International Journal for Dialogical Science
Fall 2017 Vol. 10, No. 2, 77-84

DIALOGUING–MORE AND MORE

Lia da Rocha Lordelo
Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia, Brazil

Abstract. This comment on Raudsepp's (2017) article resumes the main theoretical connections proposed by the author, who presents the particular phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia within social representations theory, along with concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology; and also contributions from the dialogical self theory—especially the idea of semiotic potency within the positioning of the Self. After distinguishing two kinds of polyphasias—positional and intra-positional—she then applies this theoretical interconnection in order to empirically understand how Estonians from a pre-world-war generation have dealt with political and social changes throughout their life trajectories. Next, this comment brings the concepts of personal and collective culture to the discussion in order to highlight the importance of analysing concepts in relation to each other. The central purpose of this comment is to argue in favour of a "relational primacy" (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007)—between the individual and the society as much as between theoretical concepts

Keywords: cognitive polyphasia, social representations, dialogical self, dialogue, personal culture, collective culture

Fruitful interactions between psychological and sociological theoretical perspectives are always in order: they constitute great contributions to comprehending human beings from an integrated, interdisciplinary point of view. That stated, Maaris Raudsepp's article "Cognitive polyphasia in the context of systemic power and semiotic potency" (Raudsepp, 2017) figures as a brilliant example of a theoretical dialogue that canalizes its efforts into understanding how people constitute and change their representations of the world and of themselves, and also how complex and contradictory those representations can be. In the article, we can visualize an intercrossing between the particular phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia within social representation theory (SRT), along with concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology; and contributions from the dialogical self theory (DST)—especially the idea of semiotic potency –as a conceptual extension of DST— within the positioning of the Self.

SRT is one of the first major theoretical approaches to propose an interface between social and psychological phenomena (Moscovici, 1988), as Moscovici trans-

AUTHORS' NOTE. Comments concerning this paper can be directed to the author at lialordelo@gmail.com

formed the Durkheimian notion of collective representations in the making of SRT. Among some of its highly relevant features, there is the reclaiming of an epistemological status of common sense knowledge, according to Raudsepp and others (Raudsepp, 2016; Jovchelovitch, 2011; Marková, 2003); and also the attempt to accommodate the dynamic nature of knowledge construction; the representations we make are not fixed or static. But why is change important? In Moscovici's words, "[i]ndividuals and groups create representations in the course of communication and cooperation" (2000, p. 27). Volklein and Horwarth (2005) remind us of the symbolic space in the development and negotiation of representations, which is precisely the reason why all human beings hold creative power and agency in their formation and use. People think and talk to each other, and this is why representations are complex and change.

The specific concept—or hypothesis, claims Jovchelovitch (2002)—of cognitive polyphasia was also coined by Moscovici and refers to different but coexisting thoughts and discourses on the same object in the same context, group or individual. Cognitive polyphasia would also be defined as the process through which different rationalities operate in the construction of knowledge (Souza, Menandro, & Menandro, 2015), or putting it in another way, as a concept which sees knowledge and belief as similar, and not contrary epistemic forms (Jovchelovitch, 2002).

The Bourdieusian notion of habitus, although used by Raudsepp to express more objective configurations of social relations in the broader, societal field, still stands as a sociological attempt to overcome the unidirectional force of the social structures onto the subject, as much as an attempt to empower the social agent—that is, the person. Bourdieu (2004) calls us to think of habitus in the sense of an incorporated social game; as the expression of the social in the body and being able to produce an infinity of acts of play.

Both sociological perspectives point at the need to address representations as dynamic, complex and contradictory, for they are ultimately constituted by people communicating to one another. That alone would involve some notion of dialogue; but the article takes a step further by organizing what Raudsepp calls "interrelated layers of reality" (Raudsepp, 2017, p. 46)—processes in the societal field; processes in the shared representational field (an intermediary layer of reality); and finally, processes in the subjective meaning fields of agents. For this last layer of reality, Raudsepp presents contributions from DST. It is precisely here that dialogue shows its force.

