Abstract The theory of social representations and communication belongs to a broadly conceived family of approaches studying interdependencies between socially and individually shared knowledge, which are based on dialogical epistemology. This epistemology, in order to ask questions about stability in knowledge, presupposes its change. The theory of social representations as a theory of social knowledge is characterized by the following concerns. First, it conceives of the dynamics of thought, language and social practices as interdependent socio-cultural and individual phenomena which are co-constructed by means of tension and polarization of antinomies. The construction of knowledge can be represented as a dynamic semiotic triangle and the change of knowledge can be represented in terms of three-step processes. Second, the theory of social representations and communication is based on the set of interrelated and dialogically defined concepts generating hypotheses, for example themata, anchoring, objectification and communicative genres.

Key Words communication, dialectic, dialogism, social representations, themata, three-step processes

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Amédée or How to Get Rid of It: Social Representations from a Dialogical Perspective

Introduction

The article by Potter and Edwards (1999) on social representations and discourse has led me to write this paper. *Culture & Psychology* is at the forefront in testing and arguing ideas and for provoking discussion. It is therefore essential that readers be informed about the status of the theory of social representations and communication and its conceptual and practical implications. The Potter and 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. What matters here is the presentation of a coherent argument for a conceptual framework that enables the exploration of common thinking and communication in, and about, fundamental macro- and micro-social psychological phenomena which move, change and turn our lives upside down.

One wonders why some of the theory's fiercest opponents have based their careers for 15 years, as Potter and Edwards (1999) declare they have, on refuting it. Their criticism ranges 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. Thus they have created a drama similar to that of Ionesco's absurd comedy *Amédée or How to Get Rid of It.* In Ionesco's play, a middle-aged couple, Amédée and Madeleine, have been trying for 15 years to get rid of a male cadaver in their tiny home. (It is not quite clear how it got there.) In the drama, this cadaver fills and ruins the couple's entire life. Absurdly, the dead body grows, occupying more and more space in the couple's little apartment and in their minds. Amédée and Madeleine watch it growing yet from time to time they convince themselves that it does not grow. The couple attributes various properties to it, some of which are positive ones, such as beautiful eyes, but most of which are negative. Did Amédée kill the person whose corpse lies there? Is it the cadaver of a baby, of Amédée's father, of Madeleine's lover? It could even be the body of a drowned woman (despite the fact that it is a male body). Should they inform the police about this cadaver? If so, how will they explain its existence in their apartment? Amédée has always promised Madeleine to get rid of this growing monster—but Madeleine no longer trusts him. Anyway, even if he would get rid of it now, who would return her the lost 15 years filled with worry and misery? Ionesco offers two endings to the drama, with Amédée, in both cases, disappearing in the air and in the wind.

There are some fundamental facts about the theory of social representations which will make it difficult for Amédée to get rid of the 'growing cadaver'. First, the critics of the theory of social representations confuse different levels of scientific explanation, in particular with respect to what they call 'perceptual cognitivism' and 'information processing'. Second, and more importantly, the theory of social representations in Moscovici's 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. Dialogical epistemology*, I claim, is at present the only viable alternative to traditional individualistic and static epistemology,

which, as many have argued, is totally inappropriate to social scientific investigation.

Cognition at Different Levels of Explanation

Potter and Edwards refer to their earlier volume (Edwards & Potter, 1992), in which they argue that perceptual-cognitivism conceives of people as perceivers of incoming perceptual information, which they process in different ways. One may easily agree with this claim as a general characteristic of certain trends in psychology. However, it is a caricature of the theory of social representations in Moscovici's sense to say that 'representations are, mostly, treated as cognitive structures of grids which make sense of information, particularly about unfamiliar social objects' (Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 449). What are these 'cognitive structures of grids'? Both the authors and the readers of this phrase would find it difficult to provide an answer to this question.

Terms like 'cognition', 'culture', 'matter', 'information', and so on, are umbrella terms which evoke all kinds of meanings because they are used at different levels of philosophical, scientific and social scientific explanation. For example, 'cognition', as used currently, may cover functions of the brain and/or of the mind. It is often used to substitute for the words 'understanding' or 'knowledge', or to separate intellectual functions of the brain/mind from emotions.

It is because different levels of scientific explanation are often used in an undifferentiated manner, whether in psychology or in cognitive science, that 'cognition' has become a stigmatized word in at least two senses.

First, cognition has become associated, for many, with the idea that knowledge or understanding is located in the brain of the individual. Concerning the confusion in psychology and in cognitive science between the brain and the mind, I could hardly find a more appropriate example of the difference between the two than the one quoted by Rommetveit (1998) from Hacker's (1990) essay entitled 'Chomsky's Problems'. There he states: 'What may grow in the brain, e.g. a tumour, cannot grow in the mind, and what may grow in the mind, e.g. suspicion, cannot grow in the brain' (Hacker, 1990, p. 135). What this quote reveals is the difference between a location of the biological growth in the brain and the social co-construction of representations or images in the mind.

Moscovici (1977, 1972/1994a) frequently makes it clear, both in his work in the history and the philosophy of science as well as in his theoretical studies of social representations, that one needs to be cautious with respect to different levels of scientific explanations. For

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example, in developing the concept of 'themata' (see later in this paper), he states:

> . . . one must admit that in addition to . . . perceptual and neuro-sensory invariants which organize our basic cognitive mechanisms, there are, in our ordinary cognitions, imprints of postulates of long duration which are anchored in our beliefs. These imprints emerge in our discourses in the form of the dynamics of recurrent openings and closures. (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, p. 68)

Second, in addition to the brain/mind confusion, and as Potter and Edwards state, 'cognition' is often reduced to the processing of information. In those cases, 'information' usually refers to bits or to elements, which are somehow transposed from one component of a system of communication (e.g. a person) to another one (e.g. another person). Cognition and information are conceived as pre-given phenomena already in existence. This conception is often referred to as a 'fundamentalist epistemology' (see, e.g., Arbib & Hesse, 1986; Taylor, 1995). The alternative to this conception is the one according to which human agents jointly construct their cognition and information. In the latter case, each expression of a 'cognition' in the individual has a double orientation: socio-cultural and individual. Cognition is a relation in the system and it cannot be decomposed into individual parts or elements. The theory of social representations in Moscovici's sense, as I understand it, is of this latter kind.

Dialogism and Dialectic

Let us now move to the second point explaining why it is difficult for Amédée to get rid of the theory of social representations. The theory belongs to the traditions of ideas which are based on a dialogical epistemology. Thus, we can refer here to cultural semiotics as it was represented in the early part of the last century, for example, by traditions such as the Prague School of Semiotics, Bakhtin's circle, Vygotskian psychology and the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, to mention some of the most important ones. These traditions and ideas have been transformed and further developed in present socio-cultural theories of the mind (e.g. Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Wertsch, 1991), co-constructivism (Valsiner, 1989, 1998), dialogism in language (Heen Wold, 1992; Linell, 1998; Marková & Foppa, 1990, 1991; Marková, Graumann, & Foppa, 1995; Rommetveit, 1998), and so on.

However, these affinities between the theory of social representations, on the one hand, and the socio-cultural theories of the mind, co-constructivism and dialogical theories of communication, on the

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other, may not be immediately recognized, and I shall mention two reasons why that might be so.

First, unfortunately, many researchers in the field of social representations, just like the critics of the theory, often subscribe, unwittingly, to a fundamentalist epistemology. In using concepts like attitudes, values, cognition, and so on, they fill them with fundamentalist, rather than with dialectical or dialogical, meanings. In other words, it is relatively common for terms to be given static and individualistic, rather than dynamic and socially co-constructed, meanings. Since these misunderstandings also affect empirical research in social representations, in terms of both the concepts and the method used, there is not much progression seen either in the theory or in empirical research.

Second, and as Valsiner (1998, p.149) maintains, the theory appears to be undeveloped. He argues, when referring to the theory of social representations, that the 'actual theoretical elaboration has yet to take place', with the fear that the theory might just turn into a passing fashion in social psychology. This fear, however, does not seem to be justified. It would be difficult to turn the theory of social representations into a passing fashion. It has already existed for more than 40 years and its conferences and summer schools continue to attract young researchers all over the world. While I have some sympathy with this diagnosis in general, the question arises as to when one can say that a theory has been fully elaborated. Any theory keeps developing as long as it attracts researchers who use it and apply it to the study of new phenomena. One could say, paraphrasing Humboldt (1836/1971), that a theory (like language) lives through its use. For Humboldt, as long as language is used, it continues to develop. It is never a finished product (*ergon*), but is a process (*energeia*). What Valsiner is correct about, though, is the claim that there have been very few accounts of the theoretical state of social representations. Instead, one can find several aspects of it in various essays and books. What is needed is to present the state of the art in a coherent and systematic way.

