the individual has indeed become . . . null and void" (p. 113). The concept of the person as a relatively autonomous, self-contained and distinctive universe is thereby said to reflect the sham and the illusion that is the bourgeois individual, not its reality.

The *concept* describes an entity who is the integrated center of certain powers: one who is aware, who feels, who thinks and judges and acts. In concept, the individual is adopted as the primary reality, the ontological base from which issues the remainder, including society and social relations (see also Mayhew, 1980, 1981). The critical theorists argue, however, that the *reality* is quite different. The concept describes a fictitious character, the bourgeois individual, whose integrated wholeness, unique individuality and status as a subject with actual powers to shape events has become null and void. They do not greet this demise with joy but with sorrow over the death of someone who might have been, and with anger at the deceit that passes for normal everyday life.

Furthermore, the critical perspective adopts a view about the real nature of personhood in which such notions as "integrated wholeness", "dynamic universe" or "self-contained center" are invariably more false than true. There is an essential *interpenetration* (see Jacoby, 1975; Meacham, 1977; Turkle, 1978) of society and the individual that warrants our approaching with scepticism any view that makes the individual a transcendent entity. We do not begin with two independent entities, individual and society, that are otherwise formed and defined apart from one another and that interact as though each were external to the other. Rather, society constitutes and

inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by its other.

To speak of the end of the individual, therefore, does not refer to the end of the ideological bourgeois individual: that is, the end of some transcendent figure. It refers to the end of the possibility for people collectively to exercise control over the social forces that govern their lives. The ideology of the bourgeois individual fosters a belief in rational control and autonomy even as that control wanes and the key shaping forces operate behind the backs of those who should know but do not.

The complexity of the critical perspective and the arguments for its conclusions can be reduced to several major themes that recur in one form or another in most of the writings of the Frankfurt group. For the sake of brevity, I will provide only a brief overview of these key themes. The result of this examination will be a perspective on the nature of personhood that is far removed from the autonomous bounded universe of ideology; it defines a new kind of personhood that, were it realized, would be party to a radical restructuring of the society within which all notions of personhood necessarily gain their standing.

Concepts are historically formed. Both the concept and the actuality of persons do not transcend society or history but emerge invariably as an integral part of the history and the underlying structures and mechanisms of a given society. Basically, all things and entities, including ideas and concepts, are formed in and through relations that are rooted in social history (e.g., Horkheimer, 1941). Personhood is a relation embedded within the social totality in which it takes shape and is defined. As Ollman (1971) states this principle, "The conditions of its [the individual's] existence are taken to be part of what it is" (p. 28). What a person is, therefore, cannot be grasped independently of the social and historical conditions that shape and define personhood.

This perspective not only introduces a sociohistorical dimension to the analysis of personhood, but also challenges all notions that introduce a transcendental subject. This view challenges the idea of an autonomous, primary (i.e., unmediated) subject, either Cartesian or Kantian, who constructs a world but from beyond the reaches of that very world. Critical theory rejects a structuring frist principle, such as transcendental subjectivity, that is not a part of and thus mediated by the very structure that it constitutes.

The bourgeois individual and early capitalism. Habermas (1975) provides a helpful account of the large-scale historical shifts in the underlying organizational principles of society that constituted different meanings and realities for personhood. He outlines four such principles: the primitive, the traditional, the liberal capitalist, the advanced capitalist. Within the primitive social form, kinship played a dominant role in defining the nature and scope

of personhood. People were not meaningfully defined apart from their family units.

In the traditional social form, the bureaucratic apparatus replaces the family unit: "This allows the transference of the production and distribution of social wealth from familial forms of organization to ownership of the means of production" (Habermas, 1975, p. 19). Fromm (1941) briefly describes this transition: the feudal household is shattered; individuals emerge from the shadows of their communal existence into the harsh glare of individual freedom of movement and choice. As Marcuse (1968) observed, the liberation that characterized this post-Medieval period empowered people as individuals to shape their own destiny. Life seemed to be unmediated: individuals directly and immediately confronted the tasks of self-maintenance and survival without being the delegated representatives of some "higher social bodies". The individual "arose as a dynamic cell of economic activity" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972, p. 203), interested in securing what economic benefits were possible.

From liberal to advanced capitalism. The further development of the bourgeois individual awaited the liberal-capitalist organizational principle. A group of corporate owners emerged, entrepreneurs with a generally wide latitude of autonomous functionng; and a class of workers emerged whose autonomy, while limited, was more substantial than in previous eras. A Civil Society developed with laws to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals, this new character on history's stage.

Habermas suggests that the liberal form functioned according to the relatively anonymous market forces of supply and demand. There was a certain reasonableness to the concept that self-contained individual actors could function autonomously as little economic calculators, guided by the unseen hand of the marketplace. Success and failure were somewhat connected to the wisdom of choices made and the intensity of personal motivation and individual achievement. This unseen hand of the marketplace that characterized the liberal form was replaced in the advanced form, by the longer arm of State intervention in market manipulation. Advanced capitalism developed along with the growing concentration of capital and the extension of corporations into international markets: that is, with the change from a local or even national economic system to an international marketplace and web of complex economic interdependencies.

While the bourgeois ideas regarding freedom of individual choice and decision-making remain, they become increasingly disjunctive with the objective realities of systemic functioning under the advanced organizational principle. Autonomous entrepreneuers no longer compete on the open market seeking fair exchange and following principles of supply and demand. Rather, State intervention creates and seeks to control conditions of supply and

demand, scarcity and abundance. The State participates actively in establishing pricing policies and market options. The range of individual choice becomes restricted and narrowed; opportunities are channeled by national priorities that reflect the requirements of system maintenance, security and enlargement.

Decision processes form around alternatives dictated by such imperatives as corporate expansion and the control of international markets. Rationality of choice becomes limited to choosing between alternatives already predetermined by socioeconomic forces about which one is only vaguely aware or able to affect (see Adorno, 1967). And yet, the ideology of autonomy and of individuality remain carved deeply in the subjective consciousness of the culture.

The bourgeois individual and societal reproduction. Societies create both the types of character essential to societal reproduction and the ideologies necessary so that those characters will function to achieve this reproduction. The bourgeois individual is such a character; the ideologies concerning individuality, autonomy and freedom play an essential role in societal reproduction. As Fromm (1955) once observed, society today requires a person who feels free to move about, to act intelligently and to make sensible choices dictated by personal interest and desire, even while its productive system demands people whose movements and choices are sufficiently well known and programmable that they can be readily predicted and controlled.

