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The "boomerang" effect of the radicalism in discourse analysis:

**"no communication without representations,
no representations without communication".**

- ✓ **A scientific dialogue or monologue?**

- ✓ **The auto-confutation of radical relativism**

- ✓ **The subject's role in a radical "contingentism" perspective**

- ✓ **The "totalising" and "reifying" role of discourse-action**

- ✓ **No Communication without Representations and no Representations without Communication**

- ✓ **"Monological" versus "dialogical" perspectives "in" and "within" RDA and SRT paradigm**

  Conclusion

A scientific dialogue

or monologue?

A scientific dialogue or monologue?

The purpose of this paper is to describe how the radicalism of the socio-constructionist thesis upheld by Discourse Analysis (RDA = Radical Discourse Analysis) may give rise to several hard-to-solve problems, which may be translated into a *boomerang* effect.

In carrying socio-constructionist thesis to the extreme (moreover already put forward by other critical paradigms vis-à-vis the mainstream of experimental social psychology and its decontexualised and non-historical approach to the study of social cognition), the RDA has enabled a clear scientific identity of the researchers who are inspired by this paradigm to be outlined, making them immediately recognisable and clearly visible within the sphere of the scientific community.

In upholding the main pillars on which socio-constructionism is based and which may be synthesised in the anti-essentialist and anti-realist position, aiming to make the most of the historical-cultural and relativistic specificity of the knowledge (including therein that are produced by the social sciences), centred on the language as a form of social action and pre-condition for the thought (and not vice-versa as in the traditional acceptance of the language as expression of the thought), with a heavy emphasis on the interaction and on the social practices and, consequently, on the interactive processes that create knowledge in the negotiation of the social exchanges more than on the unchanging cognitive structures, the radical approach of "discursive" psychology may be summed up in the sentence "there is nothing outside the text".

"A discourse about an object is said to manifest itself in texts - in speech, say a conversation or interview, in written material such as novels, newspaper articles or letters, in visual images like magazines, advertisements or films, or even in the 'meanings' embodied in the clothes people wear or the way they do their hair. In fact, anything that can be 'read' for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as a 'text'."

(Burr, 1995, p. 50-51)

Obviously - apart from the main principles in line with the *zeitgeist* of post-modernism and post-structuralism which affirms itself in opposition to the positivism and the empiricism dominating in traditional science - the visibility acquired by the most radical exponents of DA is also the outcome of their specific rhetoric-communicative strategies (or practices as they would prefer to say) not dissimilar from those used by the "active minorities", namely those based on a consistent communicative style, strongly stamped with paradigmatic (orthodox) coherence and by the group cohesion, with a contractual margin of flexibility and of internal differentiation (here I am referring particularly to the Discourse and Rhetoric Group at the University of Loughborough, a rare example of the excellent academic team-work of brilliant researchers including Michael Billig, Derek Edwards, David Middleton, Jonathan Potter and Charles Antaki).

Of course, there are nuances tailored on the specificity of the intellectual production of each: among these an attractive physiognomy is certainly assumed, for example, by Michael Billig's *rhetorical* approach. However one of the factors which characterises the polemic style of these supporters of discursive psychology, in its most radical versions, is the criticism addressed as much towards the classical experimentalism as to other paradigms of European social psychology (like that of "social identity" and of the "social

representations") which for a longer time had been proposed as an alternative to the individualism specific to the cognitivism of North American mould.

Both Social Cognition and Social Representation theories have been challenged by rhetorical and discoursive psychology by using arguments which do not leave space for any compatibility (Litton & Potter, 1985; Parker, 1991; Edwards, 1991; Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1998; Potter & Edwards, 1999 inter-alia). These autors reject the ontology of cognitivism and any form of its reified categories (scripts, schema, prototypes, representations etc.) in favour of language and its social construction as being central to an understanding of everyday talk (discourse) produced by people and the media.

If a multi-prospective look is adopted to the evolution of the debate, it is interesting not only to stop at enumeration of the criticisms (for this purpose see de Rosa, 1994), but to gather the dynamism of the confrontation activated in the wider scenario of the discipline between proposed or re-read paradigms as mutually excluding each other or as compatible.

The reaction to the ever more consistent criticisms coming from the socio-constructionism side may be classified into strongly "antagonist" (total refusal) positions, strongly "associative" (unconditional adhesion) or rather aiming towards "mediation" (integration and search for compatibility).

Faced with the emergence of the socio-constructionism criticism - generally ascribed to Gergen's article-manifesto *Social Psychology as History* (1973) - and faced with the subsequent radicalisation of the criticism by discourse analysis to the cognitivistic mainstream of experimental social psychology, various positions have arisen referable to the following:

- now to a *total refusal* of the criticism expressed with regard to the experimentalists (Greenwald, 1976; Jones, 1985; Schlenker, 1974; Zajonc, 1989);

- now tending towards recognising its *interest* for the restitution of social psychology to history and to the social dimension (McGuire, 1976; Moscovici, 1988; Triandis, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991);

- now, finally -as in the recent review of Arie Kruglanski and John Jost (2000) - aiming to identify the factors of *continuity, compatibility and integration* among those which the two well-known social psychologists define as two "subcultures" of social psychology, identifying the not necessarily incompatible differences, at method level (experimental versus qualitative), and focusing now on the "contents" of social knowledge (socio-constructionism) and now on the "processes" that determine it (experimental psychology).

"... social constructionism more is less of a rebellion against experimental social psychology than it is an inspired expression of the field's major lessons. The primary difference between the two perspectives is that experimental social psychologists retain objectivist methods to study subjectivity, whereas social constructionanists use evidence concerning the fallibility of human perceptions to reject the very methods of the science itself. (...) "

"We argue that even though the differences between these "two subcultures" of social psychology may appear to be incommensurabile, upon closed inspection, there seems to be a variation in emphasisis rather than a disagreement about fundamental principles of human behaviour. We argue that the two approaches are compatibile at the level of both the substance and the strategy of research, and we underscore their joint

potential for contributing to a social psychology that is critical, rigorous and well-informed about the historical,cultural and political contextes that shape human thought and behaviour ".

<div align="right">(Kruglanski and Jost, 2000, p. 50-51; p. 67)</div>

Within a prospect held out to the mediation and to the integration of the prospects, both considered valid, but with separate aims and levels of analysis - both on the level of epistemic assumptions and of the methodological practices - are set also Mantovani (2000) and Bonaiuto (1999, 2000).

"The contingent - but surmountable - limits of the present forms of socio-constructionism (SC) consist, in my opinion, in the radicalisation of the opposition of SC to the tradition of the cognitive sciences and in making a limited and reducible use of the potentialities offered by cultural psychology (...). I believe that the encounter between SC and the recent developments of cognitive psychology may not only be possible but also profitable for both.
The methodological question: to set quantitative and qualitative against each other seems to me a very crude way of settling the problem. There are diverse levels of analysis and diverse objects of analysis and diverse contexts of research (...). SC will consider the theoretical assumptions (and the methodologies) of the current psychological research as "one" of the possible arguments (not as an invalid argument, except for its claims to exclusivity)"

<div align="right">(Mantovani, 2000, p. 124-125)</div>

As a matter of fact, there is a tendency to underscore the importance of these two preferential associations (cognitive-quantitative and constructionist-qualitative) and to reduce consequently the difference between the two approaches to a difference essentially of methodological practices (...). It is, instead, the intention of this contribution to support and briefly describe how the crucial difference is not so much in the type of method as such, nor in the more or less prominent role that the qualitative method assumes within each approach, but rather in the *purposes* with which it is used in each approach (...): Whereas the qualitative technique of the *focus group* is used traditionally for the purpose of making the phenomena considered individual and stabile emerge, in an approach of socio-constructionist type, such as that of discursive psychology, the same technique is used for the purpose of bringing to the surface the way in which these supposed individual and stable phenomena are the outcome of negotiations among the speakers and of the specific rhetoric-discursive strategies used by the conductor of the interview.

<div align="right">(Bonaiuto, 2000, p. 122-123)</div>

If the criticisms addressed to the mainstream of experimental psychology played a role in some way in *founding* socio-constructionism, less foreseeable, less expected and perhaps less justified (if not for the rhetorical artifice of legitimising a scientific terrain built on the difference) were the criticisms directed to those paradigms of social psychology (in particular to the theory of social representations) that - with various decades in advance - had taken a critical role vis-à-vis cognitive social psychology and its methodological individualism.

We have already been observed elsewhere (de Rosa, 1994, p. 278) that criticisms of SR theory come primarily from the Anglo-Saxon world, where psycho-social research is more tightly anchored to experimental microparadigms and is less open to the interdisciplinary approaches which, in France, characterize social psychology as a sister of sociology and cultural anthropology. However these criticisms do not often come from the "aficionados" of the various alternative paradigms which can be traced to the U.S. brand of social cognition. Researchers from these traditions usually take one of two positions: either they completely ignore the theory - despite the availability of English translations of many of the most important theoretical works and empirical research on SR - or they show

interest in the SR theory insofar as they glimpse the potential for integration with various paradigms of the cognitivist mould (e.g. with cognitive schemes: see Augostinous and Innes, 1990).

The most vigorous criticisms of SR theory have until now been made by those researchers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition who are - paradoxically - most open to adopting a wider social horizon, to using methodological approaches not limited to laboratory procedures (what Potter and Billig, 1992, call "methodological individualism") and to the possibility of integrating approaches used in different disciplines - for example with ethogenics (Harré, 1984), anthropology (Jahoda, 1988) and rhetorical discoursive psychology (Potter & Litton, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1992, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 1999). Repeatedly, these authors confess sharing Moscovici's reservations about conventional social psychology, which is anchored to mechanistic and positivistic models, and they seem to accept the challenge of developing an alternative European proposal to the dominant individualistic North American tradition, which has forgotten the contribution of authors such as Mead and Lewin.