Dialogism and Dialogical Knowledge

Dialogism is most commonly associated with the name of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, although, in fact, Bakhtin took the notion of 'dialogism' from the neo-Kantian religious and moral philosophers like Rosenstock, Rosenzweig and Cohen, who were preoccupied with the dialogical principle deriving largely from Judaism (Marková, 1994). Important in this context is the fact that the neo-Kantians, and in particular Rosenzweig, did not treat dialogue simply as a mutuality

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between I and You but, above all, as judgement, difference and conflict. Batznitzky (2000, p.113) explains the specificity of Rosenzweig's approach to dialogue, contrasting it with that of Buber. While Buber's 'I–Thou' meant, just like in Mead's (1934) conception, that one has to recognize the other in order to achieve self-consciousness, in Rosenzweig's treatment the human experience does not centre on two voices in a dialogue but on a polyphony of voices in the community. Batznitzky (2000) argues that Rosenzweig's approach to dialogue stems from his understanding of the Jewish–Christian relation, which is 'never one of mutuality, but always one of absolute difference . . . judgment comes from difference, but without judgment, and thus difference, dialogue, and the potential for self-transformation, would not be possible' (p. 159). It is the impossibility of consensus that is the basis of all dialogue, and specifically, in Rosenzweig's context, of dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. The relation between them strengthens and intensifies judgement of one another through tension, but, despite tension and hostility, it leads the way to redemption. All these features, like the emphasis on community, tension, heterogeneity and polyphony, became prominent in Bakhtin's work and in the work of Bakhtin's circle (see, e.g., Volosinov's [1929/1973, p. 23] emphasis on community).

Bakhtin's monumental work was rediscovered in the human and social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s, and interest in his work still continues to grow. Bakhtin's dialogism views human cognition and language in a manner that provides a provocative dynamically and socio-culturally based alternative to the mainstream conception of cognition and language, which is based largely on various kinds of individualistic or collectivist, but static, epistemologies.

Bakhtin (1981) characterizes dialogism as an epistemology of human cognition, communication and, more generally, of the human sciences, which are concerned with the study of symbolic thoughts expressed in language. Let us consider Bakhtin's notion of accuracy or precision to bring home the difference between non-dialogical and dialogical epistemologies. In accordance with the trends of his time in the 1920s, Bakhtin and his circle (e.g. Volosinov, 1929/1973) made an essential distinction between the natural and the human sciences, the former being preoccupied with explanation (*Erklären*), while the latter with understanding (*Verstehen*). Bakhtin argues that the natural sciences are concerned with the study of reified and voiceless objects and that they aim at obtaining accurate knowledge of those objects. They are monological in the sense that they aim at identification of things: they examine things in terms of what they are, as they exist for the single

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human mind. They attempt to define and analyse them in their entirety and completeness. Bakhtin maintains that in the natural sciences, precision or accuracy means that the knowers detach themselves from the object of their contemplation and attempt to preserve their neutrality in scientific exploration.

In contrast, the aim of the humanities and social sciences is not the accuracy of 'objective' knowledge in the sense of developing and establishing an internal mirror of the external world. Instead, the humanities and social sciences understand, transmit and interpret discourses of others (Bakhtin, 1981). In the human sciences, dialogical knowledge or understanding is fundamentally reflexive. It involves acknowledgement of one self by another self and it turns into 'the reflection of a reflection' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986b, p. 113). According to this position all human cognition, communication and any text are dialogical because, in contrast to the natural sciences, the human and social sciences always involve the study of one human cognitively interacting with another. In other words, they are concerned with dialogical cognition.

Bakhtin and his circle did not accept the distinction between the natural and the human sciences as it was commonly made at the time. Referring specifically to Dilthey (e.g. Bakhtin, 1981; Volosinov, 1929/1973), they rejected his philosophy as subjectivist, not making space for the social nature of meaning. Volosinov argued against Dilthey from the standpoint of dialectic materialism, yet he made more general points extending beyond Marxism: signs and meanings are inseparable, and meanings are of a social and not of an individual nature.

Bakhtin argued that in contrast to the natural sciences, precision and accuracy in the human and social sciences consist in overcoming the 'strangeness' of the cognition of another person through *active* understanding and in mastering the social environment, language and any object which the individual cognition appropriates. Therefore, accuracy and precision are of a totally different kind: they refer to joint appropriation of cognition by different individuals. In this process, however, it is important that individual cognition preserves its individuality and does not assimilate the other's cognition into one's own cognition in its entirety, which would result in some kind of fusion (Bakhtin, 1981).

Cognitions are different one from the other and all of their aspects in dialogue are penetrated by tension. They are simultaneously multivoiced, and are oriented to different speech intentions, which are expressed in different speech and communication genres. For Bakhtin (1981), dialogism is an epistemology in which

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> . . . one point of view is opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another . . . this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point in the work. (p. 314)

As a result, dialogical knowledge—or, as Bakhtin preferred to call it, dialogical understanding—is oriented towards the study of ideas, meanings and significations of others' ideas as well as of those belonging to one's own mind. Any coherent complex of signs, written texts, works of art, pieces of music, historical interpretations, has dialogical properties, being always oriented towards other human minds and other cognitions. These characteristics of dialogical understanding clearly show that we are not dealing with the knowledge and cognition of the sole individual but that knowledge and cognition are historically, culturally and socially situated.

Above all, true understanding is *active* and already presents the embryo of an answer (Volosinov, 1929/1973). In the process of a single dialogue, each word is a two-sided act, directed on the one hand to the speaker and on the other hand to the listener. Each word is a bridge connecting the two interacting individuals. The mind and language of human beings, therefore, cannot be meaningfully studied outside the text, which is multifaceted and multivoiced, always situated in culture.

Bakhtin was a literary scholar. What he called 'dialogical epistemology' involved a picture of a colourful mixture of ideas and their clashes in a dynamic contest, whether it is of carnival laughter, of folk culture, or of the fantastic and of the polyphonic novel. While this in itself is a grandiose achievement which provides inspiration for the human and social sciences, we need to do more. In order to make his dialogical thinking directly relevant to the social sciences and humanities and to empirical research in social sciences like psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and so on, what is required is a conceptual analysis and a systematic treatment of dialogism. In fact, I would say that this is one of our main challenges today.

Dialectic
The members of the Bakhtinian circle, like Volosinov (1929/1973) and Medvedev (1934/1985), while using 'dialogism' in the above sense, also used the term 'dialectic' when referring to oppositions in various dynamic social systems like language, institutions, community, and so on. For example, in his study of literary history, Medvedev often talks about 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' phenomena which are dialectically interdependent. Volosinov discusses dialectical generative processes in

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the context of social and language changes. Tynjanov and Jakobson (1926/1981) rejected Saussurean synchrony and diachrony as two separate processes, and argued for the interdependence between synchronic and diachronic phenomena, and emphasized dialectics as the principle of incessant dynamism in language, poetics and literature.

Bakhtin and Hegel. Dialectic, Bakhtin (1981) argues, is 'born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of personalities)' (p. 162). What he means here is that cognition can be nothing else than dialogical cognition (p. 161). Interestingly, developmental psychologists like Newson (1979) and Trevarthen (e.g. 1979, 1992) have attempted, much later, to provide empirical evidence for innate intersubjectivity and for co-authorship. Bråten (1992), in a similar vein, postulates, on a computational basis, that the infant mind is a self-organizing dyad with an inborn virtual other. If there could be sufficient biological, computational and socio-cultural evidence for inborn dialogicality, this then would substantiate even more strongly Bakhtin's claim that human dialogue explains the dialectic vision of the world. Dialectic, for Bakhtin, therefore seems to function at a more abstract level of consciousness than dialogism. As dialogism involves the appropriation of the meanings of others in a very concrete sense, we need to turn, according to Bakhtin, from this abstract level of dialectic to concrete dialogues of personalities, that is, to dialogues as situated interpersonal encounters. Only at this concrete level can dialogical partners become co-authors of words or of meanings in the true sense of the word 'dialogue', which they jointly construct.

In his latest writings, Bakhtin (1981) was in fact critical of a treatment of dialectic which he saw, in particular in Hegel's sense, as an abstract, empty and voiceless monologism, deprived of the heterogeneity and polyphony of different voices and of life:

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (p. 147)

This quote clearly shows that dialogism and dialogue are active co-constructions in concrete situations involving concrete co-authorship. This also means that one cannot abdicate one's responsibility in dialogue; one is always in a situation of contract (see Rommetveit, 1974, 1992). Bakhtin (1986a) pointed out that there is no alibi in being, even if we often behave as though we could escape responsibility. Yet there is a consequence of such alibi-based existence. We deprive

ourselves of our subjectivity in the self/other interdependence, that is, we deprive ourselves of authenticity.

Authenticity in dialogue always involves combat between one human cognition and another. A combat in which language is filled with various kinds of heterogeneity: speech genres, carnival, irony and multiple voices. Wherever there are two (or more) cognitions in oppositional tension, there is a dialogue, something to be negotiated, constructed and created.

Hegel's dialectic. Bakhtin's insistence on dialogism thus excluded what in Hegel's and Engels' sense could be called the dialectic of nature. Those of us who experienced the dialectic of nature in our youth in the form of dialectic materialism might agree with Bakhtin that it was a lifeless and abstract dogmatism. Yet the perspective of the dialectic of nature of the late 18th and 19th centuries was concerned with movement, development and change, both in nature and in society. In this sense, as Taylor (1975) points out, dialectic was not for Hegel a method of doing philosophy but the conviction that there is a dialectical movement in reality because it is ridden with contradiction. In contrast to Bakhtin, who was preoccupied with literature, cognition, dialogue, culture and dialogicality, Hegel's concerns were philosophically more general. It seems to me that one can talk, in Hegel's philosophy, about at least two kinds of dialectic, both treated in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1977) and in *Logic* (1830/1873).

