

## SUBJECTIVITY: KELLY'S DISCOURSE AND FOUCAULT'S CONSTRUCTS

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*Kelly and Foucault are unlikely to be seen together in any sort of psychotherapeutic coalition, no matter how loose or it may be. Beyond very discouraging and unpromising first impressions, a second look gives the reader a chance to explore compatibilities between two different scholars who can mutually enrich each other's work by bringing personhood into the field of impersonal discourses. A surprising compatibility can be construed between the unusual construction of subjects offered in their work; a negative attitude towards the truth and similarities between Kelly's construct system (at the personal level) and Foucault's episteme (at the social level).*

Key words: *personal construct psychology, subjectivity, episteme, poststructuralism*

Anticipating a fruitful offspring from the merger of a theory of an American professor of psychology from the fifties, a psychotherapist who was straight, practical and son of a Baptist minister, with the theory of an enfant terrible of the 'French school' in the '60s, who was gay and political and an indefinable scandal master known for his disdain for psychotherapy, looks more like a blasphemy than a potentially fruitful project. Although not our first venture in this direction (Stojnov, Džinović & Pavlović, 2008) we have always been surprised with the unexpected rewards we have received from pursuing this steep path. Beside many and obvious differences between their theories, we were amazed with the emerging commonality not so apparent at a first glance. Both Kelly and Foucault resisted attempted classifications under existing categories. They have shared humanist attitudes but did not feel comfortable under the banner of humanism. Both have shown unequivocal indifference towards the concept of 'authenticity' and self-actualization. They were equally unimpressed with the idea of absolute truth. They were both avant-garde, not sitting comfortably in the mainstream of the science of their times, but still appreciating the important role that science had in human lives. Both Kelly and Foucault

present quite idiosyncratic views in their respective theories, both appearing quite subversive in their struggle for emancipation, at least from our point of view. The more comprehensive our research on these two theories, the more similarities have emerged. For the sake of this article, we have concentrated on just two: similarity between personal construct system and episteme, and the similarity between their respective ways of construing subjectivity.

### PERSONAL CONSTRUCT SYSTEM VS. EPISTEME

The word *episteme*, derived from the Ancient Greek verb *ἐπίσταμαι* meaning 'to know, to understand, or to be acquainted with' which Foucault introduced in his book *The Order of Things* (1971). An episteme is an abstraction which, 'in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's<sup>1</sup> everyday perceptions with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations from original works of Kelly and Foucault are inserted in original form insensitive to recent standards of political correctness.

which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true' (Foucault, 1971, p. xii). It refers to the orderly historical *a priori* structures that ground knowledge and its discourses. To enable the research of this field, Foucault has developed an archeology (1972). It is a method concerned with uncovering the rules of formation of discourses, or discursive systems. It proceeds at the level of statements (*énoncés*) searching for the rules that explain the appearance of the phenomena under study. It examines the forms of regularity, that is, discursive conditions, which order the structure of a form of discourse and which determine how such orders come into being. Simply speaking, archeology examines the historicity of science by describing rules that undergird ways of looking at the world. These rules are regularities that determine the system of possibility as to what is considered as true or false, and they determine what counts as grounds for assent and dissent, as well as what arguments and data are legitimate and relevant. Archeology thus focuses attention on the link between perception and action of an epoch and on why, at different periods, scientists perceive objects differently. The core of archeology is thus an attempt to establish the discursive practices and rules of formation of discourses through trying to answer how it has been that one particular statement has appeared rather than another. To achieve this, archeology must turn to search for epistemes. Epistemes are the structures of thought which archeology tries to access; 'the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific' (Foucault, 1980, p. 197). Episteme is global in its nature. In any culture, at a point in time, there is an episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all theoretical knowledge. Archeology is an historical analysis of this theoretical knowledge attempting to trace links between the different domains in life, work and language, revealing relationships that are not instantly apparent. In doing so, it seeks to expose the 'historical *a priori*' aspect of the episteme as it manifests itself in the body of discourses under study. In this sense, epistemes are not transcendental in a Kantian sense, neither are they foundations. Rather, they present practices to be encountered: they are time-bound and factual.

