Rethinking the Laboratory Experiment

FATHALI M. MOGHADDAM
Georgetown University
ROM HARRÉ
Oxford University

Two fundamentally different research approaches to the study of social behavior are represented in the logico-empirical and the discursive traditions, which have now existed side by side for some time, with little constructive interaction. In this article, we address some of the issues raised by this situation, with particular focus on how the laboratory setting has been and could be used. We propose to redefine the laboratory as an encyclema, a place for the staging of dramatic reconstructions of social episodes in which various psychological phenomena are discursively produced, such as intergroup attitudes, conformity, changes of mind, and so on. Of course, this is not a new idea. What is new, we believe, is the consequential project of reinterpreting laboratory studies of the past according to this interpretation. It might even be possible to use the possibility of such interpretations as a criterion for deciding whether or not to accept the results of an experiment into the corpus of established knowledge and how that knowledge is to be categorized.

THE STATICS AND THE DYNAMICS OF PSYCHOLOGY

There is a distinction to be drawn between studies of the processes by which some permanent psychological state is brought about and those that attempt to understand the way that a psychological phenomenon, often referred to by the same name, comes to exist in the course of a discursive

Authors' Note: *We are grateful to Daniel N. Robinson for suggesting the idea of the "encyclema" and for critically commenting on a number of other points raised in this article.* *Requests for reprints should be addressed to Fathali M. Moghaddam, Psychology Department, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057.*

AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST, Vol. 36 No. 1, September 1992 22-38

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and opinions: Studies in rhetorical psychology*. London: Sage.

Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, R. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas*. London: Sage.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice-Hall.

Geertz, C. (1983). Blurred genres: The refiguration of social thought. In C. Geertz, *Local knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist, 40*, 266-275.

Giddens, A. (1980). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge: Polity.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. In D. J. Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.

Harré, R. (1986). An outline of the social constructionist viewpoint. In R. Harré (Ed.), *The social construction of emotions*. Oxford: Blackwell.

James, W. (1890). *Principles of psychology* (Vols. 1-2). London: Macmillan.

Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969). *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation* (J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver, Trans.). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Rorty, R. (1980). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saussure, F. de (1960). *Course in general linguistics* (C. Bally & A. Sechehaye, Eds.). London: Owen.

Sholter, J. (1980). Action, joint action and intentionality. In M. Brenner (Ed.) *The Structure of action*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sholter, J. (1984). *Social accountability and selfhood*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Shotter, J. (1989). Vygotsky's psychology: Joint activity in a developmental zone. *New Ideas in Psychology, 7*, 185-204.

Shotter, J. (1991). Rhetoric and the social construction of cognitivism. *Theory and Psychology, 1*, 495-513.

Shotter, J. (1992). Social constructionism and realism: Adequacy or accuracy? *Theory and Psychology, 2*, 175-182.

Volosinov (Bakhtin), V. N. (1973). *Marxism and the philosophy of language* (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (1980). *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology* (Vols. 1-2). Oxford: Blackwell.

interaction. We can think of attitudes statically, as persisting dispositions that are produced and changed by some of the conditions to which a person is subject. But we can also think of attitudes dynamically, as features of displays put on by a person for some purpose at hand in the course of a discursive interaction. We believe that some of the apparent paradoxes that have emerged in attitude research, for instance the difference between what people say their attitudes are and the attitudes they display in some real encounter, have their origin in the running together of these two ways that attitudes can be understood. In the one, an attitude is a permanent disposition; in the other, it is a momentary presentation.

It seems to us that the latter case is at least as common as the former. If it is, then attitudes have to be studied as part of the dynamics of social interaction because in this sense they are ephemeral. All that is static or permanent is the actor's knowledge of how this or that attitude is to be displayed in the appropriate circumstances. It will be the discursive skills that are necessary to display locally recognizable attitudes that are grounded in personal dispositions. A person may very well have no fixed attitudes. Concentrating on the dynamics of attitude display turns our attention to the study of episodes, dynamic social interactions in the course of which psychological phenomena are produced as properties of the discourse itself.

