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The social basis of self-reflection

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<Title> The Social Basis Of Self-Reflection

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Self-reflection can be defined as a temporary phenomenological experience in which self becomes an object to oneself. According to theorists like Mead and Vygotsky, self-reflection is a defining feature of humans, and fundamental to the higher mental functions. Central to a socio-cultural perspective is the idea that this distancing, from both self and the immediate situation, occurs through the use of semiotic mediators (Valsiner, 1998). Naming (*i.e.*, using a semiotic mediator to pick out) an affective experience or a situation distances the individual from that experience or situation. Furthermore, such distance enables self to act upon self and the situation. For example, in order to obtain dinner one must first name either one's hunger or the fact that it is dinner time. This naming, which is a moment of self-reflection, is the first step in beginning to construct, semiotically, a path of action that will lead to dinner.

What triggers this process of semiotic mediation? Exactly how do semiotic mediators enable distancing in general, and self-reflection in particular? What is it in the structure of semiotic mediators, or signs, that enables this 'stepping out' from immediate experience? And how are these signs combined into complex semiotic systems (representations, discourses, cultural artifacts or symbolic resources) that provide even greater liberation from the immediate situation?

In order to address these questions the present chapter begins with a review of socio-cultural theories of the origins self-reflection. Four types of theory can be distinguished: rupture theories, mirror theories, conflict theories and internalization theories. In order to address the limitations of these theories, Mead's theory of the

social act is advanced. These theories are then evaluated against an empirical instance of self-reflection and a novel conception of complex semiotic systems is proposed.

<A> Rupture Theories

Rupture theories of self-reflection posit that self-reflection arises when one's path of action becomes blocked or when one faces a decision of some sort. Peirce provides an early articulation of this idea:

If for instance, in a horse-car, I pull out my purse and find a five-cent nickel and five coppers, I decide, while my hand is going to the purse, in which way I will pay my fare. [...] To speak of such a doubt as causing an irritation which needs to be appeased, suggests a temper which is uncomfortable to the verge of insanity. Yet looking at the matter minutely, it must be admitted that, if there is the least hesitation as to whether I shall pay the five coppers or the nickel (as there will sure to be, unless I act from some previously contracted habit in the matter), though irritation is too strong a word, yet I am excited to such small mental activities as may be necessary in deciding how I shall act. [...] Images pass rapidly through consciousness, one incessantly melting into another, until at last, when all is over – it may be in a fraction of a second, in an hour, or after long years – we find ourselves decided as to how we should act (1878/1998, p.141-2)

According to Peirce, the problematic situation stimulates reflective thought. Even a small irritation, or rupture, can stimulate a stream of thought. This is a phenomenological experience that many people would be inclined to agree with. But

why should a rupture spontaneously generate the semiotic system necessary for distancing?

Dewey (1896), developing Peirce's ideas, argued that in the ruptured situation the object ceases, from the perspective of the actor, to be objective and becomes, so to speak, subjective. Specifically, the object becomes subjective because the actor has two or more responses toward the object. Dewey gives the example of a child reaching for a flame. The child is attracted to the flame because it looks like something to play with; but the child is also afraid of the flame because of a previous burn. Thus there are two contradictory responses in the child: to reach toward the flame *and* to withdraw from the flame. It is due to the disjunction between these two responses, Dewey argues, that self-reflection arises.

Mead (1910) criticized this theory arguing that there is nothing in having two contradictory responses which necessarily leads to self-reflection. In non-human animals there are conflicting responses, yet there is no self-consciousness. Pavlov (1951), for example, trained dogs to salivate upon seeing a circle, and not to salivate upon seeing an ellipse. In successive trials he reduced the difference between the two contradictory stimuli, until the ellipse was almost a circle. When the stimuli became difficult to differentiate, thus evoking two contradictory responses, the dogs, usually placid, became frantic and remained disturbed for weeks afterward. Pavlov called this 'experimental neurosis.' Assuming that these dogs did not become self-reflective (and there is no evidence to suggest they did), then these experiments show that contradictory responses can co-exist without leading to self-reflection.

Piaget (1970) offers a more contemporary variant of the rupture theory. According to Piaget the child is forced to abstract and reorganize his/her developing schemas when those schemas lead to unfulfilled expectations. For example, the child

expects the consequence of action X to be Y, but instead the consequence of action X is Z. Like the other rupture theorists, Piaget points to a proximal cause of self-reflection, namely a problematic situation, but he does not give us much purchase on the semiotic processes through which self-reflection arises. Again one can ask, why should a rupture stimulate the emergence of semiotic mediators? In order to address this question we need to move beyond the subject-object relation that Peirce, Dewey and Piaget were working with, and examine the self-other social relation.