With regard to Social Representation Theory they recognise a number of important virtues over more traditional social psychological theories, in particular: "a) an emphasis on the content or meaning of human life; b) an emphasis on communication as a basis for shared social understandings; c) an emphasis on the constructive processes through which versions of the world are established" (Potter & Wetherell, 1998, p. 139).

However, criticism formulated by the Radical Discoursive Analysis (RDA) with respect to SR theory (SRT). are substantial and not only reducible at methodological level.

"With some notable exceptions (e.g. Billig, 1988n, 1993; Harré, 1984, 1998, which have entered into a dialogue of constructive engagement from rethorical and discursive perspectives) most commentaries from outside the mainstream have been antagonistic or even hostile to the theory of social representations (see, for example, the catalogue of objections in the recent contribution from Potter & Edwards, 1999)"

(Duveen , 2000, p. 13)

The RDA-SRT dispute originates from a "mentalist" reading of the S.R. construct, assuming the social representations as cognitive representations, a reading, in truth, showing little respect for the formulation that Mosovici had given to this concept in qualifying the representations as "social", not only in their *contents*, but also on account of their *genesis* and the communication processes they subtend and for the *functions* they perform in the relationships between groups and individuals. Starting from this singularly angled viewpoint of the construction of S.R., the objective of the RDA is that of substituting the approach still judged "too cognitivist" of the SRT by a more genuinely anti-cognitivist approach. One of the theoretical dispute concerns the relationship between cognition and action. The SRT has maintained that social practices reflect and create, in dialogue-circular type dynamics, the SR admitting the existence of culturally shared codes of interpretation and of attribution of meaning. The RDA, characterised by a drastic "anti-mentalist" orientation, has, instead, criticised this circular vision, maintaining the usefulness of an approach centred solely on the analysis of social practices, *tout court*

identified with the discursive practices. In actual fact, the RDA proposes to analyses the social behaviours, of exclusively linguistic character (that is the texts and the conversation), without any reference to mentalistic concepts (whether they be attitudes, beliefs or representations).

> "Discourse analysis has eschewed any form of cognitive reductionism, any explanation which treats linguistic behaviour as a product of mental entities or processes, whether it is based around social representations or some other cognitive furniture such as attitudes, beliefs, goals or wants. The concern is firmly with *language use*: the way accounts are constructed and different functions. (....). The irony, of course, is that a coherently social, social psychology is exactly one of the espoused goals of social representation theory. However, it is discourse analysis which offers a systematically *non cognitive social psychology as an alternative to the increasingly pervasive cognitive variety*". (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 157)

As will be seen in the following pages, the RDA does not deny, however, that the cognitive processes can take a certain role in explaining behaviours and social practices. It does, nevertheless, uphold the usefulness of a level of analysis and of psycho-social explanation which may be separate from those used by the cognitive sciences.

> "We are not denying the importance and interest of cognitive science and the insight it has to offer; the point is that analysis and explanation can be carried out at a social psychology level which is coherently separable from the cognitive."
>
> (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 157)

For the RDA the cornerstone for constructing a really anti-cognitivist approach is the focusing on the action and on the social practices. Through the analysis "of the language use, its functions and the way accounts are constructed", it is possible to study also the representations and the way in which they are constructed in the context of the interaction.

> "The concern will be with description and representations as they are built in the course of interaction."
>
> (Potter, 1996, p. 104).
>
> "I do not think that analyst of fact costruction need do more than consider reality constitution a feature of descriptive practices; the question is with interaction, such that philosophical questions of ontology can be left to the appropriate experts."
>
> (Potter, 1996, p. 178)

Potter (1996, p. 203-204) affirms that the distinction between the enunciative (*constative*) and performative (*pragmatic*) level is unrealisable: every linguistic formulation with descriptive functions is an act of construction of the meanings towards the achievement of aims in the context of the single specific socio-relational context. The description expressed in the context of an inter-action, is itself an action (a linguistic act): the epistemological orientation of description is an order of activity in itself (Potter, 1996, p. 176). The representation (understood as description of objects and events which reflects a "knowledge" of the world) is, therefore, an action: a concrete and observable fact, thus capable of being analysed and studied during the course of a circumscribed social interaction.

Another assumption of the RDA is the variability. The variability of the representations is linked to its pragmatic nature. If the representation is an act bound to the attainment of the aims within a specific context, on varying the contexts and the goals pursued, the representation varies also.

The consequences that the radicalism of this relativistic position leads to will be discussed further on in this paper. Here we intend to conclude this introductive scenario by recalling some positions taken in relation to the critical frenzy against the RDA by authors inspired by the T.S.R..

It is necessary above all to note that the polemic vein, manifested by the authors of the RDA concerning the SRT, has aroused more reactions of surprise and astonishment than of vehement counter-attack by those researchers who feel implicitly referred to on account of their theoretical-methodological options based on the SRT, or more explicitly, are unrecognised or rendered illegitimate regarding the accuracy of their researches, especially at methodological level - both for the scanty treatment of the problems of using investigation techniques and for the interpretation of the results, not always reasoned insofar as the contextual dynamics of inter-action between subjects of the investigation and researcher are concerned (emblematic in this respect is the rebuttal of the research of Wagner, Duveen, Themel and Verma, 1999, by Potter and Edwards, 1999).

Only recently - and precisely starting from the article just mentioned by Potter and Edwards, 1999 - a more decisive reply was given by Ivana Markova (2000) in the same review *Culture & Psychology* with the intention of clearing up a series of misunderstandings of the epistemological assumptions at the base of SRT by the RDA.

"The Potter & Edwards article contains a number of incorrect and misleading claims. I take the opportunity in this discussion of their article to explain the dialogical and dialectic nature of the theory of social representations and to clarify some of its main concepts. (...) One wonders why some of the theory's fiercest opponents have based their careers for 15 years, as Potter & Edwards (1999) declare they have, on refuting it. Their criticism range from that which sees some merit in the theory, to that which construes it as a vague and a perceptual-cognitivist information-processing approach, and which attributes to the theory properties which it does not have. (...)

First the critics of the theory of social representations confuse different levels of scientific explanation, in particolar with respect to what they call 'perceptual cognitivism' and 'information processing'. Second , and more importantly , the theory of social representations in Moscoviciís formulation (which may not be so in other kinds of formulation) belongs to a broadly conceived family of theoretical approaches which are underlined by *dialogical epistemology*."

(Markova, 2000, p. 419-420)

Other authors (de Rosa, 1994, de Rosa and Farr, in press) have underscored the tautology implied in the affirmation that forms the very basis of the RDA, *"all is action, namely discourse, in its every expressive form"*.

"The extreme consequence of the discourse analysis theorist's thesis is the tautological identification between the discourse, the reality and the subjects: a perspective which implicitly adopts an ontological and dogmatic presupposition based on the religious statement "In the beginning was the Word" (Word = God)."

(de Rosa & Farr, in press)

"From this point of view all social psychological processes resolve themselves into the effects of discourse, and the fleeting achievements and reformulations of identity which it sustains. It is the activity of discourse alone which can be the object of study in this form of social psychology, and any talk of structure and organisation at the cognitive level appears as a concession to the hegemony of information-processing model."

(Duveen, 2000, p.17)

The misunderstanding of the Moscovici's theory of social representations by some of the RDA authors makes their reading sometime close to a '*caricature*'; futhermore it is quite surprising their disownment of the heritage not only of the critical voice expressed by Moscovici (together other valuable colleagues) since the beginning of the second half of the last century for innovating social psychology and making it authentically European, but also of the fundamental role he attributes to language and communication in the genesis, exchange and transmission of social representations.

Notwithstanding Moscovici himself has more than once (1985, 1988, 2000) acknowledged several interesting implications in the rhetorical approach, although he does not believe that linguistic repertoires can correspond exactly to the nature of the phenomenon of SR since a discussion is not a representation, even if every representation can be translated into a discussion.

> "Most scientists dream of finding "the atom of thought" at some stage. Some see it in perception, others in language (...). The idea of linguistic repertoires unquestionably has interesting implications for the study of social representations; yet linguistic repertoires do not correspond exactly to the nature of the phenomenon of social representations."
>
> (Moscovici, 1985, p. 92).

> "Social constructionism is at the best a metatheory. The theory of social representations, I would say, can be viewed in two perspectives. First , it is a theory conceived to respond to specific question concerning beliefs and social bonds, and to discover new phenomena. Secondly, it is also the basis of a social psychology of knowledge. It is concerned with common-sense thinking and with language and communication (...) The theory of social representations is concerned on the one hand with questions of social bonding and action and on the other hand with social knowledge, communication and language."
>
> (Moscovici, 2000, p. 280-281)

More explicitly SRT is attributed an overlapping and inclusive position in comparison with the D.A., assuming it as "a general theory of social phenomena" or according to the expression dear to Doise (1988, 1999) as a "*grande théorie"*.

> "I have the idea that the majority of the research on discourse by Billig (1987), Potter and Litton (1985), Harré (1988), Potter and Wetherell (1987) does not contradict the theory of social representations. On the contrary, they complement it, and deepen this aspect of it. To ask then, whether language or representations is the better model can have no more psychological meaning than asking the question: "Does a man walk with the help of his left leg or his right leg". (...) I have no hesitation therefore in treating what we have learnt about rhetoric, about linguistic accounts, as being very closely related to social representations."
>
> (Moscovici, 1998, p. 246)

Strongly directed towards an integrative vision of the STR and RDA, the position of Flick (1998) is as follows

> "By taking account of the influence of scientific knowledge on everyday perception and thinking, social representations returns to the central theme of the discussion of the hisotrical character of social psychology. Lastly, knowledge is not reduced to a purely cognitive phenomenon, as in information-processing model of the mind. Rather, knowledge is understood and studied both as result and the object of interactive processes, and as a cognitive stock. Here we find a combination of the psychologies of knowledge and language. As the charter by Harré and Potter and Wetherell show, rather than presenting a clearly distinct alternative model to social cognition research, discursive psychology should be seen as enlarging and detailing a central aspect of the theory of social representaitons. For the three lines of discussion outlined above - social psychology as historical, cognitive, and discursive science - social representiations theory offers a model that takes into account the social and communicative character of social psychology of the social ."   (Flick, 1998, p 5-6).

