European/International Joint PhD
in Social Representations and Communication
International Lab Meeting - Spring Session 2015

European Commission REA-Research Executive Agency
FP7 - PEOPLE Initial Training Networks
So.Re.Com. Joint-IDP
(PITN-GA-2013-607279)

Funded by the European Union

The "Anthropological", "Narrative", "Dialogical" and "Subjective"

paradigmatic approaches to Social Representations

at the European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations & Communication
Research Center and Multimedia LAB

26th - 29th April 2015

SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations

Social representations and literary texts
A narrative approach
Key epistemological premises for modeling empirical researches

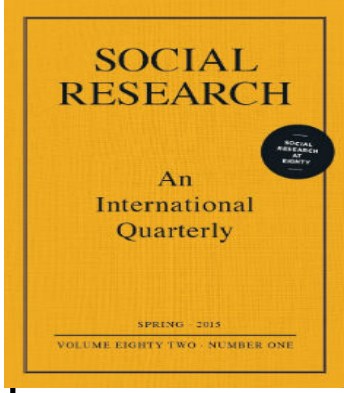
Alberta Contarello
FISPPA – University of Padova, Italy

Outline of the Talk

- Literary oeuvres and Social Representations Theory
- Classic trend
- …
- Narrative turn
- Discursive turn
- …….

The Dreyfus Affair, Proust, and Social Psychology

Moscovici 1986



- Gedankenexperiments: to study imaginary groups as if they were real ones

a. the relationships, emotions, behaviour described in fiction might be conveniently interpreted through social-psychological models

b. fiction may be used as a source of theoretical thought, by examining the writers' implicit worldview

c. specific contributions by authors who use social-psychological theories as a starting points for their novels are precious

RS and their change over time

Chombart de Lauwe 1971

- Representations of the child and childhood as an 'excellent projective test' of the values and aspirations system within a society
- A syncronic and diacronic study:
  - Change of the representations offered by adults to adults along one century
  - …..

Un monde autre: l'enfance

Material

- Wide selection of literary material (novels and autobiografies cf. Appendix, with some *short stories* and scripts of films):
  - Great writers (Victor Hugo)
  - Writers on childhood
  - Successful authors in their times, then forgotten
- More than one hundred oeouvres, later reduced to :
  - 25 before WWI
  - 25 between the two wars
  - 25 after WWI

Un monde autre: l'enfance

Methods and Results

- Content Analysis: a. exploration in terms of thematic analysis; b. analysis of the described situations and of features of the characters (in terms of categorization and symbolization processes)
- Opposition between enfant-authentique and enfant-modelé
- Mythization of childhood
- Individual vs. Society

Everyday life

In present and past literary texts

- Nearly 80 (contemporary) and 100 (past) novels and biographies

"a sort of mirror of the reality about which they speak, based upon a knowledge which we may consider widely shared, at least by a certain social group"

Selection of extracts

Lexicographic analysis via Alceste & content anaysis

Mapping and analysing everyday life - a 'structuring structure, supporting, allowing and connecting all the other spheres of reality" (Emiliani, 2008)

Narrative Analysis

- "…narrative is an oral, written, or filmed account of events told to others or to oneself (monologue) but is not verbal material that is purely descriptive, expository.., disconnected or abstract. For our purposes narrative is used to refer to accounts of personal experience, or the experiences of others, or to fictional accounts, such as stories, myths, folktales and fairy tales." (Smith, 2000)
- …not searching for literal truth but ***narrative truth***

A famous "ancestor": Propp and the morphology of fairy tales

- Functions: absentation, interdiction, violation of interdiction, reconnaissance, delivery, trickery ….(31).
- Characters: hero, antagonist, victim, means/ magic helper…

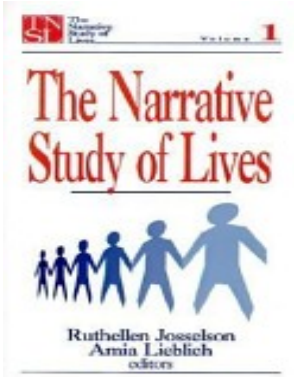
Jerome Bruner
and narrative thinking

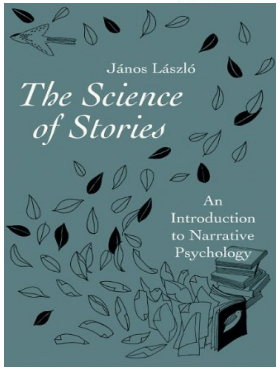
- *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*
- (1986)
- *Acts of Meaning*
- (1990)