Ideological concepts of personhood are not merely akin to a cloud that conceals a sun that remains shining, though hidden. Rather, ideology is an essential, constitutive element in the phenomenon's status itself. In this case, the underlying social structures and mechanisms could not persist without the essential functioning of this ideology of personhood. Thus the concept of the bourgeois individual is an illusion essential to the reproduction of the advanced capitalist social form in which it exists as concept but to which its actuality is suspect.

Caplan and Nelson's (1973) review of psychology's understanding of Black Americans is illustrative of what I mean. Their review discovered that over 80 percent of the psychological studies of Black Americans attributed their problems to something about themselves rather than their circumstances. This tendency to interpret social ills as psychologically derived creates a psychological subject who is given the full burden of responsibility for correcting his or her troubles. In this manner, underlying structures that systematically thwart a group's opportunities (e.g., economic structures that breed racism and sexism) are reproduced insofar as we view the troubles of people to be a problem of their willpower, motivation, intellect or personality dynamics.

The cult of psychology. The critical theorists describe the outcome of

advanced capitalist social dynamics: while the individual has become more myth than reality, the myth is used to define what is real. This is what is seen as so objectionable about most modern social science. As Adorno (1967) states it, "Psychology . . . ignoring the social process of production . . . makes a first principle out of a mediated product, the bourgeois individual" (pp. 78-79). Psychology extols the virtues of a lost character and thereby participates in the delusions, not the enlightenment, of the era.

Adorno (see also Sarason, 1981) sees psychology as an American cult movement that not only emerged historically along with the emergence of the bourgeois individual, but that now plays its tune even more loudly as that social character rapidly moves into decline. He likens this to the situation in ancient Greece in which "the cult of the individual" reached its zenith at the very moment when individuality was in its decline (Adorno, 1974; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972). The moments in which the individual is worshipped most strongly mark the very times of farthest remove from the actuality of that esteem. The intensely subjectivist doctrines of cognitivism in psychology (see Sampson, 1981) and of psychology's humanistic thrust are thereby seen as ideological: "the cult of human subjectivity is not the negation of bourgeois society but its substance" (Jacoby, 1975, p. 103).

The dialectics of interpenetration. The critical perspective argues that the real subject of history requires people who can act collectively with will and with consciousness to shape the history that shapes them. By arguing that the concept and the actuality of personhood is thoroughly inhabited by the social, economic and historical, the critical theorists have directed our attention to the inevitable interpenetration of society within the individual. The concept of personhood as an autonomous bounded universe remains primarily an ideological cover story to conceal the truth: that history is being made behind the backs of those supposedly autonomous centers of action; that insofar as that illusory character occupies the limelight, the forces that shape human history will not enter the realm of rational human governance.

The message of the critical perspective for our understanding personhood is complex. The reality of personhood cannot be grasped at either the extreme pole of individualism—in which the seemingly autonomous individual is the ontological reality and prime mover—nor the pole of mechanical collectivism—in which the individual is merely a mechanical copy of the underlying social order. There is an essentially dialectical interpenetration of subject and object in which neither has full primacy. We must refocus our understanding so that we can see what Giddens (1979) terms the *duality of structuring* that describes the person-society relationship. The person is both the mediated product of society and, in acting, also reproduces or potentially transforms that society. People can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed.

The unfolding of this process cannot occur in a structural vacuum even as it cannot occur under psychological conditions aversive to its achievement. While it would take us far too afield in this present essay to pursue the matter, some of Habermas' ideas on communication are important for the interested reader to consider (e.g., Habermas, 1971, 1973; also see McCarthy, 1976, 1978).

Derrida's Deconstruction of Psychology's Subject

While there is no simple way to define either the structuralism of the 1950s and 1960s nor the poststructuralism of the 1970s and 1980s, the essence of each is their search for basic processes that lie beyond individuality and human awareness and out of which the individual-as-such is constituted (e.g., Kurzweil, 1980). This search has usually turned to the analysis of language and symbolic practices as the key to be deciphered. Each seriously challenges the Western understanding of the person-society relationship, in particular the centrality and the sovereignty of the individual:

> The lesson of . . . structuralism was that man is to be understood as constructed by the symbol and not as the point of origin of symbolism. The individual, even prior to his or her birth, is always already subject-ed to the structure into which he or she is born. The structure is what sets in place an experience for the subject which it includes. This demands a radical re-estimation of the position of the individual; it should no longer be possible to adhere to the notion of the individual as embodying some ideal pre-given essence. Being always subject-ed, the subject can never be the transcendental . . . source. (Coward and Ellis, 1977, pp. 3-4)

As Ricoeur (1979) has observed, the decentering of the individual that marks the linguistic structuralism of Saussure (1959) and the complex post-structuralism of Derrida (1974, 1978, 1981) encompasses a tradition that joins together with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud to challenge the fundamental Western illusion:

> That illusion which bears the hallowed name of self-consciousness. This illusion is the fruit of a preceding victory, which conquered the previous illusion of the *thing*. The philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not what they appear to be. But he never doubts that consciousness is as it appears to itself. In consciousness, meaning and the consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Neitzsche, and Freud, however, we doubt even this. After doubting the thing, we have begun to doubt consciousness. (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 328)

Citing Freud, Ricoeur sees this to be the third blow to humanity's narcissism. Copernicus challenged the centrality of the earth in the universe. Darwin challenged the human domination over the creatures of Nature. And then, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche drove in the final nail: "having already known he

is lord neither of the cosmos nor of the animal kingdom, man discovers he is not even the lord of his own mind" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 426). The works of Derrida which form the centerpiece of this section of the essay fall fully within the tradition that decenters and deconstructs the previous dominance of the individual.

Derrida's Deconstructive Analysis

Jacques Derrida is a contemporary French philosopher whose efforts to deconstruct Western metaphysics have helped inaugurate the poststructuralist movement. Derrida's very term, "deconstruct", sets his task and poses a dilemma. To deconstruct is to undo, not to destroy: to undo what Derrida sees to be a tradition that has dominated Western thought since early Greek philosophy and which lies at the very roots of our commonsense understanding. The dilemma is that the tools used to deconstruct this tradition come from that very tradition: "Derrida thus finds himself in the uncomfortable position of attempting to account for an error by means of tools derived from that very error" (Johnson, 1981, p. x).

