Origins and basic principles of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*

Kurt Danziger

The origins of Wundt's conceptions can be traced to some early notions of J. G. Herder and, more immediately, to the project of a *Völkerpsychologie* developed by Lazarus and Steinhal around 1860. Wundt criticized the Herbartian basis of the latter and proceeded to work out an alternative conception of psychology in its social aspects. The basis of this conception was provided by his analysis of human action and the theory of gestural communication to which this led. Cultural products were seen as presupposing a collective subject and as acting back on the psychology of the individual. Although Wundt's conceptions had serious limitations some aspects of his thought about the relationship of individual and culture provide perspectives that are of continuing interest.

The history of psychology does not involve the progressive development of a single discipline but rather the often simultaneous appearance of a number of different disciplines, each one of which defined its object of study in a different way. Such definitions predetermine the range of findings and interpretations that is possible for a discipline. A historical examination of alternative foundations therefore provides a way of transcending the narrow horizons that confine the more dogmatic adherents of any particular disciplinary matrix.

What is true of psychology as a whole is equally true of social psychology. The second half of the 19th and the first third of the 20th century were in fact quite rich in alternative definitions of objects of study that were social psychological in the broad sense of involving psychological aspects of the relation between individual and social collectivity. Among these alternatives *Völkerpsychologie* forms a variant that is interesting precisely because it is so very different from what was to become the dominant model.

That difference is already apparent in the impossibility of supplying an accurate English version of the very title that this discipline used to identify itself. 'Folk psychology' is an absurd mistranslation. 'Cultural psychology' and 'ethnopsychology' come closer but are open to various objections. Thus, in order to avoid sterile terminological discussion as well as the inconvenience of a cumbersome title, *Völkerpsychologie* will simply be referred to as 'VPs' in what follows.

**Historical antecedents**

The roots of VPs go back to the late 18th century when Germany had developed a national culture but was split up into a multiplicity of independent states whose absolute rulers were culturally oriented towards France and generally despised the language and cultural pretensions of their subjects. These conditions were reflected in the highly influential writings of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) who made an important distinction between those social relations that are based merely on power or contract and those that involve a primary cultural community, a *Volk* (Barnard, 1965). The former remain external to the individual, while the latter enter into the very formation of the individual personality. In this process of the shaping of the individual by his culture Herder ascribed a key role to language. The latter is neither a divine gift nor an individual achievement; it is a product of social life (Herder, 1772). Yet at the same time it is the 'medium' through which individual reflectivity operates. Just as light picks out certain aspects of the world for the eye to see, so language picks out relations for individual...
thought to become aware of (Herder, 1778). But different languages do this in characteristic ways, so that the rationality of the species makes its appearance in a multitude of distinct cultural forms.

While Herder's significance for the history of social thought is generally recognized, his strong interest in psychology has been forgotten (see however Clark, 1955). Yet it was Herder who, more than anyone, took the discussion of psychological questions out of a purely philosophical context and put it in the context of an analysis of social forms. For Herder, psychology ceased to be the introspective study of the isolated individual consciousness, for he saw the forms of consciousness as being embedded in a trans-individual cultural medium. He not only originated the modern sense of the concept of 'culture', but also saw culture as grounded in man's characteristics as a biological species (Herder, 1784-1785). In developing these ideas he made use of the biological concepts of Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777) which were partly based on systematic physiological experimentation. Thus, while his predecessors had addressed psychological topics only in the course of trying to answer questions about how the human mind was able to know the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, Herder began to see matters psychological as part of the phenomenon of life. Moreover, he saw the characteristically human form of life as involving the phenomenon of culture.

While the perspectives that Herder had opened up led to much solid work in the study of language and of cultural products, they also provided a starting point for certain theoretical developments that effectively negated some of Herder's basic insights. These developments were associated with the wave of Romanticism that dominated German intellectual life in the early part of the 19th century. Herder's emphasis on the temporal, developmental aspects of culture now became transformed into a one-sided emphasis on the past and an opposition to all further development. At the same time, the distinction between the cultural community and the authoritarian institutions of the state became blurred to the point where the state was actually seen as the highest expression of the cultural community. As Germany began its development into a nation state under Prussian dominance the Romantics became mystical apologists for an autocratic nationalism. Even Hegel, who elaborated a far more sophisticated account of the process of historical development than Herder, hitched his philosophical wagon to the Prussian star.

