Introduction to Part 1: the Psychology of Selfhood Now and Then

Sandra Jovchelovitch

1 Introduction

What would Antigone—a young woman determined to honour family and gods—make of our current emphasis on the self and the many platforms we have today for curating its presentation? Would she be on Instagram or any other social media platform? And what about her father, Oedipus, or Medea, another such extraordinary woman? Could they possibly be themselves when confronted with the digital choruses that populate the public sphere of the early 21st century? Our age has come to be seen as the age of the excessive self, trapped in the 'tyranny of visibility' (Schroer 2014), diligently cultivating its own exposition, skilfully presenting itself if not with authenticity, certainly with mediatic competence. Could this make any sense for selves that lived long ago?

The study of the classics opens our eyes to the long-standing psychological problem of studying human behaviour in time and underscores the historical character of all social and psychological phenomena (Glaveanu and Yamamoto 2012; Jovchelovitch 2012). The ancients and their plays challenge the idea of de-contextualized minds and behaviours and urge us to consider the lines of continuity and discontinuity that connect the lives of predecessors to the lives of our contemporaries (see the Introduction to Part 2 by Gordon Sammut, this volume). Would it be possible for Antigone, Oedipus, or Medea to understand us? And how can we understand them, what they did, what they wanted, who they were? How do we treat the evidence left for us in voices of the past, received in the form of stories and commentary? What lenses are required to understand their understandings and compare those understandings to our own?

In the two chapters that follow, Sheila Murnaghan and Evert van Emde Boas address these fundamental questions as they explore perennial aspects of the human self, including what makes its individuality, agency and relation to context. There is much to learn from these chapters, from the detailed in-depth analysis of ancient texts to the manner in which they use psychology to respond to the modern charge levelled at Greek tragedy for its alleged failure to portray character with psychological depth. They offer us a rich discussion

of how selves are relationally constructed and talked about as they compellingly demonstrate that tragedy remains a central medium for sense-making, a powerful reservoir of folk psychologies, a carrier of the deep psychological common sense against which and within which we come to understand our individual and collective lives.

'Taming the Extraordinary: Shifting motives and the psychology of tragic actors' (Chapter 2) examines the ways in which Antigone and Oedipus relate to the extreme actions they are famous for, unpacking, against the modern critique of diminished characterization, the power of tragedy to make visible the contradictory, ever-changing and non-linear relationship the self sustains with itself over the life course. It shows that these evolving selves are as much creative agents as they are cultural resources, which travel through the centuries in the folk psychologies contained in stories. 'Individuals or Types: Ancient criticism and modern psychology on characterization in Greek tragedy' (Chapter 3) considers the types of social attribution used by scholiasts to explain the behaviour of literary characters. It draws on the folk psychology at work in these attributions to challenge the idea that Greek tragedy is focused on the typification of characters rather than on their individuality. In addition to the interest related to scholia as a data source, it raises the question of what constitutes individuality and how it stands in relation to types. As meta-perspectives expressing the world around the stage, scholia give us an inroad into ways of thinking that guided the reception of ancient plays at a time not too distant from the period they were enacted. Both chapters offer a reflection on the sources of individuality and how to work through the perennial tension between the internal world of the self and its external determination—whether by gods, cultural traditions, social categorization or typification.

I find the analysis presented by these chapters highly compelling and in what follows I will explore aspects that chime with current research on the dialogicality of the self and its socio-cultural development and realization. This will hopefully add a psychological perspective to the challenge the chapters present to the problem of individuality, its cultural sources, and what constitutes its 'depth'. Interestingly for us psychologists, these classical studies offer a robust body of evidence for understanding the historical mind, avenues for rethinking the individualization of psychological science, and not least resources to confront internal fractures within the walls of psychology itself, which are far from being resolved and where Cartesian dualist assumptions continue to predominate (Marková 2016; Farr 1991; Valsiner 2009).

2 The Dialogicality of Selfhood: the Individual and the Social, Again

Humans are highly individualized as well as highly social organisms. This apparent paradox is inscribed in our biology and central to human psychology (Tomasello et al. 2005). We are unique in that in the course of our evolutionary history, a key adaptation emerged, enabling a reflexive consciousness to understand itself as an individual agent (Humphrey 2007). Right at the centre of this agentic consciousness, regulating the individual organism's experience of itself and the environment is the private self (Harré 1998), a dual psychological structure comprising the I and the Me (Mead 1934). A central feature of the human private self is the evolution of an internal dialogicality, that is, a developed ability to creatively engage in a conversation with itself. Through perspective-taking, a major socio-cognitive skill established in early childhood, humans are able to engage in mindreading, that is, they place themselves in the position of another and infer what they think and the reasons that guide their actions (cf. the Introduction to Part 3 by Max van Duijn, this volume). Importantly, understanding the perspective of others enables the self to understand that it holds a perspective of its own, and to reflexively put itself forward as an object for consideration (Gillespie 2006, 2012).

