

Parker, I. (1989) *The Crisis in Modern Social Psychology – and how to end it*.
London: Routledge

Chapter two

The political crisis

[pp. 29-47]

The crisis in social psychology reflects economic and political crises in the culture in which it arose. Power accompanied the development of the discipline, and resistance to those power relations was defeated so that the future of social psychology was assured. These power relations must be uncovered and understood before they can be undone. To do this entails writing an unashamedly partisan ‘history’, and contesting the positions which laboratory-experimental social psychologists thought they had won. As I reinterpret those past events we will move beyond traditional conceptions of power, and will see that we also need to move beyond a mere history of an academic subject to develop a history of the *human* ‘subject’ - the peculiar malleable and asocial being who appears time and time again in the research literature. I will return to this subject towards the end of the chapter.

We are told that social psychology took off as a science with the first experiment on ‘social facilitation’ (Triplett 1898) before the beginning of the century, and that previous theories of social behaviour in philosophy and sociology merely set the stage for this historic advance: had the laboratory arrived earlier, many of the mistakes and blind alleys in the prehistory of social psychology could have been avoided. Since the discovery of the laboratory the discipline has been portrayed as following the natural trajectory which the first results produced (Allport 1968). Traditional histories of social psychology are written within the parameters of the two main narratives which describe the supposed development of paradigms in science. Social psychology, we are told, moves towards the truth (there is more accurate perception) and demystifies social life as it gets better and better (there is progress). [30] It would be easy for radical social psychologists to tack on the new-paradigm ‘revolution’ at the end of the story, and argue that now the potential benefits to humanity can be realized, but outside the laboratory. We should resist this temptation. If we look a little more closely at the foundation of social psychology as an institution, we see a discipline built out of *repression*, a repression which left its marks in latent crises and in structural defences against the possibility of those crises becoming manifest.

History and power

The steps to a history which does not develop a mythology which merely praises successes (and which effectively ratifies the present view of things) would have to include some account of how the official myths came about, how the official ‘histories’ came to be written and with what effects. Such an account should focus on the operation of power and take as its guiding principle the view that science attains a superior status as a result of political and institutional pressures. At this stage, and for these purposes, I will stick with a fairly conventional view of power. I will move on to a more adequate understanding of how power operates as the story unfolds.

Application

The psychological version of social psychology deliberately demarcated itself against the sociological versions, and was nurtured from the start by a parent discipline which was riven with conflict. In the 1920s in America psychologists were faced with a crisis of perspectives: what kind of discipline should psychology be, and where should it be going? Alongside these debates an influential 'history' was written which finally settled the disputes and interpreted psychology as an experimental science. This account, manifesto, and programme was E. G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929). This is not to say that Boring's victory silenced the alternative voices. Instead, it recast the vanquished 'applied' psychology into a real-world helpmate of 'experimental' psychology.

On the losing side of the struggle were those psychologists, and social psychologists, who wanted to take advantage of the revolution in applied research. *A Journal of Applied Psychology* had started [31] appearing in 1917, and figures recovered by Terman from the misleading 'official' statistics presented by the American Psychological Association (APA) showed that by 1921 just over half of the membership was engaged in applied work. Applied psychology, it was said, was 'the pay vein that supports the mine', and some supporters optimistically renamed it 'psycho-technology'. The reduced dependence of psychology on the laboratories made life difficult for dyed-in-the-wool experimentalists: by 1927, for example, the laboratory budget at Harvard was only \$148, of which Boring supplied \$31 from his own pocket (O'Donnell 1979).

Experimentation

The minority experimentalists, however, were in control of the APA apparatus. Supporters of Boring's position kept the secretariat - the communications centre of the organization - in their grip by manoeuvring and preferment from 1917 to 1928. In addition, there was another group of experimental psychologists outside the APA, led by Titchener, which also influenced the balance of forces inside. At one point Boring's lobbying opened up the opportunity for Titchener to be brought in as President of the APA, a bid which only failed when it became clear that he would only assume office if the vote was unanimous. The difficult atmosphere at conventions and at international meetings organized by the APA personalized these disputes.

