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Abstract History has widely been viewed as being an essential ingredient in the formation of identity. This article examines this assumption from the perspective of how narratives about the past serve as a kind of 'cultural tool' in 'mediated action' that creates and re-creates identity. Some properties of narratives as cultural tools are outlined, and it is argued that both the production and consumption of these cultural tools must be taken into account in order to develop an adequate analysis of history and identity. The notions of 'mastery' and 'appropriation' are introduced as preferable to the undifferentiated construct of 'internalization' when interpreting findings reported in other articles of this issue's special topic as well as elsewhere.

Key Words history, identity, internalization, narrative

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Narrative Tools of History and Identity

Knowledge about the past is widely viewed as a crucial ingredient in the construction of identity. From this perspective we can't know who we are if we don't know where we have been, or, in the words of the historian David Lowenthal (1985): 'the sureness of "I was"' is a necessary component of the sureness of "I am." Ability to recall and identify with our past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value' (p. 41). Parallels between individuals and nations on these issues have been drawn at least since the rise of early 19th-century nationalism, and they continue to be widely used today. For example, Schlesinger (1992) has recently argued that

... history is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual. As an individual deprived of memory becomes disoriented and lost, not knowing where he has been or where he is going, so a nation denied a conception of its past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future. As the means for defining national identity, history becomes a means for shaping history. (pp. 45–46)

Schlesinger's observation that history is 'a means for shaping history' is crucial to the arguments that run throughout the articles in this

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issue of *Culture & Psychology*. Rather than viewing history simply as a neutral instrument for providing as accurate an account of the past as possible, it is taken to serve other functions as well. In particular, it is viewed as being a powerful instrument for shaping ideas and emotions that underlie the actions of a citizen of a nation-state, actions such as voting, going to war or paying taxes. Because it functions as an instrument of this sort, the stakes in formulating and promulgating accounts of the past can be quite high, something reflected in Kundera's (1994) assertion that '[t]he only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies and histories are rewritten' (p. 22).

Claims about how history shapes national identity and political action are inherently grounded in a set of assumptions about psychological processes. However, the discipline of psychology has had relatively little to say about just what these processes are. Indeed, commentators such as Marty (1994) have claimed that psychologists are often distinctly unhelpful in dealing with such topics due to various forms of psychological reductionism that underlie their research (Wertsch, 1995). The implication of Marty's comments is that in order to contribute to our understanding of issues such as national identity, psychology will have to do so as part of an interdisciplinary effort—a point of view to which the authors of this issue of *Culture & Psychology* heartily subscribe.

The contributors to this issue have written about history and identity from a variety of perspectives, but there are some common threads that run throughout their work. I shall attempt to trace these common threads by formulating them in terms of 'mediated action' (Wertsch, 1991, 1995). From this perspective human mental functioning and human action more generally are viewed as inherently involving the use of 'mediational means', or 'cultural tools' (terms I shall use interchangeably). In trying to understand mediated action it is essential to recognize the power of cultural tools to shape such action, on the one hand, but it is equally essential to recognize the role of the active agents who use these cultural tools, on the other. The resulting picture is one of an 'irreducible tension' (Wertsch, 1995, in press) between cultural tools and their use by active agents.

This irreducible tension may be played out in a variety of ways. In some cases the cultural tool dominates the picture in the sense that variations in its use are severely limited and the agent using it must follow its lead almost entirely. In other cases the cultural tool presents a wide range of possibilities for improvisation (Sawyer, 1995) and

the mediated action that emerges is more heavily shaped by the agent.

From the general perspective of this issue's special topic the point is that an account of mediated action can be reduced neither to an analysis of agents nor to an analysis of the cultural tools they employ (nor to an analysis of scene for that matter—see Wertsch, in press). Cultural tools are always involved in shaping action, but they never mechanistically determine it. At the same time, attempts to understand human action by analyzing individuals isolated from cultural tools leaves out a crucial dimension of the irreducible tension that defines human action.