Where Herder had looked for a biological basis and had seen culture as the product of a response to very real environmental conditions, the Romantics operated only with spiritual abstractions. The characteristics of the culture now became reified in the form of a spiritual substance. E. M. Arndt (1769-1860) and F. K. von Savigny (1779-1861), the legal theorist, played important roles in these developments. While Herder had at times adopted formulations that the Romantics found congenial, the contrast between the general tenor of his thought and that of the Romantics is quite striking. Herder had integrated his social thought with the science of his time, but the discourse of the Romantics was concerned with matters that lay beyond the pale of science.

**The advent of Völkerpsychologie: Lazarus and Steinthal**

During the first half of the 19th century the terms Überfolk and Volksgeist became part of the vocabulary of a rising tide of German nationalism in which cultural and political issues became thoroughly entangled. However, in 1860 an attempt was made to reclaim these terms for scientific discourse by two socially marginal academics in Jewish descent, M. Lazarus (1824-1903) and H. Steinthal (1823-1899). This occurred in the course of their launching of a new journal, the Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft, to be devoted to linguistics and to a new discipline defined as Völkerpsychologie (VPs).
Lazarus' and Steinthal's notions aroused considerable interest at the time, at least in Germany. Their journal went through 20 volumes before it ceased publication in 1890. By that time others had made the cause of VPs their own, most notably, Wilhelm Wundt.

In their programme for the new discipline Lazarus and Steinthal tried to bring together certain theoretical notions derived from Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) and a large body of empirical material that was being accumulated in comparative and historical linguistics, as well as in historical and ethnographic studies of a wide range of cultures (e.g. Waitz, 1859). The link between theory and data never went beyond the programmatic, but their formulation of the issues is of interest.

Herbart occupies a secure place in the history of modern psychology because of his detailed elaboration of a conception of psychology as a science susceptible to mathematical treatment, and because of the enormous influence of his model until the very end of the 19th century. What has been forgotten is that Herbart conceived of his model of mental processes in the individual as applying in an analogous way to political processes. On this level the place of the competitive and assimilatory relations among ideas and complexes of ideas was taken by similar relations among individuals and groups of individuals (Herbart 1821, 1825). He felt that the social nature of human beings made a kind of isomorphism between their intrapsychic and their social relations inevitable. Thus his theory of mental processes constituted a formal model which could be applied either at the intrapersonal or the interpersonal level, almost like some versions of 20th century systems theory. Unlike Herder, however, he conceived of social relations in essentially political terms.

Lazarus and Steinthal accepted the Herbartian analogy between the intra-individual and the inter-individual level, but they redefined the latter in depoliticized terms that represented a partial return to Herder's notion of the cultural community. Like many others before and after them they struggled to achieve an appropriate conceptual representation of the whole that was constituted by a natural human group like a Volk. This whole seemed to them to be clearly more than an aggregate of individuals—the statistical approach of Quetelet and Buckle was rejected (see Steinthal, 1964)—and yet they explicitly abjured the Romantic tendency to represent the whole as some kind of substantial entity that could only have a mystical significance. The cultural group had to have some 'principle of unity', for which they retained the term Volksgeist, but they defined it as 'that which is common to the inner activity of all the individuals' (Lazarus & Steinthal, 1860, p. 29). Their reference to 'inner activity' was to be understood in a psychological and not a transcendental sense, so that they were also dissociating themselves from the classical idealist philosophy of Kant and Hegel. Lazarus, in particular, was quite prepared to explore the expression of 'common inner activity' in such distinctly non-spiritual areas as economic life and technology (Lazarus, 1865). The historical significance of the VPs of Lazarus and Steinthal thus lay in its posing of the issue of individual—community relations as a problem for psychology (Eckardt, 1971)—rather than as a problem for philosophy, legal theory or politics.

The relationship between the psychological activity of the individual and the cultural products which that activity created was conceived by Lazarus and Steinthal in a more or less dialectical fashion. Thus the individuals whose common activity created the objective reality of cultural forms were themselves to be seen as the product of these forms. Human individuals do not exist as members of society, and society does not confront them as an external environment. 'Wherever several people live together it is a necessary result of their companionship that there develops an objective mental content which then becomes the content, norm and organ of their further subjective activity' (Lazarus, 1865, p. 41).

Social attitudes and cognitive forms are objective insofar as they have a characteristic and
durable social distribution, but they exist only through the activity of individual subjects. It follows that the fundamental psychological processes which are of importance for VPs are the same processes that individual psychology operates with, and for Lazarus and Steinthal these had been adequately conceptualized in the processes of inhibition, fusion, apperception, assimilation, etc., of Herbartian psychology.