The open struggles for power which informed the administrative arrangements in the APA both affected and reflected personal power relations between Boring and his mentor, Titchener. Boring was later to refer to the influence of his 'master' and the way he accepted the insults and arbitrary control Titchener tried to exert over him (Boring 1968). Boring viewed the birth of his own son on Titchener's birthday as a 'tribute', and when Titchener died he felt 'released'. Later attempts by Boring to formulate Titchener's theoretical position were immediately followed by an intense period of psychoanalysis during which the transference recast the analyst as a 'Titchener-substitute'. These power relations with Titchener were then relayed down to others as Boring tried to name an heir in whose future he could make 'the largest investment of identification' (Boring 1968: 50).

In this account I am linking the 'investments' and 'identifications' [32] which drove the individual participants with the academic debates in which they participated precisely because the personal and political aspects of the struggles were so closely welded together at the time. To try to untangle them would simply be to fictionalize a 'neutral' history. Other historians have

pointed to the way Boring himself not only organized historical material to suit Titchener, positivism, and the experimentalists, but also hung the material around ‘personalities’ to fit up the opposition (Danziger 1979). It was during this period that Boring completed *A History of Experimental Psychology* which was a strategic intervention in the ‘experimental’ vs. ‘applied’ debate. The book swung things for the experimentalists because it constructed a history which culminated in the ideal of experimentation (O’Donnell 1979).

Psychology and sociology

While these internal debates were raging, psychology was also marking itself off against the discipline of sociology, and this tightening of the disciplinary boundaries was to have a profound effect on the character of social psychology. The creation of boundaries also specified what it would be legitimate to call ‘social psychology’, and it is necessary now to extend traditional conceptions of power to encompass the force of definitions and interpretations of activity in an accepted ‘paradigm’. The traditional view of power which focuses on the activities of a ‘power-holder’ and on the intentional exercise of power only *partially* accounts for what has been going on so far in the events I have described. This traditional view rests on *psychological* assumptions and emphasizes the control an individual could have over their actions. We now have to move on to a view of power which takes notice of the function and experience of the ‘power-subject’ (who suffers power) and recognizes unintentional facets of the phenomenon. Power reproduces certain relations between those dubbed ‘power-holders’ and ‘power-subjects’, and it suppresses attempts to refuse dominant definitions of the situations in which it operates.

This extended view of power takes on board sociological conceptions of the way the organization of the world also organizes persons. For example, Boring’s fealty to Titchener cannot simply be traced to Titchener’s exercise of power as ‘power-holder’. Boring’s recollections of his experience of that power as [33] ‘power-subject’ involves feelings of being monitored and a compulsion to confess. This should be borne in mind as we trace the effects of the overall relationship between academic disciplines on local debates and their participants. It would be too loose to say simply that psychology (and social psychology) excluded sociology as the study of society. We have to specify what that ‘sociology’ was; in what way it reflects the society it purported to investigate; what methods it employed; and what the institutional relationship was between studies of the ‘social’ and those of the ‘individual’.

Sociology and society

Two academic and cultural themes informed studies of social behaviour before, and then outside, social psychology; social Darwinism which filtered into psychology, and pragmatism which has only latterly percolated through the new paradigm breaches in the discipline. As far as social Darwinism was concerned, Herbert Spencer and his followers were able to translate the spiritual precepts of Protestantism into ‘natural facts’, and prominent sociologists took up the cause of natural selection in opposing aid to the poor, state-funded schools, and public health laws. The combination of divine and natural selection also found disciples in industry; business was seen as a social complement to the laws of nature. Once natural selection in the human world could be identified it could be assisted, by psychologists.

