Introduction to Special Issue: Linking Two Theories

HOW CAN THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY BE MADE DIALOGICAL?

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Abstract. This Special Issue is based on a symposium we organized during the 2014 meeting of the ISDS in Den Haag. The goal—looking at Moscovici's social representation theory (SRT)—from the perspective of the dialogical self theory (DST) was (and is) an interesting task in the theoretical realm of contemporary social sciences. We felt that the two theories could enrich each other, in particular regarding their respective horizons or levels of analysis, linking, first, the "macroscopic" (SRT) and, second, the microscopic and "person-centered" (DST) levels. Through such linking of levels, we had the impression that SRT could benefit from the dynamic orientation of DST while the latter could gain a better focus in locating a person's self-dialogues within the framework of social representations. In this Special Issue, the authors carry further their dialogues with both SRT and DST that have continued in the two years after the Den Haag Conference.

Keywords: social representation, relating theories, dialogical self, distance, vagueness

Creating theoretical bridges between established theories is no simple matter. Our effort in this Special Issue to construct such link between Serge Moscovici's social representation theory (SRT) and Hubert Hermans' dialogical self theory (DST) is a collective effort to enhance the horizons of both. Yet—in the process of working on editing this issue—we came to believe that SRT has more to benefit from DST than vice versa. Although Moscovici has never denied—and often emphasized—the dynamic and dialectical nature of his theory, our analysis of it has rendered such claims to be only half-true.

Despite the dynamics of social representing that SRT attempts to cover, the realities of the study of social represent*ions* have been caught in the habit of isolating them as entities, thus giving them static ontological status.[1] Yet the value of the SRT is

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[1] This seems to be partly part of the SRT itself.

its sociological depth—while in the context of DST a person may be observed to be caught by "voices" stemming from I-positions that involve social roles (e.g., ''*I* as myself'' to ''*I* as woman'' to ''*I* as daughter'' to ''*I* as feminist''). Thus, from the perspective of SRT such personal dialogues are guided by the societal set-up of the social representations of the meanings of WOMAN, DAUGHTER and FEMINIST that are in use in the given society at the given time.[2] Here is the perennial paradox of psychology—it is living human beings who make meanings, but in our theories we assume that they are doing it under the influence of our own invented concepts—those of representations.

In our goal of promoting the dialogue between DST and SRT, we emphasize that both of these theories deal with phenomena that are best viewed within the Individual-Socio-Ecological frame of reference (Valsiner, 2000). This frame sets up all research questions at the intersection of the person and environment. That relationship is dynamic—involving constant interchange between the two together with regulation of that interchange (Figure 1).
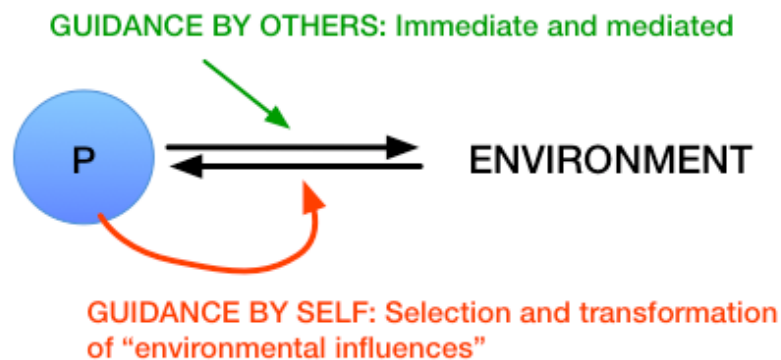

Figure 1. The General Scheme of the Individual-Socioecological Reference Frame

Looking at Figure 1 it becomes clear that all person <> environment relations are inherently dialogical—as they involve the process of constant interchange together with guidance efforts that originate both in the Person and the conditions set up for the guidance of the person by the social others. This theoretical framework is the ground for a dialogue between DST and SRT.

However, the encounter of two theories—DST and SRT—happens at a different level of abstraction than the everyday life encounters of persons with society as in

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[2] We can also consider social representing (a process which implies time) reality when a transition occurs in positioning from ''*I* as myself'' to ''*I* as woman'' to ''*I* as daughter'' to ''*I* as feminist.''