On the other side, Kelly introduced his ideas on the personal construct system, throughout his two volumes *Psychology of Personal Constructs* (1955). It refers to the set of anticipations of an individual person – transparent patterns or templates that Kelly calls constructs. Personal constructs are ways of construing the world which are ordered in a system of hierarchical properties that constitutes the basis of human experience and provides guidelines for their action. Although they may exist in similar epochs and similar cultures, they are different from person to person. They consist of verbal constructs which enable high reflexivity, but also host certain constructs which were developed early in life, before the language was adopted. They have a range of convenience and, no matter how well they serve our predictive efforts, they always undergird and determine our knowledge either in the variety of ways in which we create our hypothesis about the world, or in variety of different ways we test them. Personal construct systems may be compared to mental models of the world that we make from the data that impinges on our senses. If these models allow high predictive ability, we construe them as reality. No matter how successful they are, personal construct systems always mediate our knowledge about the reality and our efforts to map the world in one of many possible ways. When people construe, they place their own constructions upon the reality that they perceive. In that sense, our reality is created by ourselves. It is of our own making, and, in the process of coming to know the reality, we cannot escape our own interpretation of it. Whatever we experience is mediated by constructs coming from our personal construct systems. In Kelly's theory, the personal construct system is often used as a synonym for the term 'personality'.

Both the personal construct system and episteme precede sensory input and work on categorical bases. They both form the basis and condition of possibility that grounds knowledge. They serve as an outlook, a point of view, a frame of reference which at the same time allows and restrains scientific knowledge. Foucault at first stated that in any given culture, in any moment, there can be only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge (Foucault, 1971). But then he made it clear in subsequent writings (Foucault, 1983) that several

epistemes may co-exist and interact at the same time. Both episteme and personal construct systems are contingent, acquired and multiple.

Although Foucault's use of *episteme* has important similarities to *personal construct systems*, there are also some important decisive differences between them. A personal construct system pertains to an individual person, with all his/her peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. It is a source of hypotheses for the model of person-as-scientist, a metaphor which Kelly has found as useful way to emphasize human nature as a never ending epistemological quest, something deeply scientific in every lay person, as well as something very human in every scientist. On the other hand, episteme is something impersonal and social; an abstraction covering a way in which different epoch and different cultures govern their respective discourses. Whereas the personal construct system is an all-encompassing collection of beliefs and assumptions that result in the organization of personal worldviews and practices of the person-as-scientist, Foucault's *episteme* is not merely confined to the science of the individual, but applies to a wider range of discourse, as all of science itself would fall under the *episteme* of the epoch. While Kelly's personal construct system enters transition and change as a consequence of a series of decisions (coming from different levels of cognitive awareness) made by person-as-scientists to pursue a new set of questions and subsequent experiments based on them, Foucault's epistemes are something like the 'epistemological unconscious' of an era: the configuration of knowledge in a particular episteme is based on a set of fundamental assumptions that are so basic to that episteme as to be invisible to people operating within it.

Foucault writes in his foreword to *The Order of Things* (1971, p. xvi) that he has found his inspiration in a Borges' referral to 'a Certain Chinese encyclopedia' in which 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from the long way off look like flies'. The bizarre oddness of this classification suggested the exotic charm of another sys-

tem of thought, but at the same time the limitation of our own one. The question that arose was: What makes us experience this classification as ludicrous? What if they were right and we were wrong? What are the borders of our own way of thinking, then? How do modern westerners order their phenomena?