Taking mediated action as a unit of analysis raises a set of questions that normally do not emerge in approaches grounded in a single discipline of the human sciences. Of particular importance for my present purposes, it leads one to address the issue of how cultural tools are *produced* as well as *consumed*. Human actors are always in a position of using cultural tools which have been produced by a particular set of historical, institutional and cultural forces, and for this reason their actions are always socioculturally situated. Just as there is no way to speak without employing some language, there is no way to carry out other forms of action without consuming mediational means provided by one's sociocultural setting.

As I argue below, the forces of production which give rise to cultural tools in a sociocultural setting are often quite powerful in shaping the forms of mediated action that will occur. Such forces emerge in a variety of ways associated with a variety of institutions. The institution of formal education is clearly a candidate for study in this regard (e.g. Ahonen, 1997; Łuczyński, 1997), but as G.M. White (1997) suggests, other institutions, such as film, newspapers and commemorations, play a role as well. In addition to the range of sites and forces of production that need to be considered, there is a need to employ a range of methods. In this connection, Ahonen and Łuczyński focus primarily on textual analyses of instructional materials, and G.M. White supplements this by introducing ethnographic methods into his analysis.

In general, there is clearly a need to gain an appreciation of the forces that go into producing history, and this has been the orientation of many studies of how cultural tools shape human action. However, a focus solely on production misses a major part of the picture—a part concerned with the irreducible tension between cultural tool and active use that characterizes any form of mediated action. Even the most complete account of the production of cultural tools cannot guarantee that we will understand how they are consumed.

Many of the ideas I have just outlined for the study of mediated action in general are strikingly parallel to the more specific constructs employed by several major analysts of history and national identity. These analysts often argue—or at least assume—that a set of artifacts is involved in the production and reproduction of national identity. Such artifacts are viewed as playing the role of cultural tools to be taken up and used by agents. For example, authors such as Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1990) and Schlesinger (1992) have argued that the importance of historical texts, artifacts, rituals and monuments has become clear to nations and nation-states over the past two centuries. On the basis of such studies of the rise and maintenance of nation-states it is possible to identify at least three instrumental functions that historical texts are thought to serve.

First, there is a kind of cognitive function having to do with the mediational means required to create what Anderson (1991) has termed 'imagined communities', especially nation-states. Anderson argues that without instruments such as texts about history (as well as maps, newspapers and other cultural tools) it may be impossible to imagine communities or 'to "think" the nation' (p. 22). In this context, institutions such as those that are responsible for writing and teaching national history provide the "'concepts', 'models', and indeed "blueprints'" (p. 81) for various groups as they attempt to create and reproduce nation-states.

A second function of history, especially the 'official histories' (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994) promulgated by nation-states, is to provide citizens with some sense of group identity. In this connection, Lowenthal (1985) has argued,

Awareness of history ... enhances communal and national identity, legitimating a people in their own eyes. 'A collectivity has its roots in the past', in Simone Weil's phrase. 'We possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us'. (p. 44)

The kind of identity forming process to which Lowenthal alludes is similar to what McAdams (1993) has in mind when talking about the formation and maintenance of individual human identity through narrative. For nations, as well as for individuals, a notion of 'where one has been', to paraphrase Schlesinger, is a crucial element in forming an idea of 'where one is going', and in these processes history can play a crucial role in providing 'texts of identity' (Shotter & Gergen, 1989).

The third, related function of official histories is to create loyalty on the part of citizens to the nation-state. This may sound heavy-handed

to some readers, but there is little question on the part of many of those who have examined this issue (e.g. Herzfeld, 1992) that this function plays a basic role in shaping the histories produced by nation-states. The hope is that by producing powerful and appealing accounts of the past, a nation-state will be able to convince citizens of the correctness and importance of their state's causes and mobilize them around various forms of political action.

