

**CONSTRUCTING THE INTERNAL INFINITY: DIALOGIC STRUCTURE OF
THE INTERNALIZATION/EXTERNALIZATION PROCESS – A
COMMENTARY ON SUSSWEIN, BIBOK, AND CARPENDALE’S
“RECONCEPTUALIZING INTERNALIZATION”**

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ABSTRACT. Susswein et al’s analysis of the existing discourse on internalization in psychology continues the dialogue within the socio-cultural field on the prioritization of person-centered (focusing on the “inside” <> “outside” separation) or communion-centered (emphasizing the core meanings of “participation”, “mastery”) tactics for theory construction. Taking the latter axiomatic stand, Susswein et al. decide not to build their account through the use of the internalization concept, persuading their readers to accept the notions of mastery and adaptation instead. In contrast, I start from the axiomatic perspective within which internalization is necessarily the central concept. My theoretical construction prioritizes subjective experiencing as culturally mediated through the personal construction of the self that coincides with re-construction of the cultural (semiotic) mediating devices. The multi-layer model of internalization/externalization guarantees the production of novelty and openness to innovation together with selective buffering of the intra-psychological affective and mental worlds through dialogical processes at the always ambiguous quadratic boundary of the unity of INSIDE/OUTSIDE and PAST/FUTURE functionally related opposites. Possible forms of dialogical processes at the transfer *loci* are discussed.

Keywords: internalization/externalization, adaptation, axiomatics in science, process models, boundary

Dialogical science starts from the axiom of *dialogical relationship* that dynamically organizes the being and becoming of the particular phenomenon that is deemed to be of interest to the scientist. Where our observations give evidence of singularity (A) a dialogical scientist posits the underlying structure of plurality—at least duality (A and non-A—see Josephs, Valsiner & Sorgan, 1999), or most likely plurality (Bakhtin, 1934/1975, 1981; Valsiner, 2006a, 2006b). This plurality can be found at all levels of organization of the living beings—biological, psychological, and social. The

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need for dialogical science—a perspective that posits functional relations between some (or all) parts of the plurality field grows out of the need to make sense of the dynamic process of the given system’s adapting to the always ambiguous demands of the environment.

Back to Basics: Theories Instead of Social Positions

Much of our contemporary social sciences suffers from the effects of the post-modern malaise—where generalized knowledge has been denied, and “local knowledge” elevated to the status of an ideal for empirical work which is closely linkable to the socio-political uses of such knowledge. The result is a social science within which generalized knowledge construction is replaced by social positioning games. The latter happen on a battlefield of ideas where the generals are social institutions who direct the social scientists as fully loyal “foot soldiers” to conquer some knowledge domain in ways that fit the political agendas of the historical time, given country, and its set of social representations (Bongie, 2005). Persuasion efforts in favor of a social position replace detailed theoretical construction examples, and the maddening displays of F or p-values, small-but-significant correlation coefficients, and inconclusive conclusions-- fill the pages of peer reviewed journals that proudly publish empirical research results. This commerce of the data proceeds by its own consensual rules—elevating Thomas Kuhn’s notion of “normal science” to the pedestal of high desirability. We are drowning in the new knowledge of “the right kind”—without its impact on general life philosophies or even practical applications.

The new effort to build dialogical science acts in opposition to such normalization of science. Its basic axiom—*what is one is (at least) two* – is counterintuitive from the viewpoint of the common sense. Yet it is a viable axiom. The only function of any axiom is in the range of theoretical frameworks it affords us to construct—and hence counter-intuitive ideas are as good as any—or better¹. Theories are constructive fictions that—thanks to their abstractive generalization value—allow us to see the reality in ways that transcend our common sense. Theoretical languages make us relatively free from the confines of the everyday language meanings—hence the value of theoretical construction for basic science. Psychology in the 21st century is caught in the tension between keeping its theories close to those of common language (Siegfried, 1994; Smedslund, 1995) and abstracting crucial features from the common sense/language for the generalized abstraction level of conceptualization². The latter is the way for science.

