

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL ISSUES: THE PLACE OF THE PLACE

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For most psychologists and the professional public at large, organizational psychology is seen as a derivative of – or even a synonym for – work psychology. From the very first volume of the *Annual Review of Psychology* in 1950 until well into the late 1990s, key words such as work, industrial, personnel, organization, training, development, engineering would continually be present in review titles that had as their focus questions arising in work based relationships in large, hierarchical business, government and military bureaucracies. For critical psychology this focus – which still continues to inform courses, classes and textbooks – poses a number of issues and concerns. By associating organization with work and the latter with paid employment in large hierarchical bureaucracies (the basis of much of the earlier discussion about the welfare state), not only do work and organizational psychologists ignore the many other ways that people seek to sustain livelihoods (Spink, P. 2011) but they also ignore the many other reasons for which people gather together. Worse still, when they eventually do get around to these and related issues the answer is – more often than not – to seek solutions framed by the same original assumptions: that is, of a specific type of economic relationship with an entity – organization – within which behaviour takes place.

The shift

The shift from organization as a descriptor of an everyday social activity – organizing – which happens in schools, churches, communities, choirs, football teams, social movements and family outings to its current role as a generic title for that which all of these are seen to have in common – Organizations – is subtle and takes place slowly over much of the second half of the twentieth century. This shift is a result of at least three different disciplinary processes: firstly the drift of organizational studies from the various areas of the humanities and the social sciences to the business schools, along with a massive increase in grants and career opportunities; secondly a drift away from the more complex public and social issues that were around in some of the early studies of organizational processes, such as for example Selznick's study of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1940s (Selznick 1949). Whilst the first two are influences external to psychology, they nevertheless had significant impact in terms of the formation of the wider field with which organizational psychologists identified themselves and within which they would also seek work. The third is very much an internal process for which nobody else can be blamed: the individualization of social psychology and the consequent uncoupling of the person from social process, one of the overall themes of this volume.

The result is a very restricted, individually focused, hierarchical and work related notion of organization that places psychologists in a difficult position when it comes to the complexity of dealing with the area of social issues. The viewpoint is that of 'within' organizations where what is 'outside' is a client, consumer, market or society. There may be some discussion of inter-organizational issues – influenced by the intergroup relations

literature – and the difficult challenges posed for those who are in daily contact with the public, but the inside location of the viewpoint is clear. It is for this reason that our critique begins in the organizational field but is addressed to psychology as a whole.

Today, increasingly, psychologists are involved in many different spheres of public action. In communities, in public agencies, as activists and volunteers, they cross with not only the actions of governments for the public but also those actions that the public develop for the public and those that they develop when pressuring public sector agencies and governments to act on public concerns (including the formation of those concerns). How do they deal with these very different, highly complex and certainly far from hierarchical settings in which policies, plans and actions crisscross each other and in which they are required at times to play some very key roles. In their undergraduate programs most of them will at some point in time have at least one course or seminar on organizational psychology in which any one of very similar textbooks will be used, all of which will focus people in organizations (mainly business, rarely public and at times voluntary or third sector). Is it these courses and seminars that will inform their actions or is there an alternative?

In this chapter we set out the case for an alternative position that, we argue, requires the re-coupling of our notions of personhood with those of place. For this discussion, we draw on our own work in two linked areas: that of everyday organizational studies and the relationship between public sector organizations and community based organizations in service provision and poverty reduction in rural and urban settings (Spink, P. 2003; Spink, P. and Best 2009) and that of the use of the language of risk in everyday affairs with specific reference to people living in areas subject to water based hazards and land-slippage (Spink M.J. 2007; Spink, M.J.P. 2010). We argue from a theoretical post-constructionist perspective in which materialities and socialities are seen as co-present in different political ontologies, which may cooperate, be imposed or negotiated in different ways. But also from the experiences of recent years where the complexity of social, material and institutional vulnerability has been very present in our studies in densely populated areas in São Paulo, Brazil.