Figure 2. Abstractly, each of the two theories could transcend the immediate environment by means of distance in a way to innovate (going forward and *beyond*). A theory could be "in avant-garde" in relation to the society within it emerges. Very often an old theory is (re)discovered when we feel it provides innovations regarding today's societal and scientific paradigms. The innovative movements "in" society sustain its development, its expansion—when the theory spreads into the wider society. This is what Moscovici observed in the case of the diffusion of psychoanalytic ideas in the French society in the 1950s. He was not interested—then and later—in the particular personal dialogues that ordinary French people would have when first knocking at the door of a psychoanalyst's office. Yet the impact of any—new or old—social representation goes through such personal dialogic processes.

The important aspect is what happens "in-between" the self-dialoguing person and the tensions of social representing in the wider society. Let's insist on the fact that the different pieces of the fuzzy—vague and ambiguous—constantly future-oriented process of being expressed (presented) and redefined (represented) can be viewed as inclusively separated. This is the basic condition to sustain theoretical dialogue.

The content under scrutiny: What our contributors were trying to do

Raudsepp in *Cognitive polyphasia in the context of systemic power and semiotic potency* posits the complementarity between DST and SRT: they are both grounded in holism and multi-perspectivism and they both recognize the bidirectional relationship between subject and environment while differentiating themselves by focusing respectively on the intraindividual and on the societal levels of analysis. Using the concept of cognitive polyphasia, she defines environment with respect to different levels—societal objective field (relating to Bourdieu's concept of habitus), shared representational field (collective culture, regulative principles and "battlefield") and subjective meaning field (semiotic potency)—all of which coexist. Environment defines the limits, possibility and conditions of the subjective positioning process by providing guidance and resources used by subject. In relation to the two forms of cognitive polyphasia—positional (manoeuvres in the representational field in relation to its different forms of knowledge) and intra-positional (manoeuvres in the subjective field through distance and directionality) that she proposes and applies to the trajectory of the acculturation of elderly people, she tries to respond to researchers' two main challenges: "1) to describe and explain the effects of interaction of plural forms of knowledge in different contexts and 2) to explain the choice among the potential representational possibilities by a subject in his particular relationships with the environment."

Rosa and Tavares in *A semiotic-dialogical and sociocultural account on suicide* respond to the dominant biomedical approach—unilateral relationship between the subject and the environment with respect to pre-existing and fix categories in reversible time—that they critique. They propose semiotic-dialogical and sociocultural approaches

to look at the phenomena of suicide. These approaches, which are based on social constructionism and the narrative perspective, highlight the interactional, processual, relational and "linguistic" aspects of suicide. Thanks to its structural flexibility, the Self (re)organizes itself—and thus "regulates" its identity in the sociocultural "here and now". Thus the Self is being located in groups whose members share social representations that are hierarchically organized. This leads to the centrality of meta-meanings or promoter signs defined as *arguments*, that is, the relationship between different *I*-positions and the interplay of the audience (which seem to act both "from the inside" as a part of the Self and "from the outside" as a constraint).

Lanaridis in his *The narrative function of music in a contemporary society* attempts to make sense of musical communication as a framework where social representation and dialogical self (DS) meet. The affective nature of such communication is a promising field for linking the two.

Moving to the realm of history teaching, Moreau in *Understanding temporalization by the activity of historical thinking* attempts to make sense of the mythological dialogicality involved in the system of five oppositions that can be viewed in dialogical relations. Boulanger (*a*) identifies the static and dynamic aspects of SRT and uses DST to develop (expand) this dynamism—in particular with respect to the process of anchoring—while *remaining in* the theoretical environment of the former theory. He also critiques the centration of both SRT and DST (particularly the former) on the clear nature of space and the tendency to remain closed to uncertainty or, at least, to reach for its quick resolution. While DST and SRT could be linked to a representational and transitional zone, this zone needs to be put further into uncertainty. To expand these theoretical perspectives, Boulanger (*b*) refers to the concepts of *vagueness* and *boundary case*. He presents an analysis of the discourse of actors participating in a partnership program in a poor area to show how these two concepts can allow for a dynamic conception of the interplay—central in both SRT and DST, but partly conceived through a static approach—between the presence and absence of the object.

