Book Review

REFLECTIONS IN PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

Richard J. Butler (Ed.)

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Reviewed by

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I do not know if Sigmund Freud ever wrote a review. I am inclined to think he did not, for otherwise he would have added reviewing, along with therapy, education and government, to his notorious list of "impossible professions". Like any attempt to successfully construe another's construing, reviewing is fraught with practical difficulties, and of course theoretically impossible; and the practical difficulties (even though, thankfully, not the theoretical impossibility) are compounded if one is foolhardy enough to attempt to review not a single work by a single author but a collection of essays. If, after this lengthy disclaimer, my readers should be wondering why I did not wisely elect to leave this daunting task to someone better equipped to perform it (or, at least, less inclined to complain…), the answer is that the subject of the collection (as the editor defines it on the first page of the "Preface", "What is Reflexivity?") proved irresistible. This fascination will provide a rationale for the structure (if I may presume to call it so myself…) of this review. I will start by briefly discussing the chapters in the various sections of the book according to the way they approach the issue of reflexivity, which is either by examining the structure and the implications of fundamental concepts in PCT, or by explaining their relevance to the writer's personal and professional development; as will be clear from the discussion, some of the contributions are relatively

"pure" specimens of one of the two formats while some come across as hybrids. I will close this review by outlining some theoretical implications of reflexivity which I think are not obvious, but which, to my mind, deserve to be discussed.

In Section I, "Exploring personal construct theory", Harry Procter's "The construct" is as pure (and as shining) an example of the first type as could be conceived. In this chapter the central construct of PCT is subjected to a painstaking and enlightening effort of definition and extension: the first part deals with "the construct as envisaged by Kelly himself" (29), the second with "further aspects [of the construct] which result from extending and elaborating the theory to cope better with our social and relational nature" (29). Even though the author adopts a modest, even self-effacing, stance which prevents him from explicitly foregrounding his own personal experience as the object of reflexivity, we get a very definite sense of the way his intellectual and professional evolution was shaped, and in their turn contributed to shaping, his commitment to PCT: "But from the beginning I was also reading sociology […], Marxism and the family systemic writers. […] These sources were presenting material that severely challenged PCP, and indeed the basic individualistic assumptions of the discipline of psychology it-

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self. Do we therefore abandon PCT, as so many did, or rally to the challenge in order to preserve [its] insight and wisdom […]?" (29). His final proclamation of faith in PCT ("I have wanted, however, to preserve the contribution of Kelly and PCP in this debate. It seems to me that much is lost to psychology by de-emphasizing the central importance of the person in constructing meanings and values" (35) sounds completely honest and absolutely convincing because it comes from someone who has made a serious and systematic effort to become familiar with a number of alternative approaches, and to integrate them into his theoretical thinking and clinical practice.

In his final remarks the author also manages to address two profound and central issues, one having to do with the respective merits of constructivism and constructionism and the other with a fundamental aporia in Kellyan theory. I will deal with the first one here, and address the second at the end of this review.

To Procter's mind, the reason why a constructivist approach cannot be dissolved into, or subsumed by, a constructionist one has to do with the crucial issue of cultural change and innovation: "And how are we then [in a social constructionist framework] to understand the creativity of artists and writers, who inject new ideas into the culture? […] PCP has always had the spirit that this applies to everyone, children and adults, not just a few 'great' people" (35). His argument can be extended by considering that, in fields as diverse as philology, art history, linguistics and genetics, "copy" is synonymous with "error", that any attempt at reproduction, by whatever means, carries with it the certainty of modification; in Kellyan terms, not only man but the whole world is "a form of motion"; and this motion is invariably the result of *individual* processes which, even when they are aimed at perfect conformity, never unfold according to plan: it is not only in natural history but also in personal and cultural change, that variation forms the bedrock of evolution; and just as biological evolution cannot occur without a huge pool of variations to draw from, so cultural evolution is dependent on "the creativity" of "not just a few 'great' people" but of "everyone, children and adults".