We begin with a phrase '*The head thinks where the feet walk*' coined by a catholic priest and activist in *Jardim Ângela*, part of the extended south zone of the Municipality of São Paulo, where a significant part of the population built their own houses - and their churches - from scratch. This is a process that has been repeated all over Latin America where it is estimated that in many large urban conurbations somewhere in the region of 50% of housing is self built (Hernandez et al. 2012; Ward et al. 2014).

His point is doubly incisive. First, as a reminder that we are a walking species, we spend all our time connected to the ground in some way, we do not drift around in the air and when we fly we do so in machines within which we stand or sit. Secondly, as a reference to the difference in location between the policy specialists who work in the offices of São Paulo City Hall in the city's down-town area and the residents of Jardim Ângela, some thirty kilometers away and between two and four hours by bus, depending on the traffic. We use his phrase as a pointer to the need to critically reconnect psychology to the materiality, sociality and institutionality of the places where our feet move and that are constitutive of psychological action. We argue that understanding how place is performed by very distinctive and often competing and heterogeneous networks of humans and non-humans ('actantes', to use Latour's (2005) approach), with a multiplicity of conflicting social languages, provides a very different approach to questions of territoriality from those

presumed in the traditional person-environment dualism, helping us not only to rethink and reposition organizational psychology but also much of psychology itself.

A place for the place in critical psychology

In 1960, Lynch published the results of his many walks and conversations with people about the cities in which they lived (Boston, New Jersey and Los Angeles). Instead of starting from official plans and maps he got people to draw their maps; to describe where they went to; what they would tell visitors to see and what they pointed out as relevant as they walked together around the block. From these he identified certain recurring elements: paths; edges; districts; nodes and landmarks that went to make up their cities – the different public images held by different groupings of citizens. ‘Paths’ are the channels through and along which people move; ‘edges’ are the limits, boundaries, breaks and distinctions which can also become barriers; ‘districts’ are the big chunks of two dimensional space in which people are inside (and also outside); ‘nodes’ are points of convergence, crossover, strategic spots for convergence and ‘landmarks’ are external references, singled out amongst others for various reasons. Around the same time, psychology was beginning – with a push from the earlier behaviour setting studies (Barker and Wright 1951) and Kurt Lewin’s (1952) psychological ecology – to make its own incursions into a new field that would receive great visibility from Craik’s 1970 ‘New Directions in Psychology’ article on environmental psychology. Unfortunately, and despite Craik’s arguments for assuming a more ‘molar’ approach to the environment and behaviour and to the author’s preference for an ecological perspective that valued the intricate patterning of behavioural and environmental relations, the new directions assumed the dominant model of simple causality and strong individuality: concern was either with what people do to the environment or with what the environment does to people. This implicit definition of the field continues to inform current environmental psychology texts in which the discussion of place continues largely absent (c.f. Steg et al. 2012).

Whilst noting that the opportunity was lost, it is worth registering, in defense of many of those involved, that at that time, the very idea of studying every-day-life in every-day-habitats was a peripheral concern for many of the other social sciences, not just psychology. Garfinkel (1967), for example, was heavily criticized by his sociological colleagues for taking practical reasoning seriously and suggesting that sociology had got it wrong by treating the average person as socially incompetent. Habermas’s work on discursive competence would only appear in English in the 1980s along with De Certeau’s (1980) treatise on the practice of every-day life and the very interesting companion volume, in co-authorship with Giard and Mayol, on the micro-histories of every-day arts (1980). In anthropology, it would be the burst of activity brought by the discussion of social networks that led the way to every-day action and common sense in the early 1970s (Boissevain 1974; Geertz 1983). In history it would be the switch away from the history of kings and queens to what was termed, history from below that would build the bridges to the booming European Social Theory arena (see Burke 1992) and to the structuration arguments that would turn consciousness into an assumed competence in a discursively performed world (Giddens 1979).

For psychology, any alternative path at this time would have been a very difficult and lonely one. Indeed, it was to require a tremendous effort by the European networks to bring social psychology anywhere close to a potentially critical stance, but here at least by the

1990s, there were opportunities for new approaches (Billig 1982; Edwards and Potter 1992; Ibañez and Iñiguez 1997; Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network 1999).