Multiplicity of perspective—self, immediate other, we—is thus integral to the agentic awareness of the human self, internally lived as the constant dialogue between the I and the Me in relation to a given context. The internal dialogicality of the self has been captured by all central psychological theories of the modern age (Zitoun et al. 2007; Farr 1996) and in many respects resembles the insights of ancient tragedy where we are actors but not and never fully authors of our lives. Human behaviour is such that the meaning and outcome of a human act is to be found not only in the behaviour of the actant but also in the responses it elicits from others (Mead 1982). The human self, even at its most lonely, is never alone and its predicament is that its individual psychology is per necessity a social psychology as well.

This is evident in Murnaghan's detailed discussion of the changing motives and understandings that guide Oedipus and Antigone as they try to explain and make sense of their extraordinary acts. Antigone's apparent inconsistency is worked through as she encounters Ismene's opposition to what she wants to do, Creon's decree forbidding her to act as she wants and finally her impending death, the ultimate penalty for her determination to act. Her beliefs and actions change as a function of her interaction with others and the close prospect of dying; she is guided by these externalities as she presents herself

to us in her variety, contradictions, grief. And yet, through all of this, she is entirely consistent and her opting for death is a mark of her utter uniqueness, a choice that reveals her determination and ability to remain true to herself and no one else. Oedipus has more time, as Murnaghan perceptively notes, and over the course of two plays, just as in the course of a life, Oedipus works through a narrative of his deeds, from which he cannot escape but which he can recast as he finds new ways and resources to explain anew what he did. Developmental time is a precious psychological asset (Gopnik, Frankenhuis, and Tomasello 2020) and he can count on the experience of old age to renew his account: he was guided by the gods and unaware of the full scale of what he was doing, he did not know the identity of his victims, he acted in self-defence and in marrying Jocasta simply accepted a gift. Here is a man who can now see himself from a distance and reconsider the question of agency through a more encompassing and forgiving view of what shaped his behaviour. We can see how Oedipus' change is driven both by his position in the life course and his renewed interpretation of what the worlds of humans and gods have given him. Legal and religious explanations are the available socio-cultural tools of his context, which scaffold him and which he uses effectively to enable some form of reconciliation between the I and the Me, between himself and his extraordinary deeds.

Rather than lack of coherence, Oedipus and Antigone showcase the evolved plasticity and dialogicality of human selves (Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon 1992; Howarth 2002). The evolving reasons of tragic characters express the polyphony of the dialogical self (Renedo 2010), whose internal drama unfolds as it negotiates both its encounters with others' voices and the changes imposed by the life course and the embodiment of cognition (Tsakiris 2017). They change themselves as they change their representation of the situation and the situation itself changes. Whereas the script of the play may be conceived as a proxy for invariance, i.e., pre-determined by external forces, the selves involved in enacting it establish a reflexive and creative relationship with it (see the Introduction to Part 4 by Vlad Glaveanu, this volume). And as they go on speaking, acting, and letting us know why this is the case, Oedipus and Antigone become a source of knowledge for us. Through their complexity, multiple contradictions, extreme behaviours, and interactions, ancient characters make themselves instructive and paradigmatic selves. Their acting consolidates a cultural template that supports sense-making and tames the extraordinary, or in the language of social psychology, makes the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici and Duveen 2000). Objectified in story-telling and performance, they become social representations of paradigmatic selves that travel in history and public spheres as anchors for other selves. A central social and

psychological function of all social cognition, the taming of the extraordinary renders visible the formidable role of tragedy as a cultural resource for guiding the self-understanding and behaviour of ordinary selves throughout the ages. This is a central point in Murnaghan's illuminating analysis.

Van Emde Boas' investigation of scholia takes us a step further into the complex internal structure of internal and external voices at play in the dialogical self. For the social psychologist, his analysis evinces the role of external social representations and social attributions in framing selfhood as a societal mandate. We have in scholia a dual meta-perspective on what takes place on stage: scholiasts commented on characters, their actions and motives, and at the same time on how well plays re-present typical human behaviour. This dual aspect of reception has not entirely gone away, as at least in psychology we still debate the capabilities of literary texts as data sources for human behaviour (Contarello 2002; see also the Introduction to Part 3 by Max van Duijn, this volume). Van Emde Boas's approach is to pay less attention to the content and more to the thinking strategies at work in the scholia, in particular social attribution processes. His analysis points to the multiple attributional strategies present in the scholia, with stereotyping of characters being only one and not even the most prevalent.