The first way in which Hegel views dialectic as *a moving principle of reality* is his response to the Zeitgeist of the evolutionary and developmental thinking of the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Philosophically, Hegel's ancestors are Heraclitus, Aristotle, Spinoza, Boehme—that is, the thinkers who were holistic, pantheistic and who operated within some kind of dialectic. As for Heraclitus, so for Hegel: all living phenomena involve internal tension of contradictory forces. Hegel saw contradictions in social reality, in nature, and in thought, and according to him these contradictions lead to dialectical movement in the mind. He states in *Logic* that contradiction is 'the very moving principle of the world and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable' (Hegel, 1830/1873, p. 223). In this sense, one can see that dialectic is the basic *ontological principle* on which his philosophy rests. This has an important consequence, because this *ontology* has attempted, although rather unsuccessfully, to bring dialectic into science. As Hegel (1830/1873) claims, the 'dialectical principle

constitutes the life and soul of scientific progress, the dynamic which alone gives immanent connection and necessity to the body of science' (p. 116). In other words, in my reading, he views social reality and nature as dialectical and that science has a task to discover this dialectic.

Similarly, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel constantly refers to dialectic in nature and in the development of history. Both in nature and in history, it is important that each stage is determined by the one which comes before. For example, in nature, buds give rise to flowers, to fruit, to seed, to tree, and so on. Similarly, in historical epochs one stage gives rise to another one.

The second way in which Hegel treats dialectic in *Logic* and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is *dialectic as the nature of thought*. One could say that, in this sense, dialectic is *epistemology* and that it is complementary to its former, ontological sense. The mind is the realization of world development, it is a process of self-education, of the self-recognition in its own activity. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one could say, contains a complex proof that knowledge can be nothing else than social knowledge: ' "I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I" ' (Hegel, 1807/1977, p. 110)—they *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another. Thought in its very nature is dialectical. As thought is by its very nature dialectical, it must, because of its dynamics, fall into contradiction and push itself forward in order to resolve this contradiction. One of the main lessons in Hegel's *Logic* is to show this movement through contradictions in thought and the very necessity to resolve them.

It seems to me that Bakhtin's position was in principle very similar to this latter treatment of Hegel's dialectic. Yet, clearly, Bakhtin did not recognize it as such despite the fact that the neo-Kantian movement, by which he was strongly influenced, adopted many of Hegel's principles (e.g. social recognition, I–We interdependence, communal reflection on self-identity, etc.).

Although the treatment of dialogism and of dialectic in this section has been rather brief, it seems to me that there could be no objections to using both notions, that is, 'dialogism' and 'dialectic', in elaborating upon the dialogical perspective of the theory of social representations. In doing so we can adopt Bakhtin's position, according to which dialectic refers to a more abstract treatment of human cognition and language, without resorting to monologism. In this way we shall remain, terminologically and conceptually, in accord with Bakhtin's circle and with other trends for which dialogism is an epistemology of human cognition and communication.

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If They Are Not 'Cognitive Structures of Grids', What Are Social Representations?

The dialogical and dialectical position with respect to cognition and language places emphasis on the holistic and situated nature of relational phenomena, on their dynamics, heterogeneity, tension and conflict. What implications does this position have for the question as to what are social representations?

Paraphrasing Moscovici (1961/1976a), in the first instance, I shall *characterize* social representations as relational and dynamic organizations of common(-sense) knowledge and language. This characterization will certainly have to be made later more precise, both for theoretical and for empirical purposes, but here I wish to draw attention to the following question: why should one refer to *characterizing* representations rather than *defining* them?

Social representations, culture, language, cognition and any other dynamic phenomena exist only in relation to something else like figure-and-ground, and one can never capture them in their entirety. Thus, attempts to provide an exhaustive definition of such phenomena are based on a misconception of their nature. At the same time, the question as to how we define phenomena under study is natural, and is often asked with respect to social representations. Yet here we run up against the problem of how to define phenomena which are in the making, and undergoing change. At first sight, it might appear that, once again, we are dealing with the difference between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, that is, with the difference between phenomena of the natural and the human sciences mentioned above. However, it seems to me that while there might be an overlap with the *Erklären/Verstehen* distinction, here we deal primarily with the difference between defining static and single objects vs defining dynamic and relational phenomena.

Definitions of Static and Single Objects of Study

Empirical and mechanistic epistemologies have traditionally defined objects in terms of dualism between the knower and an object of knowledge: for example a banana, an atom, a hammer, and so on. They defined such objects in terms of their static properties. But, of course, we need to know what objects are. Parents need to explain to their children what an elephant is, what a ball is, what death is, and so on. We need these naïve and simplistic definitions which classify objects in terms of their properties. We need to orient ourselves in the world

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in which we live, we need to distinguish bananas from hammers and good from bad. Yet these naïve definitions can also be found in philosophical and psychological empiricism (Marková, 1982). For Locke, in the 17th century, such definitions expressed direct relations between stimulation of senses, for example sight, touch, and so on, and the properties of objects, for example colour, softness, and so on. As the senses convey the stimulation to the mind simultaneously, the mind considers all these properties together and as a result

> The complex idea which an Englishman signifies by the name swan is white colour, long neck, red beak, black legs, and whole feet, and all of these of a certain kind of noise, and perhaps, to a man who has long observed this kind of bird, some other properties: which all terminate in sensible simple ideas, all united in one common object. (Locke, 1690/1961, Vol. II, p. xxiii, 14)

Empiricist psychology of the 20th century entirely followed Locke's position:

> Most natural concepts are defined by relevant attributes which affect several different sensory systems simultaneously. Members of the class of objects called 'banana', for example, are yellow (visual), elongated (visual or tactual), soft (tactual), and rather sweet (taste and smell). (Bourne, 1966, pp. 59–60)

Studies of concept formation in psychology, too, were based on the idea that the individual has acquired a concept once he or she is able to select attributes which define the concept in question. For example, for Bruner, Goodnow and Austin (1956), 'the definition of an "influential" person could be: over 50, rich, Protestant and moderately aggressive' (Marková, 1982, p. 48).

It is doubtful, though, that what psychologists define as concepts will have much similarity with concepts which form parts of theories. In theories, concepts refer to abstract phenomena which can generate hypotheses and develop theories further. In psychology, it is sometimes ignored that although they may have the same name, 'concepts' referring directly to objects in terms of their membership in certain classes, and theoretical concepts generating hypotheses—e.g. interaction, trust, themata—are two different phenomena. The former kind of 'concepts' is often used to include, in an all-embracing manner, the latter kind of concepts, which, as a result are also defined in terms of their stable attributes. In empirical psychology, concepts and their attributes then become variables which can be manipulated. One can find that culture, social representations, cognitions, and so on, are often treated as dependent and independent variables in experimentation.

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Operationalism

Bearing these issues in mind, perhaps it is not so surprising that the question 'how do you define social representations?' is asked in the same manner as if, when talking about social representations, we were dealing with objects like a swan, a banana, a hammer, and so on. What is more surprising is the frequent question 'how do you operationalize representations?' This request is still made not only by those who subscribe to some versions of empiricism and positivism, or at least to their residuals, but also by those who would never perceive themselves as being associated in any way with these approaches.

Interestingly, Bridgman's (1927) operationalism had a particular influence in psychology, manifesting itself as a distrust of everything that could not be expressed in simple definitions. Stevens (1935a) viewed operationalism as a revolution in psychology that enables 'a straightforward procedure for the definition and validation of concepts and which applies the procedure rigorously in a scrutiny of all fundamental concepts in psychology' (p. 323). This procedure tests the meaning of concepts by means of concrete operations by which the concept is determined. True, it was primarily behaviourism (e.g. Skinner, 1945; Stevens, 1935a, 1935b) which adopted operationalism. However, the question as to how theoretical terms could be brought into relation with observation and with measurement, thus cleansing them of operationally indefinable elements, still remains powerful in many branches of psychology that aspire to become an exact science.

Yet even Smedslund (1998) emphasizes precise definitions of interdependent phenomena in his Psychologic. His arguments for precision as a precondition for the application of logic, which, for him, is essential in scientific argumentation, are premised on a total misunderstanding of the theory of social representations. This misunderstanding is based on the fact that Smedslund's starting points are elements rather than relations, and that it is from elements that he builds relations, rather than vice versa. Thus he maintains that although social representations are 'complex, fuzzy and variable, they can, nevertheless by analysed in terms of simple, precise and invariant concepts, such as those provided by Psychologic' (Smedslund, 1998, p. 436). Since he starts from wrong assumptions about the theory of social representations, it is not clear what can be achieved, theoretically or empirically, by his simple definitions. While Smedslund appeals to common sense in terms of simple definitions, in Moscovici's sense common sense has structure, and is relational and holistic in nature.

