The "*boomerang*" effect of radicalism in *Discursive Psychology*: A critical overview of the controversy with the Social Representations Theory

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INTRODUCTION

This article provides a critical overview of the controversy between the Radical approach to Discursive Psychology (RDP) and the Social Representations Theory (SRT) and aims:

a) to show what is potentially *complementary* and *contradictory* in Discursive *Psychology* (DP) and the *Social Representations Theory*, when and why they are *incompatible*, and whether and how it is possible and/or desirable to integrate these two approaches.
b) to describe how the radicalism of the socio-constructionist thesis upheld by Discourse Analysis can give rise to several hard-to-solve problems, which may then be translated into a *boomerang* effect.

In the final section, it highlights interest in dialog and "cross-fertilization" between researchers inspired by the less radical approach to discursive psychology and those inspired by the Social Representations Theory, pointing out the effect of methodological implications that would ensue.

I. RADICAL DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY VERSUS THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY: SCIENTIFIC DIALOGUE OR MONOLOGUE?

I.1. Discursive Social Psychology is not simply a method or a technique

Discursive Social Psychology (Potter, 1998) cannot simply be assumed to be a research tradition that uses Discourse Analysis as a method or technique, but presents and re-presents itself as a coherent system of epistemological options, theoretical assumptions and methodological practices which aim to provide different levels of explanations for phenomena studied by traditional social psychology's individualistic

approach. It rejects *cognitivist* psychology's classical formulations based on: 1) s*ocial nominalism*; 2) *psychological reductionism* and *sociological* reductionism; 3) *objectivism*; 4) *mentalism*; 5) *essentialism*; 6) *mechanicism*; 7) *perceptualism*. (De Grada & Bonaiuto, 2002).

Radicalizing this criticism and defining discursive psychology as incompatible with almost all widely accepted constructs, paradigms and theories of the social psychology has contributed to the development of *Critical Social Psychology* (Billig, 1987, 1991; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Ibáñez, Íñiguez, 1997; Hepburn, 2003). Viewing psychology as an ideological system to be deconstructed (Parker and Shotter, 1990) and rejecting any model inspired by complementarity with other approaches (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1998), RDP is quite distinct from other perspectives of the discursive approach, theorized as integrated and complementary with other approaches such as in van Dijk (1997a, 1997b), and those presented in the books edited by Galimberti (1992), by Orletti (1994) or reviewed by Orvig (2003), predominantly based on the French tradition of "*analyse du discours*" as a sub-discipline of linguistics. Here I refer particularly to the Discourse and Rhetoric Group at the University of Loughborough, U.K. (DARG), a rare example of excellent academic team-work by brilliant researchers including Michael Billig, Derek Edwards, David Middleton, Jonathan Potter, Charles Antaki, Alexa Hepburn and Liz Stokoe and to the most radical de-constructivist, Ian Parker of the Discourse Unit of the Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University.

The radicalization strategy established a clear scientific identity for British researchers inspired by Radical Discursive Psychology, making them immediately recognizable within the sphere of the scientific community. The visibility acquired by the most radical exponents of DP is therefore also the outcome of their specific rhetorical-communicative strategies (or practices, as they would prefer to say) which are not dissimilar from those used by "active minorities". That is to say, those based on a consistent communicative style, with a strong stamp of paradigmatic (orthodox) coherence and by group coherence, with a contractual margin of flexibility and internal differentiation.

Of course, there are nuances tailored to the specificity of each individual's intellectual production. Among these, for example, Michael Billig's *rhetorical* approach certainly has an attractive physiognomy. However one of the factors which characterizes the polemic style of the supporters of discursive psychology in its most radical versions (Parker, 1990a, 1990b), is the criticism directed at classical experimentalism as well as at other paradigms of European social psychology (such as "Social Identity" and "Social Representations") which had long been proposed as an alternative to the individualism specific to the cognitivism of the North American mold.

Taking a multi-perspective view of the evolution of the debate from the '80 and '90, it is interesting indeed to go beyond an enumeration of the criticisms (for this purpose see de Rosa, 1994), contextualize it in a wider scenario by comparing socio-constructionism to cognitivism (Gergen, 1985; Still, Costall, 1991, Shotter, 1991) and explore the dynamism of the confrontation that developed between proposed or re-read paradigms seen as compatible or mutually-exclusive.

Reaction to ever-increasing criticisms from the socio-constructionist side may be classified into strongly "antagonistic" (total refusal) positions, strongly "associative" (unconditional adhesion) or aiming towards "mediation" (search for compatibility and integration).