One of Derrida's central methodological devices to accomplish this feat hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure (sous rature). To place something under erasure is literally, first to write a word then cross it out and then print both the word and its deletion. For example, the word Being, under erasure, would appear thus: Being and ~~Being~~. What this sous rature accomplishes is a strategy of telling us that we both need the term in order to understand the points being made and simultaneously should not employ the term: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible" (Spivak, 1974, p. xiv).

The strategic device of the sous rature is necessary to Derrida's task of employing the familiar and commonly known in order to deconstruct the familiar and commonly known. Thus, we must use the terms which we believe to be inaccurate and inappropriate, under erasure, in order to reveal their status as useful, necessary, and wrong. This brings a special subtlety and complexity to Derrida's works.

A further complication exists in that Derrida's deconstructive aim is not to undo the tradition of Western metaphysics in order to install in its place another tradition founded on the same frame. Indeed, his criticism of much of what heretofore has passed for a critique of that tradition, including the works of Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, is that they have undone the tradition, but only to restore what they have undone in another form. For example, hierarchies of binary oppositions founded on an identity logic dominate the Western tradition; it is not Derrida's aim to overthrow this frame only in order to install another of the same sort in its place. Rather, his deconstructive

aim is to undo the very notions of identity and hierarchy in the first place.

In a manner reminiscent of Adorno (1973; also see Buck-Morss,1977), Derrida challenges the core identity theory and logic on which opposition and hierarchy are based. Through his close readings of texts, he seeks to discover *within* the meaning of any single term its opposite member: e.g., to discover within A the meaning of its presumed opposite, not-A. This challenges the notions of identity, opposition and entity because A is *both* A *and* not-A: each term contains both itself and its other. Derrida engages in considerable word play and word analysis, hoping to *catch* the author off guard: to undo the text by revealing its other sides in the way a word is used, in its diverse associations, in the metaphors it brings to mind, or even in the usages that it can have but which the author has failed to discuss.

We will find it helpful in examining Derrida's analysis to consider two themes. The first focuses on his challenge to what he terms the logocentrism and phonocentrism of all Western metaphysics. The second introduces some of the key concepts, especially his idea of *differance* (with an *a*) and its implication for deconstructing the familiar concept of the subject.

The Critique of Logo- and Phonocentrism

Derrida's works revolve around the fundamental structuralist thesis that all social practices, including the meaning of subject and subjectivity, are not simply mediated by language but are constituted in and through language. Therefore, it becomes important both to examine the signifying system of language and the tradition by which language has thus far been understood. Derrida's aim is to deconstruct that tradition and so provide a better understanding of the manner by which persons are constituted in social and linguistic practice.

Derrida's review of the Western tradition since Plato reveals an emphasis on the union of mind, thought and consciousness with voice or speech. The presumption has been that speech provides a privileged access to mind; that speaking and thinking are co-present; that speaking is in immediate rather than mediated presence with consciousness and being.

This logo and phonocentric perspective locates writing as secondary (i.e., derivative and mediated) to the full presence of speaking. Writing is what is nonpresent, a substitute for the immediacy (presence) of the voice. Derrida uses the term writing in both its narrow and familiar sense to refer to inscriptions on a page and more broadly to refer to anything involving traces, basically, the absence of what is presumed to be fully present (i.e., speaking and the voice). The aim of deconstructing this hierarchy is *not* so as to reverse its ordering (speech primary, writing derivative), but more pointedly, to reveal the roots of writing and the trace within the very core of speech. In

other words, Derrida's aim is to reveal how the presumption that speech occupies a privileged place vis-a-vis mind and consciousness is in error because speech is *always already* inhabited by writing and hence is mediated and derivative. Needless to say, if presence is always already inhabited by absence, then even the apparent "presence" of the subject to itself becomes suspect.

There are several historical entry points that stress this privileging of speech over writing that Derrida seeks to undo. Derrida observes how in Aristotle's view, for example, "spoken words . . . are the symbols of mental experience . . . and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (Derrida, 1974, p.11). In the Aristotlean view, speech occupies a privileged status with respect to mental experience while writing, being mediated and derivative, merely represents what is spoken: "the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind . . . It signifies 'mental experiences'" (Derrida, 1974, p. 11). Derrida argues that phonocentrism grants a special status not only to speech over writing but therefore also to presence over absence: that is, a privileging of what appears to be immediate and present, as for example, the privileged ontological status that empiricism grants to whatever has here-and-now, observable qualities (e.g., see also Adorno, 1973; Keat and Urry, 1975).

The privileging of presence is based on the notion that because speakers both speak and hear themselves speak *at the same time*, they must be constituted as subjects with subjectivity (mind and consciousness) on the basis of speech. Derrida notes that when a person speaks the voice seems spontaneously to carry forth the operations of subjectivity and of mental experience. What appears is "the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously from within the self" (Derrida, 1974, p. 20). Derrida sees this to be the master illusion of all Western thought. He likens this privileging of speech to the quest for an absolute center, an origin, a beginning, a transcendental signified: that is, a source which itself has no source other than its pure being, pure spontaneity, pure presence; a source that serves as the ground for truth itself.

It will not serve our purposes to review nor to develop in detail Derrida's arguments on behalf of the Western domination of presence over absence, of the immediate over the mediated, of speech over writing. It is sufficient to observe that this lays the cornerstone to his whole analysis. His deconstructive task introduces writing and the trace, that is, what is absent, not present, as the key elements to turn around our whole manner of thinking.

Writing, the Trace and Differance

Derrida argues that what we presume to be present (speech and the voice) is constituted through something that is a nonpresent difference. There is a

parallel here between Derrida and Bateson (1972) who similarly argues that within the world of communication and information (i.e., language) there are only *differences*, not things, events, forces or impacts: "In the world of mind, nothing—that which is not—can be a cause" (Bateson, 1972, p. 452).

To unfold the meaning of what I have just outlined, let me employ the case that Derrida uses to illustrate his own model: Freud's analysis of the psychic apparatus as a process of writing (Derrida, 1978, Chapter 7). As befits his methodology, Derrida provides a close and detailed reading of Freud's works over a thirty year period (from 1895 to 1925) as he moved towards the metaphor of writing to describe the psychical apparatus.