Doise (1990) comes close to a dialogical position when he defines social representations as organizing principles of symbolic processes

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which involve cognitive and social relations between social phenomena and individuals. They manifest themselves in communication as the organizations of representational contents that are symbolic and dynamic. Moreover, Doise insists on the plurality of processes and their functions that must be conceived at their different and hierarchically organized levels involving both individual and social phenomena.

Epistemology of Social Change

The reason why one should characterize rather than define social representations should now have become clearer. Social representations are phenomena in the making, that is to say, phenomena in social change rather than static objects. Social change underlies most of the phenomena which social psychologists study, whether conversation, the interdependence between the individual and society, group dynamics, growth and development of the self and identity, and so on.

Despite its ubiquity, social change appears to be extremely difficult to conceptualize. Some people, like the founder of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure, thought that one could capture the changes in language by studying sequences of stable, that is, synchronic states—something like a succession of stable pictures, which, if projected sufficiently quickly, would give an impression of a moving film. For others, like Volosinov (1929/1973), this was not good enough. Change is not just a succession of events. Instead, there is also simultaneity involved in change. For instance, meanings of words are joint constructions between the conversing participants.

Traditional Platonic/Cartesian epistemology was concerned not with the phenomena in change but with stability. It defined knowledge of objects in terms of dualism between the knower and the object of knowledge. In knowledge or in understanding, the human mind represents or mirrors the object of knowledge. The more exact the representation or mirroring, the more exact the knowledge or understanding. In order to ask questions about change, one starts with elements that are stable.

In contrast to traditional Platonic/Cartesian epistemology, which has as a starting point the relation between the knower and an object of knowledge, that is, I–Object, constructivist approaches start from the relation between individual cognition, 'social' cognition (e.g. socially shared knowledge, ideology, beliefs, etc.) and an object of social knowledge. Representation, rather than being an exact mirror of the object in question, is a process of reconstruction and creation. It involves both

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reconstruction of socially (culturally, historically) shared knowledge and its creation and innovation in the individual's activity.

Construction as an approach, of course, is not new, and one can find it throughout the hundred years of the history of psychology. It underlies the work of Baldwin, Vygotsky, Piaget, Karl Bühler, Peirce, as well as contemporary theories of social construction of knowledge by Arbib and Hesse (1986), Berger and Luckmann (1967), Taylor (1995) and others. For example, Arbib and Hesse (1986) challenge the positivist or verificationist foundational epistemology by drawing attention to a tradition according to which reality is constructed rather than given. They propose a model in which the unit of representation is a 'schema' and it has both a synchronic and a diachronic aspect. While the former aspect refers to socially accumulated and schematic knowledge, which is mutually and culturally shared, the latter aspect refers to the knowledge of the individual as it is continuously updated during the process of perception. Avoiding the term 'epistemology' as overloaded with positivist assumptions, Arbib and Hesse develop a potential basis for their new theory of the 'construction of knowledge' with schema theory as the new framework for this cognitively and schema-based holistic system.

However, various constructivist approaches differ enormously with respect to whether they make their epistemological stance explicit or not; whether they consider it important, and if so, how important; whether their explicit epistemological stance affects their theories; and so on. For example, discursive psychology claims that 'it has developed a relativistic and reflexive approach to knowledge where what counts as knowledge in different social and cultural settings is part of what is at stake in discourse practices' (Potter & Edwards, 1999, p. 450). In contrast, Berger and Luckmann (1967) focus in the social construction of knowledge on the historical and social structure and on the social sedimentation of knowledge. Both knowledge and communication are determined by sedimented 'social conditions', 'social circumstances' or, generally, by social structures. These structures exert considerable constraints on individual and interindividual performances. Nevertheless, such performances have an impact on social structures and are conducive to social change. Moreover, individuals have different access to the social stock of knowledge, which is distributed unequally. As a result, differential access to knowledge and communication produces more or less decreased possibilities for the life opportunities of individuals involved.

Finally, the co-construction approach places emphasis on the semio-genetic nature of human development (Valsiner, 1998). Valsiner's

theory specifically emphasizes the reconstruction of cultural messages by individuals in novel and heterogeneous ways. In this process the individual is conceived to be in a constant process of becoming while maintaining relative temporal stability (Valsiner, 1998, p. 29). This theory raises the question of how people create, maintain and transform knowledge, which pertains both to individual cognition and to socio-cultural knowing with respect to the simultaneity of the personal and the social (see also Dodds, Lawrence, & Valsiner, 1997; Valsiner, 1989, 1998; Valsiner & Lawrence, 1996).

What is important in my argument are those constructivist and, more specifically, co-constructivist approaches which explicitly substitute, in epistemological terms, the fundamentalist Ego–Object dyad with the dialogical Ego–Alter–Object (representation) triad.

Triadic Relations in the Theory of Social Knowledge

For dialogism in general, and for the theory of social representations specifically, the reference point is change. In other words, in order to ask questions about stability, one presupposes change. For Moscovici, there was a fundamental question: how can static epistemologies be transformed into dynamic epistemologies?

There are two kinds of static epistemologies: first, the Platonic/Cartesian, which concerns the relation between the knower (or his/her internal representations) and the object of knowledge; second, the collectivist, e.g. the Durkheimian, which concerns the relation between collective representations and the object of knowledge.

The answer to Moscovici's question is that social knowledge is co-constructed by the knower (I) and by the other (other individual, group, society, culture). It was on the basis of this idea that Moscovici (1984a) proposed the dynamic semiotic triangle Ego–Alter–Object (or symbol/representation) as an essence of the theory of social knowledge (Figure 1). Moreover, the interdependent dyadic relation Ego–Alter presupposes not only asymmetry but, above all, the relation of tension. In other words, what moves this epistemology forward, is tension and détente.

This basic theoretical schema of the dynamic semiotic triangle can be further developed as follows. One can propose that in the theory of social representations the dyadic relation Ego–Alter can be concretized in different ways. For example, in this semiotic triangle, Ego–Alter can represent different kinds of relationships such as I/group; I/the other person; I/nation; I/community; and so on. In other words, knowledge is co-constructed by the dyad in question in different semiotic triangles which are nested one inside another. Tension and détente, however, is
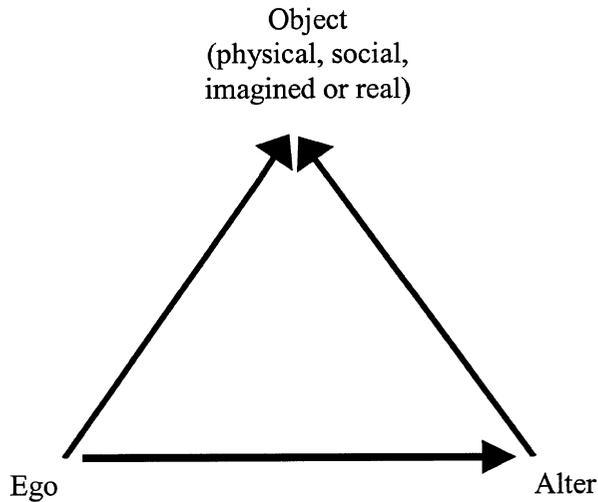
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Object
(physical, social,
imagined or real)

Ego   Alter

Figure 1. Semiotic triangle (from Moscovici, 1984a, p. 9)

a precondition of any action and therefore, if the theory of social rep-
resentations is the theory of knowledge based on dynamic semiotics,
then, by definition, the theory of action is part of the theory. Actions
of individuals are meaningful only with respect to socio-historical
contexts of which they are part. For example, contribution to a con-
versation is meaningful with respect to a genre of the conversation in
question. Here we have a triangle: contribution/genre/meaning(s). A
genre in turn has a meaning only in particular social and cultural
contexts. Here we have a triangle: genre/social and cultural
context/interpretation(s) (see also Marková, 1990). More generally,
phenomena are embedded or are complementary with their respective
complements or antinomies, with which they are in mutual tension
and as a result of resolution of tension they mutually develop (or co-
develop). These different kinds of nested and interdependent triangles,
however, are no more than the starting epistemological presupposi-
tions for the development of the theory of social knowledge. The
theory requires adequate concepts.

Three-Step Processes at Work

As the theory of social representations is a theory of social knowledge,
it is the theory from which other social psychological theories branch
off or to which they are conceptually subordinated. In order to see,

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concretely, the actual working of a triadically conceived social change, let us turn attention to the theory of innovation, another of Moscovici's (1979) major theories. The theory of innovation is, in fact, a *theory of action.* The title of the book in French explaining this theory is *Psychologie des Minorités Actives.* This theory is based on the dialectical conception of majorities and minorities. It brings home the fact that the two groups mutually define one another: one cannot have a majority without a minority. Studying their mutual co-construction, one can bring out various kinds of triadic relations and movement of meaning, which take place through tension, conflict, struggle for social recognition, and through the use of a particular behavioural style.

The Genetic Model

Textbooks of social psychology usually present Moscovici's (1976b) theory of social change in terms of two separate effects of influence, one coming from the majority and one coming from the minority. In other words, they continue treating minority/majority influence in terms of *a one-way functional* rather than of a *two-way genetic model.* The theory of social change, or, better, the theory of active minorities, is primarily concerned with changes which take place through dissent of minorities creating tension and conflict by bringing about innovative solutions to problems so created and by being committed.