Anderson (1991) touches on this function when he writes of 'the *attachment* that people feel for the inventions of their imaginations' (p. 141), inventions that rely on official histories, among other things. The power of this attachment is an issue, if not a mystery, that goes to the heart of many forms of nationalism, including the issue of 'why people are ready to die for these inventions' (p. 141). Pérez-Díaz (1993) discusses these issues in terms of how texts or rules are *internalized*, that is, 'accepted as legitimate and reasonable' (p. 40) by the majority of a population in such a way that these texts or rules provide the foundation for predictable patterns of behavior. In such cases these texts and rules and 'the attachment to them, constitute the signs of identity of their membership in civilized society' (p. 51).

Clear examples of how the production of history was aimed at enhancing loyalty to the state can be found in the Soviet Union. Even after perestroika was well underway calls for loyalty were coming through loud and clear in Soviet history textbooks. Although there were glimmerings of the impending revelations of the dark side of Soviet history, the intent was still obviously to socialize citizens who would be loyal to this state. For example, in a prefatory note to the readers of *History of the USSR*, the 1989 textbook intended to be read by every tenth grader in Soviet schools, the authors wrote:

The course on the history of the USSR that you must study in the tenth grade covers only the first four decades of the first half of the twentieth century. From the perspective of history this is a short segment of time, but it is saturated with events of global-historical significance. Among these is the Great October Socialist Revolution, which fundamentally changed the course of development of all humankind. This is a revolution of the people and for the people, for man, and for his emancipation and development.

Every Soviet person must know the history of his motherland well, must love and cherish it. (Korablëv, Fedosov, & Borisov, 1989, p. 6)

Claims about the need to develop loyalty through history instruction may be less overt and vehement in places other than the former Soviet Union, but as I shall argue in what follows, they play a role in the production of official history virtually everywhere.

Narratives as Cultural Tools for Representing the Past

Up to this point, I have alluded to the fact that the mediational means typically involved in historical representation are narratives. As authors such as Scholes and Kellogg (1966) have noted, the use of narrative forms to represent the past is not as natural as it might appear today, having evolved in complex ways over the history of historical writing. Indeed, there are several alternative ways to represent the past, alternatives that reflect the use of different cultural tools. H. White (1987) provides an overview of these when he writes

... the *doxa* of the modern historiographical establishment has it that there are three basic kinds of historical representation—the annals, the chronicle, and the history proper—the imperfect ‘historicality’ of two of which is evidenced in their failure to attain to full narrativity of the events of which they treat. (p. 4)

As outlined by H. White, the annals form consists simply of listing events in their chronological sequence. There is little tendency toward narrativity, a point he makes using the *Annals of Saint Gall* as an illustration. This text consists of a series of entries for years, some of which have nothing reported beside them and others of which have one or more events listed. In those years when events are reported, they are usually presented as if they existed in isolation from others preceding or following them. There is little or no tendency toward formulating them in terms of a plot with a beginning, middle and end. In H. White’s view these annals clearly do not have the essential properties required to make something a narrative.

Although this text is ‘referential’ and contains a representation of temporality ... it possesses none of the characteristics that we normally attributed to a story: no central subject, no well-marked beginning, middle, and end, no peripeteia, and no identifiable narrative voice. In what are, for us, the theoretically most interesting segments of the text, there is no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another. (p. 6)

The chronicle stands in contrast to the annals form. According to H. White, the chronicle ‘often seems to wish to tell a story’ and ‘aspires to narrativity’ (p. 5). However, unlike a narrative, it fails to achieve this in the way a genuine story would. In particular, it ‘is marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure’ (p. 5); it ‘does not so much conclude as simply terminate’ (p. 5). H. White goes on to write about the chronicle form that:

It starts out to tell a story but breaks off *in media res*, in the chronicler’s own present; it leaves things unresolved, or rather, it leaves them unresolved in a

storylike way. While annals represent historical reality as if real events did not display the form of story, the chronicler represents it as if real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of unfinished stories. (p. 5)