According to Freud (1925), the toy slate known as the Mystic Writing Pad provides an apt metaphor for the psychical apparatus itself. The problem with which Freud wrestled and which led him to this formulation involves the dual requirements of the psychic apparatus: there must be an element that receives messages from the external world while remaining relatively open and fresh to new material; there must be an element that records permanent traces and thus is relatively resistant to the pure receipt of incoming materials. The Mystic Writing Pad solves this need by means of its several layers.

The surface layer is open and permeable to the reception of incoming materials; it remains forever fresh however, only by virtue of the erasure that occurs each time the surface is lifted from its wax underbase. Derrida sees it to be significant that the virgin status of the first layer is assured only through its being erased so that a fresh surface can remain exposed: the erasure of presence is this essential to the continuing awareness of presence. The inner surface of the pad consists of the underlying wax layer. While it does not receive fresh imprints, it records imprints as permanent traces inscribed in its surface.

The fresh surface layer is present to our awareness; it comprises the system of both perception and of consciousness itself. Yet, it makes no lasting record. The second layer, within which are inscribed permanent traces, involves the system of the unconscious. What Derrida finds so especially informative about this Freudian metaphor is the notion that writing, that is the permanent trace, exists *always already* before perception is aware or conscious of itself. To phrase this differently, the trace, which is absent from consciousness, forms the basis of consciousness itself:

> Writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself . . . 'Memory' or writing is the opening of that process of appearance itself. The 'perceived' may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it. (Derrida, 1978, p. 224).

We have now encountered Derrida's deconstruction of the Western metaphysics of presence. The trace (writing in general) serves as the foundation of

presence; and yet, the trace that informs presence is never itself present in awareness. Derrida deconstructs the thesis that speech provides an immediacy between what is spoken and what is meant. His contention is that as the Freudian metaphor suggests, the apparent presence of speech is a mediated derivative of a nonpresent trace. Whatever is said to be immediately present is the result of a process that has always already taken place. "To mean, in other words, is automatically *not* to be" (Johnson, 1981, p. ix).

Differance

Derrida's master concept, differance, captures this complex deconstructive process in a single word that stands for two other words: difference and deferral. Difference refers to the Saussurian (or Batesonian) notion that all language and communication exists as a system of differences. As Saussure (1959) argued, the distinction between the sound forms (i.e., signifiers) of a language is discerned only by their differences with other forms within the language system and not by anything intrinsic or essential to their nature as such. Differences describe relations, not entities; and relations are not locatable as specific presences. When Derrida speaks of differance as involving differences, therefore, he is simply noting that the meanings that emerge in linguistic practice do so on the basis of differences and distinctions, not on the basis of essences or substances that are fully present as such.

The sense of deferral which the term differance also recommends derives rather directly from the Freudian metaphor we have just examined. Deferral describes the inherent time lag (distance) between presence and what constitutes that presence, namely absence, writing, the trace. Recall that the model describes a delaying mechanism; whatever is consciously perceived "may be read only in the past" (1978, p. 224). To say that differance inhabits presence and constitutes what is present, therefore, is to suggest that what we adopt as an immediate presence of being is the outcome of a complex, never ending process of difference and deferral: "*Differance* inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present . . . . The illusion of the self-presence of meaning or of consciousness is thus produced by the repression of the differential structures from which they spring" (Johnson, 1981, p. ix).

The paradoxical quality of differance is that it is a nonpresence: an interval, a space, a gap, a trace. Furthermore, differance defies the logic of identity, of either/or, through its emphasis on the logic of the supplement, of both/and.

Logic of Identity versus Derrida's Logic of the Supplement

The binarism that characterized structuralism is ·deconstructed by the opposing logic of the supplement as revealed in the concept of differance. As

we have seen, Derrida argues that in whatever we take to be immediate and present there is always already absence, difference and deferral. If presence always contains absence, there cannot be a neatly drawn line of opposition between these two notions. It is not that presence and absence are opposites, not that there is *either* presence *or* absence, but rather an inevitable defining of the one through the other: there is *both* presence *and* absence; absence inhabits and interpenetrates with presence. This appears clearly in the Freudian view in which what is conscious (present) is always already inhabited by what is unconscious (absent).

Derrida's logic of the supplement challenges the logic of identity. A supplement both substitutes for and adds to something else. Writing, for example, supplements speech. In supplementing speech, writing both substitutes for it and adds absence to its seeming presence. It is both different from speech and yet also inhabits speech. Thus writing is both speech and its other, that is, what speech is not.

In mounting this challenge to identity logic, Derrida accomplishes what Adorno (1973) likewise sought to do in his complex and richly illustrative major work, *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno sought to undo the identity thesis that seemed to threaten civilization even as it formed the basis of certainty for civilization. In the hopes of deconstructing identity, Adorno recommended a negative dialectics, a *process* that never came to rest, as Hegel's dialectics did, with some final or originary identity: a process forever in motion, hence negative rather than affirmative, positive or self-present. Derrida's deconstructive attack on presence and identity likewise envisions a never-ending process, without beginning or end. This describes the undoing of the center and the certainty that marks so many of our Western mastery-designed enterprises.

Derrida's versus Psychology's Subject

Once again it will be helpful to turn to Geertz's fine description of the Western concept of personhood in order to sharpen the comparison with Derrida's analysis. Geertz appropriately describes the concept of person that one would expect to emerge from the very Western metaphysics which Derrida deconstructs. Rather than re-quoting Geertz's description, let me simply paraphrase and highlight three key elements to which Derrida's analysis is counterposed: (1) the person is a *center of awareness*; (2) the person is an *integrated* universe and distinctive *whole*; (3) the person is a bounded entity *set contrastively against* other such entities.

A Center of Awareness?

As previously noted, Derrida builds up on the anti-phenomenologies of

Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and the similar themes of French structuralism to question the notion of the person as a fully aware, self-present being. His critique of the concepts of mind, consciousness and subjectivity as immediately self-available presences leads us to question any psychology of the self and of subjectivity that fails to adopt a mediated perspective. There are several points to recall.

First, the Derridian psychic apparatus operates in such a manner that its workings are not entirely available to itself. Although the metaphor is not entirely apt, this idea is akin to a camera that can film everything but itself filming everything (see Wilden, 1980).

In addition, recall that Derrida's thesis is that presence is always already mediated by the absent trace; thus, self-consciousness is not a direct and unmediated experience but rather is an indirect and an always already mediated experience. This way of understanding personhood and consciousness permits a key role for social and historical traces to enter and structure the very experience of consciousness and of self even as those traces are unavailable to presence and awareness.