<A> Mirror Theories

The defining feature of mirror theories of self-reflection, compared to the rupture theories, is the presence of an other. These theories assume that the other perceives more about self than self can perceive. The reflective distance from self which self-reflection entails first exists in the mind of other. This 'surplus' (Bakhtin, 1923/1990; Gillespie, 2003) can be fed back to self by other, such that self can learn to see self from the perspective of other. In this sense, mirror theories assume that the other provides feedback to self in the same way that a mirror provides feedback about appearance that we cannot perceive unaided. An early variant of this theory can be found in the writings of Adam Smith:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than the beauty or deformity of his own face. All of these are objects which he cannot easily see, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is

provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with. (1759/1982, p.110)

For Adam Smith it is “fellow man” who teaches self the value of self’s actions, who is a “mirror” redirecting self’s attention to the meaning of self’s own actions. Growing up alone, without such a mirror, Smith writes, there is nothing to make a person reflect upon him/herself. The “mirror” is the “countenance and behaviour” of other.

The metaphor of society as a mirror, leading to self-reflection, was elaborated in Cooley’s (1902, p.184) concept of the “looking-glass self.” According to Cooley, the self is a social product formed out of three elements: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification.” Interestingly, self-reflection for Cooley is always entwined with judgments, leading to emotions such as pride, shame, guilt or gloating. Unfortunately, much of the literature which has taken up Cooley’s ideas has become mired in examining the extent to which self is ‘actually’ able to take the perspective of the other (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Lundgren, 2004).

Psychoanalysts, on the other hand, have bypassed this trivial question, and have developed a sophisticated theory based on the mirror metaphor. According to Lacan (1949), before the mirror stage the child is fragmented: feelings, desires and actions are unconnected. Within this scheme the mirror reveals the child to him/herself as a bounded totality, a *gestalt*. The self, by perceiving itself as bounded, and thus isolated, becomes alienated through self-reflection. This idea of mirroring is

still current in psychoanalytic theories of child development (*e.g.*, Gergely & Watson, 1996).

The feedback theories, despite articulating a proximal cause of self-reflection, encounter three problems if extended into a theory of the origin and nature of self-reflection. First, many non-human animals live in complex societies, and are constantly exposed to feedback from others, yet they do not have a consciousness of self. Presumably the difference between humans and other animals is that humans take the perspective of the other in the mirroring process. However, this only raises the second problem, namely, how does self take the perspective of the other? This seems to be assumed rather than explained. The third problem is the apparently neutral nature of the other in mirror theories. The idea that the other is a passive mirror, neutrally reflecting self back to self, is problematized by the third group of theories dealing with self-reflection, namely, the conflict theories.

<A> Conflict Theories

According to the conflict theories, self-reflection arises through a social struggle. Hegel's theory of self-consciousness as exemplified in the master-slave allegory is a paradigmatic example (Marková, 1982). Self-consciousness, Hegel argues, arises through gaining recognition from an other who is not inferior to self. According to the master-slave allegory, initially, self and other treat each other as physical objects, and thus deny any recognition to each other. Due to this mutual denial, self and other enter into a struggle, the outcome of which is a relation of domination and subordination, *i.e.*, the master-slave relation. The master dominates the slave and in that sense is free, while the slave, having lost the struggle, is in bondage to the master and is, thus, not free. The slave is in the service of the master and sees the master as superior, while

the master sees the slave as inferior. According to Hegel's logic of recognition, the paradoxical outcome of this situation is that the slave can get recognition from the master, but the master cannot get recognition from the slave. The slave struggles for recognition from the master and thus works toward increased self-consciousness and eventually equality with the master. The master, on the other hand, cannot satisfy the need for recognition because recognition by the slave is worthless. The interesting dynamic that Hegel describes is that self-consciousness, and thus self-reflection, arise through *struggling* for recognition from the other. In socio-cultural psychology one can find variations on this basic idea at the levels of interaction, institution and representation.

