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## CHAPTER 11

# AMERINDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

## Cultural Basis for General Knowledge Construction

Danilo Silva Guimarães

This chapter addresses the challenge of cultural psychology to recover the forgotten dimensions of the human being, whose roots connect psychology to anthropology rather than to epistemology (Cornejo, this volume). For most of the Amerindian peoples, knowledge is not related to deciphering the world, as it were in Mesopotamia, Greece, or in the second wave of Enlightenment in the modern sciences (Gadamer, 1981/2010). The notion of deciphering, in modern sciences, was constructed out of the abandonment of nonrational human dimensions. Deciphering addresses precise and correct content that corresponds to the supposed true image of the world. Therefore, vital forces, empathy, physiognomic sensibilities, intuition, and fantasy, among others, had to be excluded in the process of constructing true knowledge, mainly because these ways of apprehending the environment do not fit classical logic.

Instead of stabilizing the knowledge through the supposed universal images of the truth, that is, toward general categories, opposed to unreal, fantasied/fictional images/categories, diverse cultures proposed that the process of knowledge construction is permanent and generative of multi-

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ple categories that become acceptable due to a sensory education of the body.

I argue that sensory education consists in the acquisition of clues, not ciphers, and that [Amerindian] songs and stories—including stories of how animals respond to the presence of the hunter—give shape to a perception of the world guided by this education. (Ingold, 2000, p. 10)

the cipher is centrifugal, allowing the novice to access meanings that are attached (“pinned on”) by the mind to the outer surface of the world [the correct representation], the clue is centripetal, guiding him towards meanings that lie at the heart of the world itself, but which are normally hidden behind the facade of superficial appearances. (Ingold, 2000, p. 23)

In this chapter, we assume that the clues vindicated in the Amerindian talks guide a process of knowledge construction. As an open-ended process, it is more general than the knowledge understood as ciphers, which remains as a fixed image of the world delivered by any dominant culture. Instead of stabilizing the knowledge in universal images of the truth, opposed to unreal, fantastic images, Amerindian basis for knowledge construction, or epistemology, implies a sort of subject-subject relationship (cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2006), a permanent negotiation concerning the topics of investigation culturally guided.

Throughout the following pages, we will reflect on how scientific knowledge builds its generality as an outcome of the rational—deductive, inductive or abductive—elaboration of a narrative and mythic experience of the world. If we depart from a different narrative and mythological socially constructed realities, and proceed to the rational, methodic elaboration of these realities, we are able to develop, as an outcome, distinct knowledge, which can be relevant to the cultural field from which it originates. Historical and anthropological data will be selectively focused in order to discuss the viability of an Amerindian psychology, as a sort of reflexive attitude that can emerge aligned with and from the cosmological tradition of autochthon peoples of the Americas. Finally, we argue that the Amerindian path of knowledge construction is linked to a broader, universal process of argumentative elaboration that is not only restricted to the Amerindian context.

### **CONSTRUCTING THE SUPPOSED TRUE KNOWLEDGE FROM LEGENDARY IMAGES OF THE OTHERS IN WESTERN SOCIETIES**

Many philosophers, scientists and art makers have already discussed the issue of mutual misinterpretations in the first meetings of the Europeans

and Amerindians more than five centuries ago, in the period of the invasion. Tzvetan Todorov (2010), for instance, asserted that meeting Amerindian peoples was “the most surprisingly meeting in our history” (p. 4). Nevertheless, its consequences have not yet been completely understood: as the Amerindian peoples were not completely vanished, they also were not assimilated in the contemporary Western global world. A scientist would say that the cipher that would give us the perfect understanding of these societies was not yet discovered, or, for a certain kind of mechanist thinking whose vestiges remain from the 19th century, these people were not yet fixed in the intelligible order susceptible of mathematical modeling of the scientific minds.

The issue of alterity, as the nonapprehensible dimension of the other, remains as a necessary fuel for disquieting experiences growing fantasies and knowledge construction. In this sense, knowledge construction includes the sensible, intuitive perception, fantasy, and sensuousness as integrated dimensions in science and art production, because they are culturally situated and symbolically guided by the active craftsmanship of the scientist and artist.