Linking DST and SRT: Conceptual problems and Open Avenues

In building bridges between the two innovative theories in the social sciences of the second half of the 20th century, we set our participants a very difficult task. SRT and DST operate at adjacent—yet different—levels of generality. SRT is set to work from society downwards towards individual persons—highlighting the role of the social and historical heritage in the deeply personal spheres. As such, it encounters the conceptual problem of individualizing shared social heritage. Each person in any society is unique—and therefore the notion of "sharing" the domain of social representations (as tools for organizing personal lives) is a label that covers up a complex process of negotiation of the systems of meanings and the making of personal sense. Such *sharing*

is possible only through communication processes about objects "out there" or of internal psychological phenomena "within me." This could be the arena where SRT meets with DST. The latter starts from the analysis of the phenomena "within me" (configurations of *I*-positions) and extends it towards the societally predicated extensions (e.g., moving from personal ''*I* as woman'' *I*-position to the socially intervened predication of ''*I* as **not that kind**'' of a woman) (Nedergaard et al., 2016). The "not that kind"— a fuzzy moral qualifier—starts to regulate the conduct of a real person here-and-now. The dialogues withi the self are guided by normative social representing processes.

Time matters for both SRT and DST. The link between the processes of social *re*presentation is actually those of social *pre*sentation through the meaning-making person in irreversible time. And such processes are inevitably dialogical—from the DST perspective set up in irreversible time, dialogue is omnipresent between the *I*-positions as those are (and were) and as those could be (''*I* as I could be'' or ''*I* as I should not be''). The moral dialogicality of the DS is the location where SRT and DST can be brought together on the arena that they "share"—albeit from different perspectives.

A number of basic theoretical issues become important in this regard. First, it is set up at the border of PAST and FUTURE in irreversible time. The usual mapping of DST *I*-positions needs to become temporally re-oriented (Boulanger *c*). Second, the functioning of social representations in the social presentation processes is always approximate. It has the nature of "aboutness"—social representations operate in social presentation within the DS as poorly definable fuzzy notions that cannot be located in any particular location—yet social representations are omnipresent in the dialogue within the Self. The human meaning maker arrives at very precise meanings and actions through the use of imprecise social representations that carry with them deep affective "clouds" of social suggestions. For example, the sequence of two linked *I*-positions "*I* as myself'' → ''*I* as service professional'' (the latter being set by social role systems) could be followed by a third, ''*I* as taxi driver'' (no affective valuation) or ''*I* as prostitute'' (immediate affective social valuation added). The system of social representations enters into the processes of DS through the social role meanings combined with the affective value contexts they carry.

It implies *invisible* social guidance (''*I* as taxi driver'' but also ''*We* as taxi driver'' which is an audience within the Self). Social others may be present, or not—a building designated as a "church" in the European societies and bearing specific architectural form can be guiding the present-day visitor without any social agent actively involved. The architectural form mediates the goal-oriented nature of the relationship. It is here where the social representations meet the DS. Centuries of survival of the given church in a given neighborhood provides with the tacit social guidance for ever new generations of the dwellers of the town. They may go to the church to intensify their self-negotiations within the Dialogical Self. Or—they may go

to a pub for the same purpose. In both cases the Dialogical Self operates under the conditions of Umwelt that is pre-encoded by social representations. The space for dialogues is pre-structured, yet *open* (Boulanger *b*). It is experienced in the present, facing the future.[3] The importance of ''shared'' tacit understanding about "X is Y" brings a social representation into a personal dialogue in a here-and-now action setting.