At the interactional level, for example, the tradition of research on socio-cognitive conflict has clearly established that conflict between self and other over how to proceed in a joint task can lead to cognitive development (Doise & Mugny, 1984). Moreover, recent research has shown that a key component of durable cognitive development results from social interaction that takes the form of 'explicit recognition' (Psaltis & Duveen, under review), which is defined as the interaction or conversation where new acquired knowledge for self is recognized by other and self. Sigel's Psychological Distancing Theory expresses a similar dynamic. Sigel (2002, p.197-8) asserts that discrepancies introduced by the utterances of others can put a cognitive demand on the child which can in turn lead to representational work and thus distancing.

Moving to the institutional level, activity theorists posit that contradictions between different components of an activity system lead to reflection. Activity Theory has much in common with Dewey's ideas (Tolman & Piekkola, 1989), but it differs from Dewey by extending the definition of the problematic situation to include

problems introduced by the perspective of others. This is quite clear in Engeström's (1987) concept of 'expansive learning,' which refers to participants within an activity system prompting each other to reflect upon the conditions and rules of their ongoing interaction. The roots of expansive learning are to be found in "disturbances, ruptures and expansions" which arise in communication within an activity system (Engeström *et al.*, 1997 p.373).

Finally, at the level of representation, recent work in social representations theory emphasizes the contradictions between different bodies of knowledge circulating in modern societies (Moscovici, 1984; Duveen, chapter X). Bauer and Gaskell (1999) argue that people become aware of representations at the points at which they overlap or contradict each other. "It is through the contrast of divergent perspectives that we become aware of representations, particularly when the contrast challenges our presumed reality" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999, p.169). Divergent representations, sustained by different groups, in different domains of practice, can come together and clash in the public sphere (Jovchelovitch, 1995). When this occurs, individuals and groups may come to participate in conflicting representations. According to Bauer and Gaskell, it is this conflict which produces awareness of representations. This co-existence of multiple forms of knowledge in society, and consequently, in the individual minds of members of society engenders a state of 'cognitive polyphasia' (*e.g.* Wagner *et al.*, 1999), which can, but does not necessarily, lead to self-reflection.

Examining the conflict theories critically, one could say that they have the same basic structure as the rupture theories. In the rupture theories, tension is introduced through a problematic self-object relation, while in the conflict theories tension is introduced through a problematic self-other relation. In both cases the

dynamic is similar, and thus the conflict theories are vulnerable to the same critiques as are posed to the rupture theories, namely, they identify a proximal cause of self-reflection (*i.e.*, social conflict), but do little to elucidate the actual semiotic process through which self-reflection arises. The question to ask is: what is it about the social situation (self-other relation) that is not present in the practical situation (self-object relation) and which can account for the process of self-reflection? One possible answer to this question is provided by the internalization theories.

<A> Internalization Theories

The idea that thought is a self-reflective internal dialogue with absent others goes back, at least, to Plato (*e.g.*, *Sophist*, 263e; *Theaetetus*, 190). Forms of internalization are evident in the theories of Freud (in the formation of the superego), Bakhtin and Vygotsky. Today this line of theory is carried forward by Hermans (2001), and Josephs (2002). Within this line of theorizing, one can conceptualize self-reflection as arising through internalizing the perspective that the other has upon self, followed by self taking the perspective of other upon self. Or more generally, one could think of self-reflection as arising through the internal dialogue between internalized perspectives.

There are, however, problems over how the metaphor of ‘internalization’ should be understood (Matusov, 1998). Wertsch (1985, p.163) has called the idea that social relations are simply ‘transmitted’ into psychological structure “uninteresting and trivial.” While some theorists make this mistake, Vygotsky (1997, p.106) himself emphasized that the process of internalization is a process of “transformation”, rather than simple ‘transmission’ (see also Lawrence and Valsiner, 1993). The process of

transformation is clearly evident Vygotsky's analysis of the emergence of pointing (1997, p.104-5).

According to Vygotsky, the child becomes able to point only when he/she is able to reflect upon the meaning of the pointing from the standpoint of others. How does this come about? "Initially," Vygotsky (1997, p.104) writes, "the pointing gesture represents a simply unsuccessful grasping movement directed toward an object and denoting a future action." At first the child is not self-conscious of pointing, and thus is not trying to communicate anything. Rather, the child is simply reaching for something out of reach. However, from the perspective of the mother, the child's reaching is meaningful, it indicates that the child desires the reached-for object. Vygotsky (p.105) states: "In response to the unsuccessful grasping movement of the child, there arises a reaction not on the part of the object, but on the part of an other person." The grasping first has the meaning of pointing for the mother, and only later has meaning for the child. It is only when the grasping becomes a meaningful gesture for the child that we can say the child is pointing, for it is only then that the child knows the meaning of his/her gesture for others. The child, Vygotsky (p.105) writes, "becomes for himself what he is in himself through what he manifests for others." That is to say, the child becomes self-aware of his/her own being through how he/she appears to others.