¹ Examples here are: the heliocentric planetary system, Riemann-Lobachevsky geometry, and many others.

² In chemistry a similar tension was present at the end of the 18th century, and was resolved a century later through the adoption of Mendeleev’s periodicity table (Brush, 1996; Roberts, 1991). Psychology

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The question of axioms <> theories relationship in any science can illuminate the specific dispute here. Susswein et al. prefer to build their theoretical construction on the axiom of inherent embeddedness of the person within the social context. They worry about the possible loss of the relational nature of human psychological development (p. 184) and reject the use of the term internalization as a “harmless synonym for learning” (p. 185) and the assumption of structural sameness notion as applied to interaction and thought (p. 189).

Their worry is well founded— psychology is filled with re-labeling tricks that create illusion of new perspective and new understanding (e.g., consider the shift from ‘ideas’ to ‘cognitions’ between the mental science of early 20th century and cognitive science of our times). Re-labeling is not theoretically constructive—and hence replacing ‘learning’ by ‘internalization’ renders nothing new for our understanding. Yet the dispute with the internalization notion is one about the axioms to build upon—and is therefore inconsequential. The effort to persuade the readers to prefer “mastery talk” to “internalization talk” is a question of axioms. It is only after an elaborate theory is built on the authors’ preferred axioms that their usefulness for our general knowledge can be evaluated.

Susswein et al. do not go very far in the construction of their own theory. Instead, it seems that they enter into precisely the same trap that they see the others caught in—the assumption of sameness of two posited domains. Their rejection of the “container metaphor” (and of the INNER/OUTER distinction) renders their own efforts of theoretical elaboration to make statements of axiomatic “implicit unity” (p. 198-199) of the mind and social interaction. The conceptual problem they face is the duality of meanings—by getting rid of the INNER the OUTER also disappears (by the rules of co-genetic logic—Herbst, 1995). It is replaced by the notion of unity—yet unity of what, in contrast with what else, and how? That unity is structured by the notion of what could be called “external” learning—the developing person is expected to learn (or master) the “social rule systems” that set up “selection pressures” upon social interaction.

Almost paradoxically, theirs is a re-formulation of the INSIDE/OUTSIDE distinction in terms of the new structure posited for the (former) OUTSIDE. The notion of “container”—discursively denounced by the authors as the core for internalization—now becomes re-created as a kind of boundless unity of the persons whose task becomes to “fit into” the social world-- through the work of “selection pressures” and by “fitness”.

How does this theoretical system present what is going on? The person is *inherently social* (embedded in the social context, fully interdependent with it, no

seems to be caught in conceptual distancing act similar to that of emerging chemistry’s relations with the occult symbolism in the 17th century (see Vickers, 1984).

INSIDE/OUTSIDE distinction is axiomatically allowed). The person is involved in the ongoing social interaction process -- and the social interaction process fully includes the person. The two are inseparable. Within that process of social interaction the mastery (or learning) of “social rules” is going on. If these rules exist *before* the current social interaction process comprises we *de facto* re-introduce the separation of the PAST ESTABLISHED NORMS and CURRENT SOCIAL INTERACTION PROCESS³. Under the conditions of that duality-- the past and the present relate in the process of learning (or mastery) that is guided by “selective pressures” that exist within the immediate process of social interaction. According to Susswein et al, the sameness of the domains—person and social rules—is attained through the elimination of the inner/outer duality through the notion of adaptation. *Mastery* here becomes another “harmless synonym for *learning*”—with *learning* taken as a given. As long as the notion of learning entails the notion of transmission—rather than re-construction (transformation, creative synthesis) it serves as a theoretical dead-end for both internalization and mastery concentrated theoretical accounts.

By getting rid of one duality (INSIDE/OUTSIDE) other dualities (PAST/PRESENT or NON-MASTERY/MASTERY) necessarily enter into theory construction. This is not a criticism of the authors’ intention-- it is simply impossible to build a theory that focuses on the unified field of phenomena (person in social interaction) without making distinctions that delimit such field-like phenomena. And—last but not least—making such distinctions is the necessary starting point for dialogical science.