Greek commentators helped audiences to understand what was happening on stage drawing on attributions that primarily linked characters to situations, but also to their individual dispositions and to their group membership (including stereotyping, or the particular representations that circulate about groups). If we approach this corpus as a sample of societal thinking, we can see that everyday attributions deployed at the period draw on a range of different explanations and modalities of thinking for establishing the determinants of human behaviour. Van Emde Boas's compelling use of Malle's theory of attribution enables us to discard the overly sharp opposition between the dispositional and the situational, and even the alleged stability of dispositions as personality traits. It shows both the co-existence of types in the corpus as well as a combined use of causal explanation and a history of reasons in thinking, which only make sense in relation to a given socio-historical context and its underlying folk-conceptual framework.

Now, a central problem in attribution (and all Theory of Mind) is that however much we specify the cognitive processes at work, we cannot make attributions outside the social conventions and cultural mandates that influence the perception, experience, and judgement of one's own and other people's actions, as well as the definition of the situation (Moscovici and Duveen 2000). No attribution makes sense without a social representational framework that establishes what is intelligible and acceptable in a given context and time.

Whatever we define as dispositional or situational is in itself part of a wider framework within which these explanations make sense. Much of social psychology has been able to review Heider's original work on attribution and criticize the cultural assumptions that created not only an exaggerated distinction between dispositional and situational attribution, but also a dichotomy between the perspective of actors and the perspective of observers (Farr and Anderson 1983; Hewstone 1983). The perspectives of actors and observers diverge as all individual perspectives to some extent do. But importantly, they are reconciled by the common ground of culture (Goffman 1958) and by the psychological imperative of inter-subjective communication between actor and observer. Experimental work (Miller 1984) has corroborated these re-conceptualizations showing that cultural conceptions of what is an individual agent determine how social actors use both situational and dispositional attributions. This use is in itself managed to sustain a narrative order that must be intelligible to all participants. Thus, when current critiques emphasize personal traits and underplay situations in characterization, we could suggest that they are guilty of committing this 'fundamental attribution error' (Jones and Harris 1967) or alternatively that such critiques are reinforcing a familiar narrative order about characterization as mainly dispositional.

Both chapters resonate with psychological theories of the dialogical mind linking the changing identities of dialogical selves to the social representations and attributions of immediate others and the wider socio-cultural environment. Ancient characters take us through their individual thinking in context, revealing how the I who speaks negotiates situations and representational mandates about their own extreme forms of behaviour. They disclose themselves as complex agents trying to act and understand themselves and their deeds amidst changing situations, which they do not fully control but which are nonetheless integral to who they are and why they act. Just as with us today, Oedipus, Antigone, and Medea are dialogical selves in context, experiencing and exposed to states of cognitive polyphasia, in which individuals and communities draw on different forms of explanation and reasoning and different registers of knowing to make sense of situations and communicate with the groups and cultural niches to which they belong (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2015). If anything, they show that amongst the many reasons why ancient texts speak to us today, is their ability to circumvent the view of an unchanging, internally homogeneous and bounded rational individual, who is at best one amongst many and at worst an idealized but never realized type constructed by the dualism and individualism that came to dominate our understanding of individual psychology in the modern era (Farr 1996). This consideration takes me to the second point I would like to discuss related to

the socio-cultural realization of the self and the dangers implicit in not fully appreciating its variation in time and context.

3 The Development of Selfhood: the Socio-cultural Self

Multiplicity of perspectives within the private self is not given at birth but develops through a long ontogeny through which children enter culture (Tomasello 2019); full-term human infants are helpless and premature at birth and depend on the attention of caregivers for survival and healthy post-uterine development. It is a risky adaptation compensated for by the fact that neonates are neurologically hardwired to share and align emotions with others from birth (Iacoboni 2011); babies are equipped biologically for relating to caregivers and these in turn have complementary natural propensities that motivate the care they give to infants (Keller and Greenfield 2000), even if at times in troubling ways (for an illuminating experimental study on the consequences of rejection for human infants, see Tronick 1989). It takes attachment between people, but also time and effort to transform the biological potential carried by human infants into an individual self (Ainsworth 1967), which may also explain why humans are cooperative breeders and rely on alloparenting to take care of their children (Hrdy 2009). As the saying goes, 'it takes a village' to transform a baby into a person, but this social effort pays off: the most important human socio-cognitive achievements such as language, mathematics, a sense of self, ethics, morality, the acquisition of social representations and cultural traditions are all the outcome of children's cooperative self-other interactions in a given cultural context (Tomasello 2019a).