Episode analysis involves two stages. Once the episode has been recorded, it must be analyzed into its *significant* components. Then the sequential *structure* or order of the components must be brought out. For most purposes, the psychologically relevant significant elements or components of an episode are the nested sequences of acts jointly created by the participants. Any record of an interactional episode contains a great variety of phenomena, and one needs a principled way of partitioning the flow of activity into relevant elements for the analytical task in hand. To facilitate analysis at the right level, we can make use of the familiar ethological distinction between physiologically and anatomically specifiable changes in the state of an organism, on one hand, and the acts and actions performed by that organism in interaction with others, on the other. An action is a change of the state of an organism (including vocalization) that is intended. An act is the social and/or psychological outcome of the joint performance of an action and its complements by the other actors who cooperate in creating the episode in question (von Cranach, 1982). The doings of people (and chimps), therefore, are articulated into structures by three networks of relations: causally mediated changes in the states of the organisms that interact, syntactically ordered action sequences, and semantically interrelated acts. Segmentation of the flow of behavior in any given episode will tend to yield different results,

depending on which network of relations is taken to be salient by the investigator.

We shall assume that the task of researchers into dynamic psychological phenomena, such as a manifestation of an attitude, the joint construction of a memory, or the display of an emotion is to understand behavior at the level of action and act. Making that assumption explicit requires us to acknowledge that the intentions of the actors are germane to the analysis of what happened. It is the actors who know what they meant by what they did, not the experimenter. Much of this "knowledge" is tacit, and it is one of the tasks of discursively oriented psychology to try to make such knowledge explicit (Marsh, Rosser, & Harré, 1977).

A useful refinement to the general idea of a dramaturgical model of social life has come from Sarbin (1986), who suggested that we should reserve the term "dramaturgical" for the more formal applications of the theatrical metaphor and use it to identify the kind of concepts that were picked out by the old role-rule model. But there is also the very important matter of the style in which various role enactments or formal episodes are carried out. Funerals, for example, require a certain locally distinctive style of grieving, just as demonstrations have their own characteristic ways in which the demonstrators should display indignation. Sarbin suggested that we call these *dramatistic* roles.

Dramaturgical and dramatistic concepts are already widely used in analytical social psychology. Faced with a complex and structurally and semantically opaque social episode, dramaturgical and dramatistic concepts have been used to analyze the conduct of the participants. This method has had some notable successes, for instance in the work of Marsh (Marsh et al., 1977) in which he provided a social psychological explanation of the ways that episodes of intergroup violence began, developed, and were rounded off. The use of the concept of role leads the investigator to pay attention to fairly rigid and well-defined patterns of action in well-defined social situations and institutions. Most famous, of course, is the animating analytical scheme of many of Goffman's most striking studies, for instance those described in *Where the Action Is* (Goffman, 1967). The analytical use of the theatrical metaphor and its associated concepts owes a great deal to the work of Kenneth Burke (1945). We shall briefly describe his famous "pentad," through which the basic structure of the theatrical metaphor as a conceptual scheme is expressed.

According to Burke, the five basic terms of "dramatism" are act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Taken in pairs, they pick out aspects of social interaction that mutually determine one another. These mutual determinations Burke called "ratios." So there is a scene-agent ratio, a scene-action

ratio, and so on. For example, a gesture, such as holding up the hand palm upward, has one kind of act-meaning and purpose when performed by the celebrant at the Mass and quite another when made by a diner to a server approaching with a pot of coffee to proffer a refill. Burke called these ratios a "grammar" in much the same sense as Wittgenstein used the word, that is, as a name for the open totality of normative constraints on the proper unfolding of classes of interactional episodes, or language games as Wittgenstein called them.

But the pentad has another role. It also determines the content of accounts, that is of stories about episodes in which the partitioning of the episode into constitutive events is displayed and in which a story about motives is constructed. As Burke said, "In any rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*" (p. x). However much disagreement there may be about an episode among participants and spectators, Burke asserted that "any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (*act*), when or where it was done (*scene*), who did it (*agent*), how he did it (*agency*), and why it was done (*purpose*)" (p. x). It should be obvious that, in Burke's view, a motive story is not a hypothesis about the putative antecedent causes of behavior.

In all this, the "theatrical" concepts have been used analytically to work with material that has been collected from naturally occurring episodes.

THE DISCURSIVE TURN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CONDUCT, DESIGN, AND INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIMENTS

The main methodological point that we want to make in this article is that it is not only possible to use the concepts of dramatism analytically, to study episodes that have already occurred and been recorded in some fashion, but it is also possible to use that very same conceptual system to fabricate episodes in such a way as to reveal how much a typical member of a participant group knows of the locally valid scripts or role-rule models, story lines and positions, and so on that constitute the "grammar" of that class of episode. It is to be the scene for this kind of staging, we claim, that is the proper role of the psychology laboratory. In many cases, experiments that have been reported in the literature are readily reinterpreted to conform to

this paradigm, although they have been misleadingly represented as being explorations of causes.