Internalization (and Externalization) Reconstructed

Contrary to Susswein et al. (2007, this issue), I build a theory of internalization within the general framework that could be located at the intersection of personology and socio-cultural (semiotic) psychology (Valsiner, 1998). I start from the intuition into personal existence—all psychological phenomena entail INSIDE (intra-psychological, subjective world) and OUTSIDE (perceivable external world upon which the organism acts in the process of progressive adapting) separation. The phenomenological reality of myself in relation to the outside world is given by my self-reflection upon me-within-the world—yet I do not confuse myself and that world. I relate with it—at times intensely (e.g., moments of communion, or of orgasm), at other times-- from distance. My relating with the world makes it possible to flexibly move—both in real space and

³ If, however, these social rules are being constructed concurrently with the ongoing social interaction, then the question of “selective pressures” is even more critical for theory build-up here. How does the unity of the person, social context, and “selection pressures” (which are also inherent in the immediate context, I presume) lead to the *emergence* of the social rules? Once their emergence is theoretically accepted it becomes interesting to understand what mastery means—mastery of making (new) social rules (cf. Sherif, 1936) or emergence of (unpredicted) social rules and immediate conformity to them?

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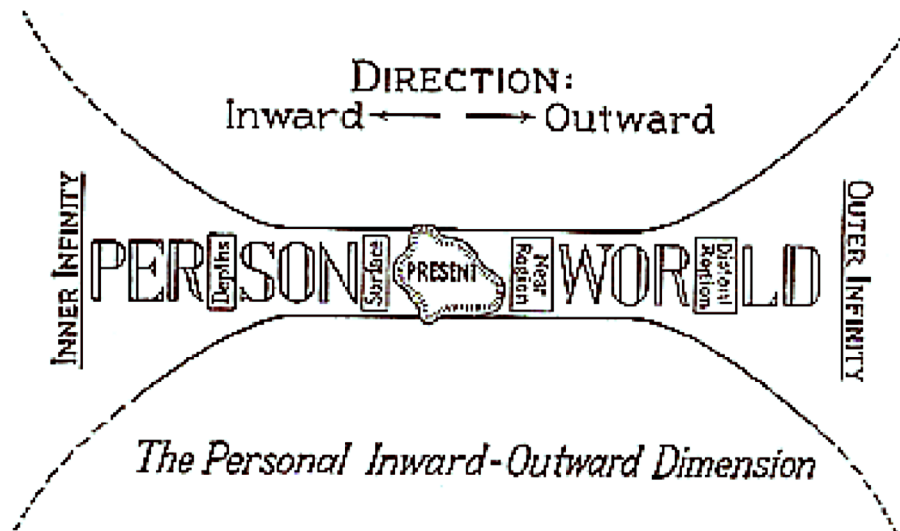


Figure 1. William Stern's depiction of the Person \diamond World relationships (from Stern, 1938, p. 94)

in the psychological realm—close or further away to/from a person or a setting in the world.

In my theory construction, these two worlds are *inclusively separated* (Valsiner, 1997) from each other so as to make it possible to make the processes of their relating open for investigation. Inclusive separation preserved or preserves the relation between the separated parts—hence keeping the unity of the system together. Both parts thus separated entail “open ends”—in William Stern’s terminology (see Figure 1) these amounted to “internal” and “external” infinity. The existing person—and especially developing person— moves towards constantly open horizons both in the interior of one’s *Psyche* and in the exterior of one’s exploration of the external world and creating its meaningfulness through signs (Rosa, 2007). The person is social because s/he is constantly transcending the immediate social context through semiotic mediation—personal experiencing is the ego-centered core for all human sociality.