At the same time, the dominant philosophy of educated America is at the time, or at least of the small entrepreneurs, was pragmatism. For the three key pragmatists, Dewey, James, and

Mead, knowledge was an instrument for action. Abstract theoretical work was secondary to what really worked in the 'real world'. A current of improvisation in business, and a general dislike of the 'written', fed into both politics in the form of the New Deal and psychology in the form of 'applied' work. This meant the rejection of sociology, and the particular exclusion of the 'philosophical' and 'sociological' pragmatists such as Dewey and Mead. This was despite their contribution at the turn of the century to psychology journals (on topics ranging from discussions by Dewey on the nature of the 'reflex arc' to Mead's references to an 'empirical community mind'), and it meant that psychology also excluded itself in a peculiar way from its own culture. [34]

'Faith in facts'

While pragmatism fed the illusion that anything was possible, an illusion that culminated in microsociology in work on the 'social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1971), positivism inside psychology was more concerned with knowing what already *was*. Positivism was adopted as the method of the new science, the method supposedly employed by Wundt at the birth of psychology in Leipzig in 1879 and faithfully transmitted by Titchener to America. Social psychology also bought this story and, in its official histories, has roped in Comte from sociology to give a broader 'social' gloss to the method. This conveniently ignores the way that Comte's 'positivism', which was to influence such figures as Durkheim in French sociology, had a philosophical and religious character which is more concerned with the nature of society and ways of reforming it than with the accumulation of separate observations in laboratories. More important still, in this catalogue of distortion, were the interpretations of Wundt's own 'positivist' research.

Wundt was not merely a laboratory-experimental psychologist. His work also influenced sociological work, both by way of his writings and through direct contact with figures such as Durkheim and Mead (Farr 1980). The second half of his career was devoted to a social *Völkerpsychologie* that dealt with the higher cognitive functions which he thought to exist in the group mind (the *Völkseele*). Wundt's 'folk psychology' was not original in Germany, but it required a sociological (Comtean) methodology which was carefully passed over by Americans anxious to translate his earlier experimental work on 'physiological' psychology into a manifesto for individual behaviour (Danziger 1979). Psychology, and then social psychology, was thus able to remain faithful to the more rigorously individualistic cause-effect positivism which it thought reigned in the natural sciences. When Titchener wrote Wundt's obituary in 1921, the later social psychology was depicted as though it were always a 'troublesome subject' for Wundt: it 'furnished a grateful occupation for his old age' (Titchener 1921: 175). The story Titchener told was that Wundt was always really an experimental psychologist but that he fell into social psychology as he stumbled into senility. [35]

Institutional divisions

In social psychology itself hostility to sociology was strengthened by the competition for attention and resources between psychological social psychology and sociological social psychology (which I refer to in this book as 'microsociology'). In 1908 an introductory book - E. A. Ross's *Social Psychology* - addressed a sociological audience, and in the same year William McDougall's *An Introduction to Social Psychology* was produced for psychologists. Despite the

massive overlap in the content of the two books, Ross's text was ignored. By the time one of McDougall's students produced his own 'introduction', Ross had been written out of the discipline. Reviews of this book in 1936 were then a pretext for complaints by sociologists that psychologists had unfairly taken 'administrative control' in many universities, and that psychologists had an inadequate knowledge of social psychology (Bernard 1936).

The institutional estrangement of psychological social psychologists from their erstwhile colleagues in sociology was also reflected in the membership of academic organizations for the two groups, the APA and the ASA (American Sociological Association). By 1937 this contact was minimal. A survey then found that 22 per cent of the members and associates of the APA and 24.6 per cent of the ASA declared a specific interest in social psychology. In all, this amounted to 729 people doing research in the area. Of this 729, however, only nineteen people held dual membership of the APA and ASA (Britt 1937). Such administrative exclusion both reflects and reproduces the view that social psychologists trapped on the psychological side of the institutional boundary have of other disciplines.

The individual and the crowd

Just as caricatures of sociology led psychology to react by adopting an extreme anti-social research programme, so a caricature of what social action was led psychology to develop an idealized model of the 'autonomous' individual. The dreadful images of what social action could look like when stretched to its worst degree in collective action were present at the turn of the century in crowds.

Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* was acknowledged by Allport (1968), in the official history of the [36] discipline, as one of the most influential books in social psychology. The political stance of the book was fuelled by Le Bon's own experience of the 'mobs' in the 1872 Paris Commune and reinforced by the various European fascists who used it as a practical handbook. More important, though, were the descriptions of individuals under the sway of a group mind, and the way those descriptions were linked with popular 'scientific' evolutionary theories. Le Bon drew on contemporary physiological 'discoveries' to explain how the crowd member is reduced, like a hypnotized subject, to the activities of the spinal cord. This state is simultaneously an evolutionary regression to the activities of 'beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution ... women, savages, and children, for instance' (Le Bon 1896: 36). Out of this theory of the group mind' flowed McDougall's description of its nature as a plurality of instincts.

Against this, the experimental social psychologist, F. Allport, argued that the 'group fallacy' was the 'greatest incubus' of social psychology, and that behaviour could be better accounted for when systematically reduced to an individual level: 'if we take care of the individuals, the groups will take care of themselves' (Allport 1919: 229). McDougall's position was specifically rejected by others. This looks like a simple theoretical disagreement: it was not. The concern that mainstream social psychologists wanted to show for individuals extended far beyond doing good positivist science: they wanted to *defend* the individual against the very group processes that they supposed did not exist. We have a striking illustration of the way a discourse - in this case, that of 'the crowd'- can effectively be reproduced by its opponents as well as by willing adherents.

Allport (1927) insisted that the social order brought about a mere 'modification' of an 'original nature'. Nevertheless, at the same time as he was inveighing against the crowd

theorists, and widening his criticisms to include those in other disciplines ranging from anthropology to politics, he was busily conducting social facilitation experiments. His doctoral dissertation, for example, was entitled *The Social Influence: An Experimental Study of the Effect of the Group upon Individual and Mental Processes*. The prospect of crowd phenomena seizing individual minds haunted American social psychologists. This theme *organized* social psychology in its infancy. Contemporary reviews of the discipline [37] commented, quite mistakenly, on the disarray in the discipline, and did so because they could not see that the horror of the crowd was everywhere - like the largest letters on a map which are often unnoticed because they fill the most space. One *Outline of Social Psychology* published in 1929 hardly mentions 'the crowd' but the key issues are listed as 'the study of social forces', 'the study of ethnic phenomena', 'the study of collectivist mentality', 'the study of behaviour in groups', and 'the study of mob or crowd phenomena' (Smoke 1935).

Opposition to the crowd and attempts to safeguard individual autonomy were held together by the method of laboratory experimentation. Such a method produced its own mechanistic caricature of the rational individual, and should be understood in the context of other discourses powerful at the time. These other discourses were also expressive accounts of rapid changes in the *practical* order. Changes in population, and in the organization of production (practical matters), produced themes of control (expressive developments with practical effects). These changes were catalyzed and compressed by the First World War, an event with practical and expressive repercussions for the organization of the disciplines *and* the study of individual 'subjects'. It is to these changes that I will now turn.

Population

The turn of the century in America saw both an increase in the native (settler) population and an influx of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. This increase was seen as a problem for social reformers and social scientists, and support for Spencer's social Darwinism and for eugenics in both groups, along with simple xenophobia, gave psychologists (many of whom were members of eugenics societies) a peculiarly reactionary voice in local government. Some liberal psychologists, such as Terman, who wanted to generate an 'applied' psychology, were engaged in a 'positive eugenics' through monitoring and developing the strengths of the naturally gifted. Other adherents of eugenics, such as Spearman, were even socialists, but the overall balance was shifting rapidly and inexorably to themes of race improvement. Those pursuing the struggle against 'feeble-mindedness' carried out the more unpleasant 'negative eugenics' plan for the eradication [38] of the unfit: between 1907 and 1928, over twenty American states had sterilized 8,500 people with the direct connivance of psychologists (Kamin 1974). Slavs and Southern Europeans were particularly victimized, and psychologists were party to the construction of the 1924 Immigration Act (which was later to bar the entry of many European Jewish refugees). In social psychology, McDougall had lamented that practical difficulties militated against the 'elimination' of the 'unfit', but was still to argue, in his *An Introduction to Social Psychology*, that eugenics was part of progressive evolution which would ensure that the fit were selected and the less fit would suffer 'extermination' (McDougall 1908: 254). Population, then, was viewed negatively. Just as contact with masses in crowds could ruin the individual, so an increase in the masses could ruin the nation. The population 'problem' was viewed by social psychologists through the optic of production.