The basis of the theory is the two-way co-constructive genetic model. One can depict it as a kind of Odysseus story which goes like this. Odysseus, on his voyage home from the Trojan War, must act on the world around him in order to survive. He kills his enemies and overcomes various kinds of danger. By his actions he changes the world. These actions have a boomerang effect on him as an individual. As he changes the world around him, this different world also alters him, so that when he comes home from his travels, he is not recognized by his wife, who has been waiting for him for years. This basic reconstruction of *The Odyssey*, which, as will be shown, is well represented by the genetic model, can be found in various guises not only in the romanticist philosophy of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and others, but also in romantic literature, including Goethe's *Faust.*

Thus, here we have a solution to the problem of change which neither Saussure could deal with in linguistics and semiotics nor Piaget in child development. Saussure came up only with layers of static, which he called synchronic, stages to portray language change. Piaget viewed child development in terms of stages. Neither could show how one layer or stage transforms into the one which follows.

The genetic model is not about shifting positions in interaction

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between minorities and majorities, nor is it about mutuality or perspective taking. It is, primarily, about tension and conflict resulting from differences which are judgemental, where consensus is not possible. It is the relation in which, similarly to Rosenzweig's dialogical position (see above), tension and conflict are intensified through judgement of one party by the other. The genetic model in *Psychologie des Minorités Actives* works through various social psychological factors like social recognition (see below), consistent behavioural style, innovative strategies, to mention but a few. These factors have been studied mainly in the laboratory, although, in his theoretical writing, Moscovici usually refers to dissident movements and to processes, which cannot be manipulated in the laboratory.

Let us first consider how co-change in minorities and majorities has been studied in the laboratory. Social psychologists usually examine the effect of influence using the following pattern: respondents first express their opinion about the subject matter individually; then they are subjected to the influence of a minority as a group; and, subsequently, they are retested individually. The retested individuals may or may not overtly change their attitudes, that is, they may or may not show the manifest effect of minorities' influence. Yet, Moscovici argues, even if the manifest effect does not show up, it does not mean that there is no effect at all. Latent effect, which is often ignored in social psychology, is equally important. From the analytic point of view, latent effect is in fact even more important because, using subtle techniques, one can show the work of tension, conflict and of unconscious change of opinions and attitudes. Moscovici (1980) refers to latent effect as conversion:

> The conversion produced by a minority implies a real change of judgments of opinions, not just an individual's assuming in private a response he has given in public. This is why we are often unaware of the profound modification in our perceptions or our ideas from contact with deviants. (p. 217)

A number of ingenious laboratory studies based on the concept of conversion have shown, for example, the shift in the perceptual threshold (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1991), differences between conscious and unconscious influences (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1980), indirect influence (Pérez & Mugny, 1986), and influence on the content of messages vs influence on the way of thinking (Butera, Legrenzi, Mugny, & Pérez, 1991–1992), to mention but a few. The essence of these experiments is to give evidence that although no manifest change may exist in the *related* experiments, there are, nevertheless, changes in attitudes, perceptions, content of

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responses, ways of thinking, in the apparently *'unrelated'* experiments. This effect, it is argued, results from conflict in the minds of respondents.

Yet, despite their interesting results, the laboratory studies of minority/majority conflict in terms of manipulation of variables cannot capture the heterogeneity of socio-cultural effects which operate in conflicts of ordinary life. Without denying their contribution to the theory, laboratory studies stem from 'researchers' preoccupation with doing their own work in a systematic and straightforward manner' (Díaz, 2000). Therefore, they need to be complemented by good descriptions coming from real-life situations. Díaz shows that good cultural description without imposing an overarching theory enables better understanding of historical events than the premature ordering of data into grids.

Just like in Rosenzweig's and Bakhtin's conceptions of dialogue, tension and conflict do not come from a few variables but are underlined by multiple and heterogeneous reasons, many of which are culturally and historically based. In fact, one should put the question in a different way. Why is it that despite historical and cultural effects, some aspects of tension and conflict can be produced even in the laboratory? Such a question, though, is hardly ever asked.

Dissidence and Totalitarianism

While laboratory studies show some aspects of the genetic model, careful observation in real life brings the Odysseus story out into full daylight.

Moscovici's essay on 'La dissidence d'un seul' is published in the French version of *Psychologie des minorités actives* (1979) but not, unfortunately, in the English version of the book published under the title *Social Influence and Social Change* (1976b). The essay is an observation and a description of the dissident writer Solzhenitsyn and of his impact on various majorities in the Soviet Union, such as the authorities of the Politburo, intellectuals and lay people. Consequently, Solzhenitsyn's and majorities' co-actions affected him personally. In his essay, Moscovici describes events from the time Solzhenitsyn published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1963 to the time he was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974. Using the genetic model, we can view the following sequence of events. The novel was first published in the journal *Novyj Mir* after Solzhenitsyn had consistently refused to make any changes in his writing, which bothered the Soviet authorities. Thus, he created a conflict between himself and the Politburo, which, despite attempts to become more liberal in the early 1960s, could not

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cope with Solzhenitsyn's exposing the taboos of Soviet totalitarian practices. The publication of the novel was a jointly constructed action: it was a dialogue of intensified judgement in which compromise was impossible. Tension and conflict so created was both manifest and latent. Manifestly, for example, Solzhenitsyn was called satirically the Father of Justice, and he became someone visible in the eyes of the general public and of intellectuals. Latently, there was a newly created problem by *Novyj Mir*'s publication of the novel, namely how to cope with censorship and with dissidents of Solzhenitsyn's type. The Politburo used to deal with such individuals privately at the personal level, whether by interrogation, threats or producing fear in order to prevent public dramatization of the problem. Finally, how did Solzhenitsyn's actions affect him as a person?

I knew of course from my personal experience that people in a totalitarian regime live a divided life—one private and one public—and that this schizophrenic existence in order to survive is an essential moral problem for many. The dissident Czech writer, and later President, Václav Havel described it in many of his writings as a loss of identity, authenticity and even of language. In his absurd dramas he gave evidence how the adapted individuals no longer used normal speech in its colourful plurality but instead they communicated only apparently, *as if*. Havel's recurrent theme was a concern to show that to be politically successful depends on uttering the right phrases at the right time. The consequence is that people talk to each other only apparently: they say words but they say nothing, and 'the word that is not guaranteed by a life loses its significance' (Havel, 1985, p. 359). One of the main messages in Havel's plays was that the language of non-communication leads to a loss of moral principles and identity. In this way, the capacity of language to express the spectrum of speech genres disappeared and was substituted by a single genre of colourless monotony.

A Czech dissident, Milan Šimečka (1985), expressed how he, like many others, conformed to the regime rather than courageously take an uncompromising moral stand:

> I would employ words that were not my own, but the expression of a venial hypocrisy. . . . I would separate truth in general from specific truths, injustice in general from specific cases of injustice, violence in general from specific instances of violence . . . in this way I evaded pointing the finger and shouting: 'The Emperor has no clothes.' (That has always been the riskiest course to take.) (p. 141)

A compromising majority, therefore, behaving as if the emperor had clothes, helped to perpetuate the status quo. The regime accepted the

as if behaviour of the silent majority, and the silent majority continued its double life and became even oblivious to that fact.

Moscovici has reminded me that the dissidents, however, by sticking to their behavioural style, destroyed the double life. By rejecting compromise, they could live their own single life, which was the reward for problems they experienced like interrogation, censorship, and so on. True, to adopt such an attitude was certainly more possible for those who were in the public eye, like Havel, Solzhenitsyn or Sacharov, and who also had tremendous influence on the international scene. If you were someone small and without prestige, it was easy for the regime to liquidate you. Moscovici shows in his essay that the dissident movement had a boomerang effect on the majority in the political power; the threat and anguish aimed at dissidents returned back to the communist authorities. In whatever way they treated the stubborn dissidents, the boomerang effect was there. If they were expelled from the country, the dissidents influenced public opinion from the outside. If they were persecuted in the country, they made trouble from the inside.

The genetic model, in particular when used to describe real conflicts, also brings into focus the basic motive for change, for identity and for the development of the self: social recognition. It can be viewed as a social psychological concretization of Hegel's master–slave allegory or that of Odysseus. By acting on the world, I not only change it, I also change myself, and I recognize this change in myself and in the world.

The Fundamental Concepts of the Theory of Social Representations

Having drawn attention to the dialogical epistemology underlying the theory of social representations, and having shown its working in the theory of active minorities, in the last part of this paper I shall discuss some basic concepts of the theory of social representations. Specifically, I shall present them as dialogical concepts. Focusing on some core concepts and indicating how they generate social representations and hypotheses, this section should also make it clear that there is an essential difference between a representation as an idea and the theory of social representations as a theory of social knowledge.

The idea of representation already appears in Descartes, Malebranche, Locke and their philosophical successors. It was from the Cartesian idea of representation, and from the philosophical tradition based on the mental processes of the individual, that the notion and the idea of representation entered into modern cognitive psychology,

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which has often been characterized as the study of internal representations. Durkheim (1898) distinguished between an individual representation and a collective or social representation. In addition to Durkheim, the idea of social or collective representation has occurred in a variety of guises, for example in Lévy-Bruhl, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bühler and Bourdieu. While these authors use, either implicitly or explicitly, the idea of representation, they have not developed it into a theory and, even less so, into a theory of social knowledge. One cannot say that, for example, Durkheim's distinction between individual and collective (social) representations or Vygotsky's theoretical insights concerning children's acquisition of ideological concepts would qualify as a theory.