What terminology shall we adopt for describing our "theatrical" project? "Dramaturgical," "dramatistic," and "dramatic" have well-established uses. Our solution is inspired by ancient Greek dramas. Although these dramas were played on an open stage, certain scenes were performed in a kind of mobile room, the encyclema, wheeled on at the appropriate moment. Encyclematic scenes were supposed to be taking place elsewhere. They served to focus attention on particular parts of the drama unfolding on the main stage. Thus the audience was made aware of aspects of the play that might have been overlooked or neglected prior to the interjection of the encyclema. In the same manner, psychological studies direct attention to particular aspects of social life and bring to the forefront issues that might otherwise have been neglected by particular audiences. For example, the Zimbardo (1971) simulation brought the "problem of prison life" to the attention of middle-class students, whose life experiences had little tendency to bring them to pay serious attention to these matters. There is something of the idea of the encyclema in our conception of the revitalized laboratory.

We shall refer to our proposals by the adjective "encyclemic," keeping the words derived from "drama" for their usual range of uses. We shall refer to the analytical use of Burke's (1945) pentad and its derivatives as the method of dramatism and to the synthetic (laboratory) use of the pentad and derivatives as the encyclemic method.

If one were to adopt the principle that social action was fundamentally discursive rather than causal, what could one do by way of deliberate manipulative exploration of people's conduct in the effort to discern the normative constraints under which it was produced? For this would be what would correspond to the classical "experiment" in the new paradigm. One possibility is the creation and staging of dramas as alternative laboratory-based manipulations. Several previous attempts to substitute dramas for experiments have been made (Evreinov, 1927; Lyman & Scott, 1969), but they made little headway. In common with our predecessors, we take the fundamentals of the method to be the identification of the experimenter with the dramatist who presents the experimental participant as a character who plays the roles of both audience and performer and whose performance of his or her part requires improvisation. Such improvisation evolves from the participant's interpretation of the dramatic situation, as well as his or her role within it. The goal of the experimenter is not to try to identify causes for behavioral events but to achieve an understanding of the participant's interpretations of the unfolding drama and knowledge of the norms in terms of

which appropriate actions are taken. The results will be explicit formulations of that knowledge, perhaps in the form of sets of rules or as scripts.

Improvisations by subjects become meaningful within particular interpretations of the drama. Each participant, as in real life, strives to keep the action going, trying for some kind of harmony within the overriding themes established by the experimenter. Jazz is "done" in just this way. The soloist "jumps in" to take the lead. Sometimes, the rest of the band will pause to allow the theme to be taken on by one member. In a well-planned dramatistic "experiment," just such gaps will exist during which the participant carries on the episode in some way meaningful to him or her.

In viewing the laboratory as an encyclema, we have come to see it as a place for staging dramas, in the course of which participants will be drawn into the action and will do whatever seems to them to be the right thing at the time, in the light of their interpretations of the plot of the play. In some cases, their roles will be dramaturgical and in some, dramatistic. In the examples through which we will illustrate the power of rewriting an "experiment" as the staging of a drama, both kinds of roles will appear. In some exemplary cases, we will show that the original experimenter's understanding of what he or she brought about was distorted by reason of assuming a dramaturgical perspective on what the participants did. By reanalyzing the experiment in terms of dramatistic roles, the performance of the players becomes intelligible as proper to their way of life and social beliefs. As will be shown, the Milgram (1974) experiment is an almost perfect illustration of this case.

The two questions that must therefore be inserted into the experimental paradigm in its new Burkean form are these: What was it that you, the participant, meant to do, and how did you mean to do it? What did you think was going on, and who did you think were the prime movers? To answer these, we call on Burke's pentad and so achieve a "rounded statement" of motive. Perhaps one of the reasons why researchers have generally failed to take these questions as seriously as they should have is that the concept of "intention" has not been properly understood. For example, a considerable body of work under the title of "social cognition" is concerned with the theme that people do not know the causes of their actions (for examples, see Wyer & Srull, 1984). This may be, but intentions are not the causes of actions anyway. There may be no relevant psychological causes (Crowle, 1990). Intentions are what actions are taken to mean; that is, intentions are displayed in the action. They are not antecedent conditions under which, ceteris paribus, the normatively required actions occur. Announcing our intentions in advance of doing something is not giving a glimpse into the causes of whatever

we are doing but providing the interlocutor with the means for interpreting what it is we are about to do.