- Narrative and Paradigmatic thinking

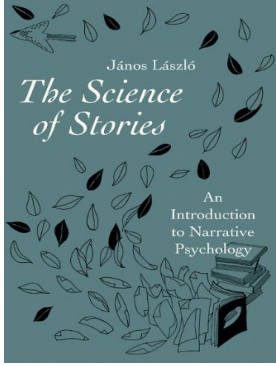
Literary Narratives in SP

- Oatley (1992) "*Best Laid Schemes*"
  depictions vs. cognitive analysis
- Potter, Stringer e Wetherell (1984)
  discourse analysis *
- Gergen M. (1994;Gergen&Gergen,1988)
  narrative analysis-social constructionism
- Làszlò et al. (2002; 2003)
  narrative analysis-social representations





The Science of Stories
Làszlò, 2008

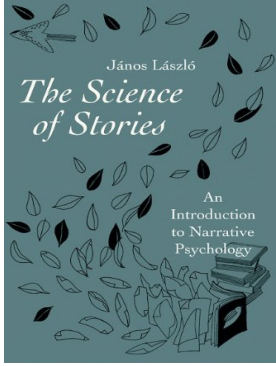


"The narrative approach to social representations processes puts forwards a model of social knowledge in which anchoring and objectification of new, unfamiliar phenomena are intimately related to those aspects of categories, that enable them to be parts of coherent, culturally acceptable narratives.

Further, individual or group placements with regard to this shared systems of meanings are also held to be best understood by exploring how people locate these categories in narrative context.

Finally, individual and collective stories jointly provide a 'thick narration' of phenomena which then can be analytically scrutinized"

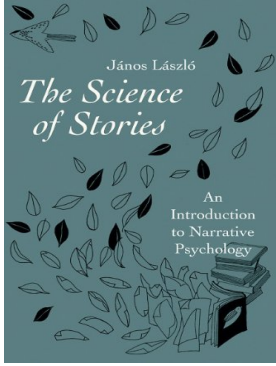
Narrative psychological content analysis *NPCA*



- "A model that aspires to explore the psychological meanings of narratives not only at the level of words or themes but also at the level of narrative, along the lines of narrative qualities like structure, organization, perspective, temporal relations and coherence"
- "narrative contains a finite number of structural or compositional 'slots' that can be filled with an equally finite number of psychological meaningful contents, while the surface text may show infinite variety"

(Làszlò, 2008)

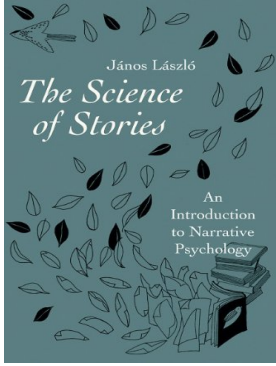
Narrative psychological content analysis
NPCA



- In search for basic units:
- narrative perspective, time experience, control of spatial-emotional distance, self-reference, negation and evaluation

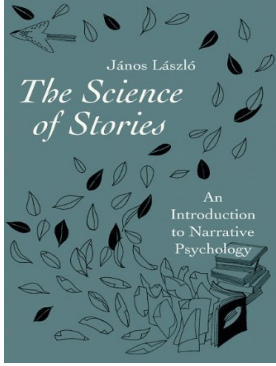
- *Nooj* vs. *LIWC*
- (Làszlò, 2008….)

SR of national identity in historical novels
Làszlò et al., 2002; 2003

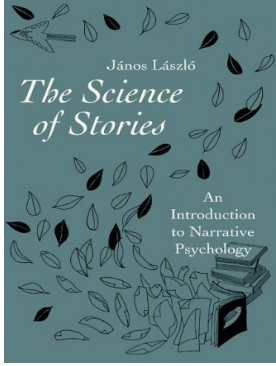


- Analysis of Hungarian historical novels:
- *1. The Stars of Eger*
- *2. Sons of the Cold-hearted Man*
- *3. Golden Age of Transylvania*

SR of national identity in historical novels Làszlò et al., 2002; 2003



- Analysis of main characters and of their actions:
- *1. Strength, knowledge, wisdom, moral excellence*
- *2. Courage, honesty, helping and democratic leadership - naivety, passivity and obedience*
- Method: Qualitative content analyses, supported by Atlas.ti, both at a word-level and at a higher concept-level to detect characters' traits & values and the outcome of their deeds



SR of national identity in historical novels Làszlò et al., 2002; 2003

- Analysis of coping strategies:

  3. Resistance, compliance, confrontation with acting out, evasion, negotiated compliance

  The novel "follows the pattern of *we lost but we won* [coming to] reinforce and transmit a coping strategy characteristic of the Hungarian culture, i.e. transforming real defeat in a moral victory"

Following Laszlo's Lesson

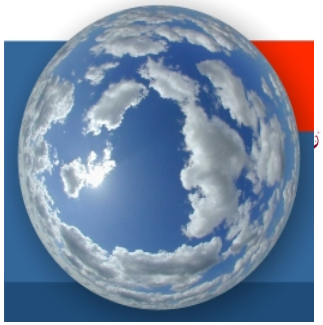
Social Representations of heroes, virtues and vices in the construction of national identity