Foucault has tried to answer this question with an archeology of the human sciences, trying to understand fundamental cultural codes imposing order upon experiences. It is a method that tries to 'unearth' *epistemes*. Kelly's answer lies within his philosophy of constructive alternativism that advocates for the possibility of humans to subject all their present interpretations of the universe to revision or replacement, backing up his philosophical position with the apt statement that humans always reconstrue what they cannot deny. Furthermore:

*No one has yet devised a set of constructs which will predict everything down to the last tiny flutter of a humming-bird's wing; we think it will be an infinitely long time before anyone does. Since an absolute construction of the universe is not feasible, we shall have to be content with a series of successive approximations to it... Any theory, then, tends to be transient. And the more practical it is and the more useful it appears to be, the more vulnerable it is to new evidence. Our own theory, particularly if it proves to be practical, will also have to be considered expendable in the life of tomorrow's outlooks and discoveries. At best it is an ad interim theory (Kelly, 1955, p. 14-15).*

Thus, humans keep doing what seems to be their best bet – mapping the reality that epistemologically always keeps itself at a safe distance from the reach of their alternative constructions. Furthermore, besides forming the guidelines for human action, personal constructs (ordered in their construct systems) precede sensory input and help mold it into alternatives that help constitute one of many versions of what they cannot absolutely know for sure, but need to make predictable. Perhaps the main context in which personal construct theory was launched – field of personality theory – may serve as a perfect example of constructive alternativism, offering many textbooks that suggest different models of human beings, some as versatile as 'human as

rat', 'human as scientist', 'human as actor' and 'human as computer' (Wiggins, Renner, Clore & Rose, 1976).

It also seems that for humans one other thing seems to be at a safe distance as much as reality – and that is an absolute and ultimate truth. Both authors – Kelly and Foucault – share their reluctance to talk about the truth as a reachable goal of scientific scrutiny. Kelly (1955) does this with gentle appeal, locating a final truth in an infinitely distant future, and proposes that the best thing we can do in our epistemological reach is subjective analysis of validation. This means that the estimate of the match of our constructions with experimental outcomes is inescapable, thus suggesting the pragmatist criteria of evaluating human constructs with the level of their predictive efficiency. Foucault approaches the idea of absolute and ultimate truth with harsh criticism, portraying the history of science as a huge graveyard replete with scientific truths (Veyne, 2008). To us their attitude seems commensurable to each other, only that Kelly stretches into the future to back up his, and, doing the same, Foucault reaches for the arguments from the past. Although Kelly does not discard its possibility, he treats the absolute truth as a construction, and advocates for the position that no one has a direct access to the truth; and that we can talk only about our constructions of it which may vary from person to person, as stated in his individuality corollary. Although we share some ground (and Kelly's commonality corollary warns us that without it we could not understand each other at all), this common ground cannot account for all the variance in meaning stemming from our respective personal construct systems. Kelly has invested his lifetime in researching construct systems of individual persons, trying to account for the inevitable human differences in meaning. Foucault has accounted for the common ground of similarities that enabled these differences, but suggested that this common ground – episteme – is as equally distant from the absolute truth as are personal constructs. Epistemes change through the history and differ in time and space. Foucault is adamant in that there are no transhistorical truths, because human facts – conduct or words – do not derive from nature, but from their discourses. Truth is a thing of this world, produced only by multiple forms of constraint. It can be regarded as a system of ordered proce-

dures for the production, regulation, distribution, regulation and operation of statements. It is also linked in a circular relationship with the systems of power which produce and sustain it, and is linked to the effects of power which it induces and which extend it.

*Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Rabinow, 1984, p. 73).*

Although it seems clear that episteme and personal construct system are different in their scope, the latter being situated in the personal realm and the former situated in the discourse, they share important similarities. They are both acquired and *contingent*; they are distinctive; both inevitably greatly influence people in their acquisition of knowledge, although on a different scale. They are both against the cumulative vision of science and both fight against essentialist approaches to human processes. Although personal construct systems pertain to individuals and are idiosyncratic in their content, they are heavily influenced by epistemes, which in turn are carried out by individuals and their personal construing. They form a spiral of reciprocal influence in which the construct 'episteme' may be construed as personal as much as the construct 'person' represents the product of the discourse. Therefore, we presume that viewing the personal construct system as a sort of 'personal episteme' and episteme as a 'social construct system' may provide a fruitful metaphor and a key to further interpretation of similarity between Kelly and Foucault. Our strong belief is that these two entities nicely complement each other.