As Coward and Ellis (1977) observe, this perspective leads us to see ideology—specific sociohistorical traces contained within the language system—permeating the very core of personhood. Ideology is not a garment that one puts on and removes at will; ideology constitutes the person as a subject in the first place. What precedes consciousness, including the consciousness of the self as subject, as cogito, is thereby a process that constitutes that presence, mediates it and sets the subject in place. The process, however, remains beyond the grasp of any status as a presence-in-itself:

> Ideology is not a slogan under which political and economic interest of a class presents itself. It is the way in which the individual actively lives his or her role within the social totality: it therefore participates in the construction of that individual so that he or she can act. Ideology is a practice of representation; a practice to produce a specific articulation, that is, producing certain meanings and necessitating certain subjects as their supports. (Coward and Ellis, 1977, p. 67)

The point summarized in this passage, derivative from Derrida as well as from Lacan among others (see Coward and Ellis, 1977; Lemaire, 1977; Turkle, 1978; Wilden, 1980), argues that persons as subjects are constructed in and through a symbolic system that fixes the subject in place while remaining beyond the subject's full mastery. In other words, persons are not at the center, fully aware and self-present masters, but have been *decentered* by these relations to the symbolic order. The very indeterminancy of the symbolic order, governed by the endless process of difference, always already inhabited by a nonpresence that founds presence, introduces a picture of a subject who is open-ended and indeterminate except as fixed in place by the culturally

constituted symbolic order.

The Western subject as one who is at the center of awareness is thereby seen as the work of an ideological practice that represses the fluidity and indeterminancy of the process in the name of a fixed point of origin. Ideology is understood as an aspect of the symbolic universe that accomplishes this fixing in the service of certain cultural and institutional practices and requirements. In this view, the intervention required to produce a new subject, decentered and open to other fixings demands a depth process akin to psychoanalysis joined with a structural change to support this new subject.

An Integrated Whole?

The Western conception of personhood that has clearly permeated psychology's understanding of its subject, emphasizes the notion of persons as more or less integrated universes and distinctive wholes. The emphasis is placed on wholeness and integration, at least as an ideal state of personhood to be attained. Read through any developmental thesis—Erickson's (1959) for example—to discover the high premium placed on the integration of opposing or contradictory resolutions to identity-crises. Or examine Lovinger's (1976) highly sophisticated conception of ego development to observe the value that is placed on what she calls the highest stage: Integrated. While Lovinger admits both the rarity of finding people at this high point of development and hence the difficulty of its simple description or assessment, she tells us that it is like the previous stage of autonomy, where oppositions are united and integrated, but involves an even greater consolidation into a coherent, integrated whole, an identity-as-such.

The conception then is of a person who integrates all the contradictions of previous stages of ego development into one dominant hierarchy. Basically, it is the ego that strives towards this integrative high point. Derrida's conception, however, gives us a fully noncentered and noncenterable representation of personhood. His deconstruction of the metaphysics that requires "centers" and "points of origin or conclusion," creates the picture of a process without beginning or end, without a center in charge:

> The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a *system* of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found. (Derrida, 1978, pp. 226-227)

Ogilvy (1979) pursued the consequences of this Derridian view of personhood in writing about a new ideal, the multidimensional, decentered self rather than the integrated, hierarchically arranged Western conception. The concept of the self as integrated and the valuing of that concept, flow from and

participate in the reproduction of the Western worldview. The ego as master in its own household, seeking to integrate the competing demands it faces and being successful to the extent that it achieves a unified wholeness, has its parallels in theories of governance and of authority within the Western world. The alternative, more Derridian view, would give us a subject who is multidimensional and without center or hierarchical integration. It would give us a process and a paradox, but never a beginning nor an end.

Opposed Entities?

The Western logic of identity is a logic of either/or. By contrast, Derrida's logic of the supplement (of differance rather than of identity) is a logic of both/and. The third theme culled from Geertz's description of the Western concept of personhood builds upon the logic of identity and either/or and speaks of one entity being set "contrastively against," that is, opposed to other entities. Contrast and opposition go hand in glove with the sense of an autonomous entity, one whose potential for unity and wholeness (i.e., for one identity above all) permits us to define this creature and to set it against others. In the Derridian logic of the supplement, what something is, is thoroughly inhabited by what that something also is not. Thus, entities are both what they are and also what they are not. Under these conditions, it is impossible meaningfully to understand the oppositional relationship between entities. This theme has been proposed as well by Wilden (1980) and Bateson (1972).

Bateson observes that the unit of natural survival is neither the individual nor the society, but that, in fact, there is no homogeneous unit of survival as such, only a system, termed the ecosystem. This system comprises *both* organism *and* environment. Bateson observes that any organism who destroys its environment manages to destroy itself. It is apparent that by thinking in terms of either/or, one creates the very conditions that oppose entities that are in fact members of the same system. In other words, only by thinking in terms of a logic of both/and, can one see that the matter is not one of opposition but only of differences: and as we know, differences do not inhere in the entity, but rather describe the relations among the parts of a system.

Wilden sees the very concept of personhood that exists in the Western world, based on the requirement for either/or identity, to be one that threatens the very persons in whose name it is offered. This Western concept forces contrastive opposition where the mutual recognition of the other-in-self and the self-in-other is essential. The Derridian subject can never be set apart from the multiple others who are its very essence. Thus, the Derridian subject who would seek to oppose and enslave others can only suffer in kind, for those others are elements of the subject's own personhood.

The Challenge of Critical Systems Theory

Wilden (1980; also see Churchman, 1979) introduced six separate meanings to the concept *system*; he also registered his disagreement with all of them, terming them pseudo-systemic. His list ranged from highly mechanistic analyses to those that, while speaking in systems language, insisted on an additive formulation in which the ontological primacy remained within the parts and not the relations that comprise the whole system. It is clear from Wilden's account that a proper system's perspective grants primacy to relations and sees the parts to be mediated derivatives.

Because of the many uses of the terms system, I have intentionally chosen to entitle this third challenge to psychology's subject, *critical* systems theory. I hope that this will separate my view of an alternative epistemology from the views that "talk" systems but "mean" elements.

Critical systems theory introduces an alternative framework of knowledge, one that forces us seriously to question the status given to the notion of the individual subject-as-such. A helpful beginning point for an examination of this alternative epistemology appears in the 1949 paper by Dewey and Bentley.