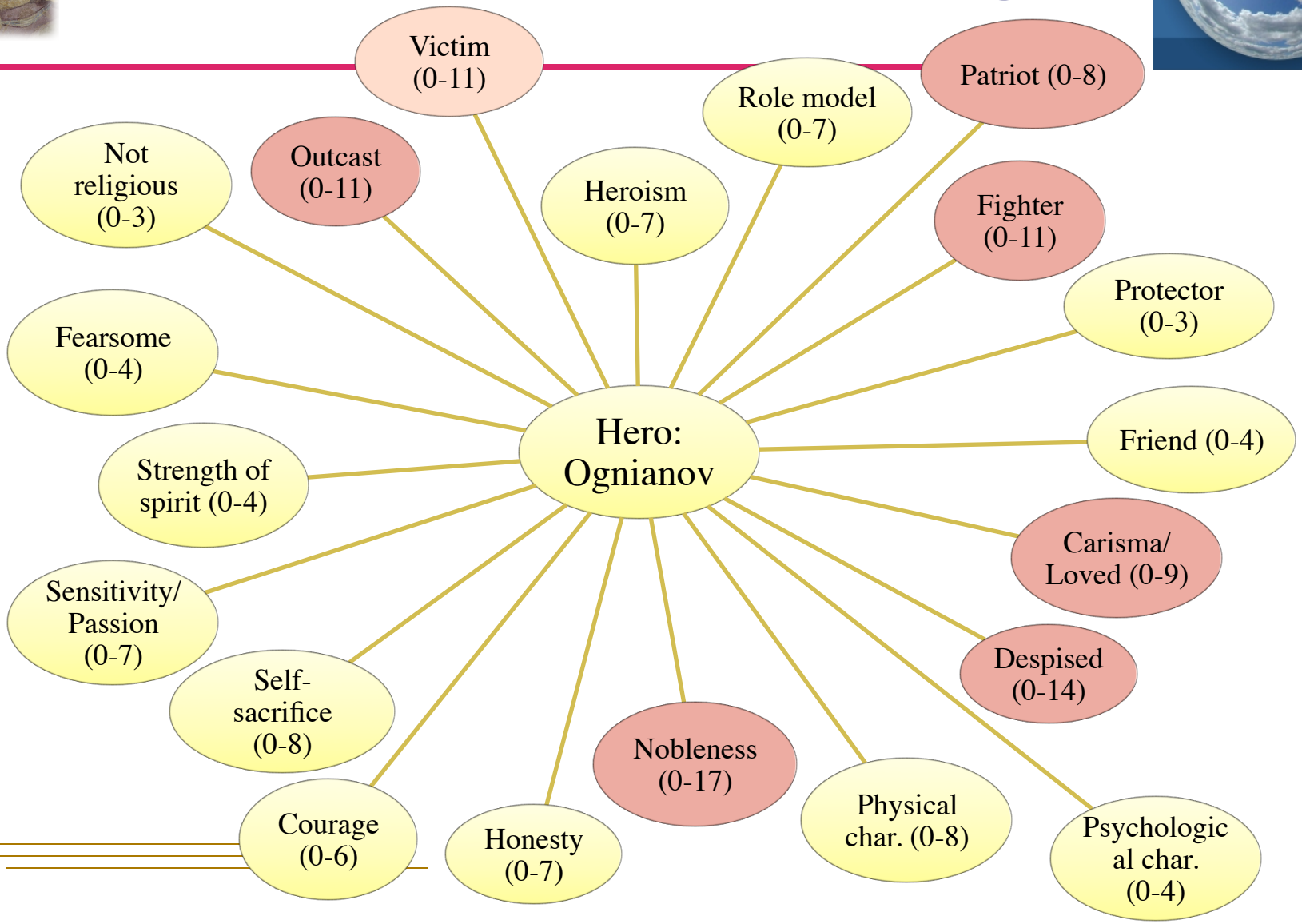
Alessio Nencini, Iana Tzankova, Slavica Raicevic, Alberta Contarello

