Civility of Basic Distrust:
A cultural-psychological view on persons-in-society

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ABSTRACT. Cultural psychology is a hybrid of social and developmental psychology on the one hand, and of cultural anthropology on the other. In this paper I will analyze the collective-cultural processes that set the stage for individual citizens of a society to develop trust in the benevolence of its social institutions. I will demonstrate that such trust is a necessary organizational illusion that functions as a promoter of social cohesiveness of social groups and guides the internalization of the acceptance of the meta-level "just world" sign-field by individual persons. Guided by such field, persons are likely to take the risk of trusting the public communicative messages of social institutions and become involved in both constructive and destructive acts. Such non-reflexive "basic trust" in the social authorities is both needed for a social system to function, and for individual persons to legitimize their actions. Yet civil society cannot remain non-reflexive, and it is through the development of social reflexivity that the basic characteristic of human survival—basic distrust in the social institutions—is developed. The latter is illustrated by the Galis and Haviv model of discursive inaction in case of genocides.

What can cultural psychology say about society in general—and of civil society in particular? At the first glance it would be inappropriate all together for anybody working in psychology to say anything about society. The two areas of investigation-- into the human *psyche* and into the social worlds-- may be best treated in their own rights as two qualitatively distinct forms of organization.

However, a perfectly legitimate research target is the relationship between these two distinct levels. There is the connection—real human beings make up "the society" and then treat it as a power to which they need to obey (Valsiner, 1998, 1999). Personal need to obey may be supported by their protests against that very obeying— while involved in the act of obeying (cf. Milgram, 1974). Persons change themselves through the society by assuming prescribed roles and acting accordingly (Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973). Last—but not least-- they may act upon the subjective feelings of one's personal duties in relation to "the society" (Moghaddam, 2003). All these varied

feed-forward processes co-produce persons and their society. These processes are culturally organized—but how?

The cultural nature of persons <> society relationships

The set of relations of persons and societies is not unitary, but multiple. There are correspondences between levels, rather than similarities. The relations operate with high degree of redundancy. In the ideational domain, human actions are made meaningful by the actors—with the result of invention of "the society" as an invented – yet objectively existing[1]—reality.

Psychological characteristics of persons feed into the ways societies are created—leading further to the metagenesis (Koch, 1986, p. 10) of individual consciousness. This process of emergence of both personal subjectivities and societies' systems of values, prejudices, and other social representations is based on the actions of real human beings (Valsiner, 2003a, 2003b). It cannot be reduced to the psychological functioning of any individual or a population of individuals. Individuals are not mere replicas of any society (or its texts, or of their language)—nor are societies viewable as "hyper-persons."

Cultural psychology: focus on semiotic mediation. Human beings create their societies—and narratives about their societies-- through the unity of symbolic actions and construction of signs. Signs become sign complexes—generalized meaning fields that are difficult (or impossible) to define. As a result of that difficulty sign complexes are flexible to use as meaningful orienting and constraining devices (Valsiner, 2005). The core notions of this intellectual project—civil society, trust, risk—are all examples of such hyper-generalized meaning complexes. They gain their social usefulness through their prioritized affective tone (preference) and vagueness of reference. Human meaning construction is reflexive of the uncertainty of human being (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, chapter 13) that is inevitable part of living with the constraints of irreversible time.

Human actions are overdetermined by meanings (Obeyesekere, 1990)—they make sense to the actors and observers through signs of various levels of generality bundled together and usable in particular life settings. By creating and using signs of various forms of iconicity and abstraction human beings regulate their relations not just merely with the world as-it-is, but also set the stage for the world as it could (or should) be. In this sense, the notion of society is a moralistic—in contrast to purely ontological—a term.

Collective and personal cultures. The persons<>society relation can be viewed as a dynamic relation of subjective and objective (Simmel, 1908) or

[1] As is obvious for anybody showing one's passport at border crossings, paying taxes without protesting it as a form of robbery, belonging to armies or political parties and thereby putting one's life at risk, and so on. The reality of "the society" shows in a myriad of forms of everyday life organization—yet these forms are based on myths created by humans. The imaginary flows into the real—and vice versa.

personal and collective (Valsiner, 2000, chapter 4) cultures. The notion of personal culture includes not only personal subjective phenomena of the mind, but also their externalized and objectified counterparts. The latter make

> …the personal culture publicly visible, as every aspect of personal reconstruction of one's immediate life-world reflects that externalization. Thus, the personal system of created meanings becomes projected to the world through personal arrangement of things that are important for the given person (Valsiner, 2000, p. 55)

This public visibility of personal meanings feeds into the interpersonally constructed collective culture that is composed of externalizations of personal cultures of different persons who are mutually linked through social ties (ibid, p. 56). Collective culture is the place where societies are being constructed.

The dynamic relation of persons and societies is highly variable in its all three components—persons, society, and their relation. Still, on the basis of such high variabilities relatively stable relations can be maintained. Cultural psychology investigates the organizational forms that make such consistency-based-on-fluctuations possible (Valsiner, 2001a, 2004a). This happens though the invention, internalization and externalization, and suggestive promotion of sign complexes. Human psychological variability is constrained—and by that guided—by semiotic mediation. Signs are the "third" component in the person-environment relations (Nöth, 1994, p. 44). It is through semiotic construction that goals-oriented transformation of the old duality into a new one becomes possible.