Summarizing the emergence of self-reflective meaning through internalization, Vygotsky (1997, p.105) writes: "Every higher mental function was external because it was social before it became an internal, strictly mental function; it was formerly a social relation of two people." Social relations, like conversations, become internalized and constitute the higher mental functions. Self-reflection, for example, can be understood as a change of perspective within the individual

(analogous to the change of perspective between people taking turns in a conversation). “I relate to myself as people related to me. Reflection is a dispute” (Vygotsky, 1989, p.56-7).

The tale that turns grasping into pointing can also be used to articulate Vygotsky’s concept of the sign. According to Vygotsky (1997), signs are first used to mediate the behavior of others, and are later used to talk about self, reflect upon self and mediate the behavior of self. The child learns to point, first in order to direct the attention of others, and later to direct his own attention (for example, using his/her finger to keep his/her eyes focused upon the text). Equally, the child learns to ask questions of others before he/she asks questions of him/herself. But what is it in the structure of the sign that enables humans, on the one hand to communicate, and on the other hand to self-reflect?

The difference between grasping and pointing is that grasping is a response (to the stimulus of the desired object), while pointing is a response that is also a stimulus to both self and other. While grasping may be a stimulus to other, it is not a stimulus to self. Pointing becomes a sign when it is *not just a response but also a stimulus to self in the same way that it is a stimulus to other*. Thus, signs differ from other stimuli because “they have a reverse action”, that is, signs are responses which can also be stimuli (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994, p.143). The classic example of “reverse action” is tying a knot in a handkerchief as a mnemonic aid. Self ties a knot in a handkerchief (a response), so that later, the knot will function as a stimulus, reminding self that something must be remembered. The idea of “reverse action” is fundamental to Vygotsky’s concept of the sign, which he initially theorized as a “reversible reflex” (1925/1999).

Only human actions and their products possess the key property of “reverse action.” A naturally occurring tree might be a stimulus, but it is not a response. A dog might bare its teeth in response to the stimulus of a wolf. The baring of teeth may be a stimulus to the wolf, but it will never become a stimulus to the dog itself. A human’s angry gesture is a response which may become a stimulus to the other. But crucially, the angry gesture may also become a stimulus to self, in the same way that it is a stimulus to other. To the other person the angry gesture may be evidence of an impulsive personality, and self may also become aware of this possible meaning of his/her angry gesture. If the gesture becomes a stimulus with the same meaning for self as it has for other, then it is a sign.

Vygotsky’s conception of the sign is astonishingly close to Mead’s concept of the significant symbol. Mead (1922) defines the significant symbol as a gesture which self experiences both from the perspective of self and from the perspective of other. As Mead (p.161) writes: “It is through the ability to be the other at the same time that he is himself that the symbol becomes significant.” The key point of similarity is that both Mead and Vygotsky conceive of the sign (or significant symbol) as comprising two perspectives. On the one hand there is the embodied actor perspective (the response) toward some object (*e.g.*, the reaching child desires the object). On the other hand there is the distance introduced by the observer perspective of the other on the action (*e.g.*, the mother sees the child’s grasping as indicating desire). When the child takes both his/her own grasping perspective and the mothers perspective toward that grasping, then the grasping becomes pointing. Thus there is an equivalence between Vygotsky’s concept of “reverse action” and Mead’s concept of taking the perspective of the other.

Vygotsky's theory of the sign, and Mead's theory of the significant symbol, are fundamentally different from the theories of Peirce, Saussure, Bühler, and Morris (Gillespie, 2005). The latter all have monological theories of the sign. Simply put, they conceive of the sign as representing something or some relation to the world. However, according to the present reading of Vygotsky and Mead, the sign (or significant symbol) is a composite of two different perspectives, namely, an actor perspective and an observer perspective. Thus the sign (or significant symbol) is fundamentally intersubjective: *it evokes both actor and observer perspectives in both self and other.*

The fruitful consequences of the present conception of the sign are immediately evident when one tries to explain the role of the sign in either empathizing or self-reflection. In empathy, the sign carries the empathizer from an observer perspective (on, for example, the suffering of the other) to an actor perspective (participating in that suffering). In self-reflection, or distanciation, the sign carries the person from an actor perspective (a fully absorbed action orientation toward something) to an observer perspective (reacting to the absorbed action orientation).