In contrast, what makes the theory of social representations a theory of social knowledge is the conceptualization:

- of the dynamics of the thought, language and social practices through socio-cultural and individual phenomena by means of tension, conflict and polarization of oppositions;
- of the set of interrelated and dialogically defined concepts generating hypotheses.

The concepts I have chosen here form by no means an exhaustive list. They only serve as a basis on which to build systematically further concepts and their mutual relations, and to generate hypotheses.

Themata

Historically speaking, the concept of themata as culturally shared primitive preconceptions, images and pre-categorizations arrived into the theory of social representations only recently (Moscovici, 1992; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994). To my mind, the concept of themata, more than any other, not only shows the socio-cultural embeddedness of social thinking, but also provides a basic starting point for generating social representations.

The precursors of this concept can be found in philosophy, sociology and the history of science, where themata seem to underlie theories of scientific thinking (Holton, 1978). By themata, Holton (1978) means preconceptions in science which usually involve dyads or triplets such as 'atomicity/continuum, simplicity/complexity, analysis/synthesis, or constancy/evolution/catastrophic change. Such oppositions help to explain the formation of traditions of schools of thought, and the course of controversies' (p. ix). He points out that scientific imagination seems to be guided by implicit fidelity to one or more such themata.

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Thematic analysis therefore reveals some constancies or continuities in the progression of science which extend through scientific revolutions.

One can suggest here that Taylor's (1989) analysis of certain kinds of dichotomies—e.g. inner/outer or higher/lower in the history of the theory of self-knowledge—also shows the same thematic nature of dichotomies. Taylor shows that certain principles of mediaeval thought extend to Renaissance thought despite the revolutionary changes in what could be called the theory of self-knowledge. In mediaeval thought, Augustine developed the theory according to which actions coming from the soul—i.e. from the inside—have moral superiority over bodily and worldly actions. Augustine elaborated the inside/outside polarity—i.e. spiritual vs bodily—into the philosophy of self-knowledge. He considered that while the component 'outside' was something which people have in common with animals, 'inside' is the soul, specific to people. Augustine was a Christian philosopher and inwardness was the way of reaching God. Augustine shifts the centre of attention from the world of objects to the inner world, to the activity of knowing and self-knowing, and to reflexivity. This is where God is to be found (Taylor, 1989, p. 130). In seeking self-knowledge, the knower turns inwards, leaving the outside world behind as something non-essential. The first-person pronoun, that is, the I as a thinker and as a knower, was then most clearly spelled out by Descartes. By making the first-person standpoint essential for self-knowledge, the inner/outer polarity again took a new turn. One part of the inner/outer polarity, that of inner, became so vastly superior to the other that the outer practically disappeared. The Cartesian theory of self-knowledge supported individualism as a new philosophy.

Referring to the work of Copernicus, Holton (1978) claims that two themata predominate in his work and that they produce the mutual accommodation of theory and data: simplicity and necessity. The antithetical thema is that of complexity. In general terms, thematic analysis is based on the idea of thematically opposing conceptions in the history or philosophy of science, like the following: objectivity vs subjectivity vs anything goes; logical vs empirical vs psychological studies; rules of reason vs mystical conversion; rational vs irrational relativism vs absolutism; analytical-reductionistic vs holistic; reason vs imagination.

However, despite the fact that Holton's themata appear as dyads or triads, they do not seem to be conceptualized dialectically. Rather, it is as if two or three different camps each proposed a different antithetical thema. For example, one camp proposes atomism while the opposite camp proposes the thema of continuum. Holton (1978) says:

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> Antithetical couples—such as evolution and devolution, constancy and simplicity, reductionism and holism, hierarchy and unity, the efficacy of mathematics (for example, geometry) versus the efficacy of mechanistic models as explanatory tools—are not too difficult to discern, particularly in cases that involve a controversy or a market advance beyond the level of common work. (p. 10)

Thus while the idea of antinomies and or polarities is an essential characteristic of dialogical movement, rather than being conceived as different guns in battles by different armies, to achieve their force, antinomies must be conceptualized as mutually interdependent. Taking the form of themata in the theory of social representations, this force is achieved.

Themata in Common Sense

As Holton (1978) himself points out, many scientific themata stem from common thinking. Yet common thinking is dialogical, and pre-categorizations and taxonomies of oppositional nature are dialogically interdependent (Moscovici, 1992; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994).

What now requires examination is the following problem: why and under what circumstances do certain oppositional taxonomies become themata? In other words, when do oppositional taxonomies start generating social representations?

In principle, all oppositional taxonomies can become themata. Many of them exist implicitly in our common sense, and they may never be brought to the explicit attention of social thinking. This is so because there may never be any reasons, or at least there may be no reasons for many generations, for their thematization—although it may be difficult to think about an oppositional taxonomy which would never be thematized. Even if we choose a perceptual taxonomy like a colour—e.g. red/not red, green/not green, white/not white, etc.—which might be considered as relatively 'neutral' in comparison to, say, freedom/oppression or moral/immoral, we may not get very far. For a while, colour taxonomies may have no more than their perceptual or aesthetic importance. Sooner or later, however, even they may become thematized, that is, brought to public attention. Thus, one can specu-late whether the preference for 'blue' in early Italian Rennaissance paintings was only a matter of an aesthetic choice or whether it had a specific symbolic significance. One can pose a similar question in regard to the preference for 'red' in the painting of Russian icons. In the latter case, one can also wonder as to whether the 'red' of a Russian icon transformed itself into a symbol of a communist state.

Thematization, perhaps it is evident, can arise from minority/

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majority confrontation which, in its origin, could be unconscious. As judgemental differences between groups intensify and consensus is no longer possible, thematization is a way towards resolution.

Social Recognition as Thema

In his study of the homeless mind, analysing the structures of pre-modern societies and their hierarchical order, Berger (1973) brought attention to the code of honour. He has shown not only that honour expressed status among the socially equal, but that its role was also to maintain boundaries between different social strata. It defined the codes of behaviour and of etiquette. Thus there were different codes of honour for different social groups, but it was the aristocratic concept of honour, together with the pursuit of glory, which attracted great literature and became eternalized by individuals like Corneille, Shakespeare, Molière, among many others. Honour was above the law, it was more important than life. As Corneille says in *Le Cid*: 'Who dares to deprive me of my honour but is afraid to take my life?' In fact, as Corneille showed, honour meant disobedience of the legal authority in the hierachical order in society.

With the transition to modernity, when the hierarchical order of society and unequal rights among people became obsolete, the concept of honour became problematized and thematized. A number of 18th-century philosophers, like Rousseau and Montesquieu, were preoccupied with the idea of changing a society based on hierarchies into a society based on egalitarian principles, on the principles of dignity. As Berger (1973) argued, dignity meant that all people, regardless of race, beliefs, colour or gender, shared that same humanity, and that human identity was independent of institutional roles.

Berger explicitly related dignity to modern identity and the problems arising from this relationship. The breakdown of pre-modern society not only brought freedom, equality and human rights but it also shattered the pre-modern identity which was tied to institutions, kinship, family and, in general, social structures. Pre-modern identity was a stabilized identity which, according to Berger, was based on a high degree of symmetry between the individual and society. This meant that the individual's identity merged with his or her social and family roles, was passed from generation to generation, and was not questioned: it was taken for granted.

The transition from honour to dignity also meant the transition from pre-modern to modern identity. Just like honour, pre-modern identity became problematized and thematized. With their problematization, the thema of social recognition gained attention. As Taylor (1992)

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points out, what was important at the time was not a sudden emergence of social recognition. Rather, it was a realization that the conditions for social recognition could be difficult to establish. He maintains that in pre-modern societies identity did not depend on social recognition. Of course, the concept of social recognition, as it was formulated explicitly by Hegel in the 19th century, had not existed then anyway. As in pre-modern societies identities were given, the question of being recognized simply could not arise. Only when people started to create their individualized identities and when their expectation of recognition of these identities was not fulfilled, when the desired freedom also brought loneliness and isolation, could the search for social recognition have become a thema. One can say that our identity is shaped not only by social recognition, but, perhaps, and even more, by its opposite, that is, by non-recognition or misrecognition by others. It can be felt as harm, oppression, imprisonment in a reduced humanity (see Taylor, 1992).

Thus for the individualized identity, as it emerged in the European culture towards the end of the 18th century, social recognition became part of common sense, that is, an ontology of modernity. Consequently, the search and the struggle for social recognition became essential to social survival and to the extension of life. In language it expresses itself in terms of freedom of choice, responsibility, control of environment, justice and rights. It is essential for the development of the self. As part of common sense, the need for social recognition is transmitted from generation to generation. To have the feeling that one is deprived of social recognition means not to be able to function as a human being with respect to things which matter, for example democracy, as we shall see later.