Moreover other authors have underlined at the same time a position open to an "integrative view", but also attentive to the reductionism implicit in the radicalism of DA:

"No doubt interest in the conversational and rhetorical approach has permitted "a lucid and efficacious rereading, in this specific perspective of many classical themes and problems in social psychology, for example that of attitudes, social categorization, accounts" (De Grada and Mannetti, 1992). However, over and above the undoubted interest of the contextualization of verbal exchanges, which these types of approach permit by largely ignoring intraindividual cognitive processes, the proposals which would confine the study of SRs exclusively to conversational analysis risk being limiting and reductionist".

(de Rosa, 1994, p. 288)

"However discourse analysis can indeed enrich social-representations studies (...). Therefore, I agree with van Dijk (1990) who has this to say (...): "In my opinion, no sound theoretical or explanatory framework can be set up for any phenomenon dealt with in social psychology without an explicit account of socially shared cognitive representations. Whereas discourse is of course of primary importance in this expression, communication and reproduction of social representation ... , this does not mean that discourse or its strategies are identical with such representations."

(Doise, 1993, p 168)

"Although on several occasions we have maintained - and still maintain - interest for a constructive integration of the theoretical and methodological prospects of discourse analysis in the wider framework of the Social Representations theory, we hold this "monotheistic" option to be excessively limiting. If within the human species the word is a privileged channel for defining, objectifying and constructing the reality, the reality has not been exclusively defined by means of the word: images, sounds, conducts, rites... are other ways for generating and communicating "multiform" aspects (not necessarily complementary and, in some cases, antagonist) of social representations."

(de Rosa & Farr, in press)

The inventory of a representation, understood as an exhaustive summary of its discursive expressions, has no operative meaning (...).The "competence", if you like, overruns the "performance" (...). The analysis of the representations must of necessity exceed the simple discursive phenomenon considered as such (...). That the statement may be an effect, a concomitance or a trace of the representation does not imply that this possesses all the properties that can be discovered in the statement.

(Rouquette, 1994, p. 170-171, my translation)

"(...) it matters little for these critics that the theory of social representations has always insisted on the symbolic character of cognition (see Moscovici, 2000). Here the vagueness of social representations is held to be its insufficiently radical departure from a ëmentalisticí discourse, but as Jovchelovitch (1996) has observed, the rush to evacuate the mental form from the discourse of social psychology is leading to the re-creation of a form of behaviourism."

(Duveen, 2000, p.14)

The need for a reconstruction of these dynamics of confrontation within the scientific community between different paradigmatic visions stems from the recognition that at times more than of *dialogue* it is a question of *monologue,* which sometimes assumes more the modality of a clash unilaterally pursued by the RDA, in which the prospect of other paradigms are rhetorically assumed solely for reaffirming the right to speak by difference, to autolegitimise oneself in a position that marks the territory by oppositions.

The usefulness of the confrontation has been also recognized by the protagonists of the meta-theoretical debate about SRT, such as Potter and Billig (1992), who write:

"It is precisely a sign of health of this debate that it has revolved around competing theoretical frameworks. It has not remained at the level of many psychological debates, which focus exclusively on empirical adequacy. The intellectual debate of the "thinking society" should neither be characterised by

"monologue", nor "dialogue striving after a common goal". Instead, there should be searching and vigorous argument which explores the adequacy of different positions."

(Potter and Billig, 1992, p.16)

On the other hand - even when the positions seem fairly well oriented to the dialogue and to a mediation - the *inclusivist* hypotheses rest often more on the *mis*understandings of the epistemologic assumptions of the interlocutor, than on the understanding them. This, for example, is the case of Kruglanski and Jost (2000), who - animated by a peace-making intention or perhaps by assimilative imperialism of the mainstream - seem to reduce the socio-constructionism perspective to a mere orientation of "method" (experimental versus qualitative) and to the focusing on the "contents" of the social knowledge rather than on the "processes" that determine it as in experimental psychology (which is frankly confutable, considering the greater attention dedicated to the discursive nature of the process and to the argumentative and counter-argumentative negotiation of the meanings, than their contents, by the RDA and rhetoric approach) .

The auto-confutation of

radical
relativism

The auto-confutation of radical relativism.

The most radical versions of the discourse analysis - which in virtue of the anti-essentialistic and relativistic positions arise in contestualism and extreme contingentism - appear subject to a series of self-confutations.

To tell the truth, the question is very much older. Already Plato had noted that the sophistic relativism, occurring in a non relativisable situation, went so far as to autoconfute itself. Still in a philosophical environment, but in a horizon referring to the philosophy of the nineteenth century, Franca D'Agostini (1999, p. 285) identifies a series of "*paradigmatic anomalies*" in the context of a critical review of the radically relativistic and contestualistic philosophic theories, which may be summed up as follows:

(a) "by declaring the absolute plurality of the truth, the unity of the specific assertion is presumed";

(b) "by affirming the universal contestuality of the meaning, a sovracontestual theory of the meaning is formulated";

(c) "by theorising the relativity of the values and of the meanings, an inconditional and absolute truth is theorised".

In other terms, the key propositions of relativism and contestualism, being in their turn incapable of being relativised and contestualised, seem to be self-contradictory. By declaring the absolute relativity of knowledge, the existence is, in fact, theorised of an unconditional and absolute truth, which denies the very idea of relativity.

If, going from these arguments, one reflects on the radical socio-constructivistic positions expressed in the discourse analysis, the same difficulties of logic seem to arise, that were treated as "paradoxes" (see Smith, 2001, p. 82-92). One of the most frequent criticisms addressed to the RDA is based on the adoption of the *tu quoque* (or *you too*) argument. By applying to the RDA its own discourse theory, it is possible to affirm that the absolute contingenism and relativism that characterised the discourse may also characterise the theoretical production of the RDA and the results of its research (Ashmore, 1989; Burr, 1995). By acting in this viewpoint, it may, in fact, be maintained that any theory that postulates the total relativity of knowledge is itself relative and contextual.

"Relativism of discourse theory makes it difficult to justify adopting one particular reading of an event or text rather than others. This is a problem that occurs because of the theory's own reflexivity, that is, the way that the theory is applied to itself and its own research practice (discourse analysis). A discourse analysis cannot be taken to reveal a 'truth' lying within the text, and must acknowledge its own research findings as open to other, potentially valid, readings."

(Burr, 1995, p. 180)

However, this criticism does not seem to form a problem for the RDA. On the contrary it is in certain respects shared by its supporters, taking the form of a cautious methodology in the practise of research dominated reflexivity, observed in the sphere of the sociology of knowledge. In fact, by asserting that each discourse is a contestualised social practice directed towards the attainment of aims, the RDA recognises the partially subjective and action-oriented character of it own works.

"How should we deal with the fact that our accounts of how people's language use is constructed are themselves constructions? (…)

It is possible to aknowledge that one's own language is constructing a version of the world, while proceeding with analysing texts and their implications for people's social and political lives. In this respect, discourse analysts are simply more honest than other researchers, recognizing their own work is not immune from the social psychological processes being studied."

(Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 182)

The practice of reflexivity implies not only a meta-theoretical glance (namely a problemising reflection on one own's theoretical opinions and on one's own research methods in comparison with other options and other methods), but also a glance of, so to say, meta-institutional nature (i.e. a reflection on the "strategic" role that the theoretical-methodological options perform in the scientific community, setting the various reference network one with respect to the other, within a composite series of dominant, dissident and marginal positions, in other terms that which is defined "*psy-complex*" - i.e. "the sprawling speculative and regulative network of theories and practice that constitute psychology" (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985)". (Parker, 1994, p. 246).

"The way that social research is contextualized now will also look a little more complex, for the "context" is, in this account, not an objective background against which the researcher renders an account of the phenomenon in question. Rather, the context is the network of forms of subjectivity that place contradictory demands on the research. In social psychological research there is an array of competive interests and agendas that frame the production of proposals; the expectations and demands of "subjects" or co-researchers; and the career investiments and projected autobiographies that exist in tension in the academic world. (...) Among the structure that frame the experience and reflection of the researcher are those of the *psy-complex*. If we want to take reflexivity seriuolsy, we have to "ground" it in the institutional context in which we carry out our research."

(Parker, 1994, p. 250)

The argument of *tu quoque* or of the reflexivity (application of the theory to itself) makes it not only legitimate, but also desirable, that the auto-reflective caution should enter to become part of the deontology equipment of each researcher attentive to the problems of his specific research contributions (whatever his paradigmatic orientation may be). Nevertheless doubts are raised regarding the way in which the reflexivity is, in fact, practised in the scientific community of the supporters of discourse analysis.

"It would not be helpful, in this case, to write off experience as just another social construction, or to reduce the expressed dissatisfaction with positivism as a rhetorical trope, discursive position, or warrant. It is here that the political limitations of social constructuionist (Gergen, 1985) and some discursive analytic approach (Edwards and Potter, 1992) become apparent. It is necessary to reflect on the structure of the institution of psychology as it operates now."