The two chapters in Section II, "The men behind the theory", "The George Kelly I knew" by Jay Efran and "Don Bannister through the looking glass" by Fay Fransella, being conceived as tributes to two key figures, stand somewhat apart from the others, and from the book's theme of reflexivity; however, the wealth of quirky anecdotes and provocative quotations makes it clear that for both Kelly and Bannister constructivism was not something they "did" in their professional life as therapists and teachers, but a core construct.[1] In this respect, it is particularly perceptive of Fay Fransella to recognize Don Bannister's last major endeavour, the writing of five novels in just eight years, as an effort to "tell us about his life in a truly reflexive fashion" (73).

Among the five chapters of Section III, "Construct theory as a meaningful alternative", Richard Butler's "Encounters of the puzzling kind: the organisational corollary in relation to self-construing" is a "hybrid" specimen, alternating as it does autobiographical reminiscence and an exposition of the methodology of Performance Profiling and of the tool of Self-Image Profiles.

Richard Bell's "Griddled with angst: a roller-coaster ride on the repertory grid", while featuring some details of intellectual biography, and ordered chronologically, is an extended and methodologically rigorous reflection on the potentials and limits of the most widely employed tool within PCP. In addition to highlighting a number of serious issues which should be (but hardly

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[1] Whose relatively late appearance in Bannister's life took the form of a conversion or epiphany: Fransella relates: "While watching television that night [after spending the afternoon in the library reading Kelly for the first time] he [Bannister] found that he was making sense of what was happening on the screen in personal construct terms" (58). I find this anecdote particularly moving because of the way it resonates not only with my own experience but with that of a number of people who have entrusted me with their memories of their first encounters with PCT, which are reminiscent of nothing so much as the experience of sudden and definitive religious conversion (or, in less ideologically loaded terms, of the discovery of one's sexual identity). I firmly believe that the forms and results of PCTers' encounters with PCP should be investigated systematically.

ever are) prominent in the consideration of all responsible grid users, Bell's chapter is important because it implicitly but constantly addresses a core metamethodological point: in order to reflect on the use of repertory grids, we need constructs beyond those of the theory within which the grid itself was formulated (this is a major reason why PCT practitioners are normally not in a position to do so – "The analysis was set out formally in mathematical terms (which explains why no grid users could understand it)" (155) – and why most reflections on the implications of grids for PCT fall, according to Bell, on deaf ears: "Needless to say, these criticisms have not found their way into any subsequent accounts of the theory" (150): reflexivity in this case is definitely not simply a matter of "using a theory to account for itself". I will come back to this issue, and to some of its implications, in the conclusion.

The other three chapters in the section, James Horley's "Individuality, community and criminal behaviour", David Winter's "Shaking hands with a serial killer" and Sally Robbins's "Sauce for the gander", explore the role that PCT, or specific constructs within the theory, played in the writers' professional and personal development. The issue (which I personally find fascinating) of personal affinites with individual aspects of PCT (as of any theory) figures implicitly but prominently in David Winter's account of his lifelong love affair with the credulous approach, whose potential he has been investigating since his 1971 undergraduate dissertation (98) and which eventually led him to the meeting from which the chapter title is derived. Winter perceptively explores both threat and guilt as inseparable companions to the credulous approach and to constructivism in general (104) and the existential "hazards of credulity"; his description of the personal consequences of what Mahoney labeled "the psychological demands of constructive metatheory" is both engaging and enlightening. I was particularly intrigued by his humorous and profound statement about the status of certainty in a credulously fragmented life: "At times it feels that [*sic*] the only certainty, apart from that of death, is in the words of a song sung in a stadium that I regularly frequent, namely that the Queen's Park Rangers are 'the greatest football team the world has ever seen'"; this allowed me

to make sense of something I had always found perplexing: the fact that quite a few self-reflexive and sophisticated intellectuals are loyal and enthusiastic football supporters: football provides an opportunity for "place-binding" (if I may be allowed the neologism) the construct of certainty, which can play no role in the rest of their life, but which, for sentimental reasons, they may be reluctant to dispose of entirely.

Among the chapters in Section IV, "Construct Theory as an Elaborative Choice", Jonathan D. Raskin's "Living aggressively" is a reflection on the role of aggressiveness (particularly of aggressive testing of the "real vs. made-up" construct) in the author's intellectual biography, and ends with a survey of his current "hypotheses" in his present area of aggression, "how does one integrate the seemingly contradictory assumptions of PCP, radical constructivism and social constructionism?" (171).