Generating Social Representations from Themata
Thus we adopt thinking in oppositions or antinomies implicitly as part of our socialization into culture. We define what is long by reference to what is short; what is white is opposed to what is non-white; and so on. However, only some, but not all antinomic or oppositional categories become themata. Themata are such oppositional categories which, in the course of history, become problematized; for one reason or another they become the focus of attention, and a source of tension and conflict.

During socialization the child learns quite naturally to distinguish between which things he or she can eat and and which should not be eaten. But so do animals. Such taxonomy could be in its origin biological—and not dialogical or even social. But in human societies, only

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things which are 'clean' and not 'dirty' should be consumed. However, although probably all cultures have a clean/dirty taxonomy, what is and what is not considered dirty differs from one culture to another. For example, if food is dropped on the ground, it is no longer edible in some cultures but still edible in others. This might depend not only on the economic conditions of this or that country, but also on religious beliefs—e.g. 'Food should not be thrown away' (see Josephs & Valsiner, 1998)—or on cultural habits. Continuing with the same theme, some cultures do not eat living creatures, like oysters, while for others this is not only acceptable, but most natural. Avoidance of eating meat, or of certain kinds of animal, of certain parts of animal, and so on, all testify to the existence of an oppositional edible/inedible taxonomy as something quite basic in daily living, something culturally and historically determined.

When a crisis occurs, the edible/inedible taxonomy will change its boundaries and will be dialogically reconstructed. The Chernobyl disaster, 'mad cow disease', pollution of animal feed—all such events rapidly change the content of what comes under 'edible' and 'inedible'. At the other end of the spectrum, urine and excrement may become 'edible' if there is nothing else to eat, and if the only alternative to consuming such 'normally inedible' things is death. Clearly, the taxonomy itself may give rise to public discussions, disputes, arguments, and it may become a thema from which social representations of phenomena like food, the animal, health, dirt, life and death, and so on, are generated.

Some themata appear essential for survival and for the extension of life. For example, it is essential to humanity that people treat each other with dignity, that they have choices with respect to their activities, style of life, that at least an essential distinction exists between what is considered moral and immoral, and so on. An example of such basic themata is social recognition, discussed in the previous section, which involves oppositional categories such as freedom/oppression, justice/injustice, and so on.

Anchoring and Objectification

Since social representations are concerned with common(-sense) knowledge, which is organized and structured, one needs to address the question as to how this organization and structuration of common(-sense) knowledge takes place. This is done by anchoring and objectification. In contrast to themata, the notions of anchoring and objectification were part of the theory of social representations from the beginning. They are processes by which representations are

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formed, maintained and changed. Like themata, these two concepts have their predecessors, and again, in social representations, in contrast to the use of the notions anchoring and objectification in other theories, these are dialogical (dialectical) concepts. Moreover, I view anchoring and objectification to be complementary to one another.

Anchoring—i.e. classifying, naming, etc.—always takes place when we are faced with new and unfamiliar phenomena. Moscovici (1984b, p. 43) characterizes anchoring as an inner-directed process, keeping memory in motion. Anchoring involves comparison, evaluation and integration of new and unfamiliar phenomena into existing knowledge. It is important to remember, though, that because the theory of social representations is a dialogical theory, all the processes by means of which representations are formed are, by definition, dynamic. This includes anchoring, which is a stabilizing process. However, to anchor an unfamiliar phenomenon to a familiar one, say, AIDS in the 1980s to venereal diseases, is neither to identify the former with the latter, nor to replace the former by the latter. Every process of anchoring also involves objectification, formation of new meaning of the phenomenon in question.

While anchoring is an inner-directed process relying primarily on the individual's experience and memory in classifying and naming newly understood and newly experienced phenomena, objectification, on the other hand, is an other-directed process. It is primarily a sense-making activity in which the individual, on the basis of his or her interpretation of events in the outside world, reconstructs the existing contents of representations, creates new ones, and gives meanings to these new contents. In relation to this, Moscovici (1984b) talks about fixation or concretization of an idea: what originally was perceived becomes conceived. One can say, therefore, that objectification is the process of thematization or sub-thematization. For example, during totalitarianism, the idea of democracy might be anchored in common thinking to freedom, justice and equality. When totalitarian regimes are replaced by democratic systems, people form representations of democracy by thematizing oppositional categories like freedom/oppression, justice/injustice, equality/inequality. As they newly experience instances of injustice, oppression, non-equality, in their daily life, they objectify the idea of democracy, fix it and concretize it in new conditions (Marková, Moodie, & Plichtová, 2000; Marková, in press).

Although both anchoring and objectification contribute to the stability and change of representations, anchoring is orientated towards stability, or towards remaining in the existing state; objectification, on the other hand, is orientated towards change. One can represent these

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orientations as complementary figure–ground relationships. In the case of anchoring, stability can be conceived as figure and variability as the ground. In the case of objectification, it is the other way round; variability can be conceived as figure and stability as the ground (see Figure 2).

For a social scientist a number of questions arise: under what conditions is it anchoring that is foregrounded and under what conditions is it objectification which prevails? Examples of some preliminary answers to such questions are already available. Studies of social representations of democracy in post-communist Europe show that if democracy is more or less taken for granted, it is not thematized and
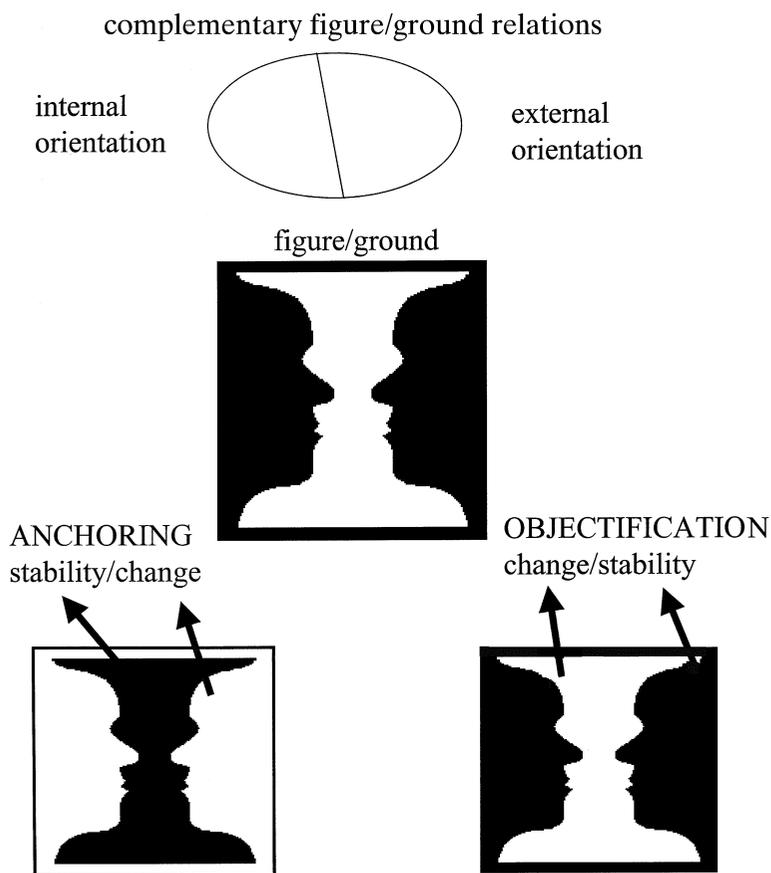

Figure 2. Anchoring and objectification

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problematized. Instead, lay participants reformulate and recycle typical points of view and common perspectives. Under such conditions, anchoring appears to prevail. On the other hand, if democracy is in the centre of people's attention, it is problematized and thematized and new meanings of democracy are created. Under such circumstances, it is objectification which is foregrounded (Marková, in press, Marková, Moodie, Farr et al., 1998; Marková, Moodie, & Plichtová, 1998).

Communicative Genres

Moscovici remarked in our recent dialogue (Moscovici & Marková; 1998, 2000) that what he had previously called systems of communication, in the context of social representations, he would now call communicative genres. Saying this, he meant that while for him the distinction between different kinds of communication was intuitively essential from the very beginning of his research into social representation, these 'systems of communication' became later known, under the influence of Bakhtin and of pragmatics generally, as communicative genres.

In particular, in *La Psychanalyse: Son image et son public* (1961/1976a), he distinguished between three systems of communication, namely diffusion, propagation and propaganda, according to the source, the goal and the logic of messages. In other contexts he considered conversation as another system of communication, essential to social psychology. Such systems of communication, or communicative genres, each have their rules of logic which shape social representations in specific ways and, at the same time, are shaped by those representations. For example, Moscovici has shown that the system of communication which he then called 'diffusion of psychoanalysis in journals' used a style which could be described as concrete, attractive and quick. It attempted to use the vocabulary of the reader in short sentences which raised attention and were amusing, such as: 'Divers into the unconscience'. In contrast, propaganda used adjectives and specific phrases, like 'psychoanalysis as pseudoscience', 'bourgeois pseudoscience', 'American pseudoscience', which intended to play an essential role in the ways these genres affected the formation and change of social representations of psychoanalysis.