Sociogenetic Personology

In the framework of classical personology, each person has one's own-- person-relevant -- "personal world"-- a world of the person's own construction (Stern, 1935, p. 126). The interdependent nature of that world is beyond doubt:

However great the power exerted by the world to make the individual fall in with its trend, he nevertheless continues to be a "person" and can react to its influence only as a person, thereby modifying and deflecting its very tendency. And vice versa, however strikingly novel and penetrating the effect of the impress by which the genius of an artist, the founder of a religion, a statesman, puts a new face upon the world; since this modified world has no creative genius, it can absorb novelty only in a diluted, simplified form; and since it meanwhile follows its own laws and is subject to other influences, it perforce modifies all acquisitions. (Stern, 1938, p. 90)

The personal world affords both continuity and change within the person. The person's assimilative/ accommodative processes transform the encoded information from/about the world into internalized personal knowledge. These processes were summarized by Stern in a general scheme (Figure 1).

The personal world is constructed by two parallel processes-- by participation in the world (the centrifugal direction: spontaneous actions guided by the material character -- Stern, 1938, p. 388), and the world's impression upon the person (centripetal direction: relating to the demand characteristics of the world). The two processes feed into each other—hence the whole human personality is inherently dialogical *as every moment of experiencing is co-created by the centrifugal and centripetal processes* relating at the boundary of the person/world relation.

The Dialogue Between Infinities: Quadratic Unity

The person \diamond world relationship exists between two infinities—the inner (intra-personal) and the outer (extra-personal). Note that neither of these two infinities utilizes the “container” metaphor (as it has been disputed by Susswein et al. here, as well as by many others over the last three decades)—yet they specify the bi-directional nature of the relations between the person and the world. The locus of construction of new psychological phenomena is precisely within the boundary zone—in between—of Stern’s “two infinities”. In fact—the theoretical (inclusive) separation of the INSIDE and OUTSIDE (both infinite-- not “containers”) *makes it possible to delineate the arena for the study* of the unity of the person and the social world (including social interaction) what needs to be studied. Psychological phenomena are proximal phenomena—they emerge at the boundary of the person and the external world, and of the future and the past (which is currently the present, Valsiner, 2007). In fact we can think of quadratic unity of two dualities of infinite kind—the INSIDE/OUTSIDE (along the lines of Figure 1) and PAST/FUTURE (after C. S. Peirce—Valsiner, 1998, p. 243, also Abbey, 2006, p. 35). Figure 2 (see next page) depicts the map of such quadratic unity. New adaptation process takes place precisely at the intersection of the two dualities—INNER/OUTER tension between the uncertainties of subjective and social kinds, and PAST/FUTURE tension of the uncertainties about the future.

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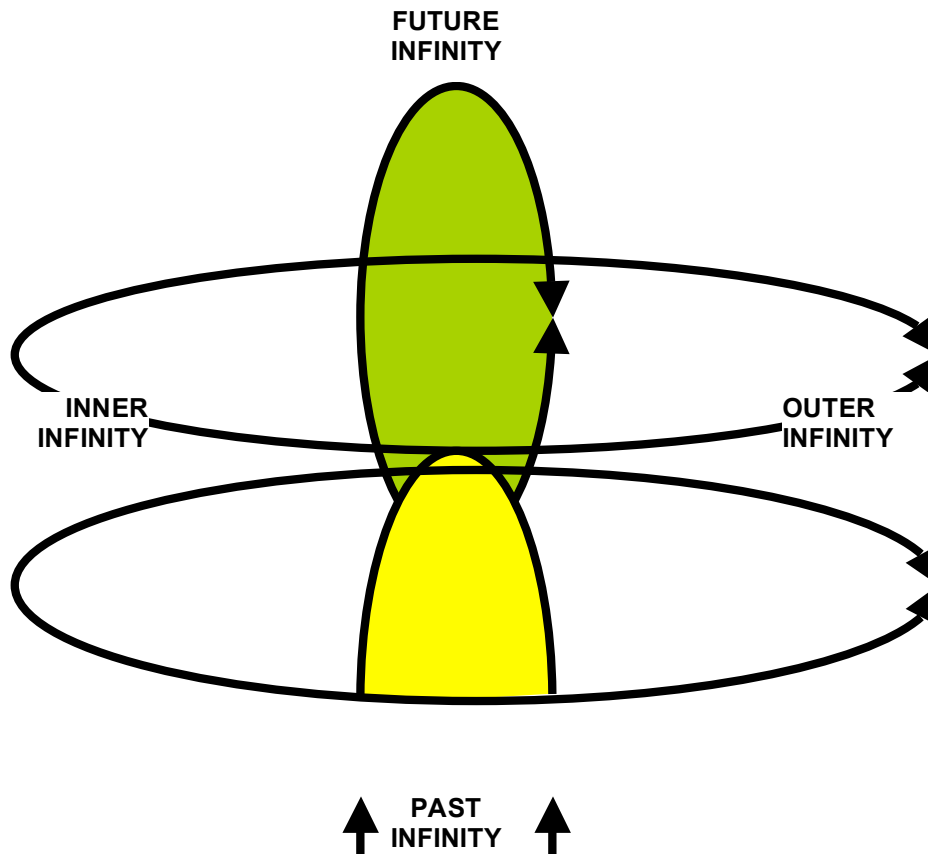