(Parker, 1994, p. 240)

"Reflexivitiy also refers to the equal status, within discourse analysis, of researchers and their respondents, as well as the accounts offered by each. This means that discourse analysts must find a way of building into their research opportunities for participants to comment upon their own accounts and those of the researcher. Sherrard (1991) criticises discourse analysts for not always meeting this criterion in their research."

(Burr, 1995, p. 181)

It must be recognised that the criticisms on this side are joined by as many detractors of discourse analysis, as by their own exponents (inter-alia: Abrams & Hogg, 1990;

Sherrard, 1991; Marks, 1993, Figueroa & Lopez, 1991; Parker & Burman, 1993; Parker, 1994). In particular Parker and Burman (1993) have produced an almost complete inventory of problems (at times of more general range, and consequently applicable also to other social science paradigms) identifying a good *thirty-two problems with discourse analysis.*

Among these, various substantial problems deal not only with the practice of research in this field, but with the transmission of the competence of the analysts to new possible analysts. In fact, if it is assumed that the meanings of the discourse are fluctuating in the discursive relations, bound in time and space to contexts in which the discourse is produced, in a radically relativist and anti-essentialist perspective, which codes will an analyst be able to use for tracing the "meanings" that are not yet themselves in the discursive act ? The self-referring perspective of the RDA should lead as extreme consequence to the annulment of any code that has not already been immanent to the discursive situation and, therefore, self-evident. Otherwise one falls into a duplicity of levels between the "visible" and the "invisible", the "conscious" and the "unconscious", which reproduces an hermeneutic horizon that recalls rather the epistemology of the knowledge elaborated by psychoanalysis (that not by chance has elaborated, together with the conceptual systems that act as interpretative codes, also the practical specifications for the training of future psychoanalysts).

The discursive immantentism specific to the RDA would appear to exclude this duplicity of levels. And yet it is no mystery that precisely to the psychoanalytical interpretative code several among the most renowned exponents of discourse analysis re-apply themselves for re-reading (or better *de-constructing*) the discourses, but also for the practice of reflexivity and of the "grounded analysis" on the institutional side.

Emblematic in this respect is the de-constructive analysis that Parker (1994) proposes in a key-document of the *British Psychological Society*, namely *The Future of the Psychological Sciences: Horizons and Opportunities for British Psychology* (BPS, 1988). He warns that the adoption of the conceptual categories and of the psychoanalytical terminology (the *ego* versus *id; working through* versus *acting out, stages of development* versus *polymorphous perversity*) does not signify any presupposition of processes at individual level and may be used only "to capture these discursive forms, within the collective, and then position individuals as subjects" (Parker, 1994, p. 247). Nevertheless, it is obvious that the borrowing in itself of a terminology specific to the psychoanalytical theory (discourse?) or the de-constructing of the institutional discourse implied in the BPS document, confirms the need that in order to analyse a discourse reference must be made to another discourse, which requires for its decoding the possession of a code and that, accordingly, a meaning of the discourse cannot do otherwise than refer back to other meanings and never be entirely self-referential.

For the same reason, the concepts of "false conscience" and of "ideology" elaborated from the hegelian-marxist tradition, do not seem applicable, at least in the notion of "true" and "false" negated at the start by socio-constructionism.

"If we say that people are living in a false consciousness, we are assuming that there is a "reality" (in which they are oppressed) which lies outside of their understanding of the world; i.e. it is a version of events that is more valid or truthful. (...) But the idea that there is one version of events that is true (making all other false) is also in direct opposition to the central idea of social constructionism. (...) Because there can be no truth, all perspectives must be equally valid. Different viewpoints can therefore only be assessed in relation to each other (hence "relativism") and not with respect to some ultimate standard or truth. (...) Given that an explicit aim of the social constructionist is to "deconstruct" the discourses which uphold inequitable power relations and to demonstrate the way in which they oscure these, it is difficult to see how it is possibile to do this without falling back upon some notion of "reality" or "truth" that the discourses are supposed to oscure."

(Burr, 1995, p. 80-82)

To summarise, the theses set forth in this paragraph can lead to the conclusion that the RDA, putting it forward as a clearly relativist theory (thus also contestualist and plurialist) does not affirm its relativity; on the contrary it affirms its unconditioned truth with a rhetorical strategy aimed at self-legitimization. Paradoxically, the RDA ends up with proposing again an ontological and dogmatic vision, based on the following theses:

1. the radical relativism is set in a non relativisable situation;

2. the radical relativism, in the self-referentiality presumed in the discourse, bars the possibility of dialogue with other theories of visions of the world.

On the other hand, the accusation of epistemological "rigidity" and of "methodological monotheism" does not seem equally applicable to the theory of social representations (SRT). It is true that the pluralist liberalism and the "methodological polytheism" has often been misunderstood. They have been on several occasions encouraged by their very founder - who has never desired to claim himself as "*owner of his own theory*" with the power of legitimising or delegitimising the work of the researchers who have inspired him (Moscovici, *personal communication*). This has led to a conceptual laxism and a casual and incoherent use of the paradigmatic constructs in rending the theory operative in the research plans. These are reasons which have motivated the reconstruction elsewhere of the inventory of the criticisms, at times deserved not so much by the SR theories, but by the way in which the researchers have banalised it (de Rosa, 1994), making it impossible to delay a meta-theoretical analysis of the whole scientific production based on this paradigm (de Rosa, in press a , b).

On the basis of these critical observations, the researchers who are inspired towards SRT can no longer fail to reflect on whether they intend not only to continue to use SRT but also to develop it. However, the latter - not assuming extremest positions targeted towards the articulation of the constructs of psychology within the extensive scenario of a socially generated and situated knowledge - puts forward a study perspective based on a *dialogical relation* (and not on a *tautolgical* one):

(1) between processes and contents
(2) between context and social representations
(3) between interpersonal micro-contexts and cultural macro-contexts
(4) between social representations and communication
(5) between contingent temporal dimensions and historic-collective memory
(6) between quantitative and qualitative methods.

It is undeniable that the articulation of these aspects or "truths" (communication, context, representation, structures, contents) is extremely difficult because of the inextricable nature of the cultural processes that put all these factors into a dialogic relationship. However, the advantage of continuing to recognise dignity to all the factors referred to, lies in the assumption of a non-totalising perspective. that opens its flank to the accusation of theoretical or methodological dogmatism.

The subject's role in a

radical

"contingentism"
perspective
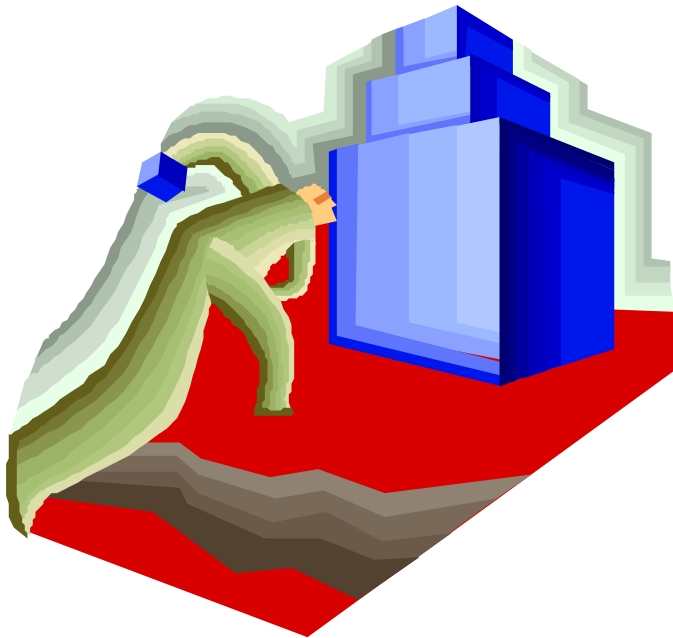
The subject's role in a radical "contingentism" perspective.

It may be asked what may be the role - in a perspective or radical "congentism" - of the individual: that of *acting entity* (namely an actor of the discourse, producer of meaning, a "*discourse producer*" or at least a "*discourse-user*") or that of an *acted-upon entity* (a "*by-discourse-used*, an entity defined by the discourse, which only the analysts can reveal)? In order to reply several points must be considered.

One of the main aspects of the RDA is to deny the existence of an internal guide of cognitive type that orients the social individual's behaviour (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; Potter and Edwards, 1999). To a typically cognitivist conception, the RDA opposes the assumption that the same cognition may be a characteristic of the social action (Potter and Edwards, 1999).

> "DP rejects perceptual-cognitivism in favour of a systematic reformulation of cognition as a feature of participants' practices."
>
> (Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449)

The idea that "cognitive facts" are an action (and more precisely a "performative" activity of discursive type) is moreover closely linked to the assumption of the variability. On varying the contexts the social practices vary also.

> "We merely have to deal with a socially occasioned variability from one time to another."
>
> (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 43)

According to this assumption the behaviours, the beliefs and the representations change as a function of the "performative" activity of the discourse and, consequently, of the contingent aims linked to a particular context. However, the discourse (with its emerging properties, namely the cognition) are not considered only as a contingent product linked to a specific interactive situation, it reproduces the existence of more ample discourses circulating in the social sphere (the "interpretative repertoires")

Through the interpretative repertoires, the RDA binds the individual to the social. In pursuing his aims (consciously or unconsciously) the individual uses the rhetorically proven and coherent discursive structures which are reified in the language and which are, in certain way, suggested by the micro-context of the interpersonal relation.

This conception, although extremely articulated, seems to raise a problem.

Paradoxically, in criticising the cognitivist ontology, the RDA ends up by creating a new ontology, this time of contestualist type, based on two complementary assumptions: all is a social practice, all is relative and variable.

What placing has the subject within this new ontology? In our opinion, in the RDA the subject:

(a) is transformed, from constructor of reality, into construction of reality;

(b) from speaking subject, it transformed into subject constantly spoken to by contextuallly variable micro-discourses.