Human beings create their meaningful parts of the environments-- their *Umwelts*. Human *Unwelts* are extended to the depth of constructed meanings. Signs are used to regulate the boundaries of the experiencing the *Umwelt* and thus constantly reconstructing it. Human cultural self-regulation is bi-directional—under the guidance of the field of social suggestions the persons actively negotiate their personal life-worlds—through involvement in the collective cultural processes-- with the immediate social input functional in their *Umwelts*. The incoming messages from the collective-cultural domains may be neutralized, rejected, or accepted with modification by the active persons within their personal-cultural spheres. These active recipients may generate counter-messages that are externalized to become parts of the collective-cultural highly variable set of social suggestions.

Active agency: the counter-messages game. The person<>society relations hence include a reflexive structure of various levels of depth (Lefebvre, 1977)—anticipation of some non-compliant tactic by the recipients makes the social institutions (who are promoting a particular message) use tactics of limiting the possibilities of success of the counter-messages. One of the general strategies of overcoming the mutual counter-messaging "game" in the field of collective culture is the increase in the redundancy of the messages oriented at key social

values. The same value orientation may be promoted in parallel in various forms that have different kinds of forms of iconicity (Nöth, 2001). Such redundant cultural organization of the human *Umwelt* is the only reasonable adaptation to the uncertainties involved in open systems. Since open systems are not controllable, their functioning can only be regulated by way of entering constraints into as many locations of the system's transactions with the environment as possible.

The ideal of social control efforts is full control of the field within which the person is located. Yet the social institutions that attempt to accomplish that task necessarily fail in specifics. Their best bet to diminish the persons' counter-actions is to control the outer boundaries of the field where the persons are located, and suggest different directions for feeling, acting, and thinking. If the outer boundaries of the field are firmly controlled, the specific actions of the person within those boundaries can be left to one's own devices. With well controlled field boundaries, any option of conduct that the person devises is acceptable, except for one-- leaving the field.

Yet the boundaries of the human meaning-making field involve both the here-and-now settings and possibilities to transcend these through meaningful invention of new desired states, meanings, and goals. Human beings can conform to action control while escaping from the fields of acting by free intra-psychological ideation (Lawrence, Benedikt & Valsiner, 1992). Once it is possible for the person to escape from the field, the social-institutional guidance of any actions the person might undertake within the field becomes crucial.

Duality within meanings

Human meaning-making is a dialogical process (Josephs, Valsiner & Surgan, 1999; Marková, 1990; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). It entails the constant making of differences within one's life experiences between what was (past), what seems to be (present), and what is expected or desired (or feared) to be (the future). Of course the making of such differences requires the use of signs. Semiosis entails the constant making and re-making of otherness (Nöth, 1994; Simão, 2005). Oppositional relations between signs in this process are the necessary vehicle for making sense.

Sign and counter-sign complexes

When a human constructs meaning to relate with their world, the field of opposites is automatically implied at every moment. Meaning arises in the form of complexes of united opposites. A sign that is constructed immediately co-constructs its opposite—a countersign. This idea can be traced back to the philosophical approach of Alexius Meinong. He claimed,

> …as I am apprehending an A, I also apprehend a non-A in some sense. So we have to do with a difference regarding what is apprehended… a difference regarding what stands opposite

> [gegenübersteht] each intellectual experience as its object [Gegenstand]…. In the non-A, then, there is a further objective factor, the "non," as it were, supervening on the A (Meinong, 1983, pp. 14-15)

Meinong understood the basic asymmetry between the two components of representation. The "non-A" operates as negativum in relation to A. Negativum is always built on the basis of the positive concept (the inferiora). Thus, it is not possible to think of "non-red" without having a notion of "red" on the basis of which the negativum is built up.

Meinong's insights into the processes of meaning making can be extended in our contemporary efforts. The opposition A vs. non-A grows by the "positive comparison" (of similarities to A) and "negative judgment" (contrast with not-A). The starting point is thus the distinction A and non-A which is a whole inclusively separated (Valsiner, 1997a) and systemically integrated by the connection and. That connection can take different systemic forms.

Organization of the non-A field. The second type of indeterminacy is associated with non-A. In addition to being more-or-less context-dependent, and 'grounded' in the "internal" field of indeterminacy of the A-field, the 'meaning' (A) is knowable only because of its relation to the (implicit) field of its opposites (non-A). Meaning is given through the presence of "internal" and "external" fields of indeterminacy. In other terms, A is "foregrounded" and non-A becomes "backgrounded" (Linell, 1992). Meaning is thus a phenomenon of contextual highlighting (and shadowing) and foregrounding (and backgrounding). These processes establish ill-defined——fields of A and non-A. The very action of "foregrounding" A automatically "backgrounds" -- but does not eliminate—the non-A. The two mutually complementary—yet differentiated and opposing—fields A and non-A are not "equal partners" in the meaning-making process. It is precisely their unity in inequality that makes the meaning-making process possible. The marked part of the dual complex (A) is

> …structurally more complex, provides more specific information, occupies a subsequent position in a serial order (Nöth, 1994, p. 42)

Yet the openness to transformation of the well-differentiated A is guaranteed by the little differentiated non-A. Non-A in this elaboration is not a field of unused, "ready" meanings, but rather a yet-to-be-differentiated field of meanings-to-be. Hence, the two poles in this theoretically created opposition are not equal. One is describable in discrete terms (as a single word, with all of its semantic field, e.g., this word means this or that, and the meaning can be expressed by similar synonyms X, Y, Z), while the other is describable in terms of partial fit of the opposites, quasi-words, sub-fields of feeling e.g. "not really A, X, Y, Z, but something else…can't describe it", etc.). Our A & non-A dual unit is more strictly given on the side of the A-field, and purposefully fuzzy on the other. It is

further posited that the indeterminate part (non-A) of the dual system A & non-A is the locus within which major transformation of the meaning takes place.