We can illustrate the effect of neglecting these questions in what would otherwise have been an exemplary case of the use of laboratory as an encyclema, namely, Milgram's (1974) attempt to create a scenario in which participants were induced to obey orders to perform morally repugnant acts. Milgram seems to have assumed that it was enough to guarantee that compliance could be interpreted as obedience for his assistants to issue orders and supplementary assurances. He made no attempt to control the way what was done was interpreted as acts. His experiments were laid over a radical indeterminacy. The vast range of variation in the way that the people who took part interpreted their own and the actions of the experimenters emerged in the debriefings that Milgram reported in his book. The "variance" was almost completely accounted for by reference to diversity of interpretations. It seems to us that had Milgram explicitly adopted the dramaturgical standpoint, he would never have missed the degree to which people failed to conform to his way when interpreting his experiment.

If social psychology is about anything, it must surely be about what people mean to do and what they are taken as doing by other people, in short it must be about acts and actions. The behavior that "carries" action is rarely of any interest. And we need Burke's (1945) pentad because, as he rightly emphasizes with his ratios, the five aspects of an episode mutually define one another. In the same way that another well-known scheme, that embodied in positioning theory, is built around the idea that there is a triad of mutually determining relations between the speaking or acting positions of the participants, speech-act type and story line or narrative convention. Again we note that Milgram took care to design his laboratory setting as a scene, so that the story line, that what was going on was a learning experiment in a psychology laboratory, should not be contradicted by the background. Unfortunately, it is evident that he did not achieve full scenic control as many of the participants took it that the acts performed by the agents with the agency of electric shocks would not result in people being killed *in a university science department.*

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE EXISTING REPERTOIRE OF LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS AND THEIR FINDINGS IN TERMS OF THE THEATRICAL METAPHOR

We will bring out the force of an encyclemic interpretation by considering the effect of such an interpretation on our reading of four well-known studies

in social psychology. In the Sherif (1937) experiment, participants were found to come to a common agreement on the movement of a spot of light, the autokinetic effect. This has been interpreted as the formation and persistence of a social norm. The second study that we look at is Asch's (1956) demonstration that a person can be induced to agree to a claim insisted on by the members of a group, however patently erroneous that claim might be. The third case, already touched on briefly, is Milgram's (1974) "experiment," in which about two thirds of a group of ordinary people were induced to give someone a seemingly lethal electrical shock. The fourth example is Zimbardo's (1971, 1972a, 1972b) study in the course of which those chosen to play the role of guards in a simulation of a prison were found to treat those playing the role of prisoners with excessive severity.

By attempting to reinterpret some classical experiments, we can lay out a spectrum of empirical procedures for the laboratory setting. At the one pole are true experiments, in which a causal relation is established to exist between two state- or event-types as they are represented by dependent and independent variables. At the other are "happenings" best seen as the staging of dramas. For us, the persistent tendency to interpret *all* laboratory studies in terms only of the concepts appropriate to the "causal" pole is a major source of errors in interpretation. We shall try to show that adopting the opposite strategy offers the most consistent and fruitful approach. We shall, therefore, interpret an experiment as an improvised drama unless this can be shown to be unsuitable or improper.

It seems to us that the Sherif (1937) experiment is not susceptible of a dramatistic reading. The induced effect lasted for a long time, provided that the participant's attention was not drawn to the inducing conformity to the common opinion of the group. We should be inclined to interpret this as a genuine experiment and to relabel it as the induction of a habit, physiologically sustained. Our only comment on the original formulation of the result is to draw attention to the misleading implications of using the word "norm" to describe the conformity. We believe that in this experiment, Sherif activated much the same mechanism as is operative in episodes like hysterical epidemics (Veith, 1964).

The Zimbardo (1971, 1972a, 1972b) prison simulation is one of the best-known pieces of social psychological research. It is discussed at length in almost every major introductory social psychology text and has been the subject of much debate in the popular media. The simulation involved two dozen people told to behave as if they were either prisoners or guards in a makeshift "prison" constructed in the basement of a building at Stanford University. The power of the simulation arose from the highly involved, and apparently realistic, way in which the participants played their roles. In

essence, the participants interpreted the roles of prisoner and of guard in such a way that violence and cruel treatment toward others became routine. Consequently, the simulation had to be stopped after the sixth day, and the experimenters could not complete their planned two weeks of observation.

The Zimbardo simulation served an illustrative function. By acting as they supposed prisoners or guards behaved, the participants showed us what a normal group of people *believed* prison life must be like for prisoners and their guards. This dramatic illustration could then be taped and documented and presented to decision-making bodies such as the U.S. House of Representatives Committee of the Judiciary (Zimbardo, 1971). Because the participants were amateur rather than professional actors, the experiment could have an illustrative power that goes beyond that of professionally produced films, whether documentaries or dramas.