Peter Cummins's "The guilty choice: reflections on dislodgement, extension and definition", blends reflections on the author's Catholic Irish youth and on his clinical practice into a comprehensive and enlightening consideration of guilt, made more compelling by the consideration that "while personal guilt is a fairly well-recognised idea, I do not think that there has been enough focus on clinical guilt" (177); starting from Kelly's definition, he singles out three central questions: "So if I am dislodged, then what from? What is the nature of this dislodgement? What led to this change?" (182); this leads him to state that "Guilt, in a Kellyan sense, is an integral part of any change" (182) and to affirm "the courage to choose to make 'the guilty choice'" in therapy, knowing that "guilt is a process to work with, to understand what is being dislodged ant to work on the development of my core role to the extent that allows me to resolve the guilt" (187).

Trevor Butt's chapter, "Different readings of personal construct theory", while featuring some references to the author's first experiences as a clinical psychologist and to his fateful encounter with Don Bannister, focuses on the topic on which he has been reflecting since his PhD thesis, a phenomenological reading of PCT. Having had a very partial and superficial exposure to phenomenology, Kelly was not in a position to

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appreciate its many and profound points of contact with PCT. To someone well versed in it, like Butt, phenomenology provides a refreshing and enlightening way to free PCP from its apparent cognitivistic bias and locate it back in the "lived world", and its "internal relations", where subject and object are not separate and "one feature [...] cannot be specified without implying the others" (202). Kelly's credulous approach "precisely mirrors Husserl's phenomenological attitude [...] one of openness to new possibilities and constructions" (204).

Trevor Butt also features as a prominent character in Vivian Burr's "The teacher, the singer and the personal construct theorist: an unlikely but fruitful dialogue"; it was Butt who first introduced Burr to PCT, which was to prove such a fruitful influence in both her personal and in her professional development, and the way this introduction took place tells a lot about what distinguishes PCP from other psychological approaches: the friendship between the two scholars (which continues to this day) began with Burr "reveal[ing her] insecurities" about her new professional role to Butt; she was prompted to this disclosure by "his role as a psychotherapist", and he reacted by "asking some good questions" and by subsequently "stepp[ing] up by bringing in some structured PCT techniques" (212). I do not believe I am alone in feeling both that such a relationship between two colleagues in another theoretical framework would have been disastrously inappropriate (imagine a senior colleague volunteering to psychoanalyze a junior fellow of his department!), and that, on the other hand, this was a natural, and a very beneficial, development of a friendly involvement within a PCT framework; the difference is, of course, reflexivity. In asking Burr his questions and using his structured techniques, Butt was not concealing any aspect of either the theory or of his construal from her; instead, he was proposing that they both use the theory as a tool to reflect both on her situation and on their respective construals of it. The life-changing potential of reflexivity (with, significantly, no distinction between "personal" and "professional" life) is aptly summarized by Burr: "My very introduction to PCT came about through reflecting on my personal experience; it was the capacity for constructiv-

ism to make sense of my problems that led me further into it as an academic" (213).

In "Reflexivity: what in the 'GAK' is that?", the last chapter of the section, Desley Hennessy writes about the impact of reflexivity both on her research about the personal meanings of tattoos and on her own experience as a tattooee.

Section V, "No one need be a victim of their biography", starts with Jerald R. Forster's "Differentiating the *I* from the *ME*", a reflection on Mead's dichotomous construct of the "self-as-subject" vs. the "self-as-object" through the lens of Hofstadter's "strange loop", according to which "perceptions of the *ME* by the *I* change the I, which then changes the way the I comes to perceive the ME during the next loop" (245). The final part of the essay hinges around the very interesting question "Can my I intentionally change my ME?, but unfortunately does not attempt to enlist any PCP or PCT constructs to address it.

In "Mirror man" David Green tries to make sense of two central constructs of the theory, the credulous attitude and the choice corollary in relation to his professional life and to the personal issue of retirement.

Finn Tschudi's "Landmarks on a personal odyssey" reflects on the wider implications of some central concepts of PCP; his plea to apply the Sociality corollary and the credulous attitude to psychological theories commonly despised by Kellyans, such as behaviourism, is a healthy provocation, and potentially very enlightening.