Production

The growing population was absorbed fairly rapidly into an expanding industry. At the turn of the century there was a massive concentration of production: in 1897 the total capitalization of corporations valued at a million dollars or more was \$170 million, a figure which rose by 1900 to \$5 billion and four years later to \$20 billion (Karier 1977). As in all other industrializing nations, however, management experienced the new non-proletarian population as a problem: the workers from rural European (and American) backgrounds were not yet acquainted with the discipline necessary to factory work. Their experience of this discipline and of the power of the employers was developed through resistance, and the crushing of that resistance, during the years in which social psychology was born. In the early years of the century the industrial unions grew in strength and violent mass strikes radicalized them, leading to anarcho-syndicalist splits and clashes with conservative labour leaders in the craft unions. It is important to acknowledge the extent of the resistance to the spread of the new work discipline so that the effects of the defeats under the mechanisms of disciplinary power can be fully appreciated.

Eventually, with little protest from the traditional American Federation of Labor, the state authorities and militias composed of ex-servicemen were brought in to break strikes and destroy the [39] most radical unions. The fate of one of the last major industrial conflicts is especially significant, for the population 'problem' once again reared its head. In 1919 the workers in the Pennsylvania steel valleys struck in protest at low levels of pay (pay which was for a twelve-hour-day seven-day-week). Slav and Italian immigrant workers held out for three months against the House of Morgan - at that time the most powerful monopoly in the world. They were finally defeated by the betrayals of the craft unions and a growing xenophobic hysteria which included the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the mid-western industrial states. As the obstacles to efficiency in production were systematically eradicated, a system of control was constructed to 'solve' the population problem. It was the success of this system of control which increased production by half between 1918 and 1928 while the factory population actually declined (Davis 1980).

Control

Discourses on the detection of 'feeble-mindedness' and the pernicious effects of crowds on people's minds intersected with social psychology's positivist understanding of the individual at the point of *method*. What was needed was a systematic study of behaviour organized by the ideal of 'prediction and control'. For all the heat of the debates between the applied psychologists and the experimentalists, it is clear now that 'applied' psychology did not so much lose as absorb experimental method and use it in the field, or rather the factory. Developments in industry also spilled back into the laboratory to reinforce social psychologists' adherence to the experiment. The most important of these developments was that of the discourse and practice of Taylorism.

Taylor's *Scientific Management*, first published in 1911, sparked off a craze for efficiency and the systematization of labour control among professional middle-rank engineers. Taylorism bonded together a rapidly expanding sector of industry (with the number of engineers rising from 7,000 to 136,000 between 1880 and 1920), and from this milieu developed a layer of social psychologists keen to take up the call for the building up of a 'science' consisting of 'rules, laws, and formulae' which would 'replace the judgement of the individual workman' (Taylor 1911: 37). Taylor asserted that 'in the past the man has been first; in the future the

system must be [40] first' (Taylor 1911: 7), and the organization and calculation of the systems' components was carried out by social psychologists pursuing the aim of 'human engineering'. One manifesto for human engineering extended the scope of this examination beyond work to such things as knowledge of work, the attitude of the employee, loyalty, courtesy, sobriety, housing, and training. Contained in this programme is a conception of normal 'work' against which *abnormal* behaviour could be defined. The system requires unconditional obedience. By 1918 Taylorism was having a significant influence outside America, and was even, for example, taken up by professional middle managers in the new Soviet state - a fact which augured badly for those fearing the crystallization of a bureaucracy anxious to demand obedience and the restoration of traditional power relations after the destruction of a capitalist economy. Lenin's characterization of scientific management is quite accurate:

the Taylor system, the last word of progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work - the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control. (Cited in Smith 1983:13)