The individual's role, which in the constructivist approach was intended to be actor and protagonist intentionally active in the scenario of the social life, becomes in the RDA problematical. On the one hand the individual seems to be conceived as a rhetorical

manipulator who builds his discourse to attain personal goals (and, therefore, endowed with a certain capacity and autonomy in managing his actions, at least the strategic-discursive ones). On the other hand - given the emphasis attributed to the contextual variables - he seems to be described as a passive entity, spoken to by his own discourses, guided by the characteristics of a contingent and extremely viable situation.

> "If people are products of discourse, and the things that they say have status only as manifestations of these discourses, in what sense can we be said to have agency? "
>
> (Burr, 1995, p. 59)

> "Because they focus upon the way that people use language to construct accounts which have some "warrant" in the word, discourse psychologists also look for the techniques by which people manage to justify themselves and their accounts, apportion blame, make excuses and so on. They appear to be using implicitly a model of the person as "actor in a moral universe", and much of their analysis focuses upon how repertoires are used to create morally defensible positions for the speaker."
>
> (Burr, 1995, p. 177)

According to the RDA, the social individual is a kind of actor within an argumentative context. However, this actor does not own an *internal script* that moves his actions, but is moved by the situation which is developed inside and action more or less circumscribed in time and space. It is true that in the RDA, the individual is moved by goals. But the goals are not internal entities or processes; they are "actions" which are suggested by a inter-personal context. Furthermore it is true that the individual uses interpretative repertoires "circulating" in the social for building the specific discourses in the context of a micro-relational situation. However, excluding the role of the mental, the RDA understands the interpretative repertoire as a social practice that is "used" for building, another practice within a suggesting micro-context.

Within this ontological vision, the subject does not have an agent role - he is *acted upon by* the context - and does not construct meanings - he is *constructed by* situationally and provisionally defined meanings.

> "people do not speak but rather are "spoken" by discourse. People thus become the puppets of the ideas they (erroneously) believe to be their own, and their actions are determined by underlying structure of ideas and language rather than by their own choices and decisions. Are we therefore the unknowing victims of discourses?"
>
> (Burr, 1995, p. 89)

If a representational map of meanings (even antagonists one to the other) does not exist that might guide the recovery of the interpretative repertoires from the network of social communication, to what extend may the individual who "uses" them call himself an agent entity (at least of a choice)? If these repertoires are acquired in terms of the characteristics of a contingent impersonal context, is it reasonable to uphold that the individual is a speaking entity, and not merely an entity spoken to by the discourse? If the discourses (and their contents: opinions. behaviours, representations, etc.) reflecting the constant pragmatic adaptation to contingent and variable situations, what role has the past experience in directing the action? If in the discourses every aspect of the individual personality varies in relation to the context, and of the goals linked to it, to what extent can the individual call himself - if not the bearer of a social identity (considering the negation

of any structure intra-individual heritage of psychology) - still a social person with his history, which is a fragment of a wider social and collective history?

"However, in this reassessment of the context, the socio-constructionist option, especially in its more radical versions, risks excessive restricting of the analysis to the immediate precincts of the communicative exchange, in which the contingent factors (...) end up by obscuring the importance of wider-range contextual elements, which are deposited in the long-term collective memory, but also as the outcome of one's own personal history, and which form a reference framework from which the process of negotiating the meanings cannot, in any case, be left out of consideration."

(Mazzara, 2000, p.125-6)

The "totalising"
and

"reifying" role

of discourse-action
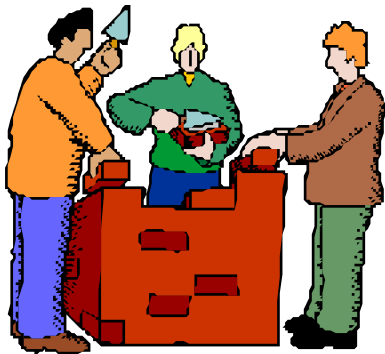
The "totalising" and "reifying" role of discourse-action.

Insofar as it is beyond question that cognition is manifest in the action, to totally identify the cognition of the action seems to be an operation no less criticable that the contrary one, namely to lead back, *tout court*, the action to an underlying cognitive process. Potter and Edwards (1999) explain this passage, demarcating one again the conceptual territorial that separates the DP from the SRT.

"In SRT, representations are primarily *cognitve phenomena* (...) which enable people to make sense of the world (...). In DP, representations are *discursive objects* which people construct in talk and texts."

(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449)

"Cognition is a feature of participants' practices (...). The sense-making role of representation is not excluded in principle"

(Potter and Edwards, 1999, p. 448-449)

These statement deserve a reflection. The operation of "putting" a representation into "shape", of translating and articulating it in a discourse or in another textual modality, exerts an influence on the representation itself, transforming it. It is, accordingly, reasonable to uphold that the representation may be also a characteristic of an act of construction. It is equally obvious that in a socio-constructionist perspective this cannot occur as a mere exchange of information in the neural networks, but as exchange of meanings symbolically connotated in a social scenario. However, the representation is not only a product of action. It guides also the action, determines the choice of the objectives and of the means, builds the inter-action context, steers the contents of the discourse. And it is, above all, this capacity to steer and guide the individual more or less, that makes the *action* something more than, and diverse from, the elementary construct of *behaviour* (see Amerio, 1991, 1996, Amerio & Ghiglione, 1986; von Cranach, 1992; Wagner, 1993, 1998).

No communication

without representations,
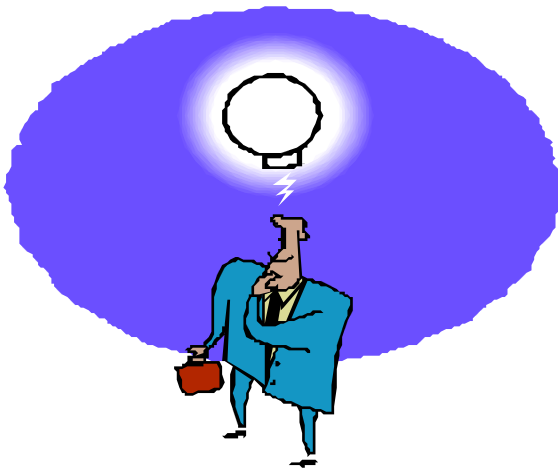
no representations

without communication

No Communication without Representations and no Representations without Communication

The social representation guides the act of communication, but, at the same time, it is transformed by the communication. The relationship is circular, or better dialogical, as is clearly shown by this statement of Moscovici:

> "It was essential from the very beginning to establish the relationship between communication and social reprsentatiions. One conditions the other because we cannot communicate unless we share certain representations, and a representation is shared and enters our social heritage when it becomes an object of interest and of communication. Without it, it would lead to atrophy, and in the end, it would disappear."
>
> (Moscovici, 2000, p. 274)

In other terms, in the SRT, there is "no communication without representations" and "no representations without communication". If both communication and representation are supposed to exist, then in SRT the key is to investigate the relation between *communication and social representations*, starting from the following questions of a general nature:

Communication and Representation

Are communications the source of (social) representations?
(C   S.R.)
Are communications merely a means for expressing/reflecting (social) representations?
(C   S.R.)
Are communications and (social) representations identical?
 (C   S.R.)
Are communications and (social) representations in a relation of mutual implication?
 (C   S.R.)

Depending on the option chosen, what is the underlying model of influence? What methodological consequences flow from this model? What is added, if we remove the brackets and refer to social representations rather than just representations? Is it possible to inter-relate the theory of Social Representation and theories of Social Influence?

Consideration of these problems leads to even more general questions:

What is communication?

What is the relationship between communication and language?
Is communication synonymous with language?
If so, is language simply a discourse, or is it something more than discourse? Or something different from it?
If communication is more than language and language is more than discourse, what is the epistemological status of a communication based on image or sound or action/practice/ritual? Are these systems coherent or not?

What is a social representation?

Is a social representation the same thing as cognition, something more or something different?
Is a social representation an object of knowledge or something more or something different?

Is a social representation purely linguistic? Can the study of social representations be reduced to an analysis of linguistic data (both oral and textual) or should it be extended to other representational channels and referential codes (e.g. visual-figurative, ritualistic-behavioural, etc.)?

If, by definition, a Social Representation lies at the interface between the "iconic" and the "symbolic", is it possible to study both aspects without destroying one in order to study the other?

And finally, what is the relation between **communication**, **social representations** and the **media**?

How are communication, social representations and the media articulated, in relation for example to a paradigm that claims that "the medium is the message"?

Are media per se simply neutral cultural or technological artefacts? Or do they imply specific systems for shaping the communication-representations binonium depending on their features (degree of interactive nature, degree of virtuality, global-local cultural scenario, etc.)?

Are the *"new"* media crucial in changing the relationship between communication, social representations and the media? Do the new media *precede* the message?

According to SRT we need to work out the inter-relationships between representations, communication and the media if we are to deal with more than isolated cognition.

"The question is not to wonder whether one acts upon the other, but what is acting upon one and the other. The famous circularity or mutual selection existing between media and their audiences offers no other sense: people do not chose media that choose them, but the relation between them comes from determinations which are deeper and appear also in other fields."

(Rouquette, 1996, p.226)

By Jodelet's definition, Social Representations are:

"forms of social thinking used to *communicate*, understand and master the social, material, and intellectual environment. As such, they are analysed as products and processes of mental activity that are socially marked. This social marking refers to conditions and contexts where representations emerge, to *communication* by which they circulate, and to the functions they serve. This form of knowledge is constructed in the course of social interaction and *communication*. It bears the mark of the subjectís social insertion. Collectively shared, it contributes to the construction of a vision or version of reality that is common and specific to a social or cultural entity. This form of knowledge has practical aims and social functions. It operates as a system of interpretation of reality, serving as a guideline in our relation to the surrounding world. Thus it orients and organises our behaviour and *communication*."