The fertilization of fictional ideas about the others has had a historical function in Western societies since ancient times. It was especially useful to ideologically protect some commercial routes. For instance, Phoenician’s legends about monsters more or less like human beings worked as semiotic barrier (Boesch, 1991) to the commercial interest of the other peoples living in the Mediterranean. The supposed presence of these fantastic and terrible creatures, as sirens and cyclops, worked as a sort of customs agency to terrified naïve navigators (Melo Franco, 1937/2000). A profusion of fictional beings continued to increase during all classical antiquity and postclassical ages, filling with fantastic images the ignorance about the lands abroad and their people. When the Europeans reached the American lands, the surprise was not because of the difference or the beauty of the landscape, but because they found there similar human beings.

When it comes to European encounters with hitherto unknown peoples, there were always multiple ways in which they could be potentially categorized according to familiar templates. The kind of image of the Others that came to be constructed, on the basis of real or alleged “facts” about them, will have been dependent on the prior background of ideas and values of the perceivers; and if these varied, so did the result of assimilation to the “familiar.” It is only after images have become culturally conventionalized that more uniformity can be expected. (Jahoda, 1999, p. 11)

The ignorance about the cultural basis of epistemology led philosophers, artists, and scientists to construct very convincing justifications pre-

sented as truth knowledge, which ended supporting the Eurocentric racism in the 19th century (Jahoda, 1999). Contemporary historical analysis shows that most of this knowledge was grounded in very ancient, myth-based, assumptions about the foreigners in Eurocentric cosmology. These assumptions, impregnated in the mythological and ritual texture of Western societies, are culturally transferred and ignore rational proofs, constituting the emotional basis of people belonging to these societies. Such emotional basis, within the academic world of philosophical, artistic and scientific knowledge, let their vestiges as bricks in the large buildings of the *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*.<sup>1</sup>

### Images of Fantasy as Opposed to the Reality, the Illuminated Truth, and Scientific Knowledge

For ancient Mesopotamians (Assyrian and Babylonian peoples), an image had an indexical nature, "it functioned through a relationship of contiguity to the signified" (Bahrani, 2008, p. 51). Images and statements were considered not as copies, but as part of reality with power and capacities, substituting their agents. At that time, the ground rules of the war adopted practices of abducting images of gods and kings during battles and carrying off monuments with the aim of destroying representations of the enemies. Mesopotamians apprehended the world as a text that had to be deciphered. The work of deciphering in the Mesopotamian divination involved a ritualized exegetical reading, mainly conducted by clergypersons, following previously established codes supposed to be embedded in nature (Bahrani, 2008).

In contrast, the semiotics of ancient Greeks constructed a distinction between the copy and the original. The intellectual mental activity (*Noûs*) started to be considered the most elevated way in which the truth was revealed (Gadamer, 1981/2010). Taking into account the Aristotelian analogical and substitutive theories of metaphor, there is, in fact, a construction of a detached representation of the real allowing the possibility of grasping meaningful similarities underlying a signifier (Aristotle, 1992). The logos, in opposition to the myth (an originally Greek word with the meaning of discourse, proclamation, announce, or news), had the function of systematizing the narrative discourse (myth) in clear and demonstrable arguments.

In the 5th century B.C., the Myth and the Logos become detached genders of discourse, which opposed the invented stories to the enumerable, demonstrable truth. Nevertheless, Aristotle recognized the truth in the roots of what is narrated and/or invented: "The Myth is, in all cases,

the already known, the announcement that is spread without determining its origins or certification" (Gadamer, 1981/2010, p. 67).

To the Mesopotamian and Greek cosmology, the world and its images should be deciphered in order to apprehend the real meaning of things. In both cases, there is a basic, tacit or explicit understanding that the landscape and/or the writings have encoded meanings to be deciphered. Through contiguity or through representation of the world, there is a quest for the correspondence, for the correct image of the world, which reveals the real underlying the appearance. The images that supposedly correspond to the real started to be classified as knowledge (*epistème*), and the images that do not correspond to the real entered in the realm of fiction (i.e., fantasies created by human imagination).