The duality of sign complexes leaves a number of our basic hyper-generalized meanings (Valsiner, 2001b, 2005) that are potent for further development through their opposites. At the level of personal cultures, the move from LOVE<>non-LOVE into non-HATE<> HATE. The "non-HATE" field now includes the former LOVE in an undifferentiated state. Such transitions within meaning fields are well known in psychodynamic accounts.

Transitions in social reality. Human meanings need to be open to transformation to their opposites—given the presence of such opposites in reality. The reality of events within societies calls for such flexible transformations—PEACE<>non-PEACE may become WAR (<>non-WAR—see Simmel, 1904 on the transitions between conflict and non-conflict), or JUSTICE<>non-JUSTICE may become EXPLOITATION. The crucial meaning complex—TRUST <> non-TRUST—that exists for our understanding of societies is of similar kind. All these meaning complexes facilitate the meaning making in real world, where

> …for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable. Furthermore, since any concrete tribal society is made up of multiple personae, groups, and categories, each of which has its own developmental cycle, at a given moment many incumbencies of fixed positions coexist with many passages between positions (Turner, 1995, p. 97, emphases added)

It would be adequate to consider human societies as always being on the move—hence mostly in a quasi-differentiated state. Any society exists in its movement towards some (and away from other) objectives. Likewise, at any moment different persons are in different relations with the social whole. There is no—and cannot be— any equal participation in any society.

The notion of civil society extended. A society may be considered CIVIL only if we consider its non-manifest opposite ("non-CIVIL") as the inevitable part of the whole. That side serves as the potential for transformation of the meaning. The whole notion of civil society is an invention of the cultural histories of occidental countries in the past three centuries. As such, the focus has been usual to the sociocentric power positions—societies other than Western ones have been viewed as "non-civil" ("barbarian"—cf. Nöth, 2002, "amorally familist"—cf. Benigni & Valsiner, 1995). In contrast, the CIVIL versions of society have presented themselves as being based on persons' voluntary participation in social events (in contrast to non-voluntary, governments' coerced participation), focus on collective

action (in contrast with non-collective, i.e. individual and individualist, action), and sharing of public interests (in contrast to non-public, private and patented, interests). All these oppositions are of the exclusive kind (Valsiner, 1997a)—as they follow the notion of the exclusion of the opposites.

Following the duality-based semiotic framework outlined above, the use of inclusive separation of the opposites could be applicable to the notion of civil society. The three features of the above description—participation, collectivity, and sharing—will then become tensions between mutually included opposites:

> VOLUNTARY << in tension with >> non-VOLUNTARY participation
> COLLECTIVE << in tension with >> non-COLLECTIVE action
> SHARING << in tension with >> non-SHARING

With this extension, any society in its current state can be characterized by different forms of resolving these three tensions. How each of the opposites becomes valued in the social myth construction depends upon the importation of semiotic catalytic conditions (see Valsiner, 2000, pp. 74-76). These conditions constitute the "third" component for guidance of the dual sign into a new form.

Let us consider the decision by an adolescent about participation in the democratic political processes of a country (Valsiner, 1997b). Any participation by a person in any social group is inherently ambivalent, and the voluntary <> non-voluntary nature of such participation may depend upon the particular subjective circumstances of the person. A 17-year old Hungarian adolescent explains his non-participation in the newly introduced democratic system:

> Neither I nor my family nor anyone of my acquaintances took part in political life earlier. I didn't like politics. and still I don't, because as a child I couldn't talk about it. I don't support a political program of any kind. And I am so very uninterested in it that I haven't even thought about which party's program I could accept. Actually none of them. They can only promise. (van Hoorn & Komlosi, 1997, p. 243, emphasis added)

Here a general ego-centered hyper-generalized meaning ("I do not like X") is sufficient for solving the participation <> non-participation tension.

Myths as collective-cultural constrainers

The creation of a set of social reflections upon the societies themselves is a process in which real human beings create myth stories about the abstract entity—society—where they believe to live in, participate, die in (and for). Such myth stories are used as a support for their individual lives within these societies. Myths, fairy tales, and – in our modern societies, wide popular consumption movies and "trash literature"—are all semiotic complexes which are guiding the internalization and externalization of basic values in human

lives (Valsiner, 1997a, 2004b). The social suggestions encoded in such holistic semiotic complexes are expected to work through the person's active relating to the complex, and establishment of intra-psychological counterpart models within one's personal sense systems (mythemes-- Boesch, 1991, p. 121).

Myth-stories are usually simple stories about events, yet some of the events are of the kind that transcend the everyday life practices. For example, there is often a quick and unusual transformations of characters in the myth-- a person becomes an animal, or vice versa. This contrast might be important by itself-- fairy tales and myths create some domains of actively promoted imagination, while bypassing other possible domains of thought. Rapid and varied changes in the image content are exaggerated in fairy tales, whereas simultaneous combination of ideas belongs to the domain of ignored possibilities. A fairy tale or a myth-story avoids all thinking that is in any way complicated, and replaces complications by exaggerations of temporal transformations of unexplained nature.