Although there is a tendency to comment on Kelly's theory as a work that does not consider the social context within which people construe, we would like to challenge such a view by suggesting that the lack of elaboration in social field & social theory are not due to his disrespect towards the importance of anything social. Although the focus of his research was directed

towards the individual and insufficiently aware of the huge body of growing work in social theory, Kelly can be shown to have been always perceptive of and appreciative towards the role of society in understanding anything personal:

*The client is not merely the product of his culture, but it has undoubtedly provided him with much evidence of what is 'true' and much of the data which personal construct system has had to keep in systematic order* (Kelly, 1955, p. 688).

It may appear somehow inappropriate to base the strong impressions about the work of an author on their early and unpublished work. Unfortunately, Kelly's untimely death in 1967 has put us exactly in such a position. Very early in his career, in an unpublished essay 'Understandable Psychology', Kelly (1932) has addressed the issues of the social groups and social minds:

*You can have no such a thing as the individual unless you have a group. That is the equivalent of saying that there is no egg without a chicken. It is only because of his social contacts that man acquires status as an individual. It is through a social or inter-individual relationship that he is able to come into existence in the first place... There are no individuals until there are other individuals for them to be related to and distinguished from. The group and the individual are two aspect of the same thing... The cognitive processes of the group are no other than the organic processes of the individual members. But is there an underling pattern for these processes which is not to be seen in any members? Yes!... A lone voter cannot deadlock an election. A bride does not go on a honeymoon alone. The process of group behavior is nothing but behavior of individual members, although the pattern may be super-individual. In this sense, then, we can say there is a group mind. But wait, we should be careful not to jump to conclusions. The group mind is not a separate organism, not a separate process, not a separate will, not a separate force from that of the individual. It is a super-pattern into which the individual sub-patterns fit... The group mind is a situation into which individual tendencies are so combined as to make their effect violently felt by all.* (Ibid., cited in Fransella, 1995: 124)

Perhaps reading the above quotations through the lenses of Foucault's episteme may throw a new light on the subject. In our opinion, it certainly has offered strong support to further explore 'Kelly's discourse and Foucault's constructs' in the field of subjectivity.

### **THE MOST PROVOCATIVE SIMILARITY: CONSTRUCTING THE SUBJECT**

The term subjectivity is used in a number of discourses in the social sciences to describe a human being constituted and altered by historical, social and linguistic structures. The post-modern conception of subjectivity can be distinguished by its opposition to the Cartesian notion of the subject. This latter suggests a strongly bounded agent of rational self-legislation conceived in traditional epistemology as the counterpart to the object. Despite diverse and sometimes oppositional formulations, postmodernist critics tend to 'deconstruct' and 'dissipate' the humanist subject as the intending source of knowledge and meaning. Such accounts redefine the human self as an entity constructed by linguistic structures and signifying practices, and not simply reflected in a culture's social discourses.

Being one of the pioneers of this trend, Foucault (1971) has proclaimed the death of both the Cartesian subject and the traditional idea of the author, giving special prominence to the concept of discourse as the primary medium in the constitution of subjectivity, knowledge and power<sup>2</sup>. He has demonstrated that the subject matter of psychology does not reside in a covert mental interior, but resides situated in particular epistemes, containing also a variety of elusive discourses. These discourses offer various discourse positions coming from different ways of speaking about different entities, and they do not allow us only to describe but rather to constitute human subjectivity. Human beings, without

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<sup>2</sup> Although power, together with genealogy, is an immensely relevant part of Foucault's writing and plays an important role in the construction of the subject, available space does not allow us to deal with it in more detail here.

whom discourse would not exist, are of discursive origin, and at the same time represent the source of discourse as well as their product. The positions that discourses offer are like vacant seats which are offered and distributed to us by others. We (human beings as talkers) are not only talking through discourse, we (human beings as object of talk) are being produced by them. The task of the others is not to describe our hidden essence, but to match positions offered in discourse with human conduct. Although at first portraying people as product of discourses, in his later work Foucault (1983) left some space for constructing people not only as outcome of discourses, but also as their agentic users – a position much more germane to the spirit of PCP. Although their construing is necessarily mediated by discourses, people do have the possibility of exercising their choice by resisting the dominant discourses and turning to alternative ones.