Gadamer (1954/2010) emphasized that Christianity, through the New Testament, radicalized the criticism to the mythological images of the world. The gods, belonging to the different peoples (paganism), were confronted by the God enlightened in the Christian messages, which reunited the multiplicity around the unity of a universal principle, originated in a transcendent dimension. The falsification of the supposed false ideas in the pagan cultures paved the way to the development of the modern sciences, at least promoting the emergence of a cultural ground that no longer accepted the multiple mythical conceptions of the world.

Modern sciences started to be developed few centuries before the milestone foundation of the first laboratory on psychological research by Wundt, in Leipzig, 1879, when Europeans were suffering the psychosocial impacts out of their encounter with a novel sort of diversity of things and peoples around the world (Figueiredo, 1992). The relatively stable life around small territory with small villages became ruptured by unknown variations and novelties; the well-known local population and language were invaded by foreigners' dialects and accents; the social hierarchies started to be questioned; the clear distinction between center-periphery was confused; as well as the well-defined notions of regularity and order.

Instead of a world plentiful of meaning and integrity with durable personal and collective identities, as the Christianity vindicated in the medieval period, the new emergent sociocultural field brought the diversity and the complexity of unusual ways of being human. The dissolution of internal borders and the meeting of external borders allowed the emergence of new ethnic mixtures, linguistic hybridism, transformations in the religiosity, and the like. The Renaissance was not only a period of openness to ancient European history, but also allowed the meeting of otherness and their ways of life beyond the borders of each feudal territory within Europe, including lands overseas.

Different strategies emerged, along centuries, as efforts to reorganize the chaos in this complex sociocultural field. Until the 18th century, a

series of transformations took place in the pool of intellectual life: the religious reformation; the construction of consistent philosophical systems, in which rigorous rational deductions were in the core of the environment explanation; the strengthening of empirical studies, from Galileo to Newton and so on. Cosmological formulas emerged along this historical moment as a solution to the gaps and uncertainties of unbalanced natural and social world (cf. Cassirer, 1994).

In this sociocultural context, Francis Bacon (1980) criticized what he considered epistemological obstacles for scientific knowledge construction. His empiricism presupposed the possibility of understanding phenomena through observation, minimizing the participation of false ideas—so-called idols. Nevertheless, empirical observations lacked strong theories for interpretation of nature. The positivism of Comte (1978) addressed the knowledge history, asserting that science would be the most advanced stage of law formulations about the real, once it was able to regulate imagination, to be pragmatically used and more precise in describing the nature of phenomena. Science should also have the capacity to organize society, avoiding metaphysical and religious tendencies. Positivist ideals guided efforts in the development of verification criteria of meaning, which divides reality from fantastic ideas relegated to the space of artistic creation, or madness.

The quest for validation criteria aiming to find the correct knowledge is remarkable from the experimental model of Galileo and posterior philosophical epistemological debate addressing the attainment of empirical data and theoretical formulation. The presupposition was that the correct knowledge should be unique. The idea of universality in science can be associated to Western cosmological-philosophical conception of the ontological unity of the cosmos (cf. Fausto, 2008). From this basic presupposition emerged devices for controlling symbolic-cultural elaborations, in conflict with the so-called mythological and fictitious ideas of other cultures (cf. Stengers, 2002). When some fictional discourses produced in the scientific grounds become more than fiction, they can be turned into a representation of “bidding system of reality” (Boesch, 1991, p. 276).<sup>2</sup> It somehow encapsulates firm and unquestioned ideas of reality, its reasons, and consequences. As such, these discourses acquire a cultural-mythological function. A scientific discourse is converted into myth when it works as a crystallized and unquestionable formula.

### The Constructivist Alternative

According to Duran (2004), both constructivist and positivist epistemologies are similar in that they consider reality as something that exists.

One difference is that while for positivism, the knowledge of reality is something possible to be reached because the organism has access to the reality through its sensible organs, for constructivism, knowledge of reality is something impossible, because we just have access to some experiences of reality: valid knowledge is that which finds internal consistency, intersubjective agreement, and viability for the continuity of human life. For positivism, knowledge is a sort of copy or representation of reality; the validation of knowledge is made through comparison between the representation and empirical phenomena, while for constructivism it is an organization of experience.