In the context of the present review of theories of self-reflection, Vygotsky's theory of the sign, and Mead's concept of the significant symbol, are landmark contributions, because both theories specify precisely the semiotic structure that can account for self-reflection. However, a lacuna remains. How does the child come to react to his/her own grasping in the same way that the mother responds? If the sign is a composite of the perspectives of self and other, then how does this composite form? How are these two perspectives brought together? In order to address this question we need to turn to Mead's theory of the social act.

<A> The Social Act

Mead's theory of the social act is a theory of institutional structures (Gillespie, 2005). The first defining feature of humans for Mead is that they move amongst positions within a relatively stable social, or institutional, structure. Of course social structure is not unique to humans. Within an ant colony one will find the queen, workers, foragers, nurses and soldiers. But it is not simply the existence of social structure that is fundamental for Mead. Rather, it is *position exchange within the institutional structure*. In non-human societies there is a division of labor, but there is never frequent position exchange. However, humans frequently exchange position within institutional structures. For example, people sometimes host parties and at other times attend parties. The perspectives of host and guest are quite divergent. If these social positions were never exchanged, or reversed, then it is unlikely that either would be able to take the perspective of the other. However, because people are sometimes hosts and sometimes guests this means that most adults have experience of both perspectives, and thus are able to take the perspective of the other when they are in either social position.

Additional social acts in which frequent position exchange occurs include: buying/selling, giving/receiving, suffering/helping, grieving/consoling, teaching/learning, ordering/obeying, winning/losing, and stealing/punishing. Each of these social acts entails reciprocal actor and observer positions, and importantly, because most people have had enacted both social positions, they have the both the actor and observer perspectives for each social act and thus are able to take the perspective of each other within a social act. Returning to the example of pointing, the

child cannot learn the meaning of his/her own pointing without first having been in the social position of responding to the pointing of others.

However, having previously been in the social position of the other, within a social act, does not mean that self will necessarily take the perspective of the other. Why should the perspective of other be evoked in self when self is not in the social position of the other? The problem is that most of the stimuli for self and other are quite divergent. The child, who desires the object and is grasping toward it, is in a completely different situation to the mother, who is attentive to the child's grasping. Even if the child had previously responded to the grasping of others, why should the child now respond to his/her own grasping? The feeling of grasping is quite different to the sight of someone else grasping. What is common in these two situations that could serve to unite these two perspectives in the mind of the child? Mead (Mead, 1912; Farr, 1997) points to the peculiar significance of the vocal gesture. Stimuli in the auditory modality (like vocal gestures) sound the same for self as they do for other. Accordingly, the vocal gesture is ideally poised to integrate both actor and observer perspectives. Because self hears self speak in the same way that self hears other speak, so self can react to self's utterances in the same way that self reacts to other.

It is often asserted that self and other co-emerge in ontogenesis. For example, Baldwin (1906, p.321) famously wrote that: "The Ego and the Alter are thus born together." However, Mead would disagree with this, arguing that the other exists for self before self exists for self. First self reacts to other, then self changes social position with the other, and finally self is able to react to self (in the same way that self previously reacted to other). Empirical evidence for rejecting the co-emergence thesis, in favor of Mead's theory, is found in studies of children's use of words

denoting self and other, which have shown that children talk about other before talking about self (*e.g.*, Cooley, 1908; Bain, 1936).

Mead's theory of the social act fits closely with his theory of the significant symbol. The structure of the significant symbol (or sign) is a pairing of an actor perspective engaged in some action with an observer perspective reacting to that action. The social act is the institution that firstly provides individuals with roughly equivalent actor and observer experiences, and secondly, integrates these perspectives within the minds of individuals.

When both actor and observer perspectives within the significant symbol (or sign) are evoked, then there is self-reflection, because self is both self and other simultaneously. The question then is: what can trigger this double evocation? Simply, there are two ways in which self can arrive at an observer perspective on self (*i.e.*, self-reflection). The process can begin with either an actor perspective engaged in some action, or an observer perspective on someone else's action. Either of these perspectives can evoke, *via* the structure of the significant symbol (or sign), the complementary actor and observer perspectives, thus leading to self-reflection. Self-reflection triggered by an actor perspective I call self-mediation. Self-reflection triggered by an observer perspective on an actor I call short-circuiting. The next section illustrates these two forms of self-reflection.