From his description of the annals and chronicle form, one can infer H. White's notion of narrative: it is organized around temporality, it has a central subject; a plot with a well-marked beginning, middle and end; an identifiable narrative voice; it makes connections between events; it achieves closure, a conclusion, a resolution. Furthermore, when describing plot, H. White goes on to describe it as 'a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning, by being identified as part of an integrated whole' (p. 9). G.M. White (1997) provides additional details about the properties that may go into organizing narratives about the past—especially 'mythic history' about war. For example, he notes the importance of considering how temporal breaks are presented and whether or not characters or groups are represented in stark, polarized ways.

The centrality of narrativity for human consciousness in general has long been obvious to scholars from a variety of perspectives in the human sciences. In addition to being a major topic of discussion in historiography, it has recently re-emerged in disciplines such as psychology, where Bruner (1986, 1990) has emphasized the need to examine a narrative as well as a 'paradigmatic' mode of thought, and in moral philosophy, where MacIntyre (1984) has argued that 'man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal' (p. 216). My purpose in what follows is not to provide a review of the vast literature on this topic. Instead, I take up the issue of what happens when we consider narrative as a cultural tool in forms of mediated action whose purpose is to represent the past.

A crucial feature of narratives as cultural tool is their tendency to create what H. White terms an 'integrated whole' out of a set of persons, actions and events. The philosopher of history Mink (1978) outlined some of these properties in his analysis of narrative as a 'cognitive instrument'. In his view:

Narratives . . . contain indefinitely many ordering relations, and indefinitely many ways of *combining* these relations. It is such a combination that we mean when we speak of the coherence of a narrative, or lack of it. . . . a historical narrative claims truth not merely for each of its individual statements taken distributively, but for the complex form of the narrative itself. Only by virtue of such form can there be a story of failure or of success, of plans miscarried or policies overtaken by events. . . . The cognitive function of narrative form, then, is not just to relate a succession of events

but to body forth an ensemble of interrelationships of many different kinds as a single whole. (p. 198)

In the course of developing his argument about how narratives function as cognitive instruments, Mink outlined a distinction between the truth of individual propositions that go into a narrative and the 'narrative truth' that applies to the 'ensemble of relationships' that are 'bodied forth' by this tool. The truth of an individual proposition rests on some notion of correspondence and may be adjudicated on the basis of evidence of standard sorts. For example, one might consult eye witnesses and documents to determine whether or not it is true that 'At 2 a.m. [on 17 September 1939] the Polish ambassador in Moscow received a note from the Soviets' (Łuczyński, 1997, p. 28). In this case truth has to do with whether this proposition corresponds to 'what really happened'. The discovery of additional evidence or the discrediting of existing evidence may be grounds for revising such truth-claims, but in general there is a relatively straightforward procedure for arriving at a consensus about whether individual propositions such as this one are true or false.

Narrative truth, however, is somewhat different. It involves the appropriateness and coherence of the story-line involved rather than some simple notion of correspondence between text and 'what really happened'. Furthermore, it appeals to a different set of criteria for adjudication. In the case of the meeting between the Polish ambassador and the Soviet authorities, for example, narrative truth concerns whether the episode is part of a story about the tragic Soviet takeover of Poland or part of a story about how Poland was emancipated from Nazi oppressors.

Mink (1978) has criticized approaches that assume it is possible to provide a complete assessment of historical narratives on the basis of the truth-values of the propositions that go into them. In his view narratives involve something else which cannot be reduced to this level of analysis.