When it came to applying these theoretical commitments to the empirical material on language, myths, customs, and so on, being published in the pages of their Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie, Lazarus and Steinthal had little to offer. The importance of their contribution lay, not in any concrete achievements, but in their formulation of a new set of problems entailed by their conviction that human culture and history involved psychological processes susceptible to systematic analysis.

Objective spirit as unconscious idea: E. Von Hartmann

One of the first to respond to the theoretical challenge of VPs was E. von Hartmann (1824–1905), the author of the enormously popular Philosophy of the Unconscious (von Hartmann, 1869). He espoused a model for the relationship between individual and culture that was very different from the one proposed by Lazarus and Steinthal (von Hartmann, 1871). Where the latter had seen the subjective activity of the individual as itself a cultural product, von Hartmann denied any 'motivational force' to mental content acquired in the course of social experience. Such motivational energy was the sole property of innate unconscious ideas which were shared by all mankind. In this connection von Hartmann pointed to the well-known discrepancy between the conscious goals that individuals pursue in their social activity, and the actual results of that activity. The conclusion that von Hartmann drew from this common observation was that individuals must actually be motivated by unconscious goals, different and far more effective than their conscious goals. Their culture was simply the product of widely shared unconscious ideas. Von Hartmann is not noted for the precision of his conceptualization, but his metaphorical language seems to suggest that there would be unconscious ideas shared by certain sections of humanity in addition to those that are common to mankind as a whole.

It is not inaccurate to regard these formulations of von Hartmann as the earliest identifiable version of an account of the relationship between individual and culture that was to receive its 20th-century incarnation in the theories of Jung and Freud. With these developments the psychologists of culture which had been initiated by Lazarus and Steinthal achieved its most radical form.

The relationship of individual and social psychology in the work of Wilhelm Wundt

The last, and from our point of view most interesting, version of VPs is to be found in the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), whom psychologists prefer to remember only as the major figure in the founding of experimental psychology. However, Wundt's active interest in VPs began very shortly after he started his career as an experimentalist, i.e. around 1860, as he tells us in his autobiography (Wundt, 1920, p. 201). He must have become acquainted with the VPs of Lazarus and Steinthal almost immediately, for he refers to it in his Lectures on the Human and Animal Soul, published in 1863 (Wundt, 1863, p. 451). Indeed most of the second half of this book is devoted to man's social life, covering similar topics to those then being addressed in the pages of the new Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie. Already at that time Wundt had a notion of the necessary complementarity of experimental and cultural psychology, firstly, because human social life could not, he thought, be brought into the laboratory, and secondly, because the individual conscious that was involved in ethnographical inve

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individual consciousness’ could never encompass the full range and development of all that was involved in ‘the moral process’ (Wundt, 1863, p. 119). Historical and ethnographical investigation would have to provide the materials that the experimental investigation of individual experience could not deliver.

Three decades later Wundt was to describe this early version of his VPs as a ‘sin of youth’ and to publish a second edition of the Vorlesungen which was to all intents and purposes a new book (Wundt, 1892). What he had in mind was the undisciplined and speculative nature of his early incursion into the field of VPs, and more particularly, his use of unconscious mental processes as explanatory constructs, a practice which he vehemently condemned in his mature years. The field of VPs was however one on which he continued to lecture intermittently through this period and one which obviously remained a preoccupation. The early editions of his famous text, the Principles of Psychological Psychology, and particularly his Ethics (Wundt, 1886a), contain a great deal of material that was to reappear in the framework of his Völkerpsychologie, published in 10 volumes between 1900 and 1920.

While Wundt’s formulation of the precise relationship between experimental psychology and VPs underwent several changes in the course of his long life (van Hoorn & Verhave, 1980), he never wavered on three fundamental points: Firstly, that experimental psychology could never be more than a part of the science of psychology as a whole; secondly, that it needed to be supplemented by a branch of psychological studies that was devoted to the study of human mental processes in their social aspects; and thirdly, that this latter type of study was able to make use of data that were no less objective than the data of experimental psychology.