<A> Two Processes Of Self-Reflection: An Illustration

The following analysis is taken from a study on the interactions between tourists and Ladakhis, in northern India (Gillespie, forthcoming). Ladakh, on the border of Tibet, is a popular backpacker destination. Tourists are led to Ladakh by representations of the Himalayan mountains, spirituality and traditional culture. Usually the tourists in

Ladakh reject the idea of package tourism, and claim to be searching for something more authentic. In the following exchange, an English university student is explaining, to me and another tourist, how she wants to have an authentic experience of Ladakh:

Laura: I wanted to come up here for longer, to do voluntary work, to be more part of it, rather than just a tourist passing through, taking photos and buying things, eh, eh, I am quite disappointed I haven't, I don't know, eh, in eight days you can't, em, [...] it's just, having been with a family in the first place, I now want everything to be personal, to see proper India rather than just the India that everyone - that sounds rather clichéd - but that tourists see (pause) - (sigh) so I am a tourist really

The actor perspective that Laura is initially embedded in is that of wanting “to be more part of” Indian life, and wanting “to see proper India.” This desire for an authentic experience is positioned against the other tourists who are merely “passing through” and touring “the India that everyone [...] sees.” Before travelling to Ladakh Laura had spent two months in south India, living with an Indian family, and thus having seen the “proper India.” Although she had planned to stay in Ladakh for longer, and even do voluntary work, she is now planning to leave Ladakh after just eight days. Accordingly, it is difficult for her to claim the position of someone who has experienced the “proper” Ladakh. The reality is that she, like the other tourists, is merely “passing through.” The contradiction becomes apparent and leads to two inter-related, but theoretically distinct, movements of self-reflection: self-mediation and short-circuiting.

 Self-Mediation

The first movement of self-reflection, which culminates in the utterance “that sounds rather clichéd,” is quite straightforward. Laura begins in the actor perspective of wanting an authentic experience of India and Ladakh, and then, in the self-reflective utterance (“that sounds rather clichéd”) switches to an observer perspective on her previous actor perspective. She ends up reflecting upon herself, suggesting that such a search for the “proper” Ladakh is in fact a tourist cliché. How can this self-mediation be explained?

The rupture theories are obviously inadequate, because there is no pragmatic subject-object rupture. The mirror theories have more to contribute, because this self-reflection is embedded in a social situation. Laura is speaking to me and another tourist, and her self-reflection may have been stimulated by social feedback. For example, she may have perceived skeptical looks concerning her search for authenticity, thus triggering this self-reflection. But the feedback she received was not neutral. Her utterance (“that sounds rather clichéd”) is pejorative. Such a cliché is an embarrassment. Thus we could describe Laura as struggling for recognition from her audience. However, such an analysis, while insightful, does not explain the semiotic process underlying Laura’s self-reflection. The internalization theories, on the other hand, do provide a model. According to these theories one could argue that Laura became self-aware by taking the perspective of her audience. But how does she take the perspective of her audience? The answer is to be found in Mead’s concept of the vocal gesture.

Laura’s phrase, “that sounds rather clichéd,” is particularly revealing because according to Mead it is precisely the sound of her previous utterances that trigger self-

reflection. The peculiar significance of vocal gestures is that they sound the same to self as they do to other. Laura hears her own utterances (expressing a desire to see the “proper India”) in the same way as her audience. Accordingly, she is able to react to her own utterance as if it were the utterance of an other. Presumably, if Laura heard another tourist talking about finding the “proper India” she would think that it sounded clichéd. Using Vygotsky’s terminology, one could say that Laura’s initial utterance is not only a response to my question, it is also a stimulus to herself. In short, she becomes self-aware because she reacts to herself in the same way that she reacts to others. The key process underling this instance of self-reflection is a movement from an actor perspective to an observer perspective on self. The vocal gesture is the semiotic means that carries Laura from being embedded in an actor perspective (searching for the “proper” India), to an observer perspective upon herself (that what she says sounds clichéd).

 Short-Circuiting

The second movement of self-reflection culminates in the utterance, “so I am a tourist really.” This movement begins with the contradiction between Laura’s criticism of tourists “passing through, taking photos and buying things” and the fact that she only spent eight days in Ladakh (and, as she mentioned elsewhere, that she took many photos and bought many souvenirs). This movement is analytically distinct from the first instance of self-reflection, because here, the movement is from an observer perspective on other tourists (criticizing them for having a shallow experience) to an observer perspective on self (recognizing that self is the same as other).