Figure 2. Quadratic unity of $INSIDE \diamond OUTSIDE$ and $PAST \diamond FUTURE$

A Dialogical Elaboration of the Internalization/Externalization Processes

The laminal model (Valsiner, 1997, ch. 8) of the process of internalization/externalization is given in Figure 3 (see next page). It involves a sequence of boundaries that distance the internal personal infinity *with* that of the outer world. This language use is intentional—distancing *within* the context (rather than *from* it) entails the dialogical unity designated by inclusive separation—a *boundary creates a relationship between the two sides distinguished by it* (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993, 2003). The internalization process needs to pass through two layers -- I and II in Figure 3 -- before reaching the "inner" sphere (III). The number of specified layers is not important, I use 3, but it could be any other number. It is the principle of viewing the boundary as a zone—a field of structured kind—that is the core for theory construction here.

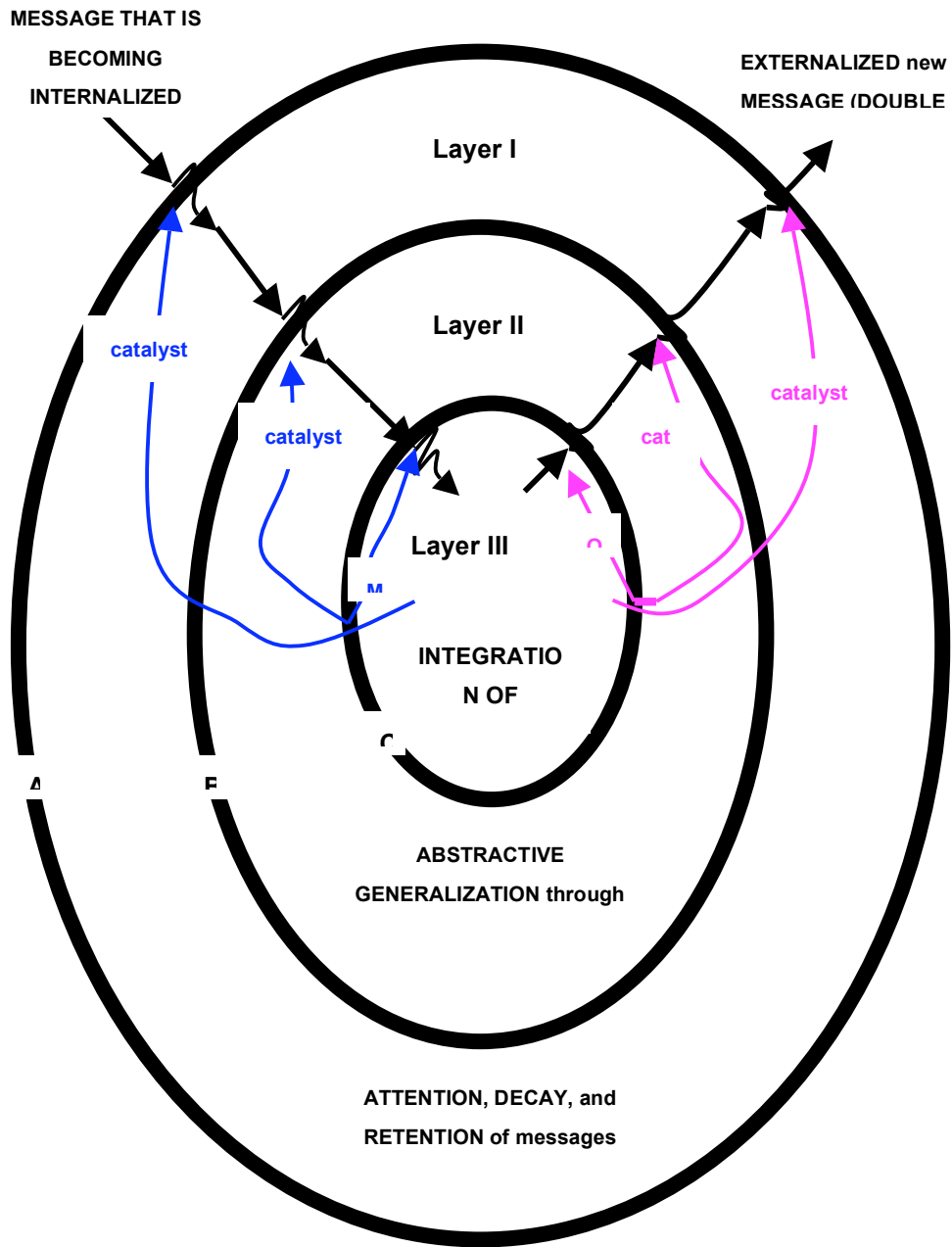


Figure 3. Laminar model of internalization/externalization as *double* transformation.

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The externalization process is viewed to proceed correspondingly, in the direction reverse to that of internalization. The model involves transformation of both internalizing and externalizing messages—hence it can be considered that of *double transformation*. The first re-structuring of the incoming message occurs as that message is moved through the sequence Layer I → Layer II → Layer III. In each layer the initial message becomes transformed into a maintained, generalized, and integrated one. Internalization is a sequential