Nor did Wundt’s reasons for these assertions undergo any essential change. Experimental psychology was necessarily limited to working with individuals and with relatively simple psychological functions. Fortunately, the social aspect of mental processes expressed itself in certain objective products, language, myth and custom, which could be analysed through both comparative and longitudinal (historical) studies, thus permitting inferences about the nature of the underlying psychological processes. As Wundt’s understanding of the purpose of psychological experimentation was also based on an inferential model, in which observed data were to be used to draw conclusions about an underlying ‘psychic causality’ (Danziger, 1980a), the scientific status of VPs was not seen by him as in any way inferior to that of experimental psychology. In fact, he came to regard VPs as the more important branch of psychological science which was destined to eclipse experimental psychology (Wundt, 1906, preface). He had always been sensitive to the enormous success of the non-experimental branches of natural science, and he never confused quantification and objectivity (Wundt, 1883).

In working out the relationship between individual psychology and VPs Wundt tried to distinguish his own position from that of Lazarus and Steinthal. What he mainly objected to in their project was its Herbartian basis. Psychological laws were not abstract principles, conceived on the model of classical mechanics, that could be applied analogously on the individual and on the social level. Rather, they were developmental principles that expressed the kinds of changes which mental contents underwent in interaction with a medium (Wundt, 1886b). That medium was environmental and social as well as physiological. The relationship between psychological laws on the individual and on the social level is not one of analogy but one of identity. The important practical aspect of this distinction was that Wundt’s interest was not primarily one of superimposing a psychological interpretation on anthropology and history, as Lazarus and Steinthal’s had been, but of using linguistic and ethnographic data to illuminate psychological processes in the individual.
Very late in his life Wundt did return to the former objective, in the speculative
*Elements of Folk Psychology* (Wundt, 1912), which until recently (Wundt, 1973) was the
only part of his huge output in this area that was available in English. It seems that after
half a century Wundt permitted himself to return to some of the sins of his youth in this
little work (little by Wundt’s standards), which is in no sense a summary of the preceding
volumes of his *Völkerpsychologie*. The difference in the goals pursued in the two works is
expressed in their subtitles. The *Elements* present ‘Outlines of a psychological history of
the development of mankind’, while the *Völkerpsychologie* itself is appropriately subtitled:
‘An investigation of the laws of development of language, myth and custom’.

Another aspect of the Lazarus and Steinthal programme which Wundt rejected was that
which provided for a second branch of VPs which was to be a differential psychological
study of the culture of different peoples. In his systematic writings he was only concerned
with universal human mental functions as manifested in cultural products. Wundt’s
interest in general principles of the human mind to the exclusion of a systematic concern
for individual differences was consistently maintained on the social as well as on the
individual level. His VPs did not include a study of national character.

**Basic concepts of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie***

The details of Wundt’s voluminous studies on language, etc., are today of limited interest.
What is, or ought to be, of considerable interest is his conception of a field of VPs,
different in principle from the field of social psychology that was beginning to be
conceived as he published his studies in this area. The point of departure is provided by
Wundt’s analysis of human action which is placed near the beginning of volume one of
his *Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1900; Danziger, 1980b). Ordinary adult intentional activity
is there seen as the result of a process of psychological development. Underlying the level
of deliberate voluntary action there is a more primitive level of ‘drive movement’
(*Triebbewegung*) which involves spontaneous affective expression. (Wundt, of course, had
long regarded drive as the basic psychological process.) These expressive movements
constitute a psychophysical action which involves inherent links between certain overt
movements and certain mental states. These links are universal in all normal members of
a species. There is also an innate mimetic response to the expressive movements of others.
This means that the mental states of one individual will be transferred to others via linked
expressive movements. For Wundt this mechanism of ‘gestural communication’ provided
the indispensable foundation of social life without which human individuals could never
begin to understand each other.

This was of course the basic feature of Wundt’s theory which G. H. Mead developed so
productively (Farr, 1980; Wundt, 1973). The consequences which Wundt himself drew
from his general theory of action, however, led in a different direction. On the level of
intentional voluntary activity human individuals certainly interacted socially, but this kind
of interaction was only made possible by a more fundamental sort of interaction on the
affective level. On this level of gestural communication the basis was laid for two
developments of fundamental significance.

In the first place, the necessary replication of similar mental states in the
communicating individuals led to the formation of an interpersonal configuration which
may be conveniently referred to as a collective subject, though this is not a term that
Wundt himself uses. What we find in Wundt is the term *Völksseele* for a specific
important form of the collective subject. The use of this term carries no suggestion of
psychological processes taking place anywhere but in the minds of individuals. However, a
crucial property of these processes had to be taken into account, namely, that they were
communicatively linked to similar processes going on in the minds of specific other
individuals. A psychic interaction was not possible, according to Wundt, unless there was
to that, from the start, a psychological system

Because community endowment with mental functioning has a relatively permanent
nature, the patte

These three constitute the product of interaction over time which accounts for the possibility of communication:

The basis for the development of social psychological interaction is not the appreciation of the individual under the influence of these products, but the development of the individual within the social system. The individual is not simply a product of the social environment, but is a part of the social system itself. The individual develops as a result of the interaction of the individual with the social system, and this interaction is characterized by the development of new social psychological processes.
individuals. A psychology that ignored these links and pretended that individual minds were independent of each other could at best present a distorted view of its subject matter. Nor was communication something added on to the mind after its formation. The fact that the basis for communication lay on the most primitive level of functioning meant that, from the start, the mind of the individual was part of a trans-individual psychological system held together by links established through gestural communication.