Dialogue, and more specifically dialogism, have constituted another large and diverse epistemological background for reconciling individual and society, articulating, on different levels, contributions of authors such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Emmanuel Lévinas, Martin Buber and others. DST was proposed as a theoretical and methodological approach, within this background, inspired mainly by two authors from

the beginning of the twentieth century—Bakhtin again and also William James. For the theory, the Self must be conceptualized in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions in an imaginal landscape (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). Those positions of the Self can only be defined in terms of their relation to other positions—of real others or of imaginary audiences; and that is why they are *dialogical* relations. For Salgado and Hermans (2005), that dialogical approach is a fruitful solution for reinstating the place and value of subjectivity in psychological sciences. The question is how flexibility and variability within human minds are created. As I have previously stated (Lordelo, 2014), in order to talk about how these qualities—flexibility and variability—function, one must explore precisely the relationship between social and individual, or personal and collective.

Relations Between Concepts: The Heart of the Matter

Relations are central to this discussion. It is from that relational primacy (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007) on that I would like to generate a debate.

Raudsepp's article thoroughly theorizes on two basic different forms of cognitive polyphasia—as in positional polyphasia and intra-positional polyphasia. She presents a set of specific positions, or response modes in relation to social suggestions, such as accepting, escaping, denying, resisting and innovating—*I*-positions which represent modifications of distance and direction (Raudsepp, 2017). She defines positional polyphasia as the plurality of representations corresponding to various individual and group positions in the societal or communicative field, stemming from complementary roles in communicative contexts, multiple group affiliations, etc.; on an intrapsychical level, this type of polyphasia would be represented as mutual positions in the dialogical self (DS) (Raudsepp, 2017). She then establishes intra-positional polyphasia as "potentially multiple ways of performing the same positional role" (Raudsepp, 2017, p. 70)—either stylistically (using various speech genres, affective modes, etc.) or through semiotic manoeuvres in relation to social suggestions. But a central question remains: can we conceive a psycho-sociological phenomenon as intra-positional? What is (in) a position?

Salgado and Hermans (2005) claim that the word "position" implies that "everything that is said, is said from one place toward a specific background, and its 'location' depends not only on what is said but on the relationship between what is said and the global surroundings" (p. 10). A position, says Hermans (2001), always implies relations: internal-external, internal, external ones. A complex mixture of all these kinds of relations is usually at work—this is the rule and not the exception when it comes to the human mind. Not only social roles, but reflective meanings and affective states would also constitute *I*-positions (Mattos, 2013).

In that sense, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) have recently theorized on different processes of positioning. One basic assumption of DST, from their point of

view, is that people are continuously involved in a process of positioning and repositioning, "not only in relation to other people, but also in relation to themselves" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 17). They propose to study processes such as the creation of third positions, meta-positions, the coalition of positions and so on. In that particular work, authors remind us that the Self cannot be considered as an entity in itself; for the concept of mind, within DST, might be understood as a dialogical process of communication with other and oneself (Hermans, 2004). With that conception of mind at stake, talking about "intra-positional polyphasia" would be, in a certain sense, to transform positions into things, entities, and not into relationships. A similar difficulty would involve the notion of positional polyphasia on an intrapsychical level, also presented by Raudsepp. If we assume there is something inside a position, we must accept there is something outside. Hence, we could generate an inside X outside dichotomy against which the DS concept has, since its first theoretical formulations, attempted to argue.

I have previously been very interested in this tension expressed in several dichotomies, such as internal X external, the social X the individual, the personal X the collective and have written on the subject a few times (Lordelo, 2013, 2014, 2015). I have claimed that one conceptual proposition that seems fruitful to the study of the intersection between that semiotic potency brought by Raudsepp, the social nature of psychological functions, and the inseparability between individual and society are the two notions of personal culture and collective culture (Valsiner, 2007, Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). For that reason, although those are mentioned by Raudsepp in the beginning of the article, I believe they deserve a more thoughtful discussion.