Using the laboratory as an encyclema in this manner does not necessarily reveal anything new about the way in which people manage the real world. For example, the Zimbardo prison simulation did not reveal anything that we did not already know about prison life. The simulation served to inform us about what participants *think* prison life must be like rather than what sort of life it actually is. The surprise element in Zimbardo's findings, if there is any, arises from the unexpected intensity of the participants' way of acting in the prison simulation. This way of acting may or may not be akin to the way that real prisoners and guards act, or have a degree of "naive realism" in Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, and Gonzales's (1990) terminology.

The Zimbardo (1972a, 1972b) simulation is readily reinterpreted along dramatistic lines. It just *was* a theatrical performance, no different from any piece of improvised or spontaneous theater. The events staged by Zimbardo and his crew cannot, without the grossest distortion, be described as the interplay of dependent and independent variables.

Both the Sherif (1937) and the Zimbardo (1972a, 1972b) studies illustrate the polarity that underlies our proposal. We believe that laboratory work is essentially either manipulation of neurophysiological processes and states or the performance of improvised dramas. The tales of the "running of experiments," which appear in the professional journals, can be read either Sherif-wise or Zimbardo-wise. In the social psychology laboratory, we are looking either at human automatisms or at human abilities and skills to perform in the manner of actors in a theater.

Milgram's (1974) study is patently in the Zimbardo category. The fake learning experiment, through which the giving of electrical shocks to the apparent subject was legitimated, is just a playlet. Milgram even engaged an

actor to play the part of the victim. The morally equivocal behavior of Milgram's assistants, none of whom are reported to have refused to continue tormenting the participants by pressing them to continue the treatment of the stooge is the most difficult part of the experiment to explain. It too can be made sense of if the whole event is interpreted as the staging of a sequence of playlets, with everyone, assistants included, playing dramatistic roles (Mixon, 1971). The assistants too were playing parts, not engaging in real-life activities which had they been *taken* as veridical would have been anathema to them, we hope. The whole thing had the air of theater. That it struck at least some of the participants that way, but clearly not those who refused to go on, is evident in some of the reports in Milgram's book.

There remains the "conformity" study by Solomon Asch (1956). Can it too be read as an instance of improvised drama? Could the performance of the central participant in each show be taken as the playing of a part, the script for which is a cultural commonplace? The group of confederates in Asch's study report estimates of the length of lines that were patently perceptibly false. After a while, the real participant comes to agree with this bunch of stooges. He may even confess to Asch that his real and private opinion had shifted a bit toward that of the gang. But isn't this just what the person who plays the role of "good guy" in the playlets of everyday life is expected to do? Usually, the issue of conformity is defined in moral terms. Ought one or ought one not to go along with what one's friends believe or propose? What would be the cost of being awkward? And so on. It appears very unlikely that anyone came to see something differently after listening to the others. In our view, there is a very sharp line to be drawn between the Sherif (1937) results and those found by Asch (1956).

We can go further. We suggest that the possibility of giving a encyclemic reading of an experiment can be used as a criterion for assigning the phenomenon reported to physiology or to culture. Some interpersonal action is physiologically mediated. Some is mediated by conformity to local requirements as to the intelligibility and warrantability of the actions engaged in by the participants in the circumstances. It is instances of the latter kind that can be written up as theater and in which locally knowledgeable people can play their parts with skill and conviction (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1992). It is inherent in the position we are proposing that cultural diversity is to be expected. We could hardly expect a participant chosen from among a group of willing undergraduates to be capable of doing a reasonably convincing job as a Bhuddist shaman, an auctioneer in a fish market, an Aztec priest, or a Polynesian centenarian!

TECHNIQUE: THE EXPERIMENTER AS DRAMATIST

PREPARING AND RUNNING "THE SHOW"

The encyclemic interpretation of the laboratory experiment requires that the same components be created in the drama as are created in the corresponding experiment. But the rhetoric of interpretation is quite different. In the experimental interpretation, the setting and the situation are treated as "stimulus objects," that is, as causes of the subjects' behavior, which is then conceived as an effect or effects of that treatment. In the encyclemic interpretation, the setting, situation, and other cues are treated as creating incomplete scenarios, providing opportunities for meaningful action, that is, for the performance of proper acts. There will be gaps in the flow of action, gaps that a participant must identify and should fill. One could think of the setting as something like those records that amateur musicians use, in which an orchestra performs a work with one part omitted. One can have the thrill of playing the adagio of Mozart's clarinet concerto backed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra without the embarrassment or expense of a public performance. In the encyclemic interpretation of laboratory studies, the participants are encouraged to complete social episodes in the same spirit as the amateur completes the concerto.