Functions of myth stories.. How does a myth-story "work" when the listener creates its morale and makes it work for one's personal culture? Dialogical processes are operating both within a myth (as reflected in different tensions implied in a given myth-story, with its foreground/background distinctions), as well as between different myths (Gupta & Valsiner, 2003). In the latter case, a "main myth" may have its opposite "counter-myth" within the same society. Thus, if in the "main myth" a particular characteristic (e.g., women being subservient to men) might be consistently promoted, then its "counter-myth" may entail the promotion of the opposite idea (men subservient to women).

The purpose of construction of myths is

> ...to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if... the contradiction is real), a theoretically infinite number of states will be generated, each one slightly different from the others. Thus, myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted. Its *growth* is a continuous process, whereas its *structure* remains discontinuous. If this is the case, we should assume that it closely corresponds, in the realm of spoken word, to a crystal in the realm of physical matter... Myth is an intermediary entity between a statistical aggregate of molecules and the molecular structure itself. (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 229, added emphasis)

The myth is thus quasi-differentiated (but not fully integrated) text that—due to its "loose ends"—allows something for everybody, while promoting specific generalized values. The functionality of the story is in the repeated insertion of semiotic material that "gives man...the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe" (Lévi-

Strauss, 1978, p. 17). This is made possible through the “bundle”-kind nature of the message:

> The true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but *bundles of such relations*, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning. Relations pertaining to the same bundle may appear diachronically at remote intervals, but when we have succeeded in grouping them together we have recognized our myth according to a time referent of a new nature. (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, pp. 211-212)

The constructive act of human imagination is built on the "as-if" kind of thinking and feeling. Narratives evoke scenarios of different kind-- which in principle could happen with real or imaginary personages in real or unreal situations. Such construction charts out the field of possibilities for acting, thinking, and feeling—often on material far removed from the everyday context. Such removal allows for a "free play" of scenarios for conduct, as the everyday realities do not enter their immediate corrective force upon those. Popular novels of different—romantic, heroic, or any other-- kind carry the same canalizing function in the written domain (Johansen, 1998; Zittoun, 2006). Yet perhaps the most prominent domain in cultural canalization of human subjectivities is the audio-visual domain—of radio, film, and television.

Redundancy. The very same general meaning—a value—would be brought into the person’s life experiences simultaneously in different forms, and are carried by different members of the social network. Thus, the notion of civil society may be brought to the people in the given country through a high variety of simultaneously active communication channels. These messages can come from anybody—intentionally or just in the course of ordinary everyday interactions and from television and radio messages. The meanings can be present in the multiplicity of public activity contexts.

Staged public dramas: guidance of the feeling fields

It is in itself remarkable how important different kinds of public ceremonies are important for their organizers and their participants. Ceremonies are collectively created dramatic events. They may be organized locally-- or these may be parts of specific symbolic travels away from home location (pilgrimages and their contemporary versions--tourist trips—Gillespie, 2005).

Public dramatisms have been often created around events of punishment as that is defined in the given society. The legal penal system of a society, in its power functions, has the notion of public punishment very acutely in its repertoire. Criminals have been punished-- from their execution to whipping-- in public places all through the European history. In New England,

from the 17th Century onwards, public punishments were turned into carnival events:

> Advertised well in advance, they attracted large crowds: drums played, the participants marched in procession, and ministers gave long sermons replete with details and graphic language. The criminals about to be punished for "black-mouthed oaths," "filthy drunkennesses," "vilest debauchery," and so forth were asked to play their part. Confessions provided the penultimate excitement before the final act took place.
>
> Executions often became the most talked-about event of the year and drew immense crowds… For James Morgan's execution in 1686, crowds began to gather in Boston a week ahead of the event. Some came at least fifty miles. On the Sunday before the hanging, two distinguished ministers preached sermons on the crime; and on the Thursday of the execution, Increase Mather preached a sermon to a crowd of five thousand, the largest theretofore gathered in New England. Vendors sold written broadsides, which, like theater programs, summarized the details of Morgan's crimes. (Daniels, 1995, p., 101)

The theatrical nature of public punishments involved coordination of mutually related social roles. Similar functions can be found in other rituals--military parades, weddings, court cases, college graduation ceremonies.

Promoting unconditional trust

Why would persons easily accept the meaning suggestions by social authorities? A neighboring country may easily become that of “enemy” when a war begins, or “friend” after it ends. Persons can operate with prejudices that are merely suggested to them—but as these become internalized into the personal culture they can antedate changes in the society (Valsiner, 2004b, pp. 229-230).

Formal schooling is used to enhance uncritical trust in the authorities. The development of cognitive (mental) functions has two facets-- that of knowledge creation and that of mediating specific functions of social control. The main finding from comparisons of formally schooled and not-schooled persons in the realm of solving reasoning tasks is the mastery of automatized acceptance of the task to assume the deductive reasoning scheme at an instant. (Luria, 1976). A syllogism may be given to a person:

MAJOR PREMISS: All metals are heavy.
MINOR PREMISS: Aluminum is a metal

CONCLUSION: Aluminum is heavy

Formal schooling leads the syllogism solver to accept the major premiss at its face value—in good faith, trusting the authoritative source that makes the all-encompassing (all X are P) assertion. By following the rule—if **ALL X are P** and **A IS X**, it follows that **A is P**. Yet in reality the authority figure cannot have full knowledge about each and every case of X, and operates at the level of categorized generalization (if X is a homogeneous class and a sample of As in it are all P, all X are P).