(Jodelet, 1993, p.184)

The mutual interdependence of social representation and communication emerges from this comprehensive definition which recognises the *fundamental role of communication in the genesis, transmission and circulation of social representations*.

"Any consideration of social representations also means a consideration of communication; social representations originate in communication, they are manifested in it and they influence it."

(Sommer, 1998, p. 186)

If, on the other hand, we adopt a definition of communication as something more than "transmitting information" from a source to a receiver, which includes an exchange of meanings, it becomes "a process of symbolic interaction, in which the possibility of

transferring messages occurs on the basis of signs, according to culturally and socially shared rules, i.e. according to codes conventionally defined on the basis of the use or criteria previously selected" (Crespi, 1996, p. 209).

In this light both the linear-reflecting (C   S.R.; C   S.R.) and tautological models (C   S.R.) of communication are epistemologically incompatible with the theory of Social Representations, which calls for a circular-dialogical model of communication-representation (C   S.R.) – as we have tried to show elsewhere on the basis of an empirical investigation (de Rosa, in press c).

If the SRT stress the importance of adopting a "circular-dialogic model" based on the mutuality of the relation between communication and social representation, in the RDA all these questions are simply nonsense. The RDA adopts, at the end, a "monological model" centred on the discourse and a "tautological model" where the power of the discourse builts the reality and the subject itself, with the consequence of destroying the thinking subject as well, by reducing it to an unstable and contextually determined "position in discourse" (Burr, 1995; Jovchelovitch, 1996).

Focusing attention on the context and performative role of the language, the RDA refutes that which it defines 'the metaphor of communication'.

It seems quite a paradox that this radicalism occurs at the time also some of the cognitive theorists, traditionally limited by an individualistic perspective which focuses on processes (the "how" and "why" of knowledge), acknowledge that the S.R.T. adopts a more genuine social perspective grounded on the social interactionism, which links social knowledge to communication. This latter approach links processes to (i) contents, (ii) contexts, (iii) communicative media and (iv) social functions (the "what" representation, "of what", "of whom", "by whom", "with whom", "where", "when" and "for what purpose"). If , according to the cognitive theorists, the preferred metaphors for the subject was a "naive scientist" or a "cognitive miser"; according to the representational theorists it was a "social actor" who constructs and re-presents his/her knowledge (and thus his/her social identity) during the exchanges of everyday life through multiple systems, channels and contexts of communication (inter-individual, institutional and mass-media). Social Representations order the material and social world - historically and symbolically significant - and provide individuals with a code for communicating with other individuals and groups.

Several researchers within the mainstream of social cognition have recognised the individualistic, atomistic and de-contextualised approach to the study of social knowledge as nothing more than "cognitive psychology applied to social objects". In 1983 Forgas (1983, p. 131) argued that "... recent social cognition turned out to be even more individualistic than its predecessors". After ten years in 1993 still others complain that:

"The rise of blackboard models and connectionist theories (Rummerlhart et al 1986) has provided new and enriching metaphors, such as the "society of mind" (Minsky, 1986), but the focus has remained on the individual as a solitary and, for the most part, purely intellective being."

(Levine, Resnick and Higgins, 1993, p.586)

Levine, Resnick and Higgins' critical review *The social foundation of cognition* aims to outline "the future of the new field of socio-cognition. This includes any social interaction as simply stimulating cognition or as deeply constituting cognition". It is no accident that at the end of their review, quoting Moscovici's theory of social representations, they are "... prepared to argue that all mental activity - from perceptual recognition to memory to problem solving - involves either representations of other people or to use the artefacts and cultural forms that have a social history" (ibidem, p. 604).

Other influential authors (Zajonc, 1960, 1989; and Adelman, 1987) argue that "it is a strange paradox that cognition is studied in isolation of a very essential process that is its immediate antecedent and consequence - communication. ...) cognition is the currency of communication" (Zajonc, 1989, p. 357).

However, whilst the cognitivist start to complain of the rare attention to communication and probably start to recognise that language and comunication are more than exchanging a "bit" of information, in the RDA:

> "The communication metaphor is rejected as inadequate for dealing with the complexities of action and interaction."
>
> (Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449)

The RDA substitutes the typical vocabulary of the science of communications (a tropology", according to Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 454) with another vocabulary that seems to be based on the hypostatisation of the concept of action. To the traditional lexicon of communications (*code, interpretation, decoding, transmission, information, reception, message*), the RDA sets a vocabulary in which all is "to do something" (*actions, to use, to do, to perform, to construct, to do a task, to blame, to accuse, to justify, performative-function, action-oriented*).

The refusal of the concept of communication, and of the vocabulary that describes its processes, is obviously not neutral, and reflects both an epistemological orientation and a methodolgy of analysis.

(a) The traditional vocabulary of communication (adopted, but also influenced by the cognitive sciences) expresses the existence of a process of representations transmission filtered by codes and based on visions of the world, themselves *generated* socially "by the" and *negotiated* "in the" social exchanges. This vocabulary expresses, in addition, the assumption that there are different aspects involved in the production of a discourse or text, implying the need for dufferent codes, which not only orient the production of the message, but also its decodification and interpretation.

(b) The RDA vocabulary, by denying the role of the cognitive and of the socio-cognitive in orienting the social practices and interactions, reifies the communication processes considering them as the observable "actions". The vocabulary expresses, moreover, the assumption that *nothing external to the action and the discursive practice exists*.

The refusal of the communication concept is linked, consequently, to a voluntary omission, namely the exclusion of the interpretation codes and of the attribution of meaning in orienting and producing the discourses and the social practices.

Nevertheless, another factor must be considered: not all the communication processes are observable.

The metaphor of the communication is also refused because, although it is possible to agree with Middleton and Edwards (1990, p. 41-42) that the discourse analysis may not have a solely descriptive purpose, the focusing of this approach concerns exclusively that which is observable. As Middleton and Edwards affirm (1990), in their study of the relationship between discourse and remembering: "*like the behaviourist, our analysis remains at all times close to the observable, recorded conversational record.*" (p. 43). It is accordingly evident that the not directly observable aspects (but ones constitutive of the communication) are conceived as an emerging feature of a discursive practice, and not as an "external" item of the discourse itself. In this view everything is inside the discourse: the cognitive phenomena (the memory, the purposes, the representations) are "objects" of (or within) the discourse (Potter and Edwards, 1999).

"Analysis has concentrated not on the sense-making role of representations (although this is not excluded in principle), but on the way the representations are constructed as solid and factual, and on their use in, and orientation to, actions (assigning blame, eliciting invitations, etc.). Representations are treated as produced, performed and constructed in precisely the way that they are for their role in activities."

(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 448)

Although interesting, the fact of considering the processes and the objects of representation as immanent to a discursive practice may lead to several criticisms. The RDA is characterised by a "monologism" in which every traditional concept of social psychology is brought back to discourse and to its pragmatic function. If taken to its extreme limits, this epistemological vision risks generating a tautology in which every concept, being a discursive practice or one of its characteristics, is equal to very other concept. Here are some examples.

Discourse	"talk and texts as part of social practices"
	(Potter, 1996, p. 105)
Cognition	"feature of participants' practices, where it is constructed, described and oriented to as people perform activities"
	(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449)
Representation	"discursive objects which people construct in tal and text"
	(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 448)
Action	"range of practical, technical and interpersonal tasks that people perform while living their relationships, doing their jobs, and engaging in varied cultural domains"
	(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 448)
Memory	"a set of *social practices* related to a range of actions and providing particular kinds of accountability"
	(Potter, 1996, p. 216)
Constrution	"is done in talk and texts"
	(Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449)

In other terms:

- ✓ the discourse is a representation in talks and texts;
- ✓ the representation is a discourse in talks and texts.

To be ironical, this "inter-reflection" or play of mirrors, in which each concept returns back to itself, is similar to the situation illustrated by Johnny Hart (1969) in one of his cartoons:

Pol-lu-tion,	De-file-ment	To pol-lute
s.	*s.*	*v.t.*
Effect of defilement	To pollute something	To cause pollution

(Hart, 1969, p. 60)

Re-ward		
s.		
What is caused by doing something	which would normall not be done	if it were not for a reward

(Hart, 1969, p. 98)

31

"Monological" versus "dialogical" perspectives

"in" and "within" RDA and SRT paradigm

"*Mono*logical" versus "*dia*logical" perspectives "in" and "within" RDA and SRT paradigm

However interesting (and philosophically legitimate) bringing all back to the discourse may be, it can leave one perplexed. It is undeniable that diverse discourses exist, that the representations and the aims pursued in the specific communicative circumstance can orient a discourse, and that the social representations can be identified in recurring elements in several discourses. Nevertheless the sensation of "monologism" or closing of the "circular loop" remains. In the same way as the sensation remains that the discourse is "reified", since immanent to the discursive practices observable (or to the message, if it is preferred to resort to the "metaphor" of the communication).

Nevertheless the accusation of "circularity" between the definitions of SR and the social subjects (groups, categories) which produce them was directed precisely by the upholders of RDA to the social representations, since expressed by socially positioned groups, which, in their turn, were already preliminary identified on the basis of the social representations.

> "In particular, Litton and Potter (1985) have polemicized on the fact that in the study of social representations, contrasting elements have been minimized and "consensual universes" created. Next to the ambiguity regarding the extent to which SRs are shared, the authors lament the lack of explicit, external criteria for identifying groups independent of shared SRs, which creates circularity insofar as a group is identified by its SRs and at the same time is assumed to be the generator of those SRs."
>
> (de Rosa, 1994 p. 285)

But it is to be demanded how the champions of such a radical socio-construtionist approach can invoke ""external" criteria that re-echo the role of the "independent variables" specific of the experimental approach they deny.