The most interesting similarity between 'personal construct system' and 'episteme' is that they both determine not only the creations – theories of person-as-scientist or scientific theories in general – but they also determine their creators. Stated more simply, what the person is and what science claims that persons are, emanates not from the essence or quiddity of persons, but is a product of epistemes and personal construct systems.

Let us *consider* two quotations. Kelly's first:

*But life, to our way of thinking, is more than mere change. It involves an interesting relationship between part of our universe wherein one part, the living creature, is able to bring himself around to represent another part, his environment. ... We like our formulation ... because it emphasizes the creative capacity of the living thing to represent the environment, not merely to respond to it. Because he can represent his environment, he can place alternative construction upon it and, indeed, do something about it if it doesn't suit him* (Kelly, 1955, p. 8).

And now Foucault:

*In a more general fashion, man for the human sciences is not that living being with a very particular form...; he is that living being who, from*

*the within the life to which he certainly belongs and by which he is traversed in his whole being, constitutes representations by means of which he lives, and on the basis of which he possesses that strange capacity of being able to represent to himself precisely that life* (Foucault, 1971, p. 352; emphasis added).

Besides the strikingly similar emphasis on persons as beings capable of representing their life and their environment to themselves, both Kelly and Foucault move the emphasis from the essence and nature of human being to their capability of representing their lives – which also includes their representations of their selves. Human subjectivity seems to be treated in a similar respect by both authors. It is not so much what humans *really* are, what is their human nature, but the way they can represent their world and environment including their own representations of themselves. It is not so important what people are, but rather what they think, suppose or presume themselves to be. Their constructs and discourses are what sets them off into the busyness of producing their own subjectivity. By construing, following, abandoning and reconstruing their representations of themselves, they develop and change. But getting to know what they think they are, and through continuous upgrade of their representations of themselves as beings, they become different beings. In the opinion of both Foucault and Kelly, their 'nature' is not something that is given once for ever – it is continually changing through their discourses and personal constructs systems. It is not something given, it comes from this world. It is not contained inside human nature, but distributed and dispersed and diffused in elusive space between people, space inhabited with a myriad of social discourses and personal constructs. Thus, Foucault and Kelly, respectively, attribute to epistemes and personal constructs systems a very similar status in human knowledge – they both serve as isomorphisms situated between our epistemological efforts and the reality they represent. Since reality is too elusive a concept to handle, the only way to investigate it is through our investigations and its outcome: epistemes at the collective and personal constructs at the individual level. Although it may sound somewhat bizarre, human persons may be viewed as epistemological orphans of mother nature because

she is too negligent to appear to them, leaving them the meagre comfort of two foster parents that people have created as substitutes – epistemes and personal construct systems.

The basis of Foucault's (1983) view of human phenomena such as personality and identity can be only understood in relation to historical and cultural realms. The human being cannot be studied in the same way that physical phenomena can. To understand the historical dimension of the human psyche, it is counterproductive to study it as a series of isolated, stand alone, functional components. While natural sciences are fruitful about the physical components and organic nature, there is no human nature for the human sciences to be right about. For Foucault, the subject is constituted through many different practices. It is not pre-given and already there waiting to be discovered. The subject cannot exist as a being determined by specific qualities prior to the practices that make a subject's relationship with themselves in different historical periods come into being. As individuals reconstrue and reflect upon an imaginary identity, they cultivate an illusion of conscious control that only serves to occlude the aleatory and contingent origin of this imaginary essence. On one side, identity is constituted by a personal experience and an individual history, but on the other it is also and inevitably a product of the otherness of cultural, social and linguistic determinants. Therefore, it is not 'integrated', or contained 'within the skin' of an individual person. It is placed in a much larger and comfortable space among people and in much longer perspective of centuries, rather than flickering moments of their present existence.

Speaking about Foucault's subjectivity appears to be an easy task, but what about Kelly? It is a well-known fact that Foucault was a distinguished pioneer of (post)modern subjectivity; but Kelly's construction of the subject was somehow 'below the radar'. Although he has submitted his novel definitions of person, personality and self in the fifties and early sixties, well before Foucault, it seems to us that there was not enough interest and willingness to regard his work in the key of postmodern subjectivity.