One can regard any text in direct discourse as a logical conjunction of assertions. The truth-value of the text is then simply a logical function of the truth or falsity of the individual assertions taken separately: the conjunction is true if and only if each of the individual propositions is true. Narrative has in fact been analyzed, especially by philosophers intent on comparing the form of narrative with the form of theories, as if it were nothing but a logical conjunction of past-referring statements; and on such an analysis there is no problem of *narrative truth*. The difficulty with the model of logical conjunctions, however, is that it is not a model of narrative form at all. It is rather a model of *chronicle*. Logical conjunction serves well enough as a representa-

tion of the only ordering relation of chronicles, which is '... and then ... and then ... and then ...'. (pp. 197–198)

In Mink's view, narrative truth differs from the truth of propositions in that 'there are no *rules* for the construction of a narrative as there are for the analysis and interpretation of evidence' (p. 199). Instead, 'when it comes to the narrative treatment of an ensemble of interrelationships, we credit the imagination or the sensibility or the insight of the individual historian' (p. 199).

Like most discussions in the philosophy of history, Mink's claims are concerned with the production of history by professional academic historians. Such claims provide an important foundation for the line of reasoning reflected in this issue's special topic, but these claims need to be extended to deal with the topic of history and identity. Specifically, the authors of the articles in this issue expand the analytic scope in two essential ways. First, they are generally concerned with the production of histories intended for lay citizens rather than for professional historians, and, second, they are generally concerned with the consumption, rather than simply the production, of history.

The production of history intended for the general citizenry involves a range of forces that may not operate, or at least may not operate in the same fashion, in the production of academic history. For example, in his review of American history textbooks during the 20th century FitzGerald (1979) noted:

History textbooks for elementary and secondary schools are not like other kinds of histories. They serve a different function, and they have their own traditions, which continue independent of academic history writing. In the first place, they are essentially nationalistic histories. The first American-history text was written after the American Revolution, and because of it; and most texts are still accounts of the nation-state. In the second place, they are written not to explore but to instruct—to tell children what their elders want them to know about their country. This information is not necessarily what anyone considers the truth of things [especially the narrative truth]. Like time capsules, the texts contain the truths selected for posterity. (p. 47)

In the case of producing an American history textbook for elementary and secondary schools several forces are at work in addition to contributions from academic research. Although history textbooks in the United States are produced by private companies, these companies must be very sensitive to the political winds of nationalism and patriotism if they wish to be successful in marketing their product in a broad audience. In 1979, for example, FitzGerald wrote that

The publishers were ... mindful of the Texas State House of Representatives, which—in a state that already required a loyalty oath from all textbook

writers—approved a resolution urging that ‘the American history courses in the public school emphasize in the textbooks our glowing and throbbing history of hearts and souls inspired by wonderful American principles and traditions’. (p. 38)

Although these comments were made in connection with a context in the US nearly two decades ago, the production of history textbooks has always involved forces of nationalism and patriotism, and these forces clearly continue to play a role today and can be expected to do so in the future.

To many, it would appear to be easier to appreciate the power of texts about history to shape human consciousness and action in totalitarian, or near totalitarian, states, the most ominous vision of this being Orwell’s (1949) *Nineteen Eighty-four* (Ahonen’s, 1997, review of ‘newspeak’ in textbooks is relevant in this connection). After all, it would seem that authorities in totalitarian settings have unique opportunities for controlling what citizens think and believe because they control all, or nearly all, of the cultural tools that provide the foundation for thought and belief. This line of reasoning, however, is based on a single-minded focus on the production of cultural tools and says nothing about consumption. Indeed, by saying nothing about consumption, this approach runs the risk of being taken to suggest that agents’ thinking can be mechanistically determined by the cultural tools they employ—something that I rejected in my earlier outline of mediated action. The picture I wish to draw adds an important complicating element because it insists on the need to consider the complexities of consumption as well as production when trying to understand how historical representations play a role in shaping identity.