The rupture theories again are of little use in this analysis because there is no subject-object rupture. Both the mirror and conflict theories can contribute an

understanding of the proximal cause of Laura's self-reflection. One could speculate that the gaze of the audience made the contradiction salient, thus leading to a collapse of the self-other distinction. But again, this does not explain the semiotic process through which this might occur. Interestingly, the internalization theories also have little to contribute. Laura is not taking the perspective of the other, *rather she is taking her own perspective upon the other tourists and turning this upon herself.*

Vygotsky's theory of the sign and Mead's theory of the significant symbol, however, can begin to unpack this movement of self-reflection. When Laura is criticizing the other tourists, she is using signs (or significant symbols) to describe the other. She says that other tourists are just "passing through, taking photos and buying things." In the moment of speaking, Laura is blind to the fact that this is exactly what she has done. However, because signs are pairings of actor and observer perspectives, describing the other always evokes an empathetic actor response in self. In Laura's case, this empathetic response 'resonates' with her own experiences. She hesitates ("eh, eh") and begins to speak ("I am quite disappointed I haven't") and then hesitates again ("I don't know, eh") and finally we discover what it is that is welling up in her mind, namely, that she has only spent eight days in Ladakh (and was leaving the next day). The significance of this takes time to manifest explicitly, and when it does, Laura can only say that, despite her wishes, she is a tourist just like any other tourist in Ladakh ("so I am a tourist really"). I call this form of self-reflection 'short-circuiting,' because it begins with an emphasis on the difference between self and other, and then this difference collapses and self becomes equivalent to other.

Mead's theory of the social act takes the analysis even further. *Laura's short-circuit can only occur because of frequent exchange of social positions within the social act.* If Laura had not been in the actual social position of the other tourists, if

she had not been merely “passing through,” taking photos and buying souvenirs, then the self-reflection could not have occurred. Stating the case even more forcefully, position exchange is a necessary precondition for this type of self-reflection. In this type of self-reflection, one can see clearly that self and other do not co-emerge, as argued by Baldwin, but rather that the characteristics first associated with ‘they’ become recognized as characteristics of ‘me.’ First there is action, second, there is observing the other doing the same action, and finally, in the combination of these two perspectives, there is self-reflection.

<A> Complex Semiotic Systems

The analysis of Laura’s self-reflection, as outlined so far, could be criticized on two fronts: first it is too individualistic (isn’t Laura’s self-reflection part of a larger cultural pattern?), and second, it is overly concerned with individual signs (what about more complex semiotic systems?). Both of these criticisms are well placed. Laura is not the first tourist to hypocritically criticize other tourists (Prebensen *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, Laura’s description of other tourists as just “passing through, taking photos and buying things” is a complex collective and historical product. Neither Vygotsky nor Mead provides an adequate theory of the more complex trans-individual semiotic systems that circulate in society. One of the significant advances of socio-cultural psychology, since the work of Mead and Vygotsky, has been the theorization of these complex semiotic systems in a variety of ways: as social representations (Moscovici, 1984), cultural artifacts (Cole, 1996), symbolic resources (Zittoun *et al.*, 2003; Zittoun chapter X), narratives (Bruner, 1986), interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and discourses with subject positions (Harré & Van Langehove, 1991).

Laura participates in a collective and historical discourse that contains several subject positions. First, there is the subject position of the tourist dupe. This is the tourist who just passes through, takes photos and buys souvenirs. Most tourists willingly ascribe this subject position to other tourists, yet few ascribe this position to themselves. Instead, tourists try to occupy one of the more favorable subject positions, like that of adventurer, spiritual searcher, or reflexive post-tourist. Laura, for example, tries to occupy the position of having authentic encounters with the local population, as evidenced by her aspirations to do voluntary work and live with a local family.

The question is: How can these complex semiotic systems be used to help explain the semiotics of self-reflection? The interesting thing about the discourse is not simply that it has several subject positions, but that Laura claims, in discourse, one position, while enacting, in action, a different position. On the one hand, Laura's actions conform to typical tourist practices. She has been led, by various representations, to a tourist destination where the only obvious paths of action are to sightsee, take photos and buy souvenirs. On the other hand, Laura participates in a discourse that conceives of these typical tourist actions as shallow, and instead aspires to less attainable subject positions (*i.e.*, having authentic encounters). Thus Laura is caught in a contradictory stream of cultural meanings. This collectively produced, and historically sustained, fault-line makes both self-mediation and short-circuiting immanent.