constructive process that operates on the basis of dialogical synthesis of person's previous system of meanings (Valsiner, 2002) and I-positions (Hermans, 2001, Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007) through dynamic ambivalence (Ferreira, Salgado & Cunha, 2006). It is through such process that James Mark Baldwin's (1915) notion of *persistent imitation* operates in the course of development.

A similar transformation process takes place in the externalization trajectory. An integrated and generalized personal-cultural self-organizer—a “value”—becomes transcribed into concrete meaningful actions through its transformative contextualization as it is moved through Layer III → Layer II → Layer I → “OUTSIDE. As a result, there is no “sameness” implied between the two “outside” materials-- the message that was becoming internalized, and the one that emerges as a result of externalization. The model also localizes the areas where the transformation processes take place on the boundaries of the layers, and specifies the conditions (catalytic centripetal inputs K, L, M for internalization and Q, P, O for externalization). The process is viewed as entailing the oppositions of action and counter-action.

Three boundaries (a, b, c) are to be penetrated by the internalization/externalization process. Since the process is constructive, the "inner core" of the person regulates each of the boundary crossings by specific social (semiotic) regulating device. First, the outmost boundary can be selectively open for some communicative messages from the external social world, while remaining closed for others. The specific "boundary regulator" -- **K** -- recognizes those messages that the person is ready to internalize, and ignores or blocks others.