The case of psychoanalysis has clearly shown that its representation was not peacefully transferred from the books on psychopathology into ordinary life. Instead, representations formed themselves in cultural and ideological combat within and between specific groups in a particular historical period: the Catholic Church, on the one hand,

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and the Communist Party, on the other. Diffusion, propagation and propaganda exerted their influence in specific ways and they challenged the social scientist to identify the specific social psychological and linguistic characteristics of those genres.

Conversation is another system of symbolic communication which generates social representations and at the same time is embedded within a system of representations and is shaped by it. In the case of psychoanalysis, talking in the context of doctor–patient interaction with the aim of cure could be one communicative genre, which might be called psychotherapy. In another context, talk with the same content but within the context of the practices of the Catholic Church could be described as a confession. These genres, while talking about 'the same' subject matter, would have specific terminology, would emphasize and de-emphasize different issues relevant to social practices of which they are part. Thus, communicative genres, whether a conversation, a prayer, a piece of propaganda or a medical interview, are not phenomena in themselves, hanging metaphysically *in vacuo* (Moscovici in Moscovici & Marková, 1998, 2000). It would be ludicrous to claim that they are, on their own, the starting points of all human activities and of social practices. Rather, they are mutually interdependent with social thinking. They are formed through social thinking and they themselves transform social thinking.

So what are communicative genres and why should they be so intimately related to social representations?

Communicative Genres as Conventions

In literary circles the notion of a speech or a communicative genre immediately evokes Bakhtin's work. While being primarily concerned with genres of great literary masters such as Rabelais and Dostoevsky, Bakhtin also emphasized that speech genres penetrate all our daily activities. We do not speak in 'neutral sentences' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986b, p. 84) but we express our evaluative attitudes towards the object of our speech, whatever that object could be. These attitudes also determine 'the choice of lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance'. Genres, although they are expressed through the mouth of the individual, are social conventions. There is no genre that would belong to a sole individual; instead, through genres, the individual conveys his or her belonging to a certain culture, a group or commitment to a certain social practice. Genres correspond 'to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and consequently, also to particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances' (Bakhtin,

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1979/1986b, p. 87). One can in this context recall Humboldt's ideas concerning the interdependence between speaking and thinking as a reflection of the soul of the people.

Just as we are born into the world of social representations, so we are born into the world of communicative genres. Children adopt speech or communicative genres naturally in their social environment as they acquire language. Thus we speak in different genres without even realizing that we do so. Their diversity stems from their embeddedness in specific local situations (e.g. family, therapy, social and political group), their enframing by social positions of interlocutors, their personal interrelations, and so on. The proliferation of different communicative genres in all life-situations was already noted by Volosinov (1929/1973), who, in fact, spoke about behavioural genres, thus interconnecting communication with action:

> Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience and, hence, a particular repertoire of little behavioral genres. The behavioral genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal, and social composition. The behavioral genre is a fact of the social milieu ... it meshes with that milieu and is delimited and defined by it in all its internal aspects. (Volosinov, 1929/1973, p. 97)

What is clearly implied by such a characteristic of genres is their conventional and institutional nature. Thus for a communicative activity to be called a genre, it must be recognized as such, even if only implicitly, by members of the community of which it is part.

The Double Orientation of Communicative Genres

Despite being conventionalized and institutionalized, speech and communicative genres, like social representations, have a double orientation: they are both relatively stable and dynamic organizations of common thinking and language. While a genre is a relatively stable social product, embedded in its socio-historical background, it changes through communicative practices—a point which, again, echos Humboldt. Referring to Dostoyevsky's work, Bakhtin (1984) characterizes genre as living in the present yet remembering its past: 'Genre is the representative of creative memory in the process of literary evolution, which is precisely why genre is capable of guaranteeing the unity and the continuity of this evolution' (p. 142). And elsewhere he says:

> Cultural and literary traditions (including the most ancient ones) are preserved and continue to live, not in the subjective memory of the

individual, nor in some collective 'psyche', but in the objective forms of culture itself (including linguistic and discursive forms); in this sense, they are intersubjective and interindividual, and therefore social; that is, their mode of intervention in literary works—the individual memory of creative individuals almost does not come into play. (Bakhtin, 1979/1986b, p. 397)

In social representations, this dialectic double orientation towards stability and dynamism is reflected, too, in the fact that they are stabilized in culture and renewed and changed through the activities of individuals. To my mind, it is the dialectic nature of anchoring, the orientation towards stability and objectification, that is, the orientation towards change, which also brings into focus the interdependence between social representations and communicative genres. The claim that social representations could be seen as being pragmatic presuppositions 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.

Communicative Genres and Thematization

Like representations, genres cannot be operationalised. François (1998) maintains that the attempts to define genres precisely or to provide an exhaustive inventory of genres are based on a misconception as to their nature. One can, of course, outline general characteristics of a genre and provide a general typology of genres, but, just like any dynamic phenomena that exist only in relation to something else, one can never capture them in their entirety. One could say, following Rommetveit (1974), that ordinary language provides us with culturally and socially transmitted drafts of contracts. As Rommetveit points out (p. 26), a pluralistic world is by definition a world of multitude of relations, of varieties and heterogeneities, and it provides us with options with respect to contracts. One could add that it also provides us with options with respect to characterizations (rather than definitions) in the cases of social representations and communicative genres. We categorize states of affairs within the multifaceted social world and optionally elaborate and realize these drafts of contracts. Options, by definition, involve antinomies and oppositional contrasts, and since social representations and communication genres are only partially determined, they allow each situation to be modified and created.

Both communicative genres and social representations are concerned with thematic content. Thematization is an essential characteristic of

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genres, and it is through thematization that social representations are formed.

One can 'thematize' something which is not problematic. Such 'thematization' is likely to involve restating and recycling of what is already known without questioning it, without adding new information, puzzling over it, and so on. This could be viewed in terms of social representations as an anchored state of affairs, relatively speaking, a more passive way of thinking and talking than objectification. For example, such basic oppositional themata in thinking as freedom/oppression, justice/injustice, could be part of implicit assumptions about our social reality. As such they may remain tacit, unverbalized and transmitted from generation to generation.

Alternatively, thematization may concern something that speakers conceive as problematic. Thematization, in this case, expresses speakers' effort to understand and appropriate meaning. The theory of social representation refers to such processes as objectification: it makes out of known things the things-to-be-known (Moscovici, 1984b, p. 43). If, for one reason or another, certain issues become problematized, they are likely to be verbalized and a source of public dispute. Of course, between these two extreme cases of thematization, which could be expressed as anchoring and objectification, one can find in practice the whole range of kinds of thematization. For example, during the AIDS epidemic the subject of medical confidentiality, which was for two thousand years unquestioned, suddenly became thematized when it became possible for an individual to wilfully transmit HIV to other people. Questions about how such an issue is thematized, sub-thematized, re-thematized in relation to socio-cultural, political, economic and other circumstances have become the focus of attention. Our research in progress in post-communist Europe shows that thematization and sub-thematization of responsibility in the case of spread of HIV/AIDS is partly determined by how responsibility is distributed between the individual and society in terms of underlying social representations. Participants in discussion groups thematize and derive new themes (re-thematize) of responsibility which are dependent on culturally shared representations. This research shows that responsibility is closely related to punishment in post-communist countries like Russia and Slovakia, while in France and in Scotland responsibility is related to education. Moreover, themes appear to have their linguistic—e.g. grammatical, lexical, pragmatic—characteristics. Such questions bring into focus the interdependence between language and social representations.

From what has been discussed so far, one can say that both social

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representations and communicative genres can be characterized as dia-
logically defined organizations of common-sense knowledge and
language, except that one might change the order of words for the
former and for the latter. Social representations, as kinds of social
thinking, are expressed through symbolic communication. Communi-
cative genres, in turn, have social representations as their pragmatic
presuppositions. Social representations shape communicative genres
and communicative genres shape social representations: they are
mutually interdependent.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why the theory of social representations and
communication define, better than any other theory, the field of social
psychology today. Theory of social representations focuses on the
study of phenomena which are at the centre of social life and of the
daily reality of individuals, groups and societies, be it political, eco-
logical, related to health issues, and so on. These phenomena are
always phenomena in change and, thus, the concept of social change
is fundamental in social psychology. In contrast to any other social
psychological theory, the concept of social change is central to the
theory of social representations and communication. Moreover, the
theory is based on an epistemology which brings to the centre of atten-
tion the dynamic interdependence between socio-culturally shared
forms of thinking, communicating and acting and their transformation
through activities of individuals 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 phenomena in social change.
Bringing into focus dialogical epistemology opens social psychology
to other fields, like developmental psychology, the studies of com-
munication and mass media. By developing and pursuing system-
atically these ideas, social psychology, it is to be hoped, will become
an anthropology of modern culture.

However, one needs to go further in characterizing social represen-
tations. The theory of social representations and communication is
not simply the study of interdependence between the collectively

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experienced phenomena and their reconstitution in the minds, activities and practices of individuals and groups. It is, above all, its underlying dialogism: that is, this interdependence involves dynamic tension, the transformation of meanings and of communicative genres resulting from this interdependence, polyphony and clash. With respect to communicative genres, 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 drafts of contracts. Communicative genres, like social representations, are only partially determined, allowing them, in each situation, to be modified, created and re-created.

Acknowledgements

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Biography

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