The socio-cultural genesis of all higher forms of behaviour is a robust finding first established by Vygotsky in the early decades of the 20th century and to this day continuously corroborated by experimental evidence. Whatever is internal to the individual was social and external at some point. A generic law of human psychological development postulates that 'all higher mental functions make their appearance in the course of child development twice: first, in collective activity, social activity, i.e. as interpsychic functions, second in individual activity, as internal properties of the child's thinking, i.e. as intrapsychic functions' (Vygotsky 1934: 31, emphasis in original). Thus, what is internal to the individual was by necessity an (external, social) relation between people before becoming an individual function within people (Vygotsky 1978). Infants internalize cultural patterns through primary relationships with care-givers and this is realized repeatedly through the key tasks of individuation and socialization: we become agents by recognizing the agency of others and

come to understand ourselves through the understanding of other selves with whom we must interact and communally live in the wider societal context (Kagıtçıbaşı 1996). Through internalizing the perspective of this generalized Other (Mead 1934), individuals grow into a community of fellow humans, create links between their personal trajectories and the community to which they also belong and apprehend the shared understandings that express the identity, culture and ways of life of the group (Keller 2017). Individual mental activity is thus dependent for its full development and expression on being linked to a specific cultural toolkit (Bruner 2001). We establish our autonomy just as we realize the ways in which the cultural norms and social representations of our cultural environment come to define who we are, shaping our identity and general outlook.

Different historical periods and societies present different modalities of selfhood, which are dependent on the different templates social worlds present to individuals as they internalize culture in order to become themselves. Our understandings of our own mind and the minds of others is entangled with societal assumptions and shaped by the culture and historical context that define what is an individual agent and how it should grow up and behave (Jovchelovitch 2019). This means that while the dialogical structure of the self is a universal individual phenomenon, its socio-cultural realization is not. The realization of character and its internal individual psychology is always played out in the theatre of a social life that carries its own 'chorus' of social representations, i.e., the values, ideas and practices of a cultural community (Moscovici 2000). These social representations provide the values, stories, ideas and practices that frame the self over time and situate its qualia in a given context. They are the tools that mediate the relations between the I and the Me and build the range and reach of the self's internal world, making that which it feels, senses, perceives, does, thinks, says, remembers and forgets, a matter of culture. Social representations are anchors for the self and establish the templates for selfhood that circulate in any given society (Oyserman and Markus 1998).

In this sense, the requirement for psychological depth, defined as 'inner lives', originality against a script, and bounded individuality, is culturally located and shaped by social representations of selfhood, rather than an essential state of being that pertains to the human self. We know that this is not a universal, but a culturally situated folk psychology, which presents in specific niches and in fact is not even found in the majority of the human world (Kagıtçıbaşı 2012). It is not a universal for thinking and enacting the self but a specific modality of selfhood that belongs to a well-defined era and its folk psychology. Definitions of a human agent comprising inwardness, bounded and rational individuality, freedom, and being embedded in nature became predominant only at the

beginning of the modern era (Taylor 1989) and not accidently provided the basis for the scientific psychology that followed (Farr 1991; Cole 1996). Born out of the Cartesian separation between mind and body and mind and context, these individualistic conceptions intermeshed with wider social and economic transformations to produce the template of the independent self, whose inner life and experience became psychology's central unit of analysis (Farr 1996). However influential this view has been (Arnett 2008), it remains the case that the individualized character is but one type, and should be seen as nothing but one, amongst the many other templates for self-realization that are part of the human spectrum.

Now, could antiquity produce an inner life of the self that only emerged as psychological experience at the beginning of the modern era? Cultural psychologists would most likely say no because the cultural mandates that shaped the representations of selfhood we live by in the Western modern era were not available to the ancients, just as they continue to be non-hegemonic to the Tikuna of the Amazon (Lima 1998), for young girls wearing the hijab in Scotland, growing up in the favelas of Brazil (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2013), or for Muslim women engaging in disciplines of prayer in contemporary Egypt (Mahmood 2001). We may consider the type of characterization we see in the novel—I can think of Henry James and the stream of consciousness his brother William helped us to understand—as part and parcel of selfhood in the modern era, but this should not be taken for granted as a universal that presents through the ages and across cultures (but see Verheij 2014 for a fascinating discussion of this problem from the perspective of classicists).