Before examining the way subject is constructed in PCT, it is fundamental to keep in mind some important theoretical preconditions

that Kelly has offered. Constructive alternativism states that everything we construe – including the subject – can be constructed alternatively. Whatever we claim to know – including the subject – is always mediated by our constructs, and the only thing we know about the subject is our constructions of it. Our search is better if it is historical and includes constructions of the subject through the centuries of human existence. Our subjectivity develops through ontological acceleration: the more we research the subject, the more it changes. People – as subjects – always reconstrue what they cannot deny, so they are doomed to eternal search which changes not only what is investigated, but investigators as well. Again, the strong similarity with Foucault emerges.

Although subject in PCT has been expressed through the usual concepts such as personality, person and self, Kelly departed from the mainstream of his time and gave these concepts unusual meanings. Very much like Foucault a decade or so later, instead of postulating an inner essence or 'psychological fabrics' that usually account for our conduct in the scientific mainstream of his time, Kelly has displaced the subject 'outside of the head' and moved it in the realm of human relations. Unfortunately, dispersing the subject theoretically out of our heads, Kelly has also dispersed it physically throughout his writing, placing his definitions in highly counterintuitive places.

For example, his definition of the person is located in the chapter *The mathematical Structure of Psychological Space*:

*From the standpoint of the psychology of personal constructs a person is perceived as the intersect of many personal construct dimensions...When we say that a person is the intersect of many subjective dimensions, we mean, of course, that a person, as construed by someone such as ourselves, is a unique combination of dichotomous categorical interpretations (Kelly, 1955, p. 299-300).*

The placement of definition of personality is even worse. Although PCT was commonly referred to as personality theory throughout his lifetime, Kelly has not included it in his two volumes. It has appeared elsewhere, in a highly unpredictable edition – proceedings of the XIV

International Congress of Applied Psychology, held in Copenhagen in 1962:

*Personality itself is, then, our abstraction of the activity of a person and our subsequent generalization of this abstraction to all matters of his relations to other persons, known and unknown, as well as anything else that may seem particularly valuable. Thus there are three points to be kept in mind in dealing with personality:*

1. *It is a venture in abstract thinking undertaken by psychologists who examine the process of the individual person, and not an object simply to be discovered by them;*
2. *it cannot ignore the person's relationship to other persons; and*
3. *it is bound to be value-laden" (Kelly, 1962, p. 220-221).*

The nature of self has been defined in a chapter titled *The Nature of Personal Constructs*:

*The self is, when considered in the appropriate context, a proper concept or construct. It refers to a group of events which are alike in a certain way and, in that same way, necessarily different from the other events. The way in which events are alike is the self. That also makes the self an individual differentiated from other individuals (Kelly, 1995, p. 131).*

God alone knows why Kelly chose such a dispersion of subjectivity definitions. Whatever the reasons were, the presence of otherness is strongly felt in Kelly's definitions of the subject. Claiming that the person is the intersect of many personal constructs, and that personality is what someone thinks about somebody else, Kelly has made otherness a prerequisite of our own existence. To be subjects, we have to be construed as subjects by others; to construe as subjects, the others have to be construed as subjects (by us or other subjects).

Although the idea of the personal construct was approached in the idiographic tradition, as an entity "belonging" to individuals and containing their idiosyncratic meaning, the personal construct is also a construct through which a person is being defined. So beside understanding individuals and their personal meanings, the

psychology of personal constructs can also be viewed as a psychology about constitution of persons through their construing, a theory that explains how the person comes about, a point taken up only in the late seventies (Stringer, 1979).