Dewey and Bentley's Transactionalism

Dewey and Bentley (1949) outline three developmental epochs in the history of human inquiry: self-action, inter-action, and trans-action. They link self-actional inquiry to the Aristotlean notion of substances: "Things which completely, inherently, and hence necessarily possess Being; that . . . continue eternally in action . . . under their own power" (Dewey and Bentley, 1949, pp. 122-123). They observe that self-actional notions survive even today in such concepts as the "'mind' as 'actor' . . . in charge of behavior" (p. 129); they liken this survival to a form of charlatanism. To this, we might well add the Western conception of personhood as a kind of self-acting universe: another survival worthy of challenge.

In rejecting the quasi-animistic, self-actional frame, Galileo replaced it with an inter-actional formulation. Bodies in motion were not driven by some inner substance or essence, but were seen in terms of the inter-action between distinctive forces. Newton further developed this inter-actional mode; the world was now to be viewed "as a process of 'simple forces between unalterable particles'" (Dewey and Bentley, 1949, p. 123). With Einstein, the movement away from inter-action and towards a trans-actional framework emerged. Dewey and Bentley introduce several key distinctions between inter-action and trans-action, two of which impress me as of particular importance.

First, unlike inter-actional inquiry, in which it is possible to offer reasona-

bly complete descriptions of the items that will inter-act *before* their encoun-
ter, one can offer only very provisional descriptions of the elements impli-
cated under the trans-actional mode. In other words, the presumption of the
inter-actional model is that "facts" exist in independence from one another
and that each can be described apart from its encounter with other so-called
facts. The presumption of the trans-actional model, by contrast, is that one
cannot adequately indicate a fact independently of its determination based on
its relation with other facts with which it engages in an encounter.

Second, given the presumptive adequacy of the descriptions of the ele-
ments *prior* to their encounter under the inter-active model, the major task is
primarily to examine what ensues following this encounter. By contrast, given
the provisional understanding of elements prior to their encounter under the
trans-actional mode, the main task is to examine the manner by which the
parts are reorganized in the encounter and thus to observe their freedom to be
redetermined and take-on new attributes as the transaction unfolds.

Clearly, the parts have priority within the inter-actional model while rela-
tions retain primacy within the trans-actional model. In the inter-actional
frame, one begins with the parts in order to understand the whole. In the
trans-actional frame, one begins with the whole system in order to arrive at an
adequate understanding of the nature of what appear as elements.

In order to highlight this distinction and to relate it to the deconstructive
task, let me quote a lengthy passage in which Dewey and Bentley reflect on
why self-actional and inter-actional treatment seem so dominant in the
human sciences:

> The organism . . . seems in everyday life and language to stand out strongly apart from
> the transactions in which it is engaged. This is superficial observation. One reason for it
> is that the organism is engaged in so many transactions. . . . A 'business man' would not
> be called a business man at all if he never did any business; yet the very variety of his
> other transactions is what makes it easy to detach him and specialize him as a business
> man. Consider the great variety of his other transactions, and it becomes still easier to
> make 'a man' out of him in the sense of an 'essence' or 'substance' . . . . He comes thus
> . . . to be considered as if he could still be a man without being in *any* transaction. (p. 131)

The subject-as-such is abstracted as an entity with mind, consciousness, or
essence; it is culled from the web of transactions and treated as though it had a
definition, reality and existence apart from that web. In its fundamental
outlook by contrast, the trans-actional epistemology rejects entity and sub-
stance over relation. Ontological priority is granted to the latter; the former
occupies a mediated status. In this model, psychology's subject does not exist
as an independent nor self-contained entity with properties that can be
defined apart from its location as a mediated element within the larger system
of which it is a part.

Maruyama's Mindscapes

In an intriguig series of papers, Magoroh Maruyama (1979, 1980) has developed what he terms a theory of *mindscapes*: "a structure of reasoning, cognition, perception, conceptualization, design, planning, and decision making that may vary from one individual, profession, culture or social group to another" (1980, p. 591). Maruyama outlines four mindscapes: independent-event, homogenistic, homeostatic, and morphogenetic. I interpret the first two to define nonsystemic epistemologies while the remaining two introduce two forms of systemic worldviews. Rather than my taking up space to introduce the details of each—he offers several helpful tables summarizing their key distinctions in his 1979 paper—let me briefly observe the nature of the differences in general terms.

Systemic and nonsystemic views. Basically, whereas nonsystemic epistemologies adopt a view of nonreciprocal causality, systemic epistemologies see events in terms of reciprocal causal loops. Maruyama argues that this distinction became possible in the Western worldview only after some 2500 years of domination by the nonreciprocal model. The challenge marks a revolution in understanding made possible by the advent of error-correcting feedback systems (e.g., the guided missle, the thermostat), which are based on a reciprocal, homeostatic model.

Maruyama sees this movement from nonreciprocal to reciprocal models to mark a radically new perspective for the Western world's understanding of biological, psychological and social phenomena. In this regard, Maruyama and Bateson (1972) appear to have adopted very similar analyses of the revolutionary import of these epistemological transformations. Bateson, for example, suggests that the time period, 1946-1947, in which cybernetics, communication, information and systems theory all began to take off marks "the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years" (Bateson, 1972, p. 476).

Nonreciprocal vs. reciprocal models. A nonreciprocal model involves a linear sequence of cause and effect: for example, A's actions cause B's behavior. We see this in the Dewey and Bentley notion of inter-action: two entities, each of which has an existence independent of the other, meet such that one's action causes the action of the other.

Reciprocal models build upon a nonlinear view of causality. In a self-correcting feedback system, for example, A's impact on B leads to B's reciprocal action back on A. In such a system, it is meaningful to say that B causes B's behavior: that is, the reciprocal loop joining A and B operates such that B's return of A's effects on B effects B's later performace. With homeostatic, error-correcting (i.e., negative) feedback loops, a specific goal is maintained

by feedback from B to A that moderates A's actions on B around that targeted goal. In a thermostat, for example, the register (A) responds to room temperature and sends a signal to the furnace (B) to turn on or off. A's message effects B's behavior which in turn feeds back to effect A's behavior: as the room heats up, A tells B to shut off.