11° International Conference on Social Representations

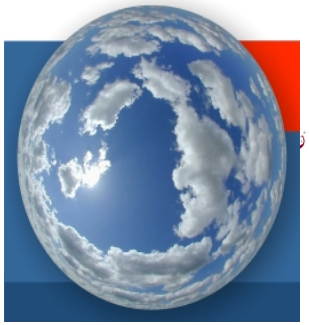
Evora, Portugal

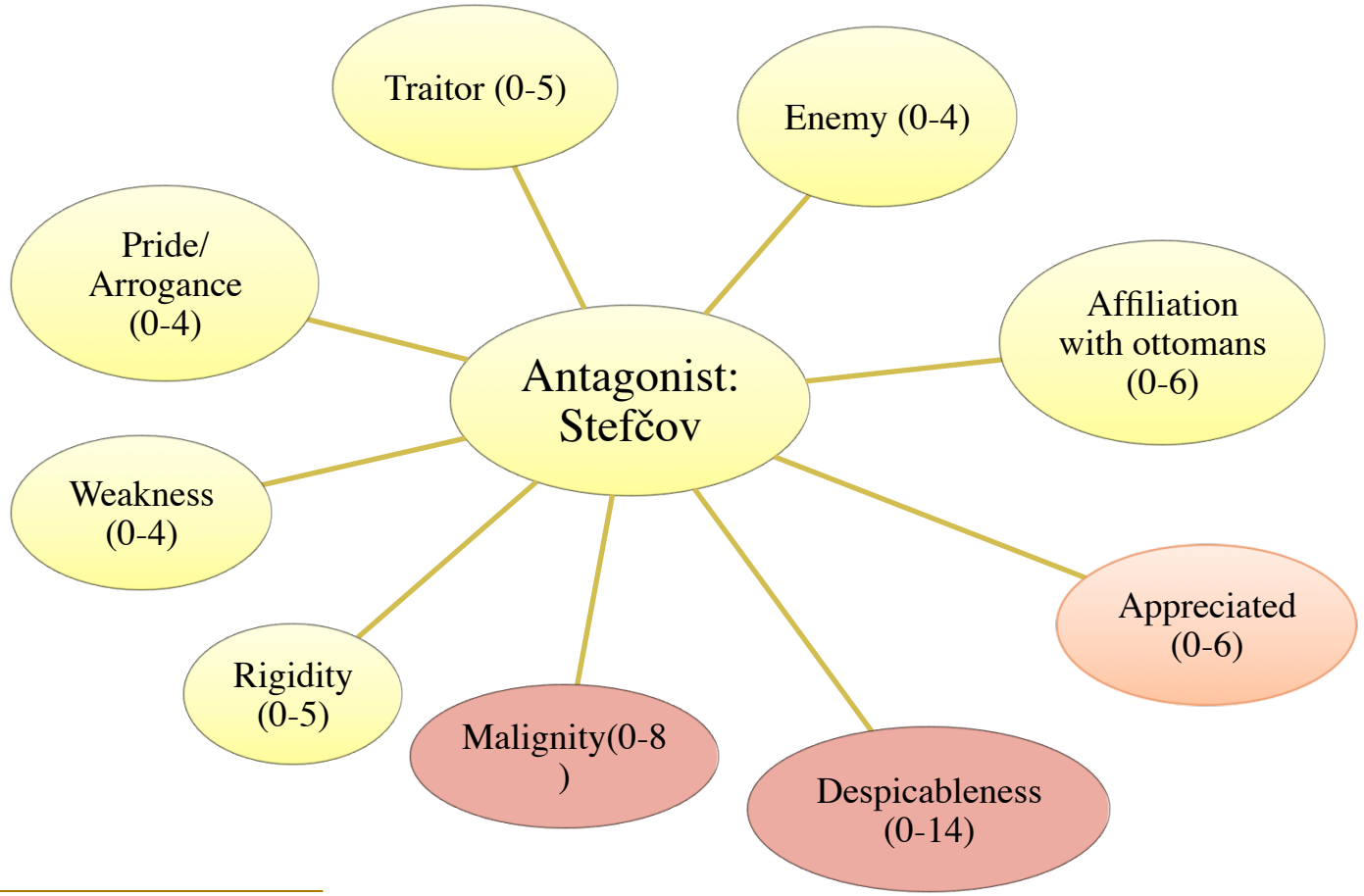
Macro-categories in the description of the hero in Under the Yoke - Bulgaria



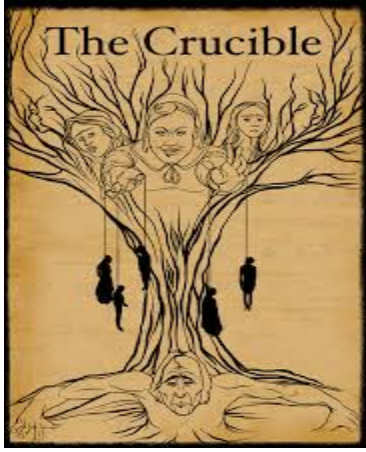


Macro-categories in the description of antagonist in **Under the Yoke – Qualitative CA – Atlas.ti**



