

RESEARCH STATEMENT

DR. NICOLAS J. BULLOT

My philosophical work is an inquiry into human culture and cognition. I aim to develop an alternative to two influential approaches: (i) individualistic models of mechanisms of human cognition and (ii) contextualistic theories of cultural practices that reject mechanistic explanation. The alternative I propose is a new philosophical framework: *the psychohistorical theory of identification and control* [1-6]. I use the qualifier *psychohistorical* to denote research that aims to integrate (i) mechanistic explanations of cognition that are common in the *psychological* and cognitive sciences with (ii) contextualistic explanations pervasive in *historical* accounts in philosophy and the social sciences. My program of psychohistorical research provides scholars from multiple disciplines with innovative philosophical and empirical tools for addressing metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and methodological questions.

Building on previous research in philosophy of science and cognition [7-10], my psychohistorical framework critiques influential individualistic and anti-mechanistic models. *Individualistic models* of human cognition posit information-processing mechanisms that are assumed to be both universal and internal to the human brain. I have demonstrated that individualistic models are incomplete because these models screen out cultural learning and historical contexts from the explanation of human culture and cognition [3, 11].

The other target of my critique is the variety of contextualism assuming that mechanistic explanations are irrelevant to our understanding of cultural practices – *anti-mechanistic or anti-reductionistic contextualism* [12]. I argue that this variety of contextualism is incomplete because it omits the investigation of crucial mental and social mechanisms. Like individualistic models, these contextualistic models have accentuated long-standing antagonisms between, on the one hand, the sciences of human cognition and, on the other hand, the historical humanities and social sciences.

To overcome the challenges posed by these antagonisms, my psychohistorical framework proposes new conceptual tools for developing psychohistorical theories of cultural and cognitive phenomena. To date, the most influential application of my framework has been to the study of *art appreciation* [1-4], which presents (i) a novel critique of individualism in aesthetics [3, 4] and (ii) a new psychohistorical theory of art [1, 2].

My psychohistorical framework has revealed methodological problems at the core of contemporary research on the relationship between art, psychology, neuroscience, and culture [3, 4] that derive from individualistic and anti-contextualistic assumptions about the universality of art appreciation. For example, since the beginning of the twentieth century, most research in empirical aesthetics has assumed that appreciators' aesthetic responses to art are the product of universal mental mechanisms. Consequently, this research has attempted to explain the mechanisms of art appreciation without taking into account the historical ontology of the arts and the role of cultural learning of in artistic practices. Such omissions motivated my critique of empirical aesthetics and my proposal of a new *psychohistorical theory of art* [1, 4], which I presented as a target article in the journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* [2, 3]. This psychohistorical theory of art addresses questions about emotions in the arts, authentication in the arts, style identification, the nature of artistic and cultural understanding, and the manipulative functions of artistic and propaganda works.

Another key outcome of my psychohistorical research program is that I have written *Tracking and Controlling Persons*, a PhD thesis (which I have reformatted as a monograph proposal) that proposes the first comprehensive *psychohistorical theory of person identification and control*. This work develops a series of claims introduced in my articles on the tracking and social control of human agents [5, 11]. It addresses core questions about human identification and social control. For example, what are the capacities and mechanisms that we use to identify other persons reliably [5, 6, 11]? Why does the tracking of persons facilitate social sorting and political control?

In *Tracking and Controlling Persons*, I argue that the explanation of a learner's practice of person identification and person control should encompass two components that are traditionally studied separately. The first component is an ontological model of the target person's causal history and behavior. The second component is a psychological model and an epistemological explanation of the mechanisms that enable the

learner's identification and controlling behavior. According to my psychohistorical approach, explaining Maria's ability to identify John requires a theory that (i) clarifies the ontology of "John" as the target of Maria's act of identification and (ii) specifies the mental and social mechanisms used by Maria to identify John as this kind of person.

In psychology and neuroscience, individualistic models of person identification tend to focus on mental and brain mechanisms, and omit the ontological analysis of persons and the epistemology of identification judgments. However, person identification and control can only be rigorously specified if the researcher is able to provide an ontological description of the target's causal characteristics [6]. Conversely, contextualistic ontologies of persons omit the investigation of psychological mechanisms and epistemological questions.

I envision *Tracking and Controlling Persons* to be the first volume of a trilogy of works about manipulation and control in human culture. Expanding on the methodology introduced in *Tracking and Controlling Persons*, the *second volume* of the trilogy would integrate my psychohistorical account of artistic practice [2, 4] with research on cultural learning and social manipulation. For example, I plan to focus this second volume on the social functions of cultural artefacts (e.g., works of art, propaganda and news media, and commercial advertisements) and the interactions between such artefact functions and the manipulation of a target person's mental processes and behavior.

I plan to dedicate the *third volume* to the psychohistorical explanation of core characteristics of both human deception and the normative practices aimed at mitigating deceptive behaviors. This research will include an analysis of impostor behaviors, criminal deceit and manipulation, and the production of forgeries. Further, in this work, I plan to demonstrate the usefulness of the psychohistorical framework for developing the ethical and political assessment of identification practices and deception.

The volumes of the proposed trilogy aim to unify scientific research on human identification and deception with normative and historical research conducted in philosophy and the humanities.

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