The difference between traditional experiments and encyclemic happenings is not just a matter of the rhetoric with which laboratory episodes are described. Causes and effects require no participation from the subject, and further research should be aimed at discovering what causal mechanisms are at work. It may even be possible sometimes to justify the use of statistical analyses in search of central tendencies. The performance of meaningful actions in the endeavor to create an orderly slice of life cannot be made sense of without assuming the active participation of the persons engaged. Such concepts as attentively, carelessly, and so on have an application in this interpretation but not in the other. There are no causal mechanisms to look for. There is tacit social knowledge that one would try to make explicit. Statistical analyses would make no sense in this interpretation. There can be no "variance" to be analyzed. There can only be different ways of understanding what is going on and what should be done. The most that one could do numerically (and it might be very valuable) would be to total up the proportions of a sample of participants who followed this or that interpretative convention and this or that set of rules of proper action.

At the risk of underlining the obvious, we think it worthwhile to spell out in some detail just how we envisage the encyclemic method would be used. The experimenter's role as dramatist begins with the devising of a plot for

the play, the experiment. The plot might be inspired by some event in the real world, or it might be inspired by a theoretical question. At this stage, because the experimenter is drawing on intuition about how such a playlet should run, other people should surely be drawn into the process of composition.

The playlet would be written in the manner of experimental theater, allowing room for scripted improvisation and for audience participation. "Scripted improvisation" refers to the technique by which free improvisation is encouraged within a predetermined framework so that the actions of the improvising actor remain within the general scenario. Actions outside the frame of scripted improvisation simply lead to the deletion of that actor and his or her performance from all formal accounts of *that* play. Of course, the play they have created is another drama and may have an intrinsic interest and importance of its own. The experimenter as playwright has a number of options with respect to how to provide room for improvisation. For instance, structural features can be varied. The range of scripted options for action can vary as can the extent to which any given scripted option requires a determinate follow-on to maintain the integrity of the predetermined scenario. But it may also be possible to vary subjective features that provide room for improvisation. For instance, the realism and salience of the available actions may vary in the context of the play as they do in real life. As Pierce and Cronen (1981) pointed out, real conversation is built out of essentially ambiguous utterances that are rarely made determinate.

Not only must a script be developed in the ways we have described but the details of staging must be attended to with the same meticulous attention to detail. Several studies (e.g., Harré, 1979) have shown how important (and complex) are the messages conveyed to participants by the environment within which a social interaction occurs. Milgram (1974) took good care to create a plausible setting for his miniature dramas.

Just as in the theater, in the encyclemic laboratory, rehearsal plays an essential part in the creation of psychological authenticity. The playwright and his or her "cast" have the opportunity to negotiate a common interpretation of the script. In particular, in this way the action structure of the episode depicted begins to gel (de Waele & Harré, 1977). Only by rehearsal does the cast begin to create that clearly demarcated "empty space" into which the audience/participants of the actual experiment can fit. The cast must rehearse to achieve that sharp boundary. Within this space is situated the scripted improvisations to be played by the experimental participants, those whose social skills and resources are being investigated.

The actual performance of the drama (the "running of the experiment" in the traditional metaterminology) is very largely a matter of managing to make an adequate record of the proceedings for analysis. But there can be unex-

pected hazards. One of us, when directing the performance of an encyclemic experiment on the conventions by which status is marked in greeting episodes (de Waele & Harré, 1977), was faced with the refusal by one of the participants to continue with the play. He felt that the performance which the script required of him was beneath the dignity of the type of person he had been cast to play. He claimed that in the person of the character he had been insulted. Of course, this was a striking confirmation of the reality of a convention whose violation was being displayed in the action of the play.

INTERPRETING THE PERFORMANCE

There are three phases to the interpretation of the drama that eventually takes place on the laboratory stage. Each phase involves negotiations about the meaning of the play.

Phase 1 involves an imaginative projection by the dramatist/experimenter into the play. What would they have done in those circumstances? Thus Milgram (1974) tried to put himself into the role of the participant to imagine how the "obedience" play would look from that perspective. Others, too, can be invited to imagine themselves to be involved (Mixon, 1971). In this way, some sort of local consensus can be established as to how participants from this culture would (not should!) interpret the play.