This "formal schooling effect" is not an effect of schooling per se, but of the internalization of the social position of assuming the correctness of the suggested position. The person becomes internally ready to immediately recognize and uncritically accept the task as a given, and apply to it the a syllogism and uses the deductive line of reasoning to solve it necessarily accepts the assertion of the person who gives the task without questioning whether deductive logic is applicable to the given content material.

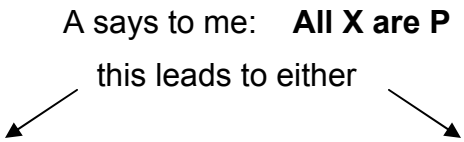
The nature of the contents can include not just statements of ontological kind, but also moral prescriptions. Consider, for instance, a syllogistic task which could have been set in the context of Salem, Massachusetts, at the time of the late 17th century witch-hunt:

> MAJOR PREMISS: All witches **should be burnt** at stake
> MINOR PREMISS: Tituba is a witch
> NO-DOUBT CONCLUSION: Tituba should be burnt at stake
> DOUBTING CONCLUSION: But I know Tituba, she is a nice person, not a witch…

The syllogism here is filled with a socially provided imperative action for concrete occasions—based on the socialized acceptance of the basic deductive logical form. The social effectiveness of this unification of the logical form with social meaning contents depends fully on the uncritical ("no doubt") acceptance of the given meaning in the prescribed logical position of major and minor premises. The person has to relate with the source of the social suggestion "this is a syllogism with appropriate fill-in" through the established dominance of trust within the TRUST <> non-TRUST duality. In the "doubting conclusion" above, however, the personal experience counteracts the power of socially established effect of formal schooling, leading to the build-up of the non-TRUST field of the relation to the source, based on personal experience. It is at the level of personal life experiences—and informal education—that persons can resist the suggested social messages and develop their unique ways of understanding that go beyond these (Poddiakov, 2001).

The central issue of basic trust and basic distrust. If the development of my argument here is adequate, the key goal in human socialization efforts is the suggestion of basic trust in the authority figures. From policemen to parents to presidents (see Hess & Torney, 1967), the ontogenetic life story of human beings is that of promotion of the hyper-generalized feeling field of "I must trust them → I can trust them". The establishment of such field-like affective sign (Valsiner, 2005) serves as a catalyst for any actual meaning-making efforts that

link the syllogistic form with socio-moral content. The full form of the syllogism described above is then in actuality:



There is *no doubt in my mind*	**There *is a great doubt in my mind***
that A can be trusted	**that A can be trusted**
AND	AND
I see that **Q is X**	I see that **Q is X**
Therefore Q is P	BUT I do not know if Q is P or not

The centrality of the catalytic meaning TRUST <>non-TRUST is then the crucial feature of any relationship between a person and others—persons or social institutions. Yet the duality involved here is in and by itself constantly in the process of inherent tension—for the resolution of which further semiotic mediators need to be summoned (Valsiner, 2001c). In the social sciences one finds the primary focus on the TRUST side of the duality structure—with the making of the communion with the object of trust (e.g. a deity, a parent, a friend, an ideology) an ideal marked by positive affective tone. Yet—when it comes to person <> society relations it might be an outgrowth from the non-TRUST field—a generalized version of basic distrust—that may fit the needs of understanding society.

It becomes obvious that the development of the basic TRUST<>(dis)TRUST complex in a society requires proliferation of generalized imperative functions of signs. The meaning complexes take the form of hypergeneralized affective fields (Valsiner, 2005) that operate to cover the whole personal-cultural field of the human being. Hence—human deep subjectivity in all of its uniqueness is a result of active social construction in the person<>society relations.

Indeterminacy in meaning generalization

The above example of syllogistic reasoning—with its undoubted and doubted decision trajectories—is an indicator of the movement of generalization and de-generalization (contextual specification) of sign construction and use. Generalization necessarily entails indeterminacy of abstraction. Thus,

> …language construes the human experience—the human capacity for experiencing—into a massive powerhouse of meaning. It does so by creating a multidimensional semantic space, highly elastic, in

> which each vector forms a line of tension… Movement within this space sets up complementarities of various kinds: alternative, sometimes contradictory, constructions of experience, indeterminacies, ambiguities and blends, so that grammar, a general theory of experience, is a bundle of uneasy compromises. No one dimension of experience is represented in an ideal form, because this would conflict destructively with all the others; instead, each dimension is fudged so that it can coexist with those that intersect with it. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 522)

Indeterminacy of generalization has a number of consequences. First, there is a resulting variability of reception, understanding, and application of cultural knowledge (Menon & Shweder, 1994). Secondly, there may come to exist conflicting meanings within the same corpus of knowledge. A good example are conflicting belief orientations that may be expressed through proverbs within the same language, such as "A spanking comes straight from heaven" vs. "A good houselord doesn't beat his animals" (implicitly - "let alone his children"; but also possibly - "this doesn't apply to children"). The belief orientations of persons are usually internally inconsistent (Valsiner, Branco & Melo Dantas, 1997). This inconsistency is their functional strength—rather than illogicality. Proverbs are fixed means of guidance of actions through semiotic means—in contrast to the open-ended nature of metaphors in the same function (Johansen, 2005).