The so-called elements in homeostatic reciprocal networks of this sort are meaningfully understood as such only within the transaction that joins them into the system of which they are elements. One and the same "entity" is both subject and object, both cause and effect. This challenges the simple identity notions that characterize Aristotlean logic. Whether A, for example, is cause or effect, depends on where in the system it is located, at what moment in time, and from what point of view. This transactional point of view forces us to reconsider the logic of identity as well as the root notions of causality.

Homeostatic versus morphogenetic frames. The crux of the distinction that Maruyama draws between homeostatic and morphogenetic systems reveals the further advances in the original system's conceptualization. Homeostatic systems retain their basic structural relations as they function; morphogenetic systems undergo changes in these structural relations. Homeostasis involves negative feedback; morphogenesis involves positive feedback. The former revolve around a set point; the latter grow and evolve and are structurally transformed.

Maruyama illustrates this distinction by describing Japanese and European conceptions of architectural space. He sees the former as involving multiple meanings and alternatives, while the latter stress "identity", "permanance" and "specialized function". In his view, European spaces and rooms follow an Aristotlean identity principle: a given room serves a given purpose and only that. Japanese spaces, by contrast, reflect the essence of a morphogenetic epistemology or mindscape: "the same room may be a bedroom at night, a dining room at mealtime, and a living room for the rest of the day" (1980, p. 598).

It is interesting to observe the striking parallels between Maruyama's and Derrida's view of the identity thesis and the different, though parallel use made of space in architecture and the space in writing to illustrate their perspective. Morphogenesis challenges identity. Its multiple forms, the slidings in the meaning of elements and the absence of a center are parallel to the Derridian analysis of grammatology as opposed to logocentrism. Language, in fact, is an especially rich locale for seeing the play that morphogenesis describes.

System's Versus Psychology's Subject

The system's approach forces us to take a very different look at the nature

of personhood and the epistemology on which that concept is built. The new epistemology warrants a new concept of personhood and thus a new subject for psychology's inquiry.

I see two major distinctions differentiating the system's subject from psychology's subject: (1) The system's subject is multicentered and multidimensional without any necessary unification or integration of this multiplicity into a single identity as such; (2) the system's subject is nonhierarchically and reciprocally related with other subjects and elements of the total field of which it is a part. A good sense of this twofold challenge emerges from briefly considering Bateson's (1972) analysis:

> The total self-corrective unit which processes information, or, as I say, 'thinks' and 'acts' and 'decides', is a *system* whose boundaries do not at all coincide with the boundaries either of the body or of what is popularly called the 'self' or 'consciousness'. (p. 319)

Let us briefly summarize these two distinctions captured by Bateson and contained in the review of the challenge posed by critical systems theory.

Multicentered and Multidimensional

The identity logic which insistently yields a single, coherently organized entity, the subject, meets with stiff resistance once we reconceptualize and refocus our inquiry in terms of the critical system's perspective. There is no entity with a bounded identity (i.e., as Bateson observes, no skin-enclosed thinking and acting machine) unless, in the name of demanding that there be a center, we abstract a hypothetical center from the wide variety of transactions in which the skin-bound organism is engaged. Only with this demand and this abstraction will we arrive at this illusory figure. The system's perspective recommends that we see relations not elements; relations appear on many dimensions and appear without a center or identity-as-such. Relations permit what seems to be the selfsame entity to be both selfsame and other without any absolute essence that *is* its alone.

As Ogilvy (1979) observes, within a logic of identity, it is correct to maintain that an object cannot have two opposing properties at the same time: for example, something cannot be A and not-A at the same time. However, within a systemic perspective, "it is perfectly possible to be both generous and stingy, both loving and hating, both downcast and elated in quite the same respects at the same time" (p. 206).

The lesson is important for understanding psychology's subject. We have invested substantial time, money and energy in techniques that assess properties that people possess. We define a person as *having* or as *being* of a certain type or as behaving in a particular manner. These traits and behaviors become

things that comprise the person-as-such. We fail to consider that people are both A and not-A, and that this is contradictory only within an identity framework that demands a selfsame, integrated center.

I believe that what has occurred is precisely what Geertz observes so keenly in his analysis of the "depersonalized" quality of Balinese ritual. In their ritual, coherence and integrity are assured by the portrayal of roles that subdue the inevitable contradictoriness and multidimensionality that comprise the person. The rituals that mute individuality constitute the coherent center. Western culture also accomplishes an integration. In this case, however, that integration is fixed in the skinbound person-as-entity rather than in culturally prescribed (and proscribed) rituals. To phrase this differently, we make the individual into our cultural ritual, whereas the Balinese restrict the ritual to a cast of recurring characters in a drama.

We demand that individuals be either A or not-A, that their essence be one or the other, not both/and. Our center thus becomes a character who while constructed in multidimensionality is expected to become unified into a coherent identity or center. We look with some puzzlement at the Balinese who seem to us to distort themselves in order to play their ritual roles. I believe that we might also look at the distortions we undergo in order to play ourselves. If they seem depersonalized from our nonsystemic point of view, we appear overly personalized from a systemic point of view.

Nonhierarchical and Reciprocal Relationships

The system's perspective emphasizes reciprocity rather than hierarchy, differences rather than oppositions in which one term has ascendency over the other. In a reciprocal relation, neither term occupies a privileged position; both contribute to the fate they each experience. The register and the furnace play important parts in the drama of the thermostat; we fail to see this once we arrange them hierarchically, giving primacy to one or the other (also see Bateson, 1972).

Psychology's subject as a "bounded universe" recommends hierarchy over difference. Where reciprocity reigns, hierarchy fades, except as some necessary (i.e., ideological) societal illusion. The cultural demand for hierarchy fails to consider the reciprocal nets that join the elements into the whole. The deconstruction of hierarchy that flows from the critical systems analysis challenges our requirements for that controlling center, that locus of mastery and control, that entity who knows.

Towards A Conclusion

This essay began by suggesting that the subject of psychology's inquiry has occupied so familiar and unquestionable a status that it has rarely received the

kind of careful scrutiny that such an important notion warrants. It has been my intent to provide at least the beginnings of that critical scrutiny by reviewing three distinct yet overlapping perspectives that challenge our present understanding.

Several of the authors who have contributed to this deconstructive challenge to psychology's subject have done so for reasons beyond the mere introduction of a new way of thinking about the universe and about human life. Many participate in the development of a new epistemology based on the belief that the old ways of understanding affirm Western civilization's material substrata and lie near the deep roots of the human dilemma of survival and wellbeing.