New possibilities for dialogue

Place is an elastic word that can be stretched in many directions and given many nuances. It can be different parts of one of Lynch's maps (the place where I work or live; where we have lunch); a socio historical reference (the place where I come from or where it happened) and place as a specific localization of a person or object (everything in its right place; my place at the table; they know their place) as well as the action of placing. It has linkages with social spaces and areas (the market place, or as a synonym for a small square) and in organizational terms to positions in hierarchy and to employment (who will take my place as Company President). Place, as a social construct, as Cresswell suggests (2004: 11) is a way of 'seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things'. A map location can be expressed precisely in latitude and longitude, but the name of a town, village, region or landmark will give the same location a very different sense of meaning. In Portugal, the word for place (*lugar*) is also used to refer to the smallest part of the civic and political institutional structure. Yet places can be immense – as for example when ecologists evoke the idea of our tiny planet located in the cosmos – as well as minute, as in the line from the A.A. Milne poem: 'a place on the stairs where I always sit'.

Despite its apparent elasticity, place is not a term to be treated lightly. It is as central a concept to human geography as culture is to anthropology and, probably, identity to psychology and, like the other disciplines, has also suffered from the disputes around different forms of science. Geography also went through periods of positive science in which place was seen in terms of spatial laws and statistics, but fortunately today authors from humanistic (Tuan 1977), Marxist (Harvey 1996) and postmodern (Soja 1989) positions provide us with intriguing entry points to a debate that also includes many of the other social sciences (see Hubbard and Kitchin 2011 for an overview). Place also draws attention to space, which to most of psychology is understood as something permanent, out there, pre-existing, empty and waiting to be occupied. However even a moment's reflection on the notions of anthropological space will show that any space – such as the space where small communities gather to pray – has no a priori existence as a vacant lot waiting to be occupied, rather as Lefebvre (1991: 26) states: '(Social) space is a (social) product'.

For psychology, these various offers of dialogue help us to think about how place is performed in different ways by different crisscrossing networks of people, materialities, social organizations and institutions. Take for example the apparently simple view of lived in experience that most of us have somewhere at home: the map. Maps for most of us are assumed descriptors of the way things are, as in, 'look it up on the map', or 'you can find us on the GPS'; they are ways of locating places. However far from describing reality, maps are high powered performers and shapers of our lived in experience, as a brief look at the main chapter headings from Wood's *The Power of Maps* demonstrates (1992): maps work by serving interest; maps are embedded in a history they help construct; every map shows this... but not that; the interest the map serves is masked; the interest is embodied in the map in signs and myths.

Let us take as an example the district of *Jardim Ângela* which has a population of over 300,000 inhabitants and occupies the larger half of one of the 32 sub municipal

administrative districts in which the Municipality of São Paulo is divided. It, like a number of the other districts in the expanded south zone, borders the Gurapiranga Reservoir and occupies part of its water catchment area. *Ângela*, as it is often referred to, went through a housing explosion from the 1960's onwards fueled by restrictive legislation on agriculture in the catchment area, which led to small farmers selling out and moving away, and the industrial boom in São Paulo which brought may thousands in search of work to a city without any planning for the necessary housing. As a result, people bought formal or semi formal small plots of land from intermediaries who took over agricultural plots or in the impossibility of payment, occupied public land alongside rivers or on hillsides. When people tell their histories they describe very similar processes. 'We first dug a well to get down to the water, then we built a room and then bit by bit we carried on, when we had the money, the time and as the family expanded'. The landscape of Jardim Ângela and its co-district Jardim Luis is highly undulated and today it is marked by high-density occupation that seems to occupy all available possibilities – and impossibilities – of location. Despite the heavy subtropical rainfall in summer months, there are no sloped roofs. The tops are flat and unfinished and are very key parts of the property: either for holding social gatherings or for, when necessary, building more rooms: (social) space is indeed a (social) product.