In the second phase of interpretation, the dramatist/experimenter will try to establish by similar methods what an unexpected (but still intelligible) way of developing a part would be. Milgram (1974), for example, sought opinions from both "expert" and laypersons as to what participants in his playlets could be expected to do. Was the response of Mr. G. ("So, this guy died—so what?") a surprise? Mixon's (1971) encyclemic version was such a great advance on the original Milgram (1974) experiment for many reasons, but one of the most striking was his careful control of the demarcation between the expected and the unexpected as the beliefs of the participants as to the authenticity of the events were revised. All of those who believed that the victim was not really wired up to a lethal electrical circuit went to the maximum shock level unhesitatingly, just as expected.

In the final phase, a negotiation as to the best version of the drama and of the performances of the participants must be carried through (Kreckel, 1981). It is from the agreed version that the social psychological material is finally to be extracted. Only when some stable interpretation has been reached can the dramatist/experimenter confidently ascribe the appropriate level of tacit normative social knowledge and skill to the participant or to the group of participants whose improvised performance has been the focus of the play.

A RESERVATION

It might be objected that there is nothing new in the encyclemic program on the grounds that it is nothing but role-play under another and more pretentious name. Participants are assembled by a therapist and they take turns in playing a troublesome adolescent or whatever is the focus of inquiry. In the course of that role-play, some sort of personal revelation is supposed to be vouchsafed, usually an empathic understanding of what it is like to be a person of such and such a category. There are all kinds of problems with the interpretation of role-play, not least the proper mood of the verb "to be like." Is it perhaps what such and such a person "would be like"?

We would argue that insofar as role-playing is a technique of psychological research, it is just one among many possible dramatistic/dramaturgical procedures. As usually performed, it is rather narrower than our proposed technique in that it explores a participant's capacity to carry out a role already defined for him or her. We see the more profound issue to be raised by questions that we can ask not only about a participant's capacity to perform a role but that person's capacity to identify the given setting as the proper place for just this or that role.

The encyclemic laboratory study sometimes includes role-play. There are cases in which the dramatistic/dramaturgical analogue is fully and literally realized in psychological inquiries. The clearest case is the Zimbardo (1972a, 1972b) study. The roles of prisoner and guard exist in the community and are known of. So at least there is knowledge of generic or mythic forms of these roles. In Zimbardo's simulated prison, the participants were given roles that they had to fill out. In the imagined world of the *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1962), the roles were made in the filling of them.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

What, then, is the logical status of the drama that we propose to stage in the encyclemic laboratory? It is first of all a simulation of life rather than a role-play. But it is also an experiment, but one in which there are no variables, dependent or independent. There are contexts and actions and the acts thereby performed. The encyclemic framework controls for conduct at the action/act level of analysis. It is an experiment of the kind common in physics in which a model universe is constructed that resembles our world in certain ways but not in others.

A careful review of the actual functions served by psychological experiments suggests the following possibilities. First, we can identify an *as if*

function, involving a depiction of patterns of behavior of participants as if they were involved in a "real life" event but in a model world. Second, the experiment serves a *could if* function, by demonstrating the types of behavior that could occur if certain conditions were met in our world.

THE "AS IF" FUNCTION

This function of the laboratory experiment involves the simulation of events as a means of focusing attention on particular types of behavior patterns. It takes the same form as many experiments in the physical sciences, in which, rather than test a hypothesis, we should see the setup as the creation of a model universe. For example, a problem that requires the "as if" treatment is the question of what the minimal conditions are in which individuals show intergroup bias (Tajfel, 1978). By creating group interactions that involved anonymous members, no face-to-face contact, and no material basis for ethnocentrism, Tajfel (1978) and his associates showed how participants might act under conditions of minimal group membership through assessing how people would act in a model universe, different in certain important respects from that which we do actually inhabit. The laboratory procedure allows us to explore a whole range of potential actions in virtual worlds.

THE "COULD IF" FUNCTION

A second function served by the experiment is the exploration of the possibilities of human behavior, not in some model world but in this very world itself. What kinds of behavior could come about if we created certain conditions? The "could if" function particularly serves to highlight and explore extreme forms of conduct that could come about if certain conditions are met. For example, what would people do when confronted with a person seemingly having a heart attack in a subway car?