Personal culture is the active construction of a personal version of any cultural phenomenon (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003, p. 730). In a similar way, Ernest Boesch (2008) reflects on what he calls subjective culture, stating that this would be constituted by individual meaning networks; he believes that in spite of the fact that these networks can overlap, they are rarely identical—and that produces diversity and singularity of meanings. The collective culture is the "living field of the suggested meanings, feelings and actions with which the person interacts over the life course" (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003, p. 726). It is relevant to add that the concept of personal culture cannot be analytically separated from its complement, which is the notion of collective culture—this analytical complementarity is crucial in this discussion. Collective culture is a concept that demands, from my point of view, a more complex empirical translation, because of its properties: while it is considered by Valsiner a relatively stable entity of collective origin (Valsiner, 2007, p. 63), it is also unstable and heterogeneous; such heterogeneity origins from its "episodic nature" (Valsiner, 2007, p. 63) in which this social construction takes place; one can say, then, that collective culture is "an interpersonal bricolage of externalizations made by a varied group of people" (Valsiner, 2007, p. 63). It is important to have in mind, especially in this case, the "ontological

indeterminacy" (Valsiner, 2007) that characterizes collective culture: since it is constantly in the process of being collectively reconstructed, it cannot be described in the form and shape it exists in the present moment. Any representation of it will be a type of delimitation of this unending reconstruction process. When we refer to meanings from the collective culture, we will certainly be dealing with a perceived homogeneity (Mahmoud, 2008); or with a kind of momentary symbolic consensus which is particularly useful to data analysis. This definition is slightly different from referring to processes in the societal field as having "objective configurations" (Raudsepp, 2017, p. 47), or yet understanding habitus as deterministic and unavoidable. I have carried that discussion, in a similar manner, when debating on semiotic mechanisms of meaning construction (Lordelo, 2013). What appears to me as central when discussing these concepts is that, although they can be defined separately, they can only be applied interconnectedly—for the flux between them is the heart of the matter. I refer specifically to personal and collective cultures, but the argument fits into how *I*-positions can be understood, and also how the connections proposed by Raudsepp—between levels of reality, concepts from psychological and sociological traditions, etc.—work: they work at their best when in relation to each other.

Conclusion

Overall, Raudsepp (2017) proposes a sophisticated theoretical framework, inspired by different concepts, to understand how Estonians from a pre-world-war generation have dealt with political and social changes throughout their life trajectories. She combines two mechanisms of semiotic potency—distancing and directionality—to show that various relatively stable forms of personal response are possible. She also explains how the unreflective level of habitus and the reflective level of social knowledge are intertwined in those processes. But if there is one central thing the dialogical approach has taught psychologists as much as sociologists is that even personal agency—our ability to act and produce change around us—is created through relations (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007). Still benefiting from the concepts of personal and collective cultures, we bring Valsiner's claim that there is no isomorphism between personal and collective cultures, and that is what makes all persons unique, and yet supported, all of us, by collective culture's broad background (Valsiner, 2007). This lack of correspondence between personal and collective symbolic spheres is assured precisely by that semiotic potency present on the third level of reality proposed by Raudsepp (2017)—"processes in the subjective meaning fields of agents" (p. 46). This means that each trajectory of each research participant, although sharing somewhat common backgrounds (the political shifts in Estonia during the twentieth century, for instance), is singular. What one person accepts from a specific change in a social economic scenario is not equal to what another person does. And more, what one person *accepts* from a specific change in a social economic scenario is not a symmetric opposite to what another person *denies* or *resists*. Those responses cannot be captured in

themselves, but only in the relation they establish with other responses or with the context around them. This means we cannot trust the supposed ontological fixed nature of that common background of representations—and that, from my point of view, still remains the true challenge in scientific investigations on the human mind and processes of social change. Marková quotes philosopher Meyerson (as cited inMarková, 2003) and reminds us that human thinking is never fully logical; instead, it is typically antinomic and dialogical. If we accept this premise and agree that to think is to deflect, to take detours (Marková, 2003, p. 161), then cognitive polyphasia might be precisely the movement that characterizes meaning-making processes. In his formulations, Moscovici had already argued that cognitive polyphasia could open up new perspectives in social psychology as it led scholars to study not only correspondences between social situations and modalities of knowledge, but also transformations and trade-offs between these different modalities (Jovchelovitch, 2002). Here, we can see that the need for movement—and dialogue, in a broader sense—has been a concern for psychological and sociological theoretical perspectives since they started to interact in a consistent way. Raudsepp's fascinating examples of Estonians' life trajectories are not only a productive way of attacking the research challenge just mentioned—how to systematically study the subjects' activity in relation to the social environment; they also seriously approach the need for more and more theoretical dialogues between concepts from psychological and sociological traditions.

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