The circularity of the S.R. theory is considered as "dialogism" to the extent in which very clearly - by epistemological roots - it was defined by Ivana Markova (2000) and, earlier still, by Ragnar Rommetveit (1984). "Dialogism" which may be invoked precisely because - unlike the RDA approach - a totallising role is not attributed to the social representation, as construction that - as the equal of the discourse in the RDA - incorporates and negates all the other constructions and processes (behaviour, opinion, common sense, communication, cognition, action, memory, etc.) and levels (individual and social, interpersonal and intrapersonal, external and internal, past-present-future, stability and change, etc.). On the contrary, to the extent in which it recognises them and assumes them, it can set itself in the condition of articulating them *dia*-logically.

> "(...) the theory is based on an epistemology which brings to the centre of attention the dynamic interdependence between socio-culturally shared forms of thinking, communicating and acting and heir transformation through activities of individual and groups. All these phenomena have a double orientation? They are embedded in culture and history and thus have a tendency towards stability. At the same time, they live through the activities, tensions and conflicts of groups and individuals, who actively appropriate, innovate and create new phenomena. On the basis of this epistemology, social representations theory develops original *dialogical (dialectic) concepts* like themata, communicative genres, objectification as appropriation and creation of meaning, which in turn are relevant to the study of phenomenon in social change."
>
> (Markova, 2000, p.455)

That the *dialogic* conception derives for the classic *dialectic of* Hegelian stamp (as in the position assumed by Markova) or instead exceeds the linearity (as in the position

gradually matured by Morin, 1994) is a philosophical question of some importance. Even if Markova identifies the *dialectic* with the *dialogue*, it can be observed that the latter (at least in the acceptation given by Morin) is "opposable" to the "linearity" of the Hegelian conception of the dialectic based on the succession of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. In fact if *dialectic* implies an exceeding of the contradiction and a synthesis of the contraries in the context of a historical process definable as "antinomony in movement" (D'Agostini, 1999); the "*dialogism*" of Morin (1994) expresses on the contrary the idea of a confrontation and interchange between concepts (or elements) "paradoxically" opposed and antagonist, not "dissoluble" one into the other.

"Hegel revealed to me a vision of the truth which met my needs (...), the truth was a totality; a totality that was always in movement (..). The dialectic represented the force of adhering to this movement that characterised the totality, tackling and assuming the contrary ideas, freeing them from the dross and fertilising one with the other for giving birth to a "synthesis", which should go beyond them."

(Morin, 1994, p. 57, my translation)

"From 1948 to 1950 I ended up the prey to contradictions that my Hegelian "forma mentis" was no longer in a position to overcome (...). It was then that the system broke up into fragments. This rupture drove me towards the original contradictions, inducing me to elaborate a conception that set itself anew to confrontation, without trying to overcome it at any price."

(Morin, 1994, p.59. my translation)

"Finally it is in the method that the dialogue clearly takes the place of the dialectic; in this work I elaborate and define the dialogism as association of examples at the same time complementary and antagonist"

(Morin 1994, p. 63, my translation)

The relationship (or the differences) between dialogism and dialectic is a philosophically exacting question which we shall not deal with here. What is important to highlight is that existence cannot be supposed of a dialogic relationship unless the existence is supposed of the dimensions or entity establishing the relationship itself (e.g. representation and communication, communication and social practices, cognition and action, etc.), however inextricably entwined and dynamically mutable it may be (and this applies also to the paradigmatic perspectives that Markova acknowledges to the SRT).

"The claim that social representations could be seen as being pragmatic presupposition of communicative genres (Moscovici, 1994b) does not mean that one is talking here about layers with representations lying beneath and communication above. Rather, one must view them as interpenetrating and diffused: genres affecting thinking and thinking shaped by language."

(Markova, 2000, p. 453)

To write off *communication* as a mere metaphor (Potter and Edwards, 1999, p. 449) implies that:

(1) the RDA researches are based on a synecdoche: the part (the observable discourse, the message) replaces the whole (the communication with all its elements and processes);

(2) this reductionism, or discursive immanentism, generates some "tautological monologues". The discourse reproposes with its totalizing dimension a new "essence" in a proposal that is founded on "anti-essentialism".

Although the role of the *action* and of the social practices cannot be denied in the construction of semantic scenarios for our representations of the world, once again radical antimentalism and the pragmatic reductionism of the RDA generates several inconveniences. The action does not explain everything.

It is certainly possible to bring back a representation to the social and cultural practices already given, as is highlighted in the TRS which - as mentioned - articulates levels and construction

"(...) I have not started from the individual, or rather cognitive, representations. And because I do not believe that, by association, by relationships or statistical diffusion, these may generate a coherent and stable social representation. In effect , this is a fact of institution, of prescribed and regulated communication. Fundamentally, as Gellner wrote: "we think what we must think". Our culture thinks in us. Both conceptually and verbally we are exceptionally well prepared."

(Moscovici, 1999, p. 223, my translation)

It is, however, hard to maintain that the social representation does not itself perform a role in orienting the action and that this role is not merely *re-producer* (the representation as mnemonic repertoire of interiorised social practices reflected in it), but at times *innovator* in relational contexts. These contexts are certainly regulated by normative systems of expectations, social prescriptions, etc., yet are also possible *scenarios of change*. The action produced in a present relational context is also *evocation* of actions previously performed (and of discourses spoken), but may also modify the scripts of the past, introducing new repertoires thanks to the *anticipating* representation of the events (all things told, the language itself is a dynamic fact and the element at the same time more stable and more changing of a culture).

"One could say, following Rommetveit 1974), that ordinary language provides us with culturally and socially transmitted drafts of contracts. We categorize states of affairs within the multifaceted social world and optionally elaborate and realize these draft of contracts. Commmunicative genres, like social representations, are only partialy determined, allowing them, in each situation, to be modified, created and re-created."

(Markova, 2000, p. 456)

In the absence of every pre-given entity, another aspect that risks being phagocytized in the "discursive imperialism" of the RDA is, therefore, the *temporal dimension* (i.e., the *role of the past* in orienting the practices and the contingent discourses, but also the *role of the future*). The individual can be considered a "*position*" in a contingent argumentative context, but the discourses spoken in the past or those imagined and projected into the future (were they only reduced to argumentative roles played as *characters in search of an author*) influence on the discourses or linguistic games in the present. It is hard not to consider the role of the memory, both personal and collective, in producing interiorised repertoires of scripts that orient the present action and the role of the *imagination* in changing the registers of discourse-actions (we know how much this has been true also in the logic of scientific discoveries).

According to the RDA, the SRT would be characterised by scanty attention towards the constructive role of the discourse and of the social practices. This criticism seems unmotivated for a series of reasons. The theory of social representations (SRT) and discourse analysis (DA) are both focused to a large extent on the study and analysis of

the social discourses, but with a diverse theoretical-methodological option. The RDA starts from the assumption that human beings produce discourses and representations of the reality that are ever changeable in relation to the situations, by using various interpretative repertoires.

> "Interpretative repertoires are used to perform different sort of accounting tasks. Because people go through life faced with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of situations, they will need to draw upon very different repertoires to suit the needs at hand."
>
> (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.156)

Consequently the RDA is mainly interested in the study of the *contextual variability of the discourses* and of the bond between the discourses and the contingent goals suggested by the impersonal context. The SRT is interested in the study both of the shared elements and of those dynamically different that characterise the discourses, i.e. of those elements that make the discourse produced by the various social groups recognisable and reveal the taking of position between the multiple and pluralist prospects of the various social discourses.

> "(...) *linguistically mediated social representations to some extent are negotiable and border on our imperfect knowledge of the world*. What is made known by what is said in particular context of human discourse is thus a considerable degree contingent upon negotiated specification of linguistically mediated general drafts of contract concerning categorisation. Negotiated specification, moreover, allows for adjustment of categorisations in accordance with *private and contextually determined perspectives*. And mutual understanding will always entail a residual of *presupposed commonality with respect of interpretation or faith in a common world*."
>
> (Rommetveit, 1984, p. 357-8)

Therefore, for the SRT each participant, although negotiating the meanings of the communication in terms of the situational and immediate interactive context, aims at expressing a point of view that reflects also previous social influences on the here-and-now interaction. The SRT does not deny that the viewpoints may be negotiated, justified or masked inside particular discussions and in terms of immediate particular goals. The TRS merely retains that these points of view are nourished from even previous discourses and social influences, that orient the discursive production developed in the course of a specific interaction. If it is true that the discourses vary in terms of the micro-temporal contexts, it is also true that, in many ways, these same discourses reflect the points of view nourished by previously spoken discourses, re-elaborated in connection to a personal, social and collective memory of wider range and in terms of semantic contexts activated by the imaginative capacities.

Thus come into play both the articulation between *relational micro-contexts* and *socio-cultural macro-context*, and the role of the *social and collective memory* as well as that of *imagination*.

The structural role of the *context* is theorised both by the RDA and by the SRT and in both paradigms the context is brought back with priority *to the common places of daily life*, rather than artificially recreated in laboratories with little ecological validity of the research (although some researches based on DA are performed in the laboratory on ad-hoc created groups and some developments of the SRT do not rule out also the experimental approach, when the SRs are isolated in the research designs and treated as independent variables). However, the context is considered in a fairly different way. The

RDA, and even more the conversational analysis, studies the way in which, in the *relational micro-contexts*, socially *negotiated* discourses are produced at a particular time. On the contrary, the SRT studies mainly the way in which belonging to a *macro-cultural macro-context* - and more specifically the multiple belonging to various groups and social institutions - influences the discourses produced in the micro-context of the here-and-now situation. For the SRT the discourses spoken and proven in the micro-context reflect the dynamics of the social exchanges spoken and proven in the macro-context, but are also in the meanwhile the dynamic element of the social change. The RDA, with its contingentism, seems to neglect the prestructural role of an interiorised discourse that is anchored to cultural membership within a temporal perspective not only autobiographical, but plurigenerational and Historical-collective.