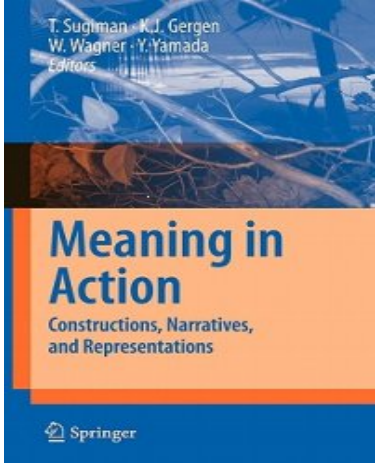


Discourse and representation in the construction of Withcraft Wagner 2008



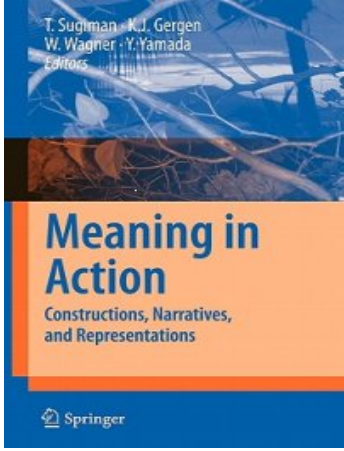
- Analysis of Arthur Miller's play.
- From tracing and depicting social representations as static units to the analysis of discursive unfolding which anticipates and produces institutionalized outcomes. Careful reading of the text allows to highlight the passage from a consensual space to a reified form of social thinking.

Discourse and representation in the construction of Withcraft Wagner 2008



- Different kinds and practices of discourse
- "It is here, in the institutionalized setting and in the related talk, that one can most easily identify a representation of witchcraft, which would easily have escaped the attention of a researcher in the initial, consensual, village life"
- In search for "dynamic units", i.e. social representations in action.

Identity, Relations and Literary Texts



- ***Study of Relations and Identity in Literary Texts in Different Cultural Contexts***
  (Contarello et al.; cf. 2008)

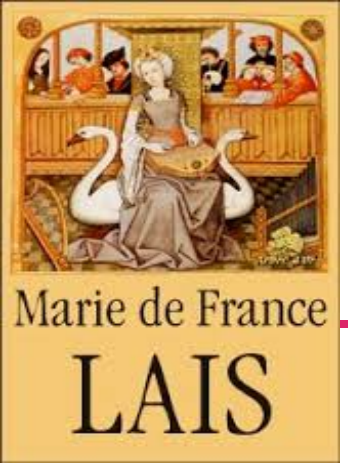
Research Questions

- How is friendship depicted in the novel?
- What types of friendship are depicted?
- Which dimensions give order to the variety of depicted relations?

- If we consider the author's voice an important one in/of her time, what SR of friendship does the novel concur to construct?

Friendship in ***La princess de Clèves***
by Madame de Lafajette (1616)

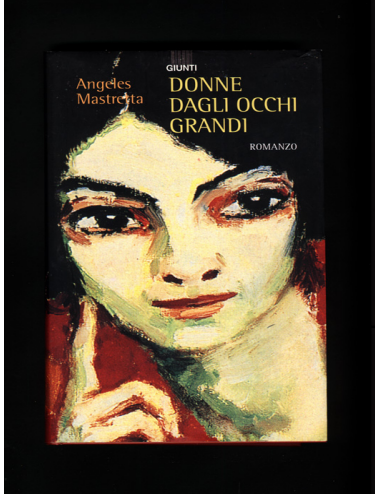
- Constructing a frequency table
- Individuating couples of friends
- Individuating "social behaviour"
- Content, Cluster and Correspondence Analysis (SPAD)



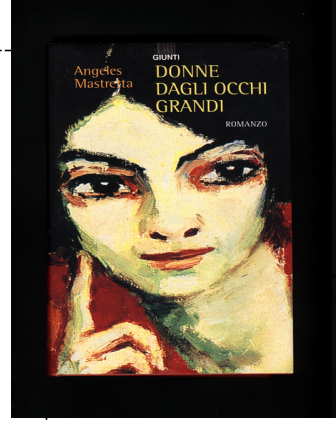
Friendship along time
Contarello & Volpato 1991

- *Le Lais* by Marie de France
- *Heptameron* by Margherite de Navarre
- *La Princesse de Cléves* by Madame de La Fayette
- *Indiana* by George Sand
- *Les Mandarins* by Simone De Beauvoir

Identity and Relations in a culture in peace, but rich of contrasts



- Self and identity in ***Mujeres de ojos grandes*** by Angeles Mastretta (1990, *Messico*)
- 37 short stories
- 53 main characters
- 58 personal and relational features
- Correspondence Analysis (Spad)