A third result of the indeterminacy of generalization in the construction of meaning is that the implicit categorization of reality which is established is left functionally open—or vague and inter-personally unevenly distributed. This speaks to the assumption that culture is comprised of something like schemas or patterns which are handed down in "tidy packages" (successfully or unsuccessfully). In fact, the packaging is nothing like tidy, although the labels used might appear to be so. Instead, the communicative process that guarantees continuities in cultural meaning systems is based on high variety of ways of talking (and non-talking), redundancy of messages, and internally inconsistent. Talking and social acting are coordinated only at times, while at others talking displaces acting, or acting— may displace talking.

Habits of talking

The human species is unique—its facility to talk in all imaginable contexts flourishes over time and advancements in technology[2]. Talking is a derivative of acting. It can progress further and become a quasi-autonomous activity—talking for the sake of talking. It is in that case that talking becomes disconnected from acting—and can displace acting. When that happens, the

[2] Consider the varieties of adaptations to cellular phone uses as examples.

goals for talking become located in the act of talking itself—whatever it is that is talked about becomes immaterial (Valsiner, 2002).

Talking is done by persons towards some other persons—yet within a social order of society. It can function in two ways—when it leads to acting, and when it does not. Social discourse can be institutionally channeled so that some previously "taboo" topics are not only turned into ones which can be spoken of, but which *must be* talked about. In other terms—one opposite (of enforced silence) becomes the other (enforces "talking through"). Whoever determines the transition from "may not talk" to "must be talked about" has the fate control over the active inactivity of the doers—if it is made certain that the new openness (talk) does not threaten the existing social order.

This latter method of social regulation of discourse is widely utilized in the so-called "open societies"-- which, by showing off openness to the public talk about sensitive matters, actually close these matters from the domain of action (Valsiner, 2000, pp., 124-126). By guiding persons to talk about an issue, the human practice of discourse – the "field of talk"—becomes segregated from the "field of action." Talk becomes action in itself—and thus limits its own proliferation.

Semiotic demand settings (SDS). Human life proceeds through negotiation between the perception and action that unite the actor and context, and the suggestions for feeling, thinking and acting that are proliferated through communication. Semiotic Demand Settings (SDS) are human-made structures of everyday life settings where the social boundaries of talk are set (Valsiner, 2000, p. 125; 2002).

Any domain of human personal experience can become culturally guided by some socio-institutional focusing of the person's attention to it in three ways. First, there is the realm of NO-TALK—the sub-field of personal experiences that are excluded. The rest of the field is the MAYBE-TALK. Experiences within that field can be talked about—but ordinarily are not, as long as there is no special goal that makes that talking necessary. Most of human experiences belong to MAYBE-TALK. The third domain of talking—the HYPER-TALK—is the socially (and personally) highlighted part of MAYBE-TALK that is turned from a state of talkability to that of obsessive talking

How is the HYPER-TALK domain created? It starts from the social marking of the highlighted zone. The suggested focus (see Figure 1, below) can operate in two ways. First, it guides the person to reflect upon the focused experience—the zone of "promoted talking". Secondly, it provides the blueprint for talking in socially legitimized ways (Discourse ways marked by numbers 1 and 2, leading to Opinion A and Opinion non-A, respectively). The acceptability (or non-acceptability) of opposition is thus enabled.

Figure 1 describes a case relation between the two opposing opinions within the field of promoted talking. By engaging persons within that sub-field—and encouraging opposing viewpoints—the SDS guarantees that through hyper-talk in this domain the attention is not taken to "side stories" (the maybe-talk zone) and is prevented from touching upon the "taboo zone". It is obvious

that here the real differences between “open” and “closed” societies disappear—both kinds of societies disallow talking about “taboo zones”, but the “open” ones guide people to hyper-talk in some area of meaning construction (while the “closed” ones have no promoted talking zones).