With regard to the *memory*, the position of discursive psychology is rather complex. Despite the recognition that "the role of memory has an important epistemological role", however once again, the role of "*remembering* can be seen as a set of *social practices* related to a range of actions and providing a particular kind of accountability" (Potter, 1996, p. 216).

"The study of remembering in conversation affords unique opportunities for understanding remembering as organized social action. Reports of past events are studiable as pragmatically occasioned versions whose variability is due not only to the nature and vicissitudes of individual cognition, but to the conversational work that those versions accomplish."

(Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 43)

In the view of the SRT, the representations are produced by the communications and by the experiences that take place (in a relatively long interval of time) within specific social contexts. However, the representations (conceivable as situated and able to be situated items of knowledge) orient the behaviour and communications produced in the course of a specific "here-and-now" interaction. On the other hand, to consider the discourse as a total contingent and variable fact, and to deny radically every cognitive-representational capacity, it means to overlook the importance of the *memory* as virtual dislocation of the subject in times prior to the discursive situation "acted" in the *hic et nunc*. The linguistic repertoires do not have a mental or mnemonic nature, they are *acts* performed in a particular time and social context:

"From the socio-constructinist and discoursivist point of view, the action of rememberig is in the first place, in fact, an action that is undertaken as part of a complex process of negotiation (as much between diverse individuals as in the context of the individual thought) between the possible explanations of the past."

(Mazzara, 2000, p. 35)

By denying the pre-structural role of the past, the social individual risks being considered as *an entity without memory*, "an empty person" (Burr, 1995, p. 59), who is moved solely by his immediate interests. In the meantime a vision to a certain extent "opportunistic" and "cynic" of the man is expressed (although, in a discursive vision, such a definition - referring to a value criterion - would be devoid of any basis).

However it is evident that - although subject to the *games played* in the interpersonal situation - the memory of the previously performed actions (and of the discourses previously spoken) may influence the social practices produced in a particular time,

contributing towards creating the same context of the interaction. The characteristics of the interaction exert an influence on the memory, no less than that which the memory does in structuring and orienting the interaction.

The memory is nourished by the social interactions and by the interpersonal exchanges produced in an extensive temporal context. The memory contains scripts that, although adaptable to the requirements of immediate and fluctuating situations in the time, show even relatively stable characteristics. Although variable, the contingent discourses always offer the trace of a discourse spoken and performed previously within a social context. The social representations are partly a trace of an interiorised repertoire of past knowledge and experience, expressed in the discourses of the present and that are joined in the present with new meanings, in a constant dynamic of stability and change.

Also the theory of the social representations (and more specifically the development of the concept of *"themata"* (see Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994) is opposed to a certain narrow and solipsistical way of conceiving the knowledge, but not denying it highlights its socially and historically situated aspect, opening it up to symbolic meanings that go well beyond those of merely informative nature. This permits it an interesting integration with the construct of the social memory, casting a bridge between collective representations and social representations, between diachronic and synchronous perspectives (Jodelet, 1993; de Rosa, 1997; de Rosa & Mormino, 2000; Bellelli, Bakhurst, Rosa, 2000).

“Themata” never reveal themselves clearly; not even part of them is definitively attainable, so much are they intricately interwoven with a certain collective memory inscribed in language, and so much are they composites, like the representation they sustain, at once both cognitive (invariants anchored in our neurosensory apparatus and our schemes of action) and cultural (consensual universal of themes objectified by the temporalities and histories of the longue durèe).

(Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, eng. transl.in Moscovici, 2000, p. 182)

The two visions could be considered complementary, if the contigentist radicalism declared by the RDA did not end up by denying the supposition itself of the communication, i.e. the existence of that reciprocally shared field of meanings and of representations already dear to Mead.

That the two paradigms should have been able to be integrated - if a radicalism had not prevailed, which in making absolute the importance of the discourse has ended up by denying all that is made necessary for it (from the representation to the communication) - is explicitly recognised on several occasions by Billig (1987, 1991) who has devoted a whole chapter (the third) of his *Ideology and Opinion* to "exploring" the points of contact between the theory of the social representations and the rhetorical approach, underscoring the argumentative and rhetorical dimension of what Mosovici calls "social representations".

“At first sight, the rethorical approach’s stress on argumentation could be inserted into Moscovici’s vision of a reconstituted social psychology.(…) One of the most important developments in European social psychology has been the emergence of the concept of ‘social representations’. (…)The rethorical perspective, it will be suggested, can complement that of the social representations theorists, regardless of wheter the universal or particular concept of social representations is adopted.”

(Billig, 1991, p. 57-9)

And even before in *Arguing and Thinking* (1987)

"However, it might be profitable to explore the rhetorical dimensions of this theoretically important concept of social representations."

(Billig, 1987, p. 261)

Altogether different is the position of the more radical exponents of DA, who, on many occasions and still recently, have emphasised the incompatibility with SRT.

"We believe contrasting rather than merging the perspectives will lead to more clarity in theory and analysis."

(Potter & Eduards, 1999, p.448)

Obviously completely different are the methodological consequences deriving from an option now addressed to the integration of the two paradigms, now targeted onto exasperating the incompatibility.

We have discussed on several occasions our point of view regarding the need for acquiring and developing a critical modality concerning the methods and techniques of survey and analysis of the data in terms of their coherence with the theoretical paradigms of reference and of the conditions of application, besides the purposes pursued by the researcher. The multi-methodolgical option hoped for on a number of occasions - as a kind of meta-theoretical instrument for problemising the data collected and the results obtained (de Rosa, 1990, 1994, in press a) - should not be exchanged for a summation of collecting and analysing data techniques. The attitude is too widely spread in psycho-social research of conducting a large number of sophisticated analyses on data collected without any critical precaution regarding both the paradigm of reference and the specific context of carrying out the investigation. The developmental psychologists, and those with a clinical formation, are often (and rightly) horrified at how sometimes the social psychologists conduct interviews with children (and not only them).

In this sense, the attention developed by discursive and rhetorical psychology towards these aspects is precious - when the expression of the positions does not end up by transforming the radical socio-constructionism in a new form of *methodological behaviourism,* attentive more to recording the rules of verbal, textual, and conversational behaviour of the *discursive facts* than to their meanings for the subjects that express them. An equilibrated position in this sense has been expressed recently in contributions that describe the requirement for a conversational/discoursive approach for the study of the social representations respectively (Mazzoleni, 2001).

Obviously this integration is possible - as well as desirable - if the field is cleared from the scholastic orthodoxy and one starts to understand what, in the theoretic perspective and in the methods specific to the paradigm which is proposed as alternative, can throw into crisis, in an interesting way, and render dynamic, critically, our paradigmatic convictions and our research practices. It is, perhaps, not by chance that this requirement is so strongly felt by the newest levy of researchers being trained (Ph.D students) who ever more frequently show their interest both for DA and for SRT and wonder why these schools do not collaborate in joint research projects. The practice of reflexivity - invoked by the DA - teaches us that perhaps this occurs because the

doctorate students are not shut up within the often separating logics of academic circles and of the virtual communities which bind the researchers' intellects in paradigmatic belongings, which bring into play identification processes, even when whole continents divide them.

Conclusion
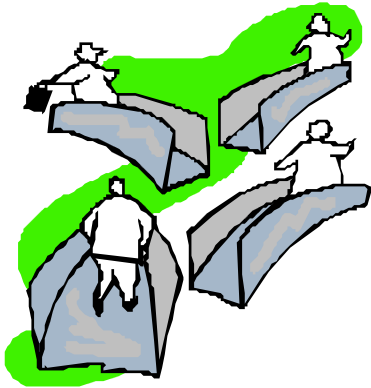
Conclusions

In this paper an initial endeavour has been made to trace the lines of the lively debate in which different paradigms of social psychology are confronted (and sometime clash) at present, identifying some positions addressed towards confirming the incompatibility or the possibility of integration among schools of thought and research practices diverse to one another. In this respect particular attention has been devoted to the positions assumed in this debate by authors who uphold the socio-constructionist theses in its most radical version expressed by Discourse Analysis (RDA) and by those who refer themselves to the Theory of Social Representations (SRT).

After having analysed several positions, which seem to suggest interest for an articulation between the two paradigms, some of the most extreme theses upheld by the DA have been analysed that in their conceptual reductionism end up by producing self-confutations and make it impossible to propose a terrain of integration with other paradigms, including that of the SRT.

Then the interest has been pointed out for a "dialogical" perspective not only in the terms peculiar to the SRT, but also in those of a possible and desired dialogue between RDA and SRT, highlighting the effect of the methodological problematisation that this would entail if the researchers with various "school" memberships (besides how to speak and write) would learn to listen and read with respect to one another.

Whether the interest for a dialogue between separate paradigmatic positions - rather than self-submission to an effective monologue behind rhetorical-dialogic appearances - is genuine and fruitful or not, can only be known in a long-term perspective. Only the fruit that will eventually spring from the implementation of those social practices that ritualise the opportunities of exchange and of confrontation in the scientific community (such as joint meetings, publications stemming from a genuine confrontation of positions and not of juxtapositions or sterile counter-positions, development of joint research programmes in which a number of plans of analysis are articulated with the specific methodologies of the different approaches etc.) will be able to testify it. We trust that this discussion will produce fruits in this direction.

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