Once a message is brought into layer I, it becomes potentially internalizable. It is noticed as a message by the intra-psychological system, but not integrated into it. The latter requires opening of boundary **b** for the message-- by way of the “social regulator”—performing a catalytic function-- **L**. The latter's action upon the message guides its transformation into a new form, as in layer **II** the message becomes generalized. This generalization in and by itself is not yet part of the structured intra-psychological world (layer III). It creates the basis for its potential integration-- if it is let through the boundary **c** under the action of social regulator **M**. If that happens, the generalized and reconstructed message becomes integrated into the structure of the intra-psychological phenomena (in layer III).

Phenomena that can be viewed as located in layer I are most widespread in our introspective worlds. For example, a tune (or phrase) from a TV commercial may keep reverberating in my mind for a long time. Any effort to suppress the silly reverberation may be ineffective, I do not bring that material to any form of generalization (which would indicate its layer II state), nor do I ever integrate it in my intra-psychological personal sense structure. After some time, the tune or phrase "dies out", yet the memory of my suffering from the futile efforts to suppress it can be re-activated later. Thus, the message was clearly noticed, maintained, and limited to the outermost layer of the internalization/ externalization system.

Once a message from layer I is brought to layer II, it is observable by the act of generalization in the introspective sphere. Yet that generalization remains just that-- it is not integrated into the personal sense system. It remains an abstract generalization, without adding to it the person's feeling tone.

Most of ordinary human interactions on issues of politics, business, and psychology may be of such layer-II type. Discussions of abstract problems that are sufficiently far from one's own "core self"—which is infinite in its dynamics-- may be an activity that seems to create an image of the person's participation in social issues. Yet that participation remains at the level of abstract discourse. In contrast, if any of the eager talkers oneself encounters "the problem", it may become taken into the layer III realm, and the person may find it too difficult to externalize any (or some) of the personally senseful aspects of the newly integrated phenomenon.

Orhan Pamuk and His Father: Opening the Suitcase

An (externalized) example of the laminal process of internalization/externalization can be found in the Nobel Lecture by the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk (2006) where he gives tribute to his father's role in his own personal life course as a writer. Two years before his death, Pamuk's father brings to his son a suitcase filled with his notebooks, asking the son to read them when he is "gone." The suitcase—familiar to the son through all his childhood memories—became an object recognized and cherished—yet it was not easy for Pamuk to open it:

This suitcase was a familiar friend, a powerful reminder of my childhood, my past, but now I couldn't even touch it. Why? No doubt it was because of the mysterious weight of its contents.

The first thing that kept me distant from the contents of my father's suitcase was, of course, the fear that *I might not like what I read*. Because my father knew this, he had taken the precaution of acting as if he did not take its contents seriously. After working as a writer for 25 years, it pained me to see this. But I did not even want to be angry at my father for failing to take literature seriously enough ... *My real fear, the crucial thing that I did not wish to know or discover,*

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was the possibility that my father might be a good writer. I couldn't open my father's suitcase because I feared this. Even worse, I couldn't even admit this myself openly. If true and great literature emerged from my father's suitcase, I would have to acknowledge that inside my father there existed an entirely different man. This was a frightening possibility. Because even at my advanced age I wanted my father to be only my father – not a writer (Pamuk, 2006, paragraphs 6-7, added emphases).

In terms of the laminal model (Figure 3) we can observe the operation of the catalyst L at the intersection of Layer I and Layer II. The content material that activated L comes from Layer III—the reflections by Pamuk upon one's own life course as a writer in comparison with what he imagined—cherished and feared—could be his father's "real self".

When finally the father's suitcase is opened, the catalyzed ambivalence continued:

So this was what was driving me when I first opened my father's suitcase. Did my father have a secret, an unhappiness in his life about which I knew nothing, something he could only endure by pouring it into his writing? As soon as I opened the suitcase, I recalled its scent of travel, recognised several notebooks, and noted that my father had shown them to me years earlier, but without dwelling on them very long...