Besides defining personality, person and self in an unusual manner, Kelly has added some of his own specific constructs of subjectivity: Role and Core Role. Although the concept of the role was defined differently from the usual use of the term, it was portrayed with enough details as a flow of activity through which the person construes construing processes of the other(s) (1955, p. 97-98). But another, equally specific and important subjectivity construct – the core role – was given sparse treatment in two volumes, although it is impossible to imagine any facilitative process without the use of it:

*Within core construct structure there are frames that enable prediction and control of the most relevant interactions with other persons and social groups. Together, these frames constitute the core role. Core role involves one's deepest understanding of being maintained as a social being. It is not merely according to what the other person appears to approve or disapprove, but according to what they believe another person thinks (Kelly, 1955, p. 502-505).*

By introducing the constructs of role and core role in his theory, Kelly emphasized the importance of decentering human conduct. Instead of a sole and legitimate scientific search for human nature, he tried to present humans as searchers who are at their peak when they succeed in overcoming the idea that there is one legitimate view on human nature. Instead of discovering the sole legitimate and true picture of human beings as they 'really' are, Kelly was trying to show that the human mind has a more noble role: on one side, it is the constitution of our worlds with all entities in it. On the other side, mind has a difficult task to see through its own illusion which tends to confuse its own knowledge with the way things ultimately are. Kelly leaves us with the endless struggle of construing, deconstruing, reconstruing and restless change. In order to cope with this task successfully, humans must learn that they exist in themselves as much as in

the constructions of others who help them become constituted as subjects through the process of construction. Stated in other terms, they have to learn that they are inevitably fragmented and dispersed as much as they need to be integrated and contained.

Foucault was blamed for killing the subject. Kelly was blamed for refusing to pursue a quest for human nature. But they both were concerned with change and emancipation. They were not fighting so much against the oppression that people suffer from other people, but rather against the invisible, tacit imprisonment coming from dominant discourses or their own personal construct systems. They have both reached for contingency, advocating that the condition of human being is far away from being predetermined by necessity. They have both recognized that although one thing may indeed lead to another, there is always an uncertainty which people cannot avoid. It would be fair to say that their common claim is that people do not have to be what they 'really' are. They have fought against the reduction of human beings to a particular set of discourse positions, or preempting persons to a finalized set of impermeable constructs mistakenly granted a status of 'absolute truth'. They have both realized that the idea of the numinous subject, self-contained and situated under the skin, has reached its limits. The center cannot hold.

We hope that it appears feasible and viable to read Kelly from the perspective of Foucault's work and to understand his work as the construction of a dispersed subject. We think that his idea of the dispersion of subjects is based on the dispersion of construing. Instead of being viewed as a result of their inner essence, the person becomes a point of intersection of constructs that people must produce about each other in order to implement their status of psychological beings. 'My' personality thus becomes an abstraction of other persons – I become what I think others are – my theory about them becomes me – as much as my construction of myself becomes a theory. Thus, the logic of the world that we cannot know as it is, becomes the logic of the description of the world: the logic of our anticipations.

We also hope that reading Foucault from the perspective of personal construct theory has some merits. What enables people to think about themselves as unique beings is not only the

product of their own individual efforts, but also includes other persons that recognize and legitimize our identity as our identity; various discourses that provide different positions – constructs through which our subjectivity is being construed; as well as wide ranging social institutions that determine the context in which our personhood and identity becomes constituted. Frequent comments about Foucault as the one who has killed the subject are thus misleading: we strongly believe that he has tried to destroy a construction of subject as numinous, a self-contained under his/her own skin, or a being that presents a precondition of every knowing and being, and not the product of that being and knowing. As much as they inhabit themselves, people also inhabit someone else's images about themselves. Thinking about themselves in the way Foucault was opposing, people succeed in maintaining the illusion that they possess something naturally given to them, an inner essence with which they have been born; a guarantee of legitimacy that makes them different from 'lower' organisms, clones, robots and all other less desirable 'natural givens'.

## FOUCAULT AND KELLY ABOUT HUMAN GOALS

Concluding this elaboration, we would like to suggest that both Kelly and Foucault have offered similar conclusive remarks about human subjectivity. Neither person nor self are entities existing in human beings independent of their construing of themselves. These entities include not only our constructs, but also a wider social context (i.e. other persons, discourses, epistemes, social institutions etc.). What determines our behavior does not have to be accounted for solely in terms of temperament, personality traits or genes, but also in terms of *our firm beliefs* that we are governed by temperament, personality traits, genes, or some other determinants. The change in these beliefs leads to change in what we call personality, person, identity, self, etc.