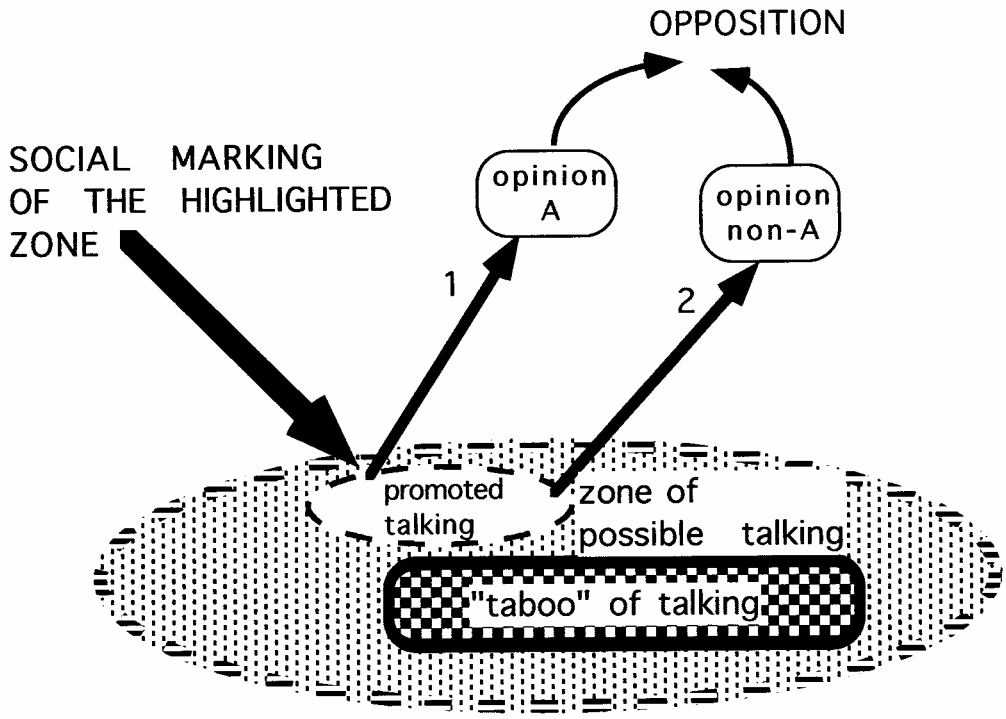


Figure 1. Semiotic Demand Setting (from Valsiner, 2000, p.125)

Each of the three discursive domains—NO-TALK, MAYBE-TALK, and HYPER-TALK—are in parallel either connected or disconnected with the action domain. The NO-TALK domain is most likely to remain connected with action domain even if the MAYBE-TALK and HYPER-TALK are disconnected. An example of that case may be a society where individuals “step in” to “correct”—by action—anybody’s violation of the NO-TALK zone boundaries. The state of disconnection from action makes these topics open for talk—as the reality of ordinary living is not threatened by it.

The un-civility of human societies: Participations in genocides.

Genocides have happened in the world all over its history—and certainly these are not the most civil of human inventions. Once discovered (and labeled

as such), genocides become objects of talk for a variety of people-in-institutions. As a recent analysis (Galis & Haviv, in press) indicates, the different positioning of these institutions creates different ways in which people in the civil society participate in the discourse about a civil war somewhere else (see Figure 2).

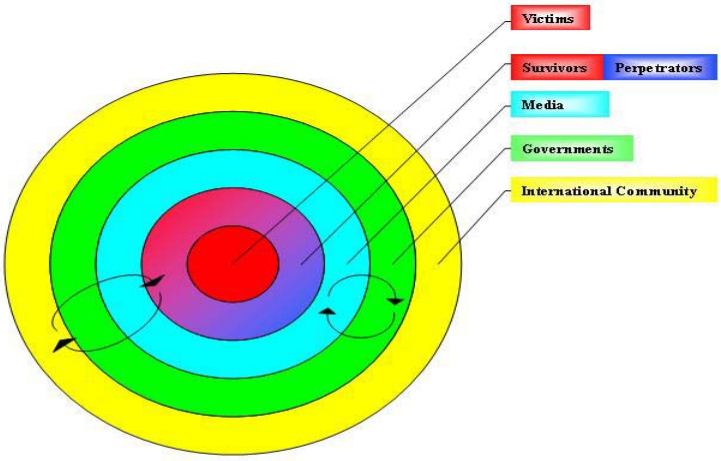


Figure 2: Competing Interests in the Discourse of Genocide

Figure 2 shows the distancing of the discourses about genocides into different layers of externally increasing distance from the actual event. Galis and Haviv (in press) developed the model on the basis of a half-year longitudinal investigation into the reporting of the Darfur crisis in Sudan in the second half of 2004. What was remarkable in the case of the unfolding genocide was intense talk at distance – both geographical and political-- about it, which was paralleled by no actions. The general model of discourses about genocides that emerged (Figure 2) combines the abstracted features of distance, social institutional objectives, and boundaries between different institutions. Thus, the field of real action (involving genocide victims and genocide producers) may be left untouched by the hyperactivity of talking about genocides. At the same time, governments talk with one another (and with the media), international community organizations (NGOs) may talk with the producers of genocides to find out about the realities of help to the victims, and so on. In the Darfur case, for example, the United Nations, the African Union, the U.S. , U.K , Nigerian, Sudanese, and other governments—were all involved in active hyper-talk about whether the events in Darfur fit their legal definitions for genocide, how grave the situation in the field is (reporting multiple large numbers of displaced and killed people), and how important it is to stop it is. Yet in the middle of such hyper-talk no action was undertaken. The actual life

situation in the loci of genocide proceeded by its own local negotiations, while the societies far removed from the field were involved in the activity of talking about the horrors and the need to stop the ongoing conflict.

The present application of a cultural psychological perspective onto the issue of civil society ends at a seemingly paradoxical note—in order to find out about the civility of any society it is necessary to look at the moments of its traversing through the opposite (non-civil) states. Thus, in order to understand how democracy (Moodie, et al, 1995) or human rights (Shi-Xu, 2006 in press) work and are socially represented one needs to examine the process of overcoming (and blocking) non-democracy and violations of rights. What we take for granted as mutually irreconcilable opposites in accordance with classic logic may be better considered as unified opposites (e.g., Sinha & Tripathi, 2001, on the unity of individualism and collectivism).