Jörn Scheer's "Reconstructing after a change in health status" starts with a momentous event in the author's biography, a heart attack, and traces his attempts to make sense of it through a variety of PCP resources, from Kelly's biographical account of a similar experience to Scheer's own work about the coping strategies of myocardial infarction patients in ICUs to Linda Viney's model of reactions to illness. The author is somewhat disappointed in all of these resources, and sets about construing his own experience starting from the most evidently relevant part of his construct system, the one pertaining to health vs. illness. I could not help but emphathize both with his attempt to seek guidance in the PCP literature and with his having to face the limits of scholarship with respect to first-person lived

(and traumatic) experience: in the way he goes about trying to make sense of what happened to him Scheer reenacts the biography of every intellectual, first turning to landmarks of his culture to get his bearings, and then realizing he has no choice but strike out on his own.

"When my father died on the eve of my twelfth birthday, one world ended and another began": Robert Neimeyer's "Constructions of death and loss: a personal and professional evolution" traces back the origin of the "network of enterprise" (Gruber) which has been sustaining a major part of the author's creative and productive scientific career over the last thirty years to a single traumatic experience. Neimeyer's work in thanatology emphasizes three main foci: death threat and anxiety, suicide intervention and grief and loss (296); the paper presents a well-structured and helpful review of the literature, spanning several decades and dispersed among innumerable publications.

Dennis Hinkle's "Reflections on the creation of a dissertation" opens with powerful memories of Kelly: "He expressed frustration with the multitudes of people who live unexamined lives" (319); "He advised me to do research that had personal significance and relevance. That way, he said, you won't lose interest so quickly. He said the best research has personal significance, unlike so much psychological research" (320). Hinkle's own retrospection shows that he took his advisor's words seriously: "I thought of laddering as what I normally did as a therapist and as a friend: I am very nosy and probing; I don't simply take things at face value; I am interested in the latent meaning […]. When I don't deeply understand another, I feel lonely." Through these insights his world-renowned research in constructivist psychometry is revealed as an attempt to (in the words of a colleague of Robert Neimeyer, 310) "put his practice into theory", to analyze and systematize what worked in his human relationships and in his therapeutic practice and to draw far-reaching and enlightening conclusions from it. The depth of Hinkle's commitment to reflexivity can be gauged not only by the fact that his dissertation ended with a section called "A brief autobiography of the present research" (reprinted in this paper) but by his statement that "Since the conception [of my research project] was self-reflexive, I became my

most useful subject." For me (as for too many people in PCP) these few pages in the book were the first direct exposure to what may well be the most quoted unpublished dissertation in the history of psychology, and I enjoyed them immensely. Consequently, I was thrilled to learn that an electronic version of Hinkle's dissertation had been made available by Fay Fransella. I am sure every reader of this review will want to experience Hinkle's reasoning at first hand.

In Section VI "The Client as an Active Participant", Naoimh O'Connor's "Enculturing reflexivity: non-PC lessons from study abroad" links her experiences as an Irish teacher of American students in Italy to concepts from cross-cultural psychology, cultural anthropology and PCP; as a native speaker of one of the languages in which this very cross-cultural experience took place, I am a little puzzled by the only example pertaining to Italian which appears in the paper: "sciuro" (342) is not an Italian word, and there is no word in Italian which even vaguely sounds or looks like it which means "clear" as applied to a colour (whatever that in itself may mean…).

Despite its title, Dina Pekkala's "The icing on the sausage: the emancipation of constructive alternativism" is not an exercise in deconstructionist cuisine, but an exploration of the author's experiences with clients in her anger management practice. However, Pekkala's kitchen figures prominently in one very enlightening episode: the first time the author found herself living as the only adult in a household, and thus able to make her own rules, a friend coming to visit reacted unfavourably to her cats being allowed on the kitchen worktops; on her second visit, seeing that the cats were there again, she remarked that she guessed they didn't bother Pekkala, who replied "No, it doesn't mean that at all, it just means I haven't worked it out yet" (351). We have of course all read about "suspending judgment of our present reality long enough for new possibilities to become apparent" (351), and those of us who are therapists have probably also relayed this to their patients as a useful piece of advice; but I can't help wondering how many of us are able to suspend judgement about something that they experience several times a day for *six months*; I, for one, know that I am not; and yet I also realize that

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change is unlikely to happen unless one is. I have been deeply struck by this episode, and only wish the author had included instructions on how to emulate her admirable judgement-suspending feat.