Because communication through expressive movements takes place in individuals endowed with memory, the effects of such communication persist in time and affect the mental functioning of the participating individuals. These individuals now become part of a relatively permanent pattern of interaction constantly enriched through associative learning. The pattern is one of 'gestures' whose meaning is understood by a specific group of individuals. Such patterns are constantly transmitted among individuals, so that their life is not tied to the life of any individual or any generation of individuals. Gestural communication thus leads to cultural products that have an objective existence. This is the second development mentioned above. The point is that these cultural products have a fundamental influence on the mental functioning of each individual. Language, the first of these products, provides the medium in which his higher cognitive activity operates. Myths, formed on the basis of language, give form to human capacities for imagination, and customs provide the framework within which individual choice and volition must operate.

These three components of culture are the product of a collective subject, they are not the product of intentional choices by individuals. They undergo relatively slow changes over time which are regular and lawful because the individual psychological processes whose interaction produces them are themselves regular and lawful. It should therefore be possible, according to Wundt, to use observed regularities of cultural change to draw inferences about the underlying psychological processes in individuals. He expected that the conclusions arrived at on this basis would converge with the findings that had been obtained through studying individuals in the laboratory.

The basis for the divergence between Wundt’s concept of VPs and the usual conception of social psychology now emerges quite clearly. Wundt’s distinction between levels of human action—one that involves spontaneous affective expression, the Triebbewegung or drive action, and one that involves deliberate goal direction, called Willkürbewegung or discretionary action—implies two levels of human social interaction. On the first level interaction is governed by individual attentions but by a group process; on the level of discretionary action, however, individuals do interact as individuals with their own independent goals and intentions. The distinction is an analytic one; in the adult person both levels of social behaviour coexist and interact with one another. Moreover, discretionary action is seen as the developmental product of social interaction on the level of gestural communication.

The adult individual therefore remains part of collective processes which occur without his intentional contribution. Sound shifts in the history of languages, for example, are not the result of deliberate actions by individuals but are the product of a level of social interaction where individuals are simply the components of a collective process that develops quite independently of their conscious individual intentions. While he recognized the role of social patterning in individual choice, Wundt did not regard rational social action as psychologically interesting. Such behaviour was as varied as the infinite diversity of circumstances under which individuals made their decisions. It was a fit subject only for descriptive historical studies, not for the kind of systematic science of universally valid processes that psychology aimed at. For Wundt, only the products of human social activity had a history; the basic psychological processes underlying that
activity were ahistorical. These conceptions were based on an unfortunate split between the subject matter of the two parts of Wundt’s psychology (Sprung & Sprung, 1981). It is only occasionally, as in his discussion of the development of language in the child, that he manages to overcome this split with some success.

There were both internal and external reasons for the historical failure of Wundt’s VPs. Among the internal reasons the most important undoubtedly lay in his very limited awareness of the possibility of subjecting the process of social interaction to direct investigation. This meant that he had to leap constantly from the products of interaction to intra-individual processes, while the crucial mediating process never advanced beyond the status of a general theoretical postulate. Secondly, Wundt’s insistence on excluding from consideration all instances of voluntary social action proved to be punishingly restrictive. It was a principle he could not consistently maintain in the later volumes of his *Völkerpsychologie*, yet because it had become a matter of principle it prevented him from conducting any effective investigation of the relationship of drive action and discretionary action in the behaviour of real individuals. Finally, it must be recognized that Wundt’s notion of adding a historical dimension to psychology by the study of cultural development amounted to little more than paying lip service to the historicity of the human mind. As all the basic processes were conceived to be ahistorical and already established through laboratory investigation much of his project became an exercise in redundancy as far as its psychological yield was concerned.