In the words of Foucault:

*Maybe today the goal is not to discover what we are, but to refuse to be what we are. We have to imagine and build what we may achieve to be in*

*order to get rid of this political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures... We have to promote new forms of subjectivities through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries (Foucault, 1983, p. 216).*

*From within language experienced and traversed as language, in the play of its possibilities extended to their furthest point, what emerges is that man has 'come to an end', and that, by reaching the summit of all possible speech, he arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him; in that region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes (Foucault, 1971, p. 383).*

In the words of Kelly:

*What I am saying here is that it is not so much what man is that counts as it is what he ventures to make out of himself. To make the leap he must do more than disclose himself; he must risk a certain amount of confusion. Then, as soon as he does catch a glimpse of a different kind of life, he needs to find some way of overcoming the paralyzing moment of threat, for this is the instant when he wonders what he really is – whether he is what he just was or is what he is about to be. Adam must have experienced such a moment (Kelly, 1968, p. 158).*

*To transcend the obvious – this is the basic psychological problem of man... But to represent an event by means of a construct is to go beyond what is known. It is to see that event in a way that could possibly happen again. Thus, being human and capable of construing, we can do more than point realistically to what has happened in the past; we can actually set the stage for what may happen in the future – something, perhaps in some respects, very different. Thus we transcend the obvious! ... if you go ahead and involve yourself, rather than remaining alienated from the human struggle, if you strike out and implement your anticipations, if you dare to commit yourself, if you prepare to assess the outcomes as systematically as you can... you will stand a chance of transcending more freely those*

*obvious facts that now appear to determine your affairs (Kelly, 1977, p. 11-19).*

We suggest that these views unequivocally imply that the principle human goal is neither to discover true human nature, nor invest too much in a search for human authenticity. What we are is not so important because we can be many things for many people. It is much more important to be concerned about where we will arrive than to ask ourselves where we come from. We have to look at the unknown. To reach the unknown we must transcend the road paved by the history of our contingent constructions of ourselves so far; and we have to give up the goal of reaching an actuality based on the necessity of an absolute truth. Instead researching the actuality of the conditions of human necessity, we have to investigate the products of our own research and the history of our contingencies. Both Kelly and Foucault seem to be sending us this message.

Luckily, it seems that we are not the only ones who were impressed by a promising coalition between Kelly and Foucault. The similarity between their work was observed in Warren's cogent comment on Foucault's late work:

*So, there is an obvious individual, but that individual has in the repertoire of behavior several ways of behaving, several reactions, and several orientations, positions or significances in respect to even the most pervasive force acting on the individual, that of power. This sounds remarkably like the process of construing, and, moreover, recalcitrance and intransigence appear to be remarkable markers of an individual's power to construe in terms of the fundamental postulate of personal construct psychology and some of its corollaries (1998, p. 93).*

Finally, it seems that the time is right to explore the new coalitions between PCT and kindred theories. PCT needs to stay open to other theories forming the postmodern challenge to the positivist legacy. This path is steep and paved with an anti-essentialist attitude, with which PCT should connect. Foucault and Kelly start from relatively similar positions, elaborating different entities for different reasons, but the combination of the two gives a precious reward: they both suggest that human freedom lies in our

recognition of human contingencies – both social and personal. Foucault is one of the recognized pioneers in this field, and we certainly think that Kelly deserves such a position as well.

Although this venture may ask for some reconstruing of the usual constructions of PCT as predominantly a theory of individual human beings, there are some voices to encourage a different way of thinking, one with which we identify our position:

*...all that Kelly said about how individuals operate in their construction of the world can be applied also to societies and cultures, organizations and groups. They can be seen to utilize bipolar constructs which define their identities, govern their interactions and shape their policies and practices. There is simply no need to make such a big issue of the distinction between the micro and the macro or the individual and the social. Culture is the copious source of our personal construing, although for PCP we always transform our construing into our own unique biography (Procter, 2016, p. 148-149).*

We sincerely hope that the future research of PCP will support this view.

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