Larry M. Leitner's "Theory, therapy and life: experiential personal construct psychology and the 'desert places' of a therapist" explores the development of Experiential Personal Construct Psychotherapy. The author's life work, this can be seen, just like Harry Procter's, as an attempt to break out of the relative isolation in which the individual and his construing processes are viewed in Kelly 1955 to take the constructivist idea of relationality seriously in making sense of a reality which is by definition social. I found what Leitner reports about his supervisors advising him "not to 'be so sensitive' with regard to clients and warn[ing him] that [his] 'sensitivity' would empower clients to manipulate [him] in pathological ways" (364) both frightening and revealing: frightening because one can only shudder in horror considering what happened to the trainee therapists who took this kind of advice seriously (and, most importantly, to their clients…); revealing because it shows how, in a profession purportedly devoted to exploring and honouring emotion, "sensitive" is not a term of praise but is used as abuse to repress deviant behaviour; I am used to vivisectionists ridiculing the "sensitivity" of students reluctant to torture animals to death, but I was suprised (and more than a little alarmed) in discovering that the same rhetorical weapons (and thus the same underlying worldview) are shared by therapy supervisors, who are supposed to be training their students not in the callous and sadistic exploitation of sentient beings but in the professional exercise of responsible empathy.

In the following paper, "Reflexivity, research and practice: explorations in experiential personal construct psychology", by Alexandra L. Adame, Anthony J. Pavlo, Brendon M. Smith, Hugo J. Schielke, & Larry M. Leitner, some of Leitner's PhD students join him in discussing tapes of a therapy and discuss the impact of EPCP on their way of thinking and of doing therapy.

I have devoted a sizable part of my own career to the application of PCT to the teaching of creativity in research and scholarly argument[2]; as a consequence I was intensely interested in the experiences Beverly M. Walker recounts in "The joint experiment of research supervision". I have a deep respect for Walker's approach, especially since she has had to face problems with which I have never been confronted, and which I would have found it very difficult to solve: "The overwhelming majority of the postgraduate students I have supervised for their doctorates had begun supervision of their thesis with someone else. […] In some cases the students had already collected their data. Not infrequently these were data I might not have let them collect if I had had input into the design. Here I had to help the students create a plausible case even though I was uncomfortable with the approach" (394); this kind of situation calls for a creative use of constructive alternativism which would probably stretch the professional competences of most of us. Walker's overview of "Techniques to overcome impasses" (394-398) and the refreshingly honest section about "My failures as supervisor" (398-400) also make for interesting reading.

Section VII "And finally… reflections on reflexivity" contains only one chapter, Bill Warren's "Critical consciousness in action: reflections on reflection in, from and beyond personal construct psychology". Most of it is devoted to "Relevant key ideas from other philosophers" (408-415); coming from a very different cultural tradition from that of the author (who in several cases seems to derive his knowledge of the authors he discusses from secondary literature which is neither up-to-date nor particularly enlightening) I was surprised, not to say shocked, at the way some key figures from the history of Western philosophy are characterized. To maintain, for

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[2] The main outcome of this effort is a hefty volume (unfortunately written in Italian), Carmen Dell'Aversano & Alessandro Grilli, *La scrittura argomentativa. Dal saggio breve alla tesi di dottorato*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2005, which outlines and demonstrates a PCT-based step-by-step procedure which leads from the first observations on an object of study to the final revision of a scholarly paper in the humanities and social sciences.

example, that the Sophists "were paid to pass on information and […] had an uncritical attitude to the information they did pass on" (409) is to completely misunderstand the first serious and systematic proponents of constructivism in the history of Western thought. Further, Warren's statement that "real knowledge is based on sound principles that are accepted and upheld because the individual grasps their significance and truth" (409) seems to this reviewer very hard to reconcile with a constructivist position, in which "real knowledge" (that is, direct complete knowledge of reality as it is independently of any personal construction of it) can by definition never be attained by any finite subject and "principles" (constructs in PCP parlance) are personal and can therefore never be based on universal "truth". This part is the one in which the overwhelming Anglocentric bias of the volume (out of 28 contributors only two, Finn Tschudi and Jörn Scheer, do not work in an Anglo-Saxon context) has the most evident negative impact on the quality of the work presented: if at least two prominent theorists (and experienced practitioners) who are often referred to in the other contributions, Gabriele Chiari and Dušan Stojnov, had been asked to contribute to this ambitious final theoretical section, the result would have been considerably improved.