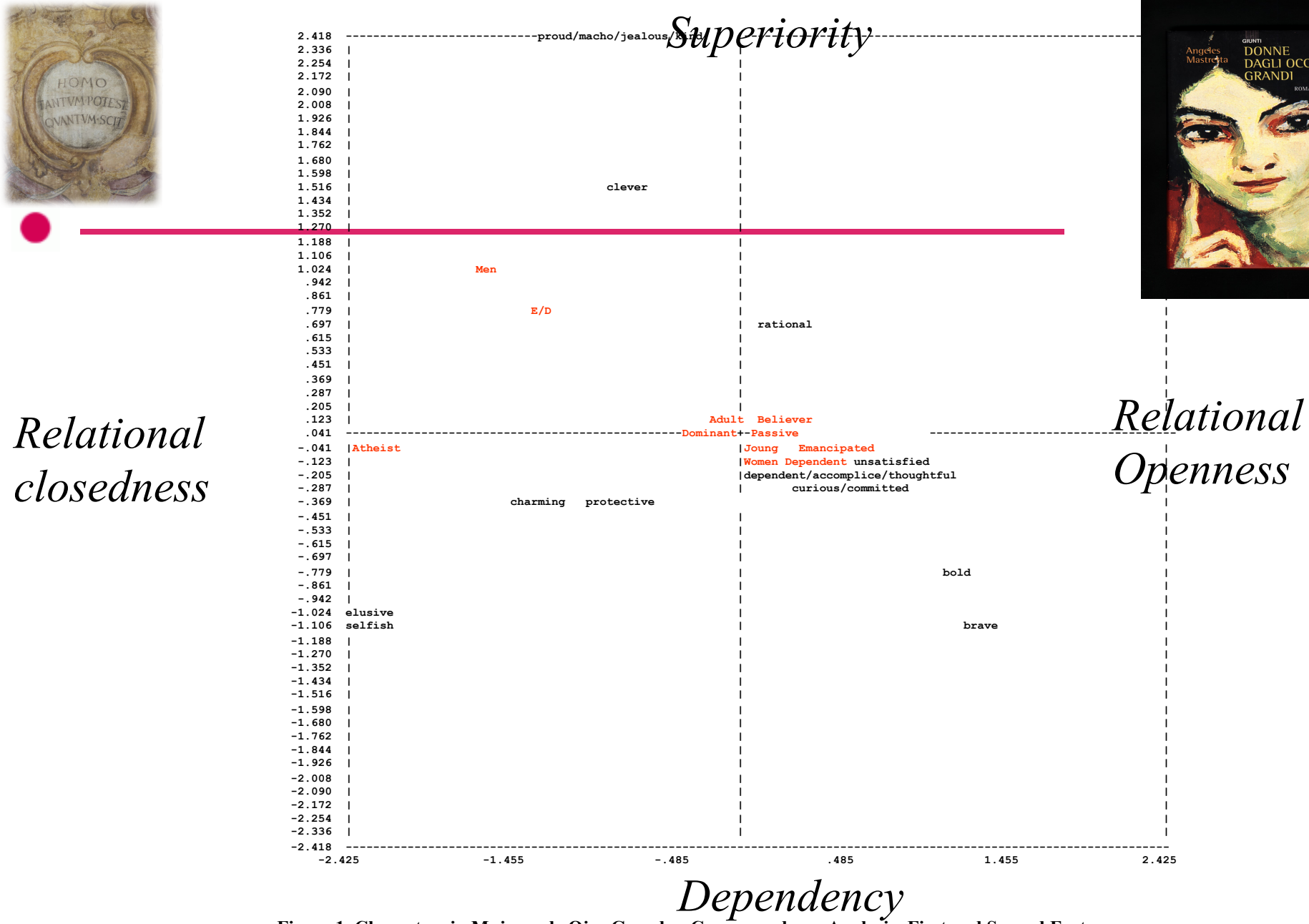
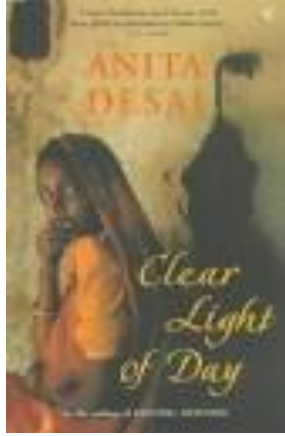


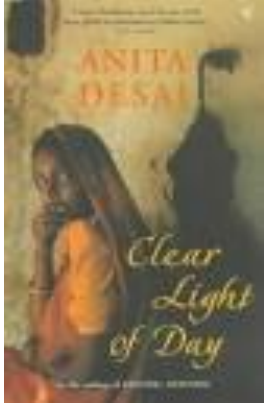
Figure 1. Characters in Mujeres de Ojos Grandes. Correspondence Analysis: First and Second Factor.