Scientific management demanded that the gaze of company management and of social psychologists should penetrate each and every one of the worker's actions. Here was a model framework for conceptually and practically breaking down the mass, whether in the form of crowds or labour unrest, into manipulable individual components. In this way the laboratory became a simulacrum of the workshop and aided the task of positivistically calculating human material. Social psychologists seized on the opportunity to study the effects of different types of factory organization in which the tasks and performance of individual subjects could, according to Allport (1919), be 'instructively varied'. Allport's search for a means of 'acquiring a knowledge of social phenomena sufficiently exact for purposes of prediction and control' (Allport 1927: 383) paralleled, and interacted with, the selection and training of suitable workers from the increasing reserve army of labour.

This is why the 'social facilitation' research took the turn it did [41] when the Triplett (1898) study of children turning fishing reels was written into the literature as the first social psychology experiment. Social psychologists focused on competition. In line with the requirements of 'applied' research, the desire to win was related to the work setting: the aim now - in 1924- was to examine the influence of rivalry on subjects' performance in simple tasks resembling factory operations. Six years later the next step was to continue the study of 'group effects' but to break them down into yet smaller components; examining, in turn, the effect of 'spectators', 'rivals', 'co-workers', and competing 'overt vocal attitudes' (Dashiell 1930).

This was how the historically constructed problem of population, epitomized for social psychologists in the figure of the crowd, found its solution in production and its 'scientific management'. The scene was now set for the compression of social psychology into a machine for social regulation, a compression accomplished in conditions of internal and international conflict.

War

The First World War fuelled the xenophobia and militarism which divided resistance to

Taylorism in industry. The government of President Wilson broke its pledge to keep out of the war, and quickly channelled the attacks on external, European, enemies on to internal, union, enemies. The Russian revolution developed, in part, out of the struggle against that same war. This revolution inspired the American labour leaders to continue the strikes against the Taylor system (which had already led to a commission of inquiry in 1911), but then demoralized and disarmed the struggle when Lenin argued vigorously for the adoption of scientific management. The war also reinforced the American images of European crowds and the hostility to any theoretical framework which might endorse crowd or collective mentality. For the American social psychologist the organic metaphor applied to society (employed by European sociologists such as Durkheim) was an unpleasant and offensive one, as was Wundt's notion of the *Völkseele*. References to the social 'body' were made as warnings, and used by psychologists to draw lessons from the experience of war: the dangers arose when the individual was subordinated 'like a cell in a larger organic unity. Here suggestion may easily become contagion' (Hall 1919: 44). [42] Wundt, of course, was on the enemy side in the war, though the full extent of his militarism, which he shared with many German psychologists active in both World Wars, was carefully glossed over; Boring ignored it, and Titchener, in his obituary of Wundt, only alluded to it. Other social psychologists were more inclined to exploit the situation. As McDougall (no liberal himself) remarked, one good result of the Great War is that we have broken away from the thralldom to theories of German professors to which the scientific world submitted before the war' (cited in Billig 1982: 82). Out of the war, then, sprung a discipline able to profit from the broken labour resistance and manically optimistic about the scientific research which could be carried out on the 'subjects' moulded by the social and political changes. G. Stanley Hall proclaimed,

As we have put more psychology into this war than any other nation, and as we have more laboratories and more men than all others we should henceforth lead the world in Psychology ... Hence the future of the world depends in a peculiar sense upon American psychologists. (Hall 1919: 49)

Social psychology as a discipline

A discipline which was devoted to the study of social behaviour but which was organized, amongst other things, to prevent the 'contagion' of social behaviour spreading, entailed some conception of what would count as 'normal' and 'abnormal'. The rhetoric of the laboratory-experimental social psychology which, according to Allport (1968), saw a great 'flourish' after the First World War, policed the boundary between normality and abnormality in two ways. The first concerned the nature of the individual 'subject' who was the object of research and model of theories in the discipline. The second act of policing concerned the nature of the academic subject and the defences erected against other accounts of social life. The two fit together, of course, and both operate to deny difference, yet at different points in the history of social psychology each has had a particular weight and function.