I chose to defer the treatment of the two editorial contributions which open the book because of the broader issues with which they are concerned, and which deserve an extended discussion.

In Chapter 1, "Coming to Terms with Personal Construct Theory", the editor of the volume attempts to provide, in glossary and outline form, a comprehensive introduction to PCP as Kelly conceived of it and to its later theoretical and clinical developments. This is of course a daunting task, and the results are necessarily so compressed as to only be (barely!) comprehensible to readers already thoroughly coversant with the material covered. Since this is, in my experience, far from an isolated occurrence, it might be worthwhile to discuss the assumption, prevalent throughout the PCT-PCP community, that introductions and explanations should always be provided even for the most basic concepts and formulations of the theory. I can't help wonder-

ing if this habit could not be interpreted as an attempt to react to the still relatively insular status of PCT (a state of things we all find – and with good reason – absolutely deplorable) by attempting to make PCT publications as "accessible" and as "user-friendly" as possible. This is, of course a laudable effort; however, we should also bear in mind that the reason why writings in the psychodynamic, systemic or CBT traditions are perceived as more accessible is not their lack of technical terminology but the amount of exposure readers have had to that terminology through their education and through social discourse in general; I do not think I am the only one to anticipate that long and systematic (and almost illegible) introductory chapters to PCT works will not prove particularly effective in setting that imbalance right.

An additional problem with the first chapter is the erratic use of references in the text: for example one is given for the theory that serial invalidation may lead to schizophrenic thought disorder, but none are provided for the notion that "constriction is regarded as central to depression" (p.15). Since one main purpose for an introductory chapter conceived in this way is to provide a systematic and comprehensive introduction to the literature, this lack of documentation is a serious impediment.

This is probably the best place to mention that I found the editorial policy regarding references to be a sore point throughout the book. The normal format of citations (author – year – page number) has been modified with the omission of page numbers; it should be evident to anyone who ever used a reference in a scholarly work for its intended purpose of verifying the author's use of another scholar's material that this flies in the face of, and ultimately defeats, this very aim: informing readers that a particular idea or quote comes from "Kelly 1955", and then leaving them to sort out its precise location in the two volumes we are all familiar with, can only be construed as either an inept joke or a form of abuse.

I shall now turn to the other editorial contribution, the "Preface", which is largely devoted to a discussion of the theme of the volume, reflexivity. It seems to me that the term is used to refer not to one but to two quite different constructs between which the editor, however, does

not draw a distinction. Since I believe this to be a very important point, I will attempt to do so here by referring to two exemplary quotes:

> *Reflexivity may be understood as an act of self-reference whereby a person examines the nature of their own actions, beliefs, idiosyncrasies and emotions – an exploration, as it were, of one's psychological stance.* (xv)
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> *In concert with reflexivity, helpful psychological accounts ought to be able to explain the construing of the theorist, as well as the people he or she is theorising about. The notion of reflexivity assumes that the models, ideas, methods and thinking that variously evolve should be able to subsume the thinking which led to them. In essence, the generalizations made about other people should be equally valid for the psychologist who makes such statements. As the creation of any theory is a facet of human behaviour, reflexivity demands that the theory account for its own construction. [...] Reflexivity can thus be understood as "the ability of a theory to account for the theorizing of the theorist"* (Dunnet and Miyaguchi, 1993). (xvii)