Psychologists have researched the different socio-cultural templates that offer anchors to the self-concept and demonstrated that there are different forms of being an individual and different pathways for expressing the depth of our inner lives (Greenfield 2009). Individualism and collectivism have been described as prototypical social representations of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1991), ideal types corresponding to independent and autonomous versus inter-dependent and relational forms of selfhood (Kagıtçıbaşı 2005). This work has shown that some human cultures tend to foster an independent and autonomous self-construal since they are focused on individual autonomy, uniqueness and a strong emphasis on the inner core of the self. Its dominant discourses and everyday social representations build a folk psychology where identity is mainly defined by personal characteristics and individual choice and accomplishments are reinforced and taken for granted. Other human cultures on the contrary, foster inter-dependent and relational forms of selfhood and define identity through the characteristics of the group to which

one belongs. The emphasis is on the social context and its mandates, prioritizing silence and modesty over self-expression. In such contexts, excessive distinction between individual and type fail to hold and even to be intelligible (Markus and Kitayama 2010).

These prototypical modalities are ideal types and rarely present in pure form; more recent investigations point precisely to the polyphasia in self and attribution suggested by the analyses by Murnaghan and Van Emde Boas, in which dialogical selves combine elements of different cultures and creatively use forms of independence and inter-dependency, autonomy and relatedness throughout the life course. The dialogicality of mind enables us to understand this plasticity with which human selves adopt, discard, negotiate and reconstruct their relationship to themselves, their own actions and the social representations of selfhood offered by the templates of their socio-cultural world. Importantly, there is agency and individuality in the rule-governed behaviour of collectivistic selves. For many individual selves, cultural social prescriptions create the stage on which the depth and inner life of the self is enacted, the practices through which the self can both be itself and express itself. Rule-governed behaviour still requires the perspective of a first person that decides to act and this implies both choice and expression of individuality. The view that social prescriptions and ritualistic behaviour are a constraint on the self is only possible under the assumption that the agency of the self is entirely independent from others engaging in the same behaviour and the cultural context that prescribes it.

4 Conclusion

In the above I have emphasized the dialogicality of selfhood and its socio-cultural realization as key psychological aspects of the contributions by Murnaghan and Van Emde Boas. Right from birth human development shows that our human nature makes us inter-dependent on collective forms of acting and thinking. Humans' long ontogeny evinces the social foundations of our biological development and opens the species to pedagogy and cultural transmission, which in turn make us social and historical beings. Individuation and socialization go hand in hand in human developmental history: they are the two sides of the same process of development and challenge the strict separation between what is individual and what is social in the constitution of personhood. Rather, we internalize culture and its social representations, drawing on its materials as resources for thinking and being. I have also emphasized that any requirement for inwardness and depth must be seen through the

perspective of the historical mind and the specific manner in which modern psychology and the modern era define and conceptualize selfhood.

Interestingly enough, the global emergence of social media has made connections ubiquitous and reset the modern requirement for 'depth' and 'inner life'. A new form of collectivism has entangled online self-characterization with celebrity culture and the gaze of others, making selves ever more dependent on the empty act of 'watching others watching me' (Ibrahim 2017). The internal life of the self becomes dependent on strangers but at the same time a-relational and narcissistic (amongst other forms of vulnerability). Indeed, many of our current frameworks for selfhood are focused on the pressures coming from this external gaze, leaving much to ask about what is happening to the idea of 'inner life' and individual freedom. Today, algorithms, ideologies of success and failure, perfectionism and relentless pressure to achieve (Curran and Hill 2019) are insidious and widespread so that these social representations of who we should be, end up shaping in fact who we are. In this context, it is not accidental that mental distress in the form of anxiety and depression are major contributors to the overall global burden of disease (GBD 2017 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2018).

To go back to the beginning, what would the ancients say of this type of psychology? Well, ancient tragic characters are involved in parricide, incest, filicide, defiance of the city's law and self-sacrifice for what they believe to be right. Much of their worlds are out of joint and they suffer, they mourn, they go against the grain, they live with actions that are difficult to bear. With Antigone and Medea, we are initiators of our actions, but as Oedipus will discover we also suffer what we do. However, in everything these characters do and experience there is also a psychology of hope that keeps teaching us of the potentials of human action, of its being infinitely open and fundamentally linked to beginnings (Arendt 1958), even if it never quite escapes from the social and cultural ground in which, for better or for worse, we must all live. The dialogicality of ancient selves gives us anchors to look ourselves in the eye and make sense of that which is both self and other, individual and social in ourselves and our human world. No wonder they do not go away and their influence on us will continue.

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