Before turning to a consideration of consumption, it is worth emphasizing that there is no suggestion here that we should abandon studies of production for studies of consumption. Studies of the production of history and abrupt changes in production such as those conducted by Ahonen (1997) can tell us a great deal about the forces that provide the cultural tools to be employed in understanding the past. Furthermore, several recent studies (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994; Wertsch, 1994; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994) have demonstrated that even when consumers of state-produced official histories resist or reject these histories, their accounts of the past are heavily influenced by them. Łuczyński (1997) has also made this point in this issue. He reports that even though official, Soviet-era accounts of the past are widely rejected, they continue to have a powerful impact on the accounts young adults in Poland provide of World War II. In the cases

outlined by Łuczyński, accounts of the past were shaped by the fact that the subjects continued to employ older narratives. In other studies (e.g. Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994), subjects' accounts were shaped through the process of resisting the official histories. In all cases, however, the power of official history narratives to shape what people say about the past is evident, providing a reminder that massive efforts to produce official history are likely to have an impact, even if it is not the sort of impact intended by the producers.

Having said this, let me turn to the other side of the picture—consumption. As I have just noted, consumers of official history narratives do not always employ these narratives in the way intended by their producers. In order to explore some of the complexities involved in this connection, it is useful to consider a term that has long been used widely and variously in the human sciences: 'internalization'. In recent years the construct of internalization has been debated in connection with various approaches in psychology (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993; Wertsch, 1993). In these discussions, I have expressed a preference not to employ the term 'internalization' at all, but, given its widespread use, my major point will be to clarify its various meanings by differentiating some of the notions that are generally associated with it.

As I have argued elsewhere (Wertsch, in press), there are two senses of internalization that often stand in need of differentiation. The first of these is what I term 'mastery' and has to do with the cognitive skill to use a cultural tool. In this sense one can speak of mastering the use of a computer, mastering the use of an alphabet, and mastering the use of a historical narrative. When authors such as Vygotsky (1987) and Luria (1981) write of internalization, they are particularly concerned with the mastery of mediational means in the form of language. As Wertsch and Stone (1985) note in this connection, internalization has to do with the 'emerging control of external sign forms', a process that 'involves the mastery of socially defined activity through coming to appreciate the full significance of the signs one uses in social interaction' (p. 177).

In my view it would be appropriate to replace the term 'internalization' with 'mastery' when considering phenomena such as those examined by Vygotsky. I believe such a substitution could result in the introduction of less theoretical baggage than is often intended or needed in discussions of internalization (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1993). In addition, using the term 'mastery' would help differentiate this from another notion often considered under the heading of 'internalization'. This second sense of internalization came up in my earlier discussion of claims by Pérez-Díaz (1993). Recall that

when he used the term 'internalization', he was concerned with how texts or rules are 'accepted as legitimate and reasonable' (p. 40). In many cases this acceptance of a cultural tool may be correlated with its mastery, but the point I wish to emphasize is that this need not be the case.

In general, it is quite possible for individuals to have mastered a text or rule in the sense that they can demonstrate facility for using and reflecting on it *without* coming to accept it as legitimate and reasonable, and this creates major problems for an undifferentiated notion of internalization. In such cases, disagreements over whether or not the text has been internalized are often bogus disputes arising out of the conflation of various meanings under a single heading. In many instances the second notion of internalization I have mentioned descends in vague ways from psychoanalytic constructs such as 'incorporation', 'introjection' and 'internalization' (Schafer, 1968). In trying to outline this second sense of internalization, however, I shall turn to ideas set forth by Bakhtin (1981). Specifically, I shall harness his idea of 'appropriation'.

Appropriation has come to be used fairly widely in contemporary sociocultural studies. For example, Rogoff (1990) has employed this term, and has done so in a way that often suggests her focus is similar to that of Pérez-Díaz. However, in writings such as Rogoff's appropriation is often called on to do 'double duty' in that it also involves mastery. Although mastery and appropriation are often closely connected in actual practice, I would again emphasize that they need not be. Differentiating them provides some crucial insights into the issues raised by the authors of this issue of *Culture & Psychology*, so my emphasis will be on keeping them distinct.