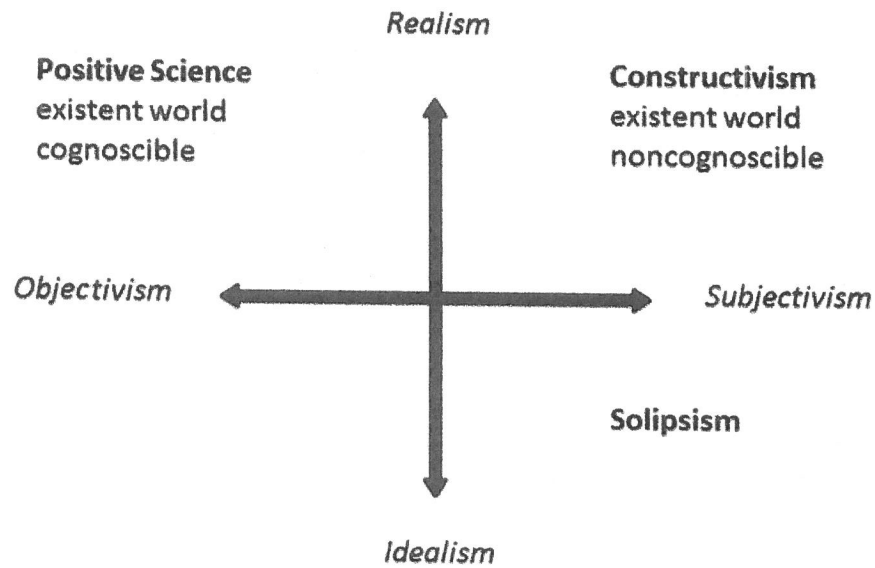
Considering that there are different kinds of constructivism (cf. Neymeier, 1997), when discussing it in an epistemological level, there are some convergences that allow us to integrate different theories in a meta-theoretical umbrella. For instance, in the constructivist epistemology, the organism (a person, a subject) is understood as an active system in relation to its environment:

The organism experiences its environment in an interactive and continuous process, adjusting and changing itself, letting impacts in its epigenetic system, in its genome as well as in its environment. These impacts are left to the subsequent generations. So, there is not any separation between development and evolution. The organism takes an active part in the process of its own development, as well as in the evolution of its ecological community. (Almeida & Falcão, 2008, p. 529)

From this, there is no biological or sociological determinism over the organism. Instead, it considers the role of self-regulatory processes and self-reproductive agency of the person-subject in relation to its exteriority. New psychological functions emerge from the relation of the organism/subject in the world, as functional organizers of these relations (Valsiner, 1994, p. 250). That is, the organism/subject is able to act persistently over disquieting experiences in the world, organizing it and addressing a less tensional state; for instance, through the creation of meaning for these experiences and devices to overcome difficulties.

So, from the epistemological viewpoint, constructivism is defined in contrast with objectivism (cf. Neymeier, 1997). Additionally, from the ontological viewpoint, it is defined in contrast with idealism (Duran, 2004). Therefore, constructivism can be situated in the intersection between the realism and the subjectivism: there is a reality, but we just have access to the experience of the reality. The Figure 11.1 shows some key points of rupture between objectivist epistemologies and subjectivist epistemologies.

Historically, in the field of psychology, distinct versions of constructivism were developed through the elaboration of consistent metaphors for the



Source: Adapted from Duran (2004).

Figure 11.1. Coordination system of constructivism.

understanding of knowledge construction. In these versions, consensus and viability as criteria to knowledge validation in constructivism, have a functional relevance in the adaptation to the social and natural world, intertwining the cultural preconceptions and novel intellectual elaborations. Therefore, the culture, from which a science is a part, is something that “belongs to the relating of the person and the environment ... a process of internalization and externalization or mutual constituting between person and the social world ... elaborated in terms of appropriation, guided participation or mastery” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 22).

The members of a culture guide their actions according to a small number of values that they are not usually aware of (Descola, 1998). These values can be found in the myths and ideologies socially reproduced in different ways by the members of any society. Myths are constantly reaffirmed by each community, spreading “a pattern of intelligibility that allows the articulation of understandings about the world, society and history, which are hidden in the thresholds of consciousness” (Lévi-Strauss & Eribon, 1988/1990, p. 182).