However, these limitations of Wundt’s VPs, serious though they were, could hardly be considered to be intrinsically more damaging than the limitations of other projects which flourished while Wundt’s died. Numerous external factors deprived VPs of any residual influence on the subsequent development of a social psychology that had become American, behaviouristic and individualistic. At the simplest level, Wundt’s work was inaccessible, for reasons of language, to the overwhelming majority of social psychologists. But even if it had been available it would have remained an alien and conceptually unassimilable product. Its fundamental distinction between drive action and considered action was behaviouristically irrelevant and its reference to a collective subject would seem indistinguishable from mysticism. It ran counter to the vision of psychology as a purely experimental natural science in all its branches. Such specific areas of research as psycholinguistics (Blumenthal, 1970; Porsch, 1980) and non-verbal communication (Wundt, 1973), where Wundt’s perspectives were in fact far ahead of their time, blossomed half a century too late for his influence to be felt. In other areas his approach was completely at variance with the interest in the control and manipulation of social behaviour that motivated so much of subsequent social psychological research.

Conclusions

Quite apart from all the specific problems of Wundt’s version, there was undoubtedly something anachronistic in the very term that VPs used to identify itself. While representatives of this trend generally made it clear that the groups they were concerned with were any groups characterized by a culture of their own, the national group remained the prototype for all the others. VPs never really cut its historical roots which lay in the national struggles of the 19th century. In the era of nation states, industrialization and class conflict this emphasis on the national cultural community was at best irrelevant to most practical social issues and at worst ideologically suspect (cf. Hellpach, 1938). The study of culture as culture had passed to other disciplines, and insofar as VPs aspired to something more than this it had been deprived of its social legitimation. The ideologues of aggressive nationalism rejected it for its universalistic and scientific aspiration; mysticism.

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Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that VPs, especially in the form given to it by Wundt, contributed at least three sets of concepts which are of more than purely historical interest. The first of these involves the notion of different levels—or perhaps one should say modalities—of social action and interaction. This notion can be traced to Herder’s distinction between the ‘artificial’ social relations of the state and the ‘natural’ social relations of the cultural community. For Wundt it takes the form of a distinction between spontaneous affective expression and considered, instrumental action. A somewhat related distinction between affective and rational action is to be found in the works of Max Weber (Weber, 1947). Where Weber’s main concern was with the social context of rational action, Wundt’s interest was focused on the social aspect of non-rational action. This was an interest that was pursued from a more individualistic perspective by men, like Tarde, Le Bon and Freud. However, these distinctions became blurred in behaviouristic social psychology. This inevitably led to inappropriate generalizations and to a flattened image of social interaction that could not accommodate the ambiguities and tensions that arise from its multilayered structure. A more serious concern with alternative historical models could help to open up this issue.

A second and related topic on which VPs provides a possible source of insight concerns the question of collective subjects. Psychologically trained social psychologists have often found it difficult to think of social processes in any other terms than those provided by the model of independent subjects pursuing individual ends. Indeed, this model may be appropriate to what happens whenever sophisticated adults agree to place themselves under experimental scrutiny. The range of non-experimental situations for which this model is appropriate is however unknown. It is certainly risky to assume its universal validity, especially across cultures, subcultures and historical time. What VPs does is to supply a possible alternative model where social psychological processes are treated as attributes of a collective subject constituted by the unintentional common action and interaction of individuals. This does not mean, of course, that the particular forms of collective subjects favoured by VPs are the only conceivable ones, or even that those forms have any kind of universal importance.

Finally, VPs raises fundamental questions about how social psychology ought to conceptualize the relationship between its human subjects and their environment. In the standard experimental paradigm it is the responses of individuals to environmental manipulations carried out by someone else that constitute the object of study. No doubt, individuals do have to cope with such situations also outside the laboratory, especially when one thinks of them as quite separate from other individuals. But VPs suggests that there is a large range of social psychological problems for which this model is inappropriate. Here the environmental changes that are the immediate cause of psychological responses are themselves the products of the activity of the responding subject. A partition of such a process into independent and dependent variables would destroy its essential nature. But beyond this, the involvement of collective rather than individual subjects in such a process involves products that can no longer be categorized as environmental in the same sense as physical stimuli. The case of language illustrates that these products provide forms of interaction which constitute the subject itself. In the last analysis, therefore, VPs involved an implicit critique of the appropriateness of the organism-environment metaphor for social psychology. With all its gross limitations it did contain some hints of alternative directions of conceptual development which social psychology may have ignored to its cost.
References


Requests for reprints should be addressed to Professor K. Danziger, Department of Psychology, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Downsview, Ontario M3J 1P3, Canada.