Since I trace my understanding of appropriation to Bakhtin's writings, it is worth examining the term he employed in Russian: *prisvoenie*. The root of *prisvoenie* and the related verb *prisvoit'* is related to the possessive adjective *svoi*, which means 'one's own'. *Prisvoit'* means something like to bring something into oneself or to make something one's own, and the noun *prisvoenie* means something like the process of making something one's own. There is much more to say about the complex dynamics Bakhtin envisioned between one's own and others' words (see Emerson & Holquist, 1981; Wertsch, in press), but for my present purposes the point is that making words, including narratives, one's own may be quite distinct from mastering them. Indeed, findings such as those reported by Tulviste and Wertsch (1994) suggest that in some cases individuals may master historical narratives that they do not accept as their own better than those which they have appro-

priated. The state of mastering *and* appropriating an historical account seems to parallel what Lowenthal (1985) had in mind when he talked about the 'ability to recall *and* identify with our past' (p. 41; emphasis added). To satisfy the usual goals of history it is important to do both.

When people are encouraged, or coerced, to master narratives about the past that they do not accept as legitimate and reasonable, a variety of responses may arise. Wertsch and O'Connor (1994) suggest that in the United States the response often seems to be that individuals express some degree of mild disagreement or criticism of the narrative, but have no further means for resisting it. In contrast, in places like Poland (Łuczyński, 1997), Estonia (Ahonen, 1992, 1997; Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994) and Russia (Wertsch & Rozin, in press), there were quite powerful, quasi-institutionalized forms of 'unofficial history' that made resistance to the official versions during the Soviet era a more elaborate process. The result, which may at first glance appear ironic, was that in many cases people living in the Soviet bloc had more effective ways to circumvent the power of official history to shape their knowledge and beliefs about the past than their counterparts in the United States.

Several of the articles in this issue of *Culture & Psychology* are fundamentally concerned with the question of whether or not narratives about the past are appropriated (i.e. not just mastered). Furthermore, the crucial factor around which this appropriation revolves is narrative truth. In such cases, the issue often is not whether the particular propositions that go into a historical account are true, or whether individuals have mastered the propositional information or the narrative truth involved, but, instead, which narrative truth is appropriated. For example, Ahonen's (1997) comments about the 'double consciousness' that seems to have been so prevalent in East German and Soviet Estonia suggest that people were quite capable of mastering the historical 'facts' and narratives presented to them, but they did not believe them. Instead, they developed a set of alternative narratives and defense mechanisms to distance themselves from the official history they were required to learn. In his analysis of how commemorative practices around war memorials involve 'mythic history' which helps create 'social and emotional meaning', G.M. White (1997, p. 63) delves into a related set of issues. Here again, the focus is on narrative truth and on whether one or another narrative truth is appropriated.

I have argued that constructs like narrative truth, mastery and appropriation, as well as mediated action more generally, provide

some common threads that run throughout the contributions to this issue's special topic. Such constructs certainly do not provide the only means for examining history and identity, but they do provide means for allowing scholars in disciplines such as psychology and anthropology to coordinate their efforts more productively with representatives from other disciplines when dealing with the complex issues involved. In particular, it seems to me that a focus on cultural tools invites complementary, mutually informative analyses of the production and consumption of narrative texts.

The contributors to this issue's special topic have employed a range of methods and theoretical perspectives, but insofar as these methods and theoretical perspectives are not parochial and exclusionary this must be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness. Complex cultural and psychological issues do not come in the single, pre-sliced forms often assumed by isolated disciplines, and our experience at trying to fit them into such forms suggests the futility of assuming that they do. While the particular proposals and solutions the authors in this issue have arrived at will undoubtedly be found to be in need of revision, the general orientation toward studying culture, society and psychology in some kind of integrated way clearly must be on the agenda for the long haul.

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