From the myth to the logos, some branches of the scientific culture have fallen in the metaphysic belief in which the reality would be com-

pletely disenchanted through reasoning as a criticism of the mythical beliefs. Nevertheless, the rational criticism of the myth is only one possible path concerning an object of human reflection. The same object could be explored in the paths of arts, religion, or politics, for instance. Besides, regarding the object, reasoning is not able to regard itself in its real historical situation: the rational self-comprehension is always delayed in relation to its praxis, evincing a limit to its aims of achieving a full awareness of its position (Gadamer, 1954/2010, p. 63). These hermeneutic propositions assert that it is only by comprehending the role of the myth in the process of knowledge construction that we can achieve a self-comprehension that includes but also surpasses the limits of reasoning. It is, then, relevant to pay attention to the extra-scientific truths (i.e., arts and religion) which are reunited, although not fused, in the poetics of knowledge construction.

Figure 11.2 shows the recursive process in which the scientific knowledge constructions emerge and develop as an argumentative criticism of the experiential and mythological narratives (as we discussed previously from Gadamer, 1954/2010). Some of the emerged elaborations are reconverted into mythological narratives in the field of social representations (Marková, 2006; Valsiner, 2012) and are the support for the elaboration of other institutionalized or noninstitutionalized discourses in religion, arts, politics, or common sense.

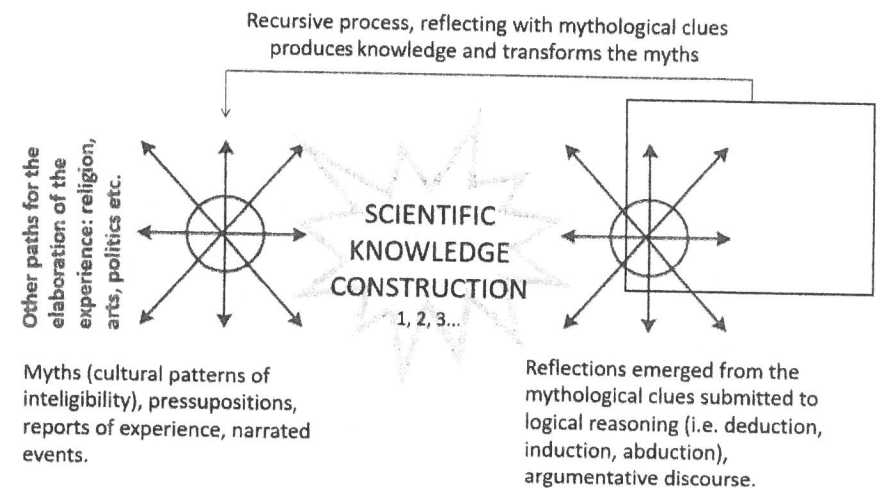


Figure 11.2. Scientific knowledge construction between narrative and argumentative discourses.

### Multiplying the Multiplicity of Psychologies

From the latest decades of the 19th to the first decades of the 20th century, a considerable number of projects for a scientific psychology emerged as an outcome of the intellectual production of researchers in Europe and the United States, from different academic backgrounds (philosophy, medicine, literature, biology, law, etc.). Publications of some precursors of contemporary psychologies are representative of the intellectual aims to achieve a general psychology, the basis for scientific ventures—for example, *Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890); “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (Freud, 1895/1996); *Introduction to Psychology* (Wundt, 1911); “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It” (Watson, 1913); *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (Koffka, 1935), among others. At this time, one of the most relevant reflections concerning the fragmentation of the psychological field and the efforts for its integration was documented in Vygotsky’s work “The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation” (1997).

Vygotsky (1997) assumes the task of realizing the psychology as a science by the means of dialectically integrating the scientific knowledge already produced by the different schools. First, he identifies the fragmentation of psychology concerning the distinct subject matters focalized by the different schools, that is, the consciousness, the behavior or the unconscious, and the distinct starting points elected by the researchers, that is, the normal or the pathologic, the simple or the complex phenomena, the human or the animal behavior. Vygotsky observed that the answer each psychology had given to unify the phenomena of interest led to the emergence of dogmatic or eclectic positioning. That is, the former, by selecting an object of study—the observable behavior—and excluding the possibility of considering others such as the conscious or unconscious. The latter, eclectic positioning, tried to assimilate concepts emergent in different philosophical and scientific matrixes, fusing disparate theories.