We envisage an experimental paradigm in which there is a spectrum of cases. Those in which sensemaking is reduced to a minimum, as in role-play, occupy one pole, the "could if" format; that is, the encyclema is just a segment of our familiar world. Those in which the opportunity for free construction of meaning is maximized are at the other, the "as if" format, those in which the encyclema is a novel or virtual world. There is a theatrical genre of exactly the free construction kind, namely, the theater of the absurd. Lyman and Scott (1969) proposed the writing of works in that genre as a model or analogue for a sociology. The performance of plays in that genre can serve us as an analogue of cases in which the demands for sensemaking placed on partici-

pants are at their greatest. This simulates many of those situations in life in which we really do not know what is going on but have to make out some sort of sense of events to be able to act at all. There are examples from the literature of classical experimentation that appear to us to be exactly Ionesco-like. For instance, the setting in Duval, Wicklund, and Knealy's (1979) study of helping behavior was very strange. It provided participants with a world seriously deficient in routine opportunities for sensemaking. It required that participants literally imagine a world in which it would make sense to look at oneself in a monitor for a minute or so and then fill in a questionnaire in an adjoining room. The experiment, reinterpreted encyclemically, is surely a study of the extraordinary power of sensemaking possessed by quite ordinary people. In the Milgram (1974) experiment, people were also required to make sense of a bizarre situation. They did so but, as it turned out, in ways that Milgram (1974) neither envisaged nor intended. In neither case could the experimenters control for meaning and so for action. As dramas, these experiments were at the Ionesco pole.

The literature of social psychology is littered with attempts to develop a methodology based on the analogy of the stage to everyday life. So far as we can see, there is nothing inherent in the encyclemic appropriation of the laboratory that can explain the failure of these methods to become a main tool of social psychological research. Once again, then, we follow Evreinov (1927), Goffman (1959), Burke (1945), de Waele (de Waele & Harré, 1977), Lyman (Lyman & Scott, 1969), and many others in advocating an explicitly formulated rethinking of the experimental format in dramaturgical/ dramatistic terms.

REFERENCES

Aronson, E., Ellsworth, P. C., Carlsmith, P. C., & Gonzales, M. H. (1990). *Methods of research in social psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs, 70*(9, Whole No. 416).

Burke, K. (1945). *A grammar of motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Crowle, A. J. (1990). I don't know why I did it. In R. Bhaskar (Ed.), *Harré and his critics* (pp. 154-164). Oxford: Blackwell.

de Waele, J. P., & Harré, R. (1976). The personality of individuals. In R. Harré (Ed.), *Personality* (pp. 189-246). Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield.

Duval, S., Wicklund, R. A., & Knealy, R. (1979). Self focus, felt responsibility and helping behavior, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 1769-1778.

Evreinov, N. (1927). *The theater in life* (A. J. Nakaroff, Trans.) New York: Bretano.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of the self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday/ Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Where the action is.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Golding, W. (1962). *Lord of the flies.* New York: Coward-McCann.
Harré, R. (1979). *Social being: A theory for social psychology.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Kreckel, M. (1981). *Communicative acts and shared knowledge in natural discourse.* London: Academic Press.
Lyman, S. L., & Scott, M. B. (1969). *A sociology of the absurd.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
Marsh, P., Rosser, E., & Harré, R. (1977). *The rules of disorder.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority.* New York: Harper & Row.
Mixon, D. (1971). Behavior analysis treating subjects as actors rather than organisms. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, 1,* 19-31.
Moghaddam, F. M., Taylor, D. M., & Wright, S. C. (1992). *Social psychology in cross-cultural perspective.* New York: Freeman.
Pierce, W. B., & Cronen, V. (1981). *Communication, action and meaning.* New York: Praeger.
Sarbin, T. (1986). Emotion and act: Roles and rhetoric. In R. Harré (Ed.), *The social construction of emotion* (pp. 83-97). Oxford: Blackwell.
Sherif, M. (1937). An experimental approach to the study of attitudes. *Sociometry, 1,* 90-98.
Tajfel, H. (Ed.). (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations.* London: Academic Press.
Veith, I. (1964). *Hysteria: The history of a disease.* New York: Norton.
von Cranach, M. (1982). The psychological study of goal-directed action. In M. von Cranach & R. Harré (Eds.), *The analysis of action* (pp. 35-73). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wyer, R. S., Jr., & Srull, T. K. (Eds.). (1984). *Handbook of social cognition* (3 vols.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Zimbardo, P. G. (1971, October 25). *The psychological power and pathology of imprisonment.* Statement prepared for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee No. 3: Hearings on Prison Reform, San Francisco.
Zimbardo, P. G. (1972a, April). Pathology of imprisonment. *Transaction/Society,* pp. 4-8.
Zimbardo, P. G. (Producer). (1972b). *The Stanford prison experiment* [Slide/tape show]. (Available from Philip G. Zimbardo, Inc., P. O. Box 4395, Stanford, CA 94305)