Self and relations in a changing world



- Depictions of person in *Clear Light of the Day* by Anita Desai (1980, India)
- 13 main characters
- 72 personal and relational features
- Correspondence Analysis (Spad)

Desai's *Clear Light of Day*



First Factor (I.= 14.26%)			
Vulnerability and fear			
	coord.	c.a.	c.r.
Baba	-1.33	25.39	.43
Tara	-1.84	16.64	.32
Dr.Biswas	-1.13	8.41	.11
Aunt Mira (adult)	-.66	6.69	.12

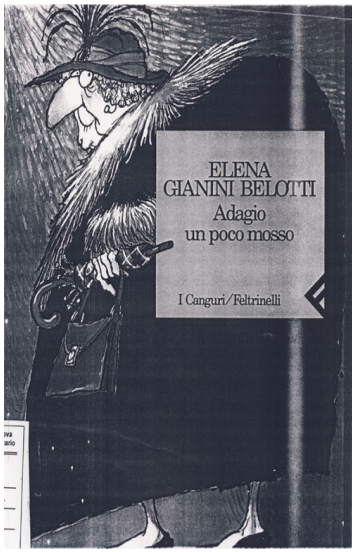
	Coord.	c.a.	c.r.
Afraid	-1.02	6.07	.64
Passive	-1.30	3.96	.56
Fragile	-1.30	3.96	.56
Awkward	-1.36	3.58	.09
Sweet	-1.23	3.52	.90
Innocent	-1.32	3.39	.54
Shy	-1.18	2.17	.23

Anger and confidence			
	coord.	c.a.	c.r.
Bim	.62	17.55	.33
Bakul	1.07	8.88	.16
Raja	.69	6.05	.09
Father	.95	2.83	.06
Hyder-Ali	.82	2.65	.04
Tara's daughters	1.52	1.81	.05

	coord.	c.a.	c.r.
Angry	.75	3.07	.26
Self-confident	1.03	2.48	.25
Attractive	1.04	2.96	.09
Ambitious	.95	1.06	.34
Sharp	.91	1.91	.37
Impatient	.70	1.69	.36
Irritated	.82	1.82	.25

Social Representations of Ageing and Literary Texts

Exploration of social representations of ageing in contemporary society through the analysis of literary texts.