One of the problems of the dogmatic attitude in psychology is that it ends up by fragmenting the field in distinct sciences, thus failing in the objective of creating a unified science. The eclectic attitude also fails because it does not take into consideration that

the word that refers to a fact at the same time provides a philosophy of that fact, its theory, its system. When I say: “the consciousness of the color” I have scientific associations of a certain kind, the fact is included in a certain series of phenomena, I attach a certain meaning to the fact. When I say: “the reaction to white” everything is wholly different, (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 326)

Therefore, for Vygotsky (1997), it is relevant to understand the process of construction of scientific concepts, and he understands that the dialectic materialism provides the best methodology in order to integrate the two principles that he identified as the main source of fragmentation in the psychological field, the opposition between the objectivist materialism and the subjectivist idealism: “Dialectics covers nature, thinking, history—it is the most general, maximally universal science. The theory of the psychological materialism or dialectics of psychology is what I call general psychology” (p. 389).

After all, our task is not at all to isolate our work from the general psychological work of the past, but to unite our work with all the scientific achievements of psychology into one whole, and on a new basis. We do not want to distinguish our school from science, but science from non-science, psychology from non-psychology. The psychology about which we are talking does not yet exist. It still has to be created—and by more than one school. (p. 405)

The teleological, or prophetic, aims for the creation of the new man and the new society through the scientific emancipation of the mankind are still unrealized. Psychology, almost a century after Vygotsky’s claims for integration, remains a field of dispersion in which the stereotyped repetition of the old ideas and nourishment of strained oppositions between schools of thinking guides the sterilization of the creative process in the expected scientific development of new ideas (cf. Valsiner, 2012). By contrast, the study of what constrains human creativity, in order to enlarge it, is precisely the aim of cultural psychology (cf. Boesch, 1997). Psychology, as a scientific, therefore, cultural knowledge, faces the fact that each culture cultivates its members in a self-centered way, that is, each culture has a proper systematized knowledge, notions, and methods to empirically understand and produce what the Eurocentric sciences call psychological processes.

### Facing the Diversity

Why do people feed and take care of small babies? They do it because babies are *kwamonuru*, “handsome, sad, little wretched ones, poor little things.” It gives rise to *getwamonuta*, “discerning the sadness, pity, abandonment, graciousness of someone,” that is an aspect of *nshimkanchi* [mind, intelligence, memory, respect, love]. *Getwamonuta*, “to discern the affliction,” moves the older parents to an effort in order to satisfy babies’ desire, leading to the formation of *nshinikanchi*, in the process of upbringing. (Gow, 1997, p. 55)

Which psychology would emerge if we decided to reflect on the Piro's<sup>3</sup> notions of *kwamonuru*, *getwamonuta*, and *nshinikanchi*, in order to develop it as a scientific concept, for instance, submitting the Piro's narratives to an argumentative logical reasoning, deductive and inductive analysis, or hermeneutic interpretation? Or which psychology would emerge from the development of Amerindian philosophical concepts (cf. Viveiros de Castro, 2006) into novel methods for general knowledge construction, from the deep and sophisticated local wisdom? How do we include the voice of other cultures in the epistemological debate concerning the universal knowledge of mankind in a pluralistic world?

The issue of knowledge demarcation, in opposition to the false, fantastic worldviews, is a relevant dimension in the process of interethnic subjugation. The demarcation between knowledge and lack of knowledge is in the core of the assimilationist projects of Amerindian peoples in Brazil, starting from the Catholic religious conversion projects to the secular efforts of the State to integrate the population. In Brazil, for centuries, the Amerindians were considered as unable to access civil rights. The State historically addressed their full integration to the National Society, despite the resistance of the peoples themselves.

Between the 19th and the 20th centuries, with the secularization of the State institutions in coalition with scientific knowledge, the opposition to the Amerindian traditions was strengthened, including their knowledge associated with fairy tales or myth as a product of fantastic imagination, in opposition to the scientific as the truth. Amerindian peoples have been resisting and constructing counter-discourses and pervasive practices that act on public opinion, aiming to reverse misconceptions and, consequently, develop more consistent ideas and social practices in relation to them (e.g., the documentary *Tenonderã: Um Olhar para o futuro*).