In a strikingly similar manner, the three perspectives we have examined locate the root psychological problem within the epistemological framework that has dominated the Western worldview. Insofar as differences between people and between organisms and environment have been understood to be nonreciprocal and hierarchical, there has evolved a domination of group over group, individual over individual, humanity over humanity's environment, including both the natural ecology and its varieties of cultural representatives (e.g., see Leiss, 1975). As long as we persist in this nonsystemic manner of viewing the world and its inhabitants, there will continue to be incursions that destroy in the name of momentary peace. Only when more systemic points of view can be sustained by underlying structural modifications will it be possible to grant nonhierarchical significance to the unification that differences provide.

Where will psychology be in this unfoldong drama of human survival? As I see it, the challenge for psychology is to renovate its own formulations. This renovation must begin at psychology's very base, the understanding of the subject that psychology examines and the methodologies appropriate to this new venture. In this way, psychology's subject may become a new and different character, and psychology will have helped contribute to the creation of a new subject instead of continuing to affirm the old.

Reference Notes

1. Bond, M.H. An agenda for cross-cultural studies of attribution. Paper presented at the International Association of Cross-cultural Psychology, Taipei, August, 1981.

2. Bond, M.H., Leung, K., and Wan, K.C. The impact of task and maintenance contributions on reward distribution: How does cultural collectivism operate? Unpublished paper, Department of Psychology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, no date.

References

Adorno, T.W. Sociology and psychology. *New Left Review*, 1967, 46, 63-80.

Adorno, T.W. *Negative dialectics*. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Adorno, T.W. *Minima moralia*. London, England: NLB, 1974.

Allport, G.W. The historical background of modern social psychology. In G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology*, (2nd ed.). Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1968, 1-80.

Bateson, G. *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Chandler Publishing, 1972.

Buck-Morss, S. *The origin of negative dialectics*. New York: Free Press, 1977.

Caplan, N., and Nelson, S.D. On being useful: The nature and consequences of psychological research on social problems. *American Psychologist*, 1973, 28, 199-211.

Capra, F. *The Tao of physics*. Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, 1975.

Churchman, C.W. *The systems approach and its enemies*. New York: Basic Books, 1979.

Coward, R., and Ellis, J. *Language and materialism*. London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Derrida, J. *Of grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Derrida, J. *Writing and difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Derrida, J. *Dissemination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Dewey, J., and Bentley, A.F. *Knowing and the known*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1949.

Erikson, E.H. *Identity and the life cycle* (Psychological Issues). New York: International Universities Press, 1959.

Freud, S. A note upon the 'Mystic writing-pad'. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *Collected Papers*, (Vol. 5). (Originally published, 1925.)

Fromm, E. *Escape from freedom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941.

Fromm, E. *The sane society*. New York: Ninehart, 1955.

Gadlin, H., and Rubin, S.H. Interactionism: A nonresolution of the person-situation controversy. In A Buss (Ed.), *Psychology in social context*. New York: Irvington Publishers, 1979, pp. 213-238.

Geertz, C. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Geertz, C. From the native's point of view: On the nature of anthropological understanding. In P. Rabinow and W.M. Sullivan (Eds.), *Interpretative social science*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 225-241.

Giddens, A. *Central problems in social theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Habermas, J. *Knowledge and human interests*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Habermas, J. *Theory and practice*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Habermas, J. *Legitimation crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.

Hofstede, G. Motivation, leadership, and organization: Do American theories apply abroad? *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer 1980, pp. 42-63.

Horkheimer, M. Notes on Institute activities. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, 1941, 9, 121-123.

Horkheimer, M. *Critical theory*. New York: Seabury Press, 1972.

Horkheimer, M., and Adorno, T.W. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Seabury Press, 1972.

Jacoby, R. *Social amnesia*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.

Johnson, B. Translator's Introduction. In J. Derrida, *Dissemination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. vii-xxxiii.

Keat, R., and Urry, J. *Social theory as science*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Kurzweil, E. *The age of structuralism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

Leiss, W. The problem of man and nature in the work of the Frankfurt School. *Journal of Philosophy and Social Science*, 1975, 5, 163-172.

Lemaire, A. *Jacques Lacan*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Loevinger, J. *Ego development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976.

Marcuse, H. *One dimensional man*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

Marcuse, H. *Eros and civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

Marcuse, H. *Negations*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.

Maruyama, M. Transepistemological understanding: Wisdom beyond theories. In R. Hinshaw (Ed.), *Currents in anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton, 1979, pp. 373-389.

Maruyama, M. Mindscapes and science theories. *Current Anthropology*, 1980, 21, 589-600.

Mayhew, B.H. Structuralism versus individualism: Part II, Ideological and other obfuscations. *Social Forces*, 1981, 59, 627-648.

Meacham, J.A. Soviet investigations of memory development. In R.V. Kail, Jr. and J.W. Hagen (Eds.), *Perspectives on the development of memory and cognition*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1977.

McCarthy, T.A. A theory of communicative competence. In P. Connerton (Ed.), *Critical sociology*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1976, pp. 470-497.

McCarthy, T.A. *The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1978.

Ogilvy, J. *Many dimensional man*. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

Ollman, B. *Alienation*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Pepitone, A. Lessons from the history of social psychology. *American Psychologist*, 1981, 36, 972-985.

Ricoeur, P. *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

Ricoeur, P. Psychoanalysis and the movement of contemporary culture. In P. Rabinow and W.M. Sullivan (Eds.), *Interpretative social science*. Berkeley: Unviersity of California Press, 1979, pp. 301-339.

Riesman, D. *The lonely crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

Sampson, E.E. On justice as equality. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1975, 31, 45-64.

Sampson, E.E. Psychology and the American ideal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1977, 35, 767-782.

Sampson, E.E. Scientific paradigms and social values: Wanted—A scientific revolution. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1978, 36, 1332-1343.

Sampson, E.E. Cognitive psychology as ideology. *American Psychologist*, 1981, 36, 730-743.

Sarason, S.B. An asocial psychology and a misdirected clinical psychology. *American Psychologist*, 1981, 36, 827-836.

de Saussure, F. *Course in general linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.

Smith, M.B. Perspectives on selfhood. *American Psychologist*, 1978, 33, 1053-1063.

Spivak, G.C. Translator's Preface to J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp. ix-lxxxvii.

Turkle, S. *Psychoanalytic politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1978.

Wilden, A. *System and structure*. New York: Tavistock, 1980.