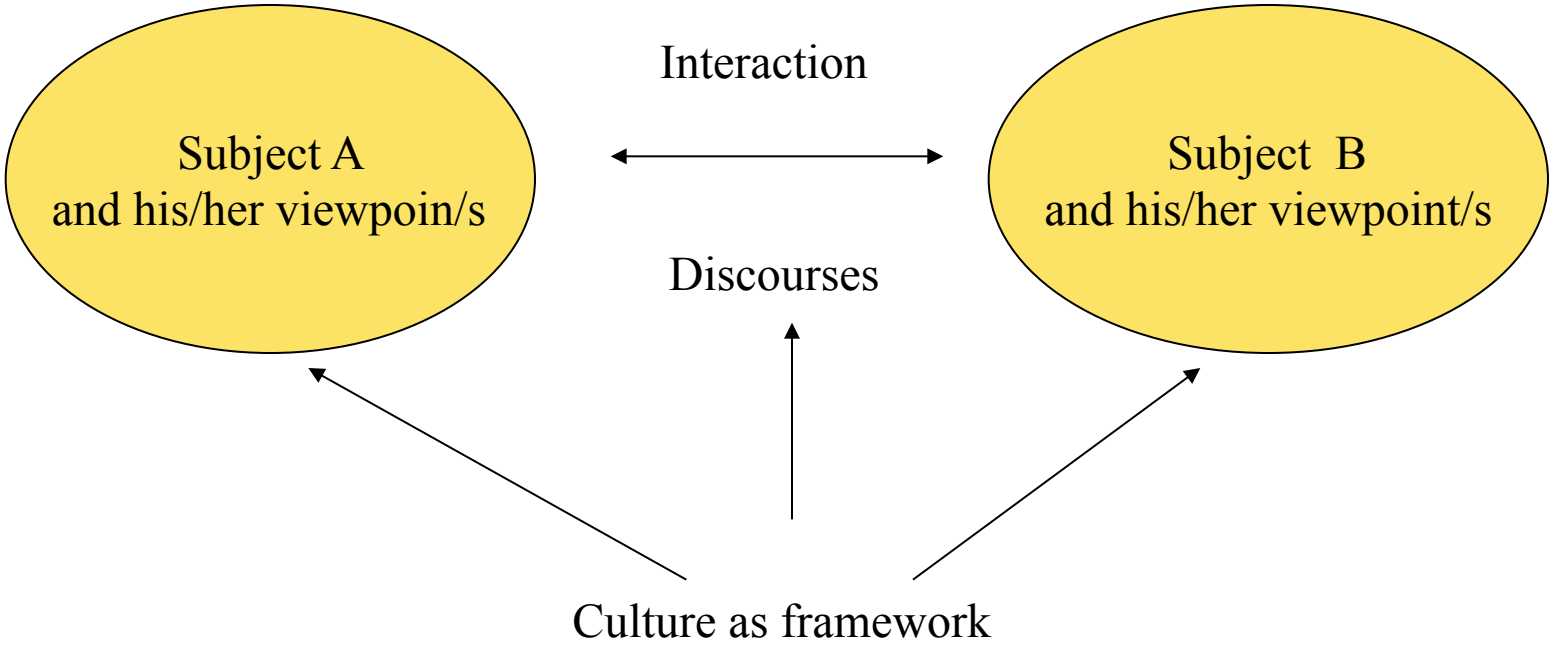
Adopting as methods

content and corresponding analysis

but also searching for metaphors and profiles

(Contarello et al., 2011)

Perspectives in Qualitative Research
Flick 2006



Concluding remarks

Along these five decades, literary texts have been employed in SR research mainly as

protocols of observations to *highlight the frame of mind of a period*

to study the dynamics of imaginary groups exactly as if they were real groups

The narrative and discursive turn offer precious indications and instruments … and the dialogical? (Jesuino, 2015)

Also a classic approach, open to possible extensions, may provide empirical assessment and theoretical advancement in social representations research.

Further steps

From overview to review … perhaps also in relation with iconic (cf. de Rosa, 2014) or cinematographic language (e.g. Brodesco, 2013)

Analyses of texts and readers' interpretation (e.g. Nencini, 2011)

Conjunctivization … possible worlds … from mirroring to making.. research for future forming (listening to/contributing to shape a variety of – less widely recognized – voices) (Gergen, in press; Jovchelovitch, 2013).

References

- Moscovici, S. (1986). The Dreyfus affair, Proust and social psychology. *Social Research, 53*, 23-56.
- ***
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.
- Chombart de Lauwe, M.J. (1971). *Un monde autre: l'enfance. De ses représentations à son mythe*. Paris: Payot.
- Contarello A. (2008) Social psychology and literature. In K. Gergen, T. Sugiman, W. Wagner, Y. Yamada (Eds.) *Meaning in Action. Constructions, Narratives and Representations*. N.Y.: Springer.
- Contarello, A., Nencini, A., Marini I., & Ricci G. (2011). Rappresentazioni sociali dell'invecchiamento tra psicologia sociale e letteratura. *Psicologia & Sociedade, 23*, 171-180.
- De Rosa A. (2014) The role of the iconic-imaginary dimensions in the modelling approach to social representations. *Papers on Social Representations, 23*, 17.1-17.26.
- Emiliani, F. (2008). *La realtà delle piccole cose*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Gergen, K.J. (2014). From mirroring to world-making: Research as future forming. *PsyArt Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, in press.
- Jesuino, J.C. (2014). Images of old age. *Papers on Social Representations, 23*, 15.1-15.22.
- Jovchelovitch, S. (2007). *Knowledge in context: Representations, community and culture*. London: Routledge.
- Jovchelovitch, S. & Priego-Hermandez, J. (2013). *Underground socialbilities. Identity, culture and resistance in Rio de Janeiro's favelas*. Brasilia: Unesco.

References

- Laszlo, J (2008). *The science of stories. An introduction to narrative psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Laszlo, J. & Vince, O. (2002). Coping with historical tasks. The role of historical novels in transmitting psychological patterns of national identity. *SPIEL (Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft), 21*, 76-88.
- Laszlo, J., Vince O., & Somogyvari, I.K. (2003). Representation of national identity in successful historical novels. *Empirical Studies of the Arts, 21*, 69-80.
- Moghaddam, F. (2004). From psychology in literature to psychology is literature. *Theory & Psychology, 14*, 503-525.
- Nencini, A. (2013). A matter of shared knowledge. *Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*. Available Http.
- Nencini, A. (2013). Narrative construction of Italian identity. An investigation through literary texts over time. In J.P. Forgas, O. Vince & J. Laszlo (Eds.), *Social cognition and communication* (pp. 263-280). Psychology Press.
- Nencini, A., Tzankova, I., Raicevic, S., & Contarello, A. (2012). Social Representations of heroes, virtues and vices in the construction of national identity. Paper presented at the *XI International Conference on Social Representations*. Evora, Pt, June 25-28.
- Smith C.P. (2000). Content analysis and narrative analysis. In H.T. Reis, & C.M. Judd (Eds.) *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 313-335). Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Wagner, W, Mecha, A, & Carvalho, M.R. (2008). Discourse and representation in the construction of Withcraft. In T. Sugiman, K.J. Gergen, W. Wagner, & Y. Yamada (Eds.) *Meaning in Action. Constructions, Narratives, and Representations*. (pp. 37-48). N.Y.: Springer.