Sharedness requires difference as its necessary condition. In fact, this is because negotiating meaning is an ambiguous and ambivalent process as unfolding meaning-making happens in communication, which implies ''sharing'' a dialogical space (or place) that is constantly changing. Abbey (2007) refers to poetic motion to conceptualise this dynamic of meaning-making through ambivalence. In relation to Boulanger's and Christensen's (2018) efforts to situate SRT into the aesthetic realm, we propose opening up on their concept of CHARACTERisation. The latter enables us to synthesize the introduction by referring to the issues of classification (''*I* as **not that kind**''), indeterminacy (comprising ambivalence, openness, ambiguity and fuzziness), ''sharedness,'' embodiement (whether the Other is present or not) and irreversible time. In fact, this will also allow us to go beyond this introduction and the whole Special Issue. Instead of fully developing the concept of CHARACTERisation, we will illustrate it as follows, then present some epistemological and theoretical issues.

Imagine a *scene* in which you *present* someone who is absent to your audience by using your body to perform gestures and adopt certain physical positions, and by means of verbal cues such as intonation. You will not only say that ''this is that kind of guy or girl,'' but foremost accentuate it (Bakhtin, 1929) through enacting and *embodying* this person in a specific context.

The *absent* Other is made *present* through your relationship with the audience, like in theater. If you present the same person to another audience, you may use other gestures. It means that this *presentation* is contextual: in a systemic way, you and your audience are co-constructing it. Instead of situating the person in a pre-defined and fixed class, you CHARACTERize him or her through *aesthetic representation* like in theater. A CHARACTER –as opposed to a class— is part of a fuzzy set which is undetermined and ambiguous. While in theater there are many versions of the same character, and in improvisation there is an open co-construction of it, in social encountering, speaking about and enacting Others entails negotiating and renegotiating them. Here, imagination is central. Presenting someone implies distancing ourselves from the context in which we met him or her and extending some of his or her characteristics. If I present someone who had an accident, this very accident will be *re*presented –presented in a different way— differently when I go into the center of my living room –which is a scene— to embody this person falling on the ground and when we discuss it together, adding to this event the coloration of our own accents.

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[3] In this sense, it could be more relevant to refer to place instead of space (Christensen *a*).

Sharedness happens through and because of these accents that are contextually grounded on differences. Let's look at sharedness from another perspective, through the following question: What does the real *person who experienced* the accident and the *represented person* in the reconstructed scene –in my living room as a stage to embodying the event— have in common and *share*? The *trajectory* of the object –from being a real person to a character—is constructive and part of an open space. It thus happens in irreversible time, in the present –in an unfolding matter— through a synthesis between the past and the future.

CHARACTERisation has some epistemological and theoretical incidences on bridging SRT with DST. In both theories, the object –which could be a real person—is thought and spoken of (Boulanger, 2018). In Moscovici's analysis, the members of the French population spoke about the psychoanalysts *without meeting them*. Making the Other present means to give him or her a discursive reality, to picture him or her like with realism in painting. This discursive context gives the object its materiality in social thinking. On the other side, DST focuses on how Others are as they are thought. Yet, SRT focuses on a classificatory way of thinking and constructing an image–fixing the Other in a class (Boulanger *a*). Instead, the imagine of Others in DST is not fixed but part of a *stage* where they are alive through their *voice*.

CHARACTERisation happens here, both inside (focus of DST) and outside (focus of SRT in reference to conversation). Yet, *voicing* the Others –both inside (mind) and outside, when the stage is my living room—does not *make them really present*, in the sense of them being socially embodied. The Other is not participating in social discourse about him or her. What is the difference between, first, lay people speaking about a professional –in reference to Moscovici's study— and, second, them having this dialogue while the latter is in the room? What is the difference between sustaining an internal dialogue with someone that is there in front of me and with an absent Other? In what conditions are voices –as part of representational scenes— embodied?

Representing theories—presenting potential linkages

While theories –here DST and SRT— must represent people's voice differences, the authors of these theories themselves convey and enact different accents. There is certain asymmetry in the histories of DST and SRT. While the former is very well situated in the practices of therapy and provides new avenues for psychological analyses, the latter needs specifications beyond those left by Moscovici. It is our hope that making the discourses on *social representing dialogical dynamics* would be a fruitful exercise on both sides. The contributions to this Special Issue have worked diligently towards that goal—now available for public scrutiny

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