Not only are these two meanings of reflexivity not synonymous but, moreover (whatever Butler says, "In concert with reflexivity"), the first one in no way implies the second. For instance, a theory of language and a metatheory of language (a theory of theories of language) do not have to be couched in and accounted for in the same terms (indeed, it is impossible that this will be the case). The second instance of reflexivity is an added requirement based not, as Butler puts it (xv-xvi), on the "compellingly implie[d] [...] dualism" between the "self-as-I" and the "self-as-me" (the subject and object of the theory, respectively), but, quite on the contrary, on the assumption that both "selves" work in exactly the same way (in Kellyan terms, that they both construe, and that they do nothing else). This, of course, is not a necessary and indispensabile requirement of any sound and viable psychological theory but only of *monistic* psychological theo-

ries: the reason why Kelly's justly famous first and last question in his debate with Skinner[3] *** proved so devastating a blow to his opponent is that behaviourism is, just like PCP, a monistic theory, that is, a theory which assumes that all of a person's processes are to be explained by a single underlying principle. Indeed, one of the many merits of Harry Procter's outstanding paper in this collection is that it dares to spell out the fundamentally monistic nature of PCP's most basic theoretical construct, a nature which of course flies in the face of the theory's assertions about dichotomy.[4] (Of course I can hear the readers of this journal protesting in unison that behaviourism is a form of reductionism while PCP isn't; well, just as "relativism" has no independent existence as a philosophical entity but is simply what realists call constructivism because they don't like it, "reductionism" is simply what we all – realists and constructivists alike – call forms of monism we don't like.) If Kelly had asked Freud how psychoanalytic theory was to be explained in terms of Freud's own unconscious processes and fantasies, Freud would have been completely justified in replying that a scientific theory is – or should be – the product of conscious ego processes, and that its roots in the proponent's unconscious should play no role in a discussion of its intellectual merits.

Because of its allowing – indeed, demanding – that a theory comply with the requirements of both brands of reflexivity, monism may seem like a very good idea. However, some of its practical shortcomings should also be considered, especially since these shortcomings are implicitly and obliquely addressed by some of the most methodologically thorny parts of Kelly's indications for clinical practice. When Kelly writes that therapists use professional constructs to construe patients and implies that they use nothing else[5] – a fantastic claim which

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[3] According to an unconfirmed anecdote, Kelly asked Skinner what stimulus behaviorist theory was a response to.

[4] His speculations about the submerged pole of the construct, informed by many decades of meditation practice (37), are just as daring, and every bit as interesting.

[5] *But the psychologist is himself a person; hence, his psychological processes follow his own personal*

makes it possible for him to formulate the equally fantastic claim that in dealing with clients the therapist should use a "subsuming construct system" which is "primarily methodological" (thus refusing to acknowledge the role of the therapist's personal construct system in his construing of the client, Kelly, 1955, II 595) – what he is doing is nothing more nor less than trying to deal with a potentially paralyzing consequence of monism: infinite regress. It is always possible to construe any construction of any construction, and so on *ad infinitum*; however, therapy, as a practical endeavour, must decide that it has hit rock bottom somewhere, and that somewhere had better not be too much out of the therapist's depth. I am perfectly aware of the huge practical import of these considerations, and of the consequent temptation not to deal with them lest this open up a methodological can of worms which might have paralyzing consequences both on the training of therapists and on professional practice; however, to my mind this should rather be a

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constructs. Other psychologists are persons too. If there is to be a common understanding of the client, there must be commonality in the way he is construed. If there is to be a constructive social process involving the client – for example, therapy – the person who is to play the role of therapist must subsume the constructs of the subject rather than merely interpret his overt behavior. All this means that we cannot consider the psychology of personal constructs a phenomenological theory, if that means ignoring the personal constructs of the psychologist who does the observing.

What the personal construct psychologist does is first attempt to describe accurately the highest level of abstraction in his subject's system at the lowest level of abstraction in his own. [...] Data, when considered as such by the psychologist, are relatively concrete elements awaiting some sort of construction. (Kelly, 1955, I 174)

What I find fascinating in the first paragraph is that the last sentence does not follow in any intelligible way from what has been said before: the attitude we are being warned against, "ignoring the personal constructs of the psychologist who does the observing", is exactly what makes it possible to be optimistic about the possibility of commonality and subsuming, which are presented as unproblematic steps in the understanding of the client immediately before.

reason to devote much more attention, in a much more systematic way, to therapists' personal constructs than has so far been the case at least in PCP literature, if not in training practice.

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The most fundamental driving force in what I do, both as a scholar and as an activist, is the questioning, critiqueing and crossing of boundaries between disciplines, theoretical orientations, and social roles (academic/activist, artist/critic, professor/student...).

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