Conclusion: society in tension between civility and non-civility

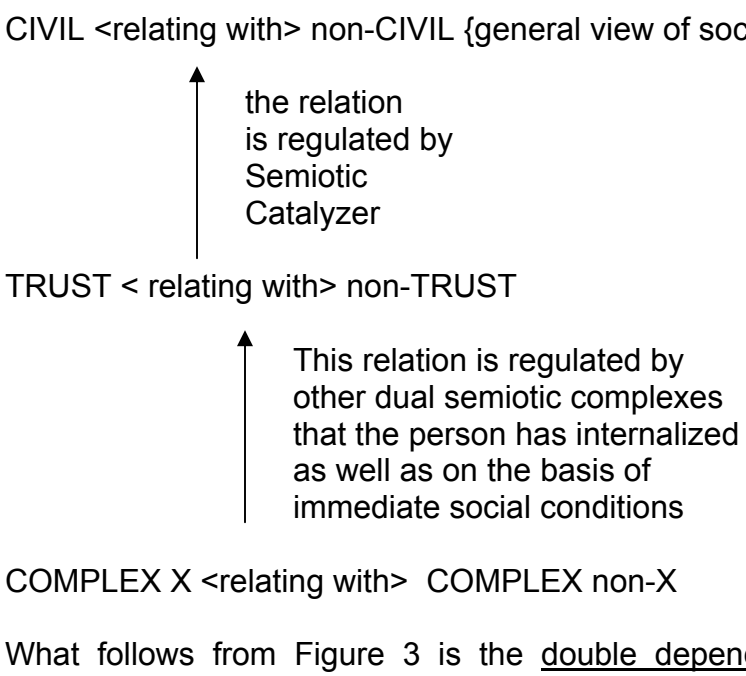
Through the lens of cultural psychology we can observe the potential "blind area" in occidental discourse about civil society. Civil society is marked with positive value in that discourse—in contrast to its opposite counter-field (non-civil society). Yet in the history of humankind various kinds of acts of destruction—be those uses of nuclear bombs, or starting of wars—have happened un the past history of the societies in Europe and North America where self-congratulatory claim of being civil (democratic, depending on voluntary participation, and sharing) has been fixed in their self reflections. The contrast usually made is with their so-assumed "non-civil" others in Africa, Asia, or elsewhere. At the same time the history of collective organization of these "other" societies—through families and kinship networks—becomes overlooked. Participation in one's kinship network organization is somehow seen as part of "non-civil" societies—while participation in voluntary organizations belongs to the "civil" side.

The difference may be in something else—the people involved in the civil society discourse may be sufficiently removed from crisis periods in their own histories and from interest in the development of other societies. The realities of the world "out there, elsewhere" may be knowable only the reflection on it through creating new myth stories of "help" and "concern". Distancing leads to exclusive separation -- "we" (the "good, civil society") are aghast about "their" (the "backward" and "uncivil" society's) engagement in local wars, and are ready to undertake military interventions to "help" them to overcome their "backwardness."

The notion of civil society is thus best treated as a meaning complex of hyper-generalized kind that guides the creation of myths about different societies. In actuality of meaning construction, it is the duality of the sign that provides for the use of the sign complexes. To mark the benevolence of society in respect to the persons entails inherent opposite of trust—a kind of basic distrust—may serve as a flexible organizer of the meaning field. In sum,

we may speak of a double tension system when we (as persons) consider society as an abstract entity. We posit a dynamic relation of two levels (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Semiotic regulation of our reflection upon society



What follows from Figure 3 is the double dependence of the target meaning (in our case—that of "civil society" on the hierarchical meaning-making process. First, there is no entity without its opposite—hence, in order to understand what "civil society" means it is not sufficient to reiterate the declared characteristics of the positively marked whole ("participation", "collective" action, "sharing") but analyze the states of the given society in its historical periods when some forms of the opposites emerge from the non-manifest counterparts of these characteristics. Thus, the move to limit participation in the "open/civil society" by some groups of persons on the basis of quickly proliferating prejudices, or the consensual decisions to bomb a neighboring or some far-off country, or the non-sharing of property—are the domains where the dynamics of "civil society" can be investigated. Secondly, the dynamics of the CIVIL <> non-CIVIL society complex depends on the dual relation with some semiotic catalyzer. Here we play out the TRUST<>non-TRUST complex in such function. Any of these catalyzing complexes may in their own turn be regulated by other meanings.

Without doubt, the present view is aimed at widening the perspectives of the "talkability zone" of the civil society discourse towards the "taboo zone" (se Figure 1 above). From the perspective of our value-maintaining everyday talking about civil society, a suggestion to look at how that very same society

deals with horrifying events like the dropping of bombs or dealing with immigrants is clearly politically incorrect. Yet it is in the movement between the opposites within the duality—regulated by "the third" (another opposition)—that basic knowledge about society becomes possible.

In this paper I have analyzed the collective-cultural processes that set the stage for individual citizens of a society to develop trust in the benevolence of its social institutions. I demonstrated that such basic trust is meaning complex that involves its opposite (non-trust). What follows from my analysis is that positively flavored unipolar terms— "civil society", "human rights", "justice" etc—are necessary organizational illusions that functions as a promoter of social cohesiveness of social groups. Their use guides the internalization of the acceptance of the meta-level "just world" feeling by individual persons. Such illusions are needed by human living—perhaps for the sake of reducing the complexity of multi-faceted ways of being into a personally acceptable understanding of oneself—and of the society. For the social sciences, however, it is the dynamic relation of these desired states of meaning with their opposite counterparts that give us a window of opportunity to make sense of the tumultuous human condition.

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