Using the theory of the sign, outlined above, we can further this analysis. This fault-line in the cultural stream corresponds to the structure of the sign. The contradiction is between the semiotic guidance of tourist action (actor perspective) and the criticism of other tourists (observer perspective). There is, at the level of discourses and representations, then, a lack of integration between actor and observer

perspectives. It must be emphasized that this is not simply a contradiction between two semiotic systems (*i.e.*, a conflict theory of self-reflection), rather it concerns a very specific contradiction, namely between actor and observer perspectives. The position that self claims and the position that self enacts are disjunctive. This is what Ichheiser (1949) called a mote-beam divergence. The prevalence of this divergence reveals that the lack of integration between actor and observer perspectives is not simply something that occurs at the level of individual signs, but something that is played out in much more macro semiotic dynamics. The point, then, is that the structure of the sign (or significant symbol), is not only evident at the level of individual words or gestures, but is evident in the macro-structure of whole complex semiotic systems.

<A> Conclusion

Returning to the questions raised at the outset of this chapter, it is now possible to offer some concise answers. The proximal reasons for self-reflection are diverse. Humans can be led to self-reflection by ruptures (problems with the subject-object relation), social feedback (where the other acts as a mirror), social conflict (in the struggle for recognition) and internal dialogues (through internalizing the perspective of the other on self). Moreover, there is a cultural level to the analysis; the complex semiotic systems in which people are embedded contain contradictions that can make self-reflection immanent. However, fundamental to all these proximal causes of self-reflection is the logic of the sign.

Before the formation of the sign (or significant symbol) there is undifferentiated experience (level 0 experience in Valsiner's (2001) terminology). But this experience is structured by social acts: it contains experience belonging to both

actor and observer perspectives. The magic of the social act is that it integrates these actor and observer experiences, or perspectives, into the formation of signs.

Conceiving of the sign as this integration of perspectives elucidates the logic of self-reflection. Whenever one uses a sign to describe self's own actor experience, the sign may carry self from an actor perspective to an observer perspective on that experience (as illustrated by Laura's self-mediation). Equally, whenever one uses a sign to describe, or observe, the actions of others, the sign may carry self from this observer perspective to an empathetic actor participation in the actions of the other (which in Laura's case leads to a short-circuit).

Introducing the concept of the sign (or significant symbol) into our conception of complex semiotic systems entails abandoning the assumption that the complex semiotic systems 'mirror' the world, and instead conceptualizing these semiotic systems as architectures of intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1974) which enable the translation between actor and observer perspectives within a social act. Such a conception gives us considerable purchase on complex semiotic systems.

Consider, for example, narratives. It has been argued by Nelson (2000) that the key to self-consciousness is awareness of self in time, and that this implies narratives. According to Nelson, the developing child is offered self-narratives, and by appropriating these, the child is able to conceptualize him/herself in time. Combining this with the present theoretical approach, we can say that before appropriating a narrative a child will have certain fields of undifferentiated (actor perspective) experience. For example, the child may have experienced the loss of a loved one, but have not reflective articulation of this experience. The narrative offered to the child provides an observer's perspective on this actor experience of loss. And it

is the integration of actor and observer perspectives, that enables the child to distanciate from the experience, and thus to become self-conscious of the loss.

A similar dynamic is evident in Zittoun's (this volume, section 2.3) analysis of Emma Bovary's use of novels as a symbolic resource. Initially, Emma is embedded in the actor perspective of being in love. She feels exalted and has no self-reflective awareness of this experience. Then she thinks of some romance novels that she read. These provide her with an observer's perspective on an other's love. Combining the actor perspective (elation) with the observer perspective (on the love of others) results in the self-reflective awareness of herself being in love. Thus the narrative is not just a narrative that is analogical to self's own experience, it is an intersubjective structure that enables translations between actor and observer perspectives.

Partially integrated actor and observer perspectives are the pre-condition for self-reflection. Rupture, feedback, and social conflict can cause self-reflection because of a pre-existing, and only partially integrated, architecture of intersubjectivity. These social dynamics can provide the impetus for self-reflection, and thus have a part to play in constructing the architecture of intersubjectivity. However, these social dynamics, in themselves, cannot explain the semiotic process underlying self-reflection. The origin of self-reflection is not just in social interaction, but in social acts, or institutions, which provide structured actor and observer perspectives, and a mechanism for integrating these perspectives in the minds of individuals.

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