Self-building did not only apply to housing but also to most everything else. These were areas of the outskirts of São Paulo that were largely ignored by the municipal government and those present had to fend for themselves. Many of them were religious people – Brazil has a large catholic population – and were used to the church playing an important role in the community. They built their own places for worship that in turn strengthened the communities and were key elements in the São Paulo Catholic Church's 1970's option for liberation theology. With municipal government absent, social mobilization, through the ecclesiastical base communities and also the trade unions was the route to providing basic services and pressuring for place based public investment: water, electricity, sewage, schools, health, transport amongst others were many of the themes that people recall.

In Jardim Ângela, there are plenty of maps that can be found if you are prepared to dig around the many different service providers in today's São Paulo Municipality. But as our earlier comments would suggest, this does not mean that they are describing anything similar. On the contrary they are performing very different ways of being. Take for example urban mobility. There is a São Paulo road map, similar to every other city, but in Ângela there are some parts with roads (paths in Lynch's approach) along which people move that are not on the map. The big central road, like the backbone of a fish, moves through the districts to cross the Pinheiros River and to connect to the São Paulo train and metro 'system' – which until very recently was largely a loose mess of unconnected bits until it too was given a map which, for those unfamiliar with the day to day of urban mobility in the mega cities of the third world, looks very much like the London Tube map. However to those in the know, life hangs on the big central road down which fleets of buses flow – unless there is an accident or a protest and everything stops – and from there to trains - where the same thing can happen.

The São Paulo State Water Company (SABESP) also has maps, which are very difficult to find but which determine catchment areas and places of investment. Health services have their internal organization with a health center for every 20,000 inhabitants and there are maps for State Schools (secondary), Municipal Schools (primary) and private schools. There are maps of bus routes, maps of housing density developed by the Municipal Housing

Secretariat and for Jardim Ângela and its co-district Jardim São Luis, maps of the more than 50 areas in which people are living in risk of land slippage and flooding (a very real and present risk). The state police have their maps and as violence is a constant theme in the region there are also maps of violence. The Catholic Church also has its parish maps that group territory and populations and these too will change over time as parishes grow and are divided. The problem is: a) that many of the maps are not available either for lack of public access or simply a lack of interest in turning lists into locations; b) the maps, lists and locations use different distributions and forms of territorial organization and, c) as a result the maps don't talk to each other. As a way of creating pressure on local authorities, we began to talk about invisible cities; about places that existed but that were being excluded from the day to day of the wider lived in city. There was nothing new in this comment, part of this region was the birth-place of a wave of youth based cultural movements, community poetry reading and RAP groups from which emerged the expression and a reference to a key 'edge' in Lynch's terms: 'the world is different on this side of the bridge' (a reference to a key bridge over the Pinheiros river).

Then, following Lynch, there are the maps that people use as they move around and perform their lived in place: both the regular daily movement from house to work, to the crèche or school, to the very few state lottery agencies or even fewer banks to pay bills, to the supermarket or the neighboring shop; of where the floods reach or where and when it is safe to walk at night.

Complexity: modes of ordering and heterogeneous networks

Our first incursions into Jardim Ângela were guided by our past experiences in studies of public policy, social movements and governmentality. As such, it made good sense to choose an anchorage in some existing organization and the *Forum em Defesa da Vida* seemed to fit the bill. The Forum has a historical link to one of the Catholic Church leaders and has been very active in local social movements that have helped to give Angela a more humane image – it was at one point considered the most violent region in the world.

First meeting - first surprise. The Forum is an open event with diverse participants who, at each meeting, introduce themselves in equally diverse manners and forms of positioning: for example, territorial belonging (I am a resident of xxx), rank (I represent the city hall), political activism (I am a member of the movement for popular housing) or profession and program (I am a social worker at the yyy center). Each of them is a link to a network of actants (Latour 2005), some humans, some non-human (as spokespersons of sewage, rain, buses and vulnerable houses). There are many layers of discourses, institutions and practices. Choosing one point of view, one social organization, one service provision agency or any other nodal point in the diversity of actants that are present in this territory would be too much of a simplification and we wanted to understand the intricacy of action, without reducing what was obviously complex.