In this context, the dialogues between psychologists and Amerindian peoples presuppose an indefinite dynamics of approximation and distancing which are primarily affective, motivated by the availability to recognize an uneasy feeling in relation to otherness (Simão, 2003). Uneasiness, as the motor of epistemological curiosity and ethical approaches of the Self to Other, emerges if we are available to face the diversity of psychological processes, languages, myths, rituals, and memories that are constitutive of strong and peculiar perspectives on the basis of reflected, consistent, and coherent realities and worldviews.

Besides, we need a method to approach the Amerindian psychology without falling into dichotomist attitudes, claiming for an impossible communication between distinct culturally made knowledge, or eclectic attitudes, making cursory approximations between millenary traditions developing proper and sophisticated systems of knowledge. If there is a bridge between the Amerindian and European cultures, this bridge was

broken about 10,000 years ago, and the last 500 years have contributed to intensifying such cultural distance, instead of creating communicative conditions to epistemological exchange. It means that Amerindian and European cultures were not stable from the period these people became geographically distant, and each one guided its cultural traditions to different ontological routes (Descola, 2008). If each culture developed resources to deal with foreigners, it is also true that the reflections emerged in each cultural frame are not transparent to the other (Rasmussen, 2011), there is always a zone of misunderstanding (Simão, 2003) or equivocation (Viveiros de Castro, 2004) in such efforts of interethnic translation. It is, then, necessary work on the gaps between both worlds in order to control or minimize the unavoidable equivoques.

When recognizing the mythopoetic as an inclusive part in the process of knowledge construction in its scientific path, psychologists are able to reflect on its belongingness to the social life of a specific community among others, that is, a perspective that implies a natural attitude and constructs a social objective reality (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 2003). The scientific knowledge emerges as a criticism of such socially constructed reality or natural attitude in order to understand and/or manipulate it. Recognizing its belongingness to a socially constructed reality, instead of assuming it to be universal when the psychological knowledge is local and mainly Eurocentric, psychologists constructing knowledge concerning interethnic frames need to reflect upon the images and associated feelings that emerge in the experience of diverse cultural fields as distinct trajectories of knowledge construction. Any cultural knowledge, including the scientific, needs to be approached from a critical perspective; that is, including nonscientific, ontological, and ethical evaluations as a strategy of self-reflection in order to become systematic, intelligible, and functional to certain cultural aims.

### **Other Fantasies and Other Images Grounding Knowledge Construction**

In this chapter we focused "the forgotten dimensions of the human being, whose roots connect psychology to anthropology rather than to epistemology" (Cornejo, this volume, p. x), proposing that psychological knowledge is immersed in the images and fantasies of the cultural field in which it belongs. This unavoidable participation in a cultural field guides further reflections, addressing epistemological disputes and theoretical construction. Nevertheless, distinct cosmologies guide the construction of concepts based on images, fantasies, and desires, addressing notions of

persons who are not similar to those who developed in the ontological trajectory of Eurocentric cultures.

William James (1890) presented and discussed three of the main sources of error in psychology. First, the absence of proper terms for the investigation and comprehension of thinking and feelings that are part of the psychical life; second, the confusion of the psychologist between thinking and the object of thinking; and third, the possible mess between the perspective of the psychologist and the psychical fact he/she investigates.

More recently, Hermans, Kempen and van Loon (1992) cited Jaynes (1976) in his observation that the language people typically use to describe psychical phenomena is derived from the visual and active experience of the being in space, as a metaphor for the mental processes, that is, slow thinking, agitated mind, brilliant ideas, open mindedness, and so on. These terms are all metaphors that belong to a certain cultural field; they are not completely invented in the scientific framework.

Altogether, these considerations call the attention to a sort of promiscuity between the scientific and the cultural knowledge in psychology: psychology has no proper terms. The terms adopted in the construction of the psychological science depend on the articulation of words and meanings belonging to a cultural conception of human being. Additionally, each person culturally situated takes as object of his feeling/thinking specific elements derived from the experience in social life: that is, the object of concern and the solutions given by an Amerindian shaman finding the cure to an illness are radically different from those given by biomedicine.