Normalization

Social psychologists saw a close connection between the study of social behaviour and the identification of deviance. In both areas it [43] was assumed that the deviant processes were not socially organized (through such phenomena as labelling described later in microsociology) but

must be found *inside* the individual. The guiding theme which flowed into social psychology as it was first formed was that pathologies of individual and social action should be the prime focus of any science of behaviour. In 1921, social psychology found official recognition and house-room when it was incorporated into the title of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. The editors of the journal noted that social psychology probably could not have reached its current status if it had not been for the developments in the ‘sister science of abnormal psychology. If this was true, then it was reasonable to suggest that social psychology could benefit ‘in a peculiar way’ by discoveries in psychopathology (*JASP* 1921: 2).

This common front against abnormality then set the agenda for the debates between the ‘expansionists’ in the APA who campaigned for more jobs and the ‘restrictivists’ who saw unemployment as a golden opportunity to prune dead wood throughout psychology. Some ‘restrictivist’ arguments included appeals for the integration into psychology of the hard natural sciences. This, it was hoped, would not only firm up psychology but also weed out dubious ideas which were a liability to both experimental and applied work. Courses in physics and chemistry, for example, would, in one hard-liner’s words, ‘serve as a filter to *strain out weak brothers and sisters* who would prefer to study English and Sociology and then turn to Psychology’ (emphasis in original, cited in Finison 1977: 749). This proposal quite explicitly links the fortunes of psychology to the exclusion of other disciplines.

Segregation

The hostility to other disciplines drew upon, and reproduced, xenophobic themes in American popular and academic culture. Psychology as a whole was sometimes depicted as under threat from internal and external enemies. This fear was relayed through the images and allusions which make up the subtext of reviews of the progress of psychology. One striking illustration is in the 1937 Golden Jubilee Volume of the *American Journal of Psychology*. The editor described the first ‘invasion’ into psychology of ‘immigrant subjects’ and the threatened ‘adulteration’ of positivism after [44] the war:

Then before experimentation and other sound methods could counter, came the Second Invasion to substitute easy and absorbing narrations of disorder, childhood sex, and personality in terms of herding instinct, id, ego, libido, repression, conflict, the unconscious, and the lurid doctrine of lust in little children. (Bentley 1937: 61)

When the events of such a wide stretch of time are rendered in narrative form, the paradoxes start to reappear as ironies. It does seem odd that psychology should use the rhetorics of race and nationhood when it had taken such care to insulate itself from the culture (as represented in pragmatist philosophy and sociology), and had attempted to insulate its beloved rational, autonomous, individualized ‘subjects’ in the laboratories from the outside social world. Of course, as new paradigm critics of laboratory-experimentation were to point out, it is impossible to escape ‘confounding variables’ by shutting out everything. If you do this you end up simply re-recording over and over the effects of a bizarre social situation (Harré and Secord 1972). These paradoxes are not simply ironies, however. The differences reflect conflicts inside and outside psychology, and then conflicts inside and outside social psychology. The differences could be usefully viewed as ironic ‘textual’ matters (and I will suggest how we might go about this in the following chapters), but they must always also be located in power relations and

resistance to power. The question then is, what is it that resists?

Agency and behaviour

The easy option would be to defend the individual 'subject' against the designs of the experimenter. I use the term 'subject' here to refer both to the subject ('s') in the experiment who attempts to interact with the experimenter ('E') *and* the subject ('being') of philosophical reflection, the experience we have of our-selves. We should resist the temptation simply to defend this individual subject. That would be an appealing humanist option precisely because the subject who suffers in the experiment is intended to make exactly such an appeal. A contrast between the 'social' and the 'individual' is set up in social-psychological discourse, and the [45] individual 'subject' is created as an 'object' of that discourse. People then talk about it (and experience it) as if it exists. To respond as good humanists would have the effect of *reinforcing* the very discourse we thought we were against (just as, for example, the anti-crowd American social psychologists strengthened the power of the demon they imagined they were exorcizing). The key paradox in social psychology is that although it appears to defend the individual against social and collective phenomena, its traditional methodology simultaneously reduces the individual to a type of mechanism. In one sense psychology and sociology complement each other: psychology studies the individual but portrays the individual (often in behaviourist fashion) as being at the mercy of the situation; sociology studies society but is careful to set aside a space in any theoretical model for an autonomous human agent.

