

Tropic Constructions of the Self

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This essay examines the relationships between tropic strategies used in the construction of the self in the human sciences, in the humanities, and in culture and the political and social context within which the specific strategies arise and are maintained. Three specific tropic strategies are identified – reductionist, structuralist, humanist/anti-humanist. These are shown to rely upon three of the master tropes identified by Kenneth Burke. Two specific contextual factors are shown to nurture the use of one or another tropic strategy. One of these is the overarching historic trend of the disembeddedness of the world. The other factor consists of the lived social realities within bureaucratic and institutional settings. It is argued that there are many forces promoting reductionist strategies, including the overall disembedding of the world, however many of these forces also foster competing and contradictory strategies. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2010 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

The self is constituted in and through language (Mead 1962), and the self is a trope. More than one trope is implicated in any construction of the self, but there is a tendency for one or another to be the dominant figure in any particular formulation. In this essay, I show how a few of the mas-

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