Therefore, the cultural situation of psychology, that is, its unavoidable indigenous genetic basis, imposes limits to its aims of generalization if psychologists are focused on the regularity of behavior and the contents of mental life. An exploration of indigenous psychologies around the world would bring myriad novel terms and meanings to the same terms that enormously amplify the dispersion of the already fragmented psychological schools. Besides, the meanings of the cultural production of objectivity, through semiotic and other material elaboration, emerge from a social situation in which an already elaborated meaning becomes open to the singularity of the other.

In its singularity, the otherness ruptures the identity or unity of the knowledge, establishing a field of unknown as an ethical condition that instructs the processes of cultural differentiation and dedifferentiation. The susceptibility to the unknown precedes knowledge, demanding an answer as an affective and cognitive semiotic elaboration and action in relation to which the person is responsible.

Psychologists are, then, ethically responsible for their elaborations (fantastic, imaginary or those assumed as real), while moving across distinct cultural fields, as the Amerindians' diversities, to the same extent that each culture is responsible for the implications of its indigenous psychology. It is also necessary to think carefully about the consequences of building approximations and distancing, especially in the interethnic situations that involve psychosocial vulnerabilities, which are consequences of historical interethnic threatening practices.

If the psychologies have no proper words to express the universal contents of human minds, they can observe, reflect, and intervene in the heterogenetic process of meaning construction, as it appears as a general aspect in the diversification of cultures. Instead of producing transcultural correlations between psychological contents, cultural psychology could develop the sensibility to apprehend and the capacity to host the process of semiotic multiplication that takes place in concrete situations of a world in which people have the right to manifest their singularities.

Cultural creativity transforms the social incompleteness with autonomy and responsibility to a greater or lesser extent under specific conditions. Therefore, psychologists should not feel insecure because they do not have all the script prefigured to their practices in the interethnic zones: learned ignorance, as the recognition of the limits of the cultural immersion of the psychological knowledge, is a good starting point in order to develop novel knowledge in partnership with other realities that are representative of human semiotic-cultural creative conditions.

## NOTES

1. This idea was explored in a preliminary paper (Guimarães, 2012, p. 349):

"At the psychological level, science may become 'a system of explanation and justification for which no rational proof or deduction is or can be given. It somehow encapsulates firm and unquestioned ideas of reality, its reasons and consequences' (Boesch, 1991, p. 123). The cultural psychologist Ernst Boesch described a representative situation in which a young girl started to perceive the Freudian Oedipus 'myth' as a scientifically proved explanation for the course of human development. The presupposed valid scientific explanation became a reference of true, and could be confronted with other 'fairy tales.' In this confrontation, the vast number of arbitrary myth stories from Asia to Greece and the Americas probably would be considered as 'non-committal' (cf. Boesch, 1991, p. 276). In such Boeschian case, a scientific discourse was converted into myth, working as a crystallized and unquestionable formula in the psychology of his patient."



2. That is, if we think in the theories as real explanations, they become unquestionable, but if we understand them as fictions, then we are able to criticize and develop other fictions we consider more consistent to understand the phenomena, the experience of the untranslatable real.
3. The Piro are a people who live in the Amazonian forest between Brazil and Peru.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# GAPS IN HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

## Highlighting the Whole Beyond Our Conceptual Reach

Lucas B. Mazur

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Over the last several centuries, human inquiry into the nature of knowledge has perennially confronted the challenge of how to unite the knower with the known, a problem inherited largely from the Cartesian mind-body divide. As discussed by Cornejo (this volume), in response to this, the natural sciences and psychology have increasingly turned to quantification and mechanization in the hope that these tools will produce the kinds of objective answers that the toolmakers themselves appear unable to provide. Cornejo convincingly argues that this has led in many ways to the devaluation of the notion of *fantasy*. As a result, we have come to cut the world up into knowable bits, but bits that fail to capture the greater whole and that fall short of the objectivity and universality we hope will accompany them. The Truth for which we seek remains eternally just out of reach. Rather than seeing the space between Truth and our imperfect knowledge as a source of anxiety, this chapter will argue that we can see it as space into which we might grow. In order to do so, we must have faith in light of this Sisyphean task and trust in our engagement with the world. In this sense, science and psychology share with faith traditions the