Social psychology perpetrates a convoluted rhetoric which at some times functions as a double-bind and at others sounds like a bad joke. As we shall see in Part two, this rhetoric has not faded progressively over the years but has been transformed as the discipline defends itself against external and internal attack. Social psychology, old and new, is structured so as to endow the individual with agency - emphasize the person's 'attitudes', respect 'beliefs', and study each set of 'attributions' - but to do this by stripping the individual of any control. Individuals are made powerless through their participation in a laboratory experiment where they have no rights to alter the rules, or in a field experiment where they are the unwitting players in a setting they must necessarily misunderstand.

Power and truth

The consequences of the paradoxical rhetoric of social psychology for radicals are threefold. The first is to do with the nature of power itself. I have already moved from an individualistic, traditional view of power to one which takes account of the way institutional structures (both practical and expressive) place people in positions of control or helplessness. We now have to take this further and explore how the 'power-subject' experiences that position: what is the nature of that subjectivity. In our history of laboratory-experimental social psychology, the subjectivity which [46] emerges is one which includes themes of being observed, being powerless, and being responsible: the subject is invited to imagine that power is absent because it is hidden deep within themselves (Foucault 1981).

The second consequence is that we are empowered to see how social psychology arose to capitalize on these extra dimensions of power. We can go further than this, to say that social psychology was of a piece with the social, political, and economic changes which brought about a new subjectivity, a subjectivity necessarily caught in meshes of power from the moment it

comes into being. The history of social psychology illustrates how power and resistance work when we move outside the traditional accounts and attend to conflicts outside academic boundaries. The discourse of social psychology is connected with the discourses of the surrounding culture, and all such modern discourses 'subject' the individual (Parker 1988a).

The third and final consequence is that the descriptions of the different discourses which intersected at the point we now call 'social psychology' are descriptions of a historical period which we are *now* in a position to call 'modernity'. Modernity is the cultural form dominant in the western world for the past century and a half which encourages us to represent the world as if it were organized by metanarratives of humanized science, progress, and individual meaning. My position on this has been made easier to adopt because that modern culture appears to be breaking down. There are spaces of resistance opened up by postmodernity (Lyotard 1984). (I will explore this possibility in Chapter seven.)

Politics

This political history of social psychology has concentrated on America because that is where the discipline, as we understand it in America and in most of the English-speaking world, began. I have brought the question of class to the fore in my descriptions of the resistance and defeats which made the discipline possible, but there are other shared lines of oppression which we who are outside America share with those inside. The assumptions ground into the laboratory-experimental 'paradigm' have also conditioned perceptions by social psychologists of possible alternatives. The assumptions then deceive critics who would like something better. [47] All of this baggage has been exported and linked into societies in Europe and the Third World no less oppressively. We have to deal with that history of the discipline which has been made our history before we can construct real alternatives.

The political repercussions continue to the present day, and the politics I will discuss in Chapter eight will have to address issues of cultural dominance in the discipline. The power American social psychology has enjoyed has had much to do with economic power. Glossier, cheaper textbooks, more laboratories, and more men have enabled it to lead the world. This point also flows into another issue to do with social psychology as a gendered discipline, and the links between a 'hard' science obsessed with 'seminal' papers and penetrating arguments, and the nature of those who staff it. Alternatives have to address the discourse, the expressive power of the discipline, as well as its practice.

The political consequences of this understanding of the paradoxical discourses which make up 'modern' culture are, not surprisingly, difficult to articulate in the terminology of traditional old-paradigm social psychology. They are a little easier to understand in the language of the new paradigm, but to give these issues a more powerful voice I will now turn to the language of poststructuralism and post-structuralist accounts of language. [end of page 47]