...What caused me most disquiet was when, here and there in my father's notebooks, I came upon a writerly voice. This was not my father's voice, I told myself; it wasn't authentic, or at least it did not belong to the man I'd known as my father. Underneath my fear that my father might not have been my father when he wrote, was a deeper fear: the fear that deep inside I was not authentic, that I would find nothing good in my father's writing, this increased my fear of finding my father to have been overly influenced by other writers and plunged me into a despair that had afflicted me so badly when I was young, casting my life, my very being, my desire to write, and my work into question. (Pamuk, 2006, paragraph 16, added emphases)

The opening of the suitcase created the possibility that its contents—material brought into Layer II through the act of reading the father's notebooks—might lead to re-organization of Layer III. This entails deep subjective intuitions about "my father", "my father as (potential) writer", "myself as a writer", "being authentic"—the inflow of Layer II material into Layer III could have been difficult to stop (by catalyst M).

Of course Pamuk's highly elaborate introspective externalization of the episode of the contact with his father's suitcase—which was actually his abstractively

generalized philosophical statement about the living by a human being in the role of a writerverb missing in this sentence?. It was not an episode of locally relevant sequence of social interaction, but a personally hyper-generalized message for communication with all of the “outer infinity” we might call humanity. The secluded private lives of writers become—in the form of generalized messages—semiotic organizers of deeply subjective infinities of other human beings.

Conclusion: What Kind of Theoretical Advancement Do We Gain from the Internalization Model?

This paper sets up a contrast within unity. The unity is clear-- both Susswein et al. and my coverages build on the focus on the mutuality of the person and the social world. However, the two theoretical constructions proceed in different directions.

The internalization model leads to the recognition of the *relativity* of person's participation in external activity contexts (i.e., moving between central and peripheral roles in a joint action setting). This freedom to modulate one's participation has its counterpart in the intra-psychological sphere. In the laminal model it is organized by way of maintaining different kinds of internalized materials in different layers, and selectively (and episodically) letting them to become integrated into the personal sense system. The person is a *relative*-- sometimes peripheral, sometimes central-- *participant in one's own life*, thanks to the differentiated system of internalization/ externalization. Agency is maintained—without reducing the social embeddedness of the person.

This commentary is also meant to illustrate the focus on theoretical construction based on axioms in ways coordinated with phenomena. Contemporary social sciences confuse theoretical and axiomatic statements in the art of creating general conceptual schemes of their objects of investigation. This brief exposure of the laminal model of internalization/externalization is given here to illustrate what kinds of questions concerning internalization, externalization, learning, mastery, or—ultimately—dialogical self, are in need for elaboration. Concrete elaborations of how the posited processes operate—be those internalization/externalization (as in my example here), or appropriation or mastery (as suggested by Susswein et al.)—are necessary to move the field ahead beyond discussions about preferences for axiomatic bases.

The elaboration in this paper has clear limits—we have not discussed the issue of relationships between levels of development (microgenetic, mesogenetic, and ontogenetic). For full understanding of the use of evolutionary ideas (recommended by Susswein et al, 2007, this issue) this issue needs to be addressed. The notion of *selection*—as brought into their theorizing from evolutionary psychology—has two limitations for productive theory building. First, it operates at the level of phylogenesis (in strict evolutionary theorizing) and its application at the level of individual organisms is problematic (Valsiner, 1989). Secondly—and more importantly—it is a concept that

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fails to make sense of the process of emergence itself—prior to being selected, different versions of whatever are under the “selection pressure” need to be generated.

The crucial question of such emergence of not-yet-selected (and not yet fully formed) novel forms is at the core of all developmental theorizing from Baldwin, Bergson to Vygotsky and Piaget, and to our contemporary developmental science (Carolina Consortium on Human Development, 1996; Fischer & Biddell, 2006; Gottlieb, 2003). Contemporary evolutionary psychology with its mixing of levels of organization and uncritical adherence to axioms of population genetics may have less to offer for solving the problems of development than the post-1960s epigenetic revolution in protein genetics. It may be time for psychology to constructively internalize (and externalize) the theoretical creativity of contemporary biology—rather than remain involved in the mastery of statistics-based theoretical models (Gigerenzer, 1993) the axiomatic bases of which are non-fit for both developmental psychology and dialogical science.

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