Complexity is another of those slippery words that are easy to use as an adjective but very difficult to face straight on in a research program: how to work with complexity? Fortunately this is the question addressed by many of the authors of chapters in the book edited by Mol and Law (2002): how not to reduce research to one only point of view; how to work with what Bakhtin (1984) referred to as multivocality?

Traditionally, this sort of diversity in social action has been handled through perspectivism; the acceptance that there are many points of view, some of which allow for

dialogue and some that are in competition. However, this would result in layering: some points of view being more accepted or legitimate than others. Working with multivocality and the complexity of every-day events requires an ontological reconfiguration through which reality itself is multiple - 'not plural: multiple' (Mol 1999: 75) - because it is performed in a diversity of practices. As such, attention must shift from versions of reality to forms of coordination; to modes of ordering that coexist:

Often it is not so much a matter of living in a single mode of ordering or of 'choosing' between them. Rather it is that we find ourselves at places where these modes join together. Somewhere in the interferences something happens, for although a single simplification reduces complexity, at the places where different simplifications meet, complexity is created, emerging where various modes of ordering (styles, logics) come together and add up comfortably or in tension, or both. (Mol and Law 2002: 11).

Or do not add up, as when modes of ordering are so fragmented that response to problems related to environmental vulnerabilities cannot be properly addressed. In Brazil's southern hemisphere subtropical summer we have many episodes of monsoon type rain and in areas prone to risks of landslide and flooding, as in Jardim Angela (and other peripheral areas of the city of São Paulo) contingency plans are drawn up by the Civil Defense. This should be a coordinated effort involving social services, health authorities as well as the civil defense apparatus. In January 2014 heavy rain caused flooding of some of the streams that crisscross the territory. Mary Jane was invited to visit one of these areas and, in the company of staff from one of the local social organizations (this was not an area for an unknown person to walk alone), witnessed the devastation that had happened. In this specific area the houses had been built in impossible places, precariously located on the edge of the river bank or even on pillars on top of the water (obviously without any sewage or fresh water connections). The story told by residents was of fear as the waters rose and invaded their houses: of loss of belongings; of total abandonment by the public authorities. Emergency action was left to the initiative of local residents and to the staff of this one social organization. And to top it all, when the wet belongings, mattresses and beddings were piled up on the street and in protest, the police reacted with tear gas and rubber bullets. It was to be several days before more formal help arrived, along with lists and forms to be compiled and filled.

Social services and health services, as well as civil defense, are all regionalized in different ways at sub-municipal level. So, what does this single event can tell us about complexity? Firstly, that there are many strands of this heterogeneous network that have to be unraveled. The many rivers and mountains in the territory tell us of geological vulnerability and, hence, the question: why people build houses in such terrain? This strand takes us to urban planning (or lack of it) and to discriminatory processes that push the poor to the periphery of cities like São Paulo. But it also takes us to discourses of the environmentalists and the green political parties, where preservation of the environment and concerns about future supply of water and clean air abound. However, this is also a place where people live, lots of people for whom Jardim Angela is home and public services must be provided: education, health, social services, police, and transport. Each has its own agenda with modes of ordering that might add up. Others have agendas that are in

competition: how to build more houses in areas of preservation; how to enlarge roads in built up areas; how to encourage community policing if drug lords have control.

Social issues, as we have suggested, do not float around in the air but are intrinsic parts of ordinary places that are being constantly performed in multiple ways including the urban, the rural, the mountainous, the coastal and, in our example the water basin. To work with the connections and disconnections between heterogeneous networks of bits and pieces, with their socialities, materialities and institutionalities requires walking away from the idea of a given place which psychology can take as a generic context and assuming the difficulty and the challenge of its multiple textualities as, for example, in the different social languages of planners, human rights advocates, community workers, mothers and young people amongst many others. This will have consequences both for what we study, how we carry out our studies and with which disciplines we talk about our work. Even more difficult will be the challenge of rescuing Organizational Psychology from the hole it has put itself into.

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