I.2. Antagonist, Associative and Integrative perspectives in the socio-constructionism

Faced with the emergence of socio-constructionist criticism, generally ascribed to Gergen's article-manifesto *Social Psychology as History* (1973), and faced with the subsequent radicalization of the criticism of the cognitivist mainstream of experimental social psychology by discourse analysis, various (antagonistic, inclusive or assimilative) positions have arisen, including:

— *total refusal* of the criticism expressed concerning the experimentalists (Greenwald, 1976; Jones, 1985; Schlenker, 1974; Zajonc, 1989);
— the tendency towards recognizing its *interest* for the restitution of social psychology to history and to the social dimension (Moscovici, 1988; Triandis, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991);
— and finally, as in Kruglanski & Jost's review (2000), the goal of identifying the factors of *continuity, compatibility and integration* among the two "subcultures" of social psychology as defined by the two well-known American social psychologists, identifying the differences that are not necessarily incompatible at the method level (experimental versus qualitative), and sometimes focusing on the "content" of social knowledge (socio-constructionism) and sometimes on the "processes" that determine it (experimental psychology)[1].

Mantovani (2000) and Bonaiuto (1999, 2000) work within a view towards mediation and integration of the viewpoints, both being considered valid, but having separate aims and grounds of analysis both on the level of epistemic assumptions and of methodological practices.[2]

Dickins' 2004 paper aims toward a provocative and disputable assimilation of *Socio-constructionism as Cognitive Science*, calling for integration of socio-constructionism with cognitive science (a multidisciplinary approach to the science of the mind, wider than cognitive psychology, which emerged in the last twenty years and attempts to relate brain, cognition and behavior). His core argument is that an integrated science of the mind and socially embedded action is required, based on a unifying *theory of function*, in turn based on the role of *information*. This will profit from the integration of socio-constructionism and cognitive science. Both deal with systems that undergo changes as a result of specific input: the socio-constructionist perspective stresses the *social functions*, the cognitive scientists, *natural functions* grounded in biology.

I.3. Expanding criticism from cognitivism to the Social Representations Theory

If criticisms addressed to the mainstream of experimental psychology in some way played a role in *founding* socio-constructionism, less expected and less justified were the criticisms directed to those social psychology paradigms (in particular to the theory of social representations) that for decades had taken a critical role vis-à-vis cognitive social psychology and what Potter and Billig (1992) call its *methodological individualism*.

As we already stated elsewhere (de Rosa, 1994: 278), criticisms of SRT come primarily from the English speaking world, where psycho-social research is more tightly anchored to experimental micro-paradigms and is less open to the inter-disciplinary approaches. However these criticisms do not often come from the "aficionados" of the various alternative paradigms that can be traced to the U.S. brand of *social cognition*. Researchers from these traditions usually take one of two positions: either they completely ignore the theory—despite the availability of English translations of many of the most important theoretical works and empirical research on SR—or they show interest in the SRT insofar as they see the potential for integration with various paradigms of the cognitivist mold (e.g. with cognitive schemes: see Augostinous and Innes, 1990; Kruglanski, 2001).

The most vigorous criticisms of SRT have until now been made by those researchers in the British and North American tradition who are—paradoxically—most open to adopting methodological approaches not limited to laboratory procedures and to the possibility of integrating approaches used in different disciplines, for example with ethogenics (Harré, 1984), anthropology (Jahoda, 1988) and rhetorical discursive psychology (Potter & Litton, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1992, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 1999). These authors repeatedly confess to sharing Moscovici's reservations about conventional social psychology, anchored to mechanistic and positivistic models, and they seem to accept the challenge of developing an alternative European proposal to the dominant individualistic North American tradition. They recognize that the Social Representations Theory has a number of important virtues over the more traditional social psychological theories, in particular: "a) an emphasis on the content or meaning of human life; b) an emphasis on communication as a basis for shared social understandings; c) an emphasis on the constructive processes through which versions of the world are established" (Potter & Wetherell, 1998: 139; Potter & Edwards, 1999).

According to Duveen (2000: 13), if Billig (1988n, 1993) and Harré (1984, 1998) represent notable exceptions, it is because they have entered into a dialogue of constructive engagement from rhetorical and discursive perspectives. Most commentaries from outside the mainstream have been antagonistic or even hostile to the SRT (see, for example, the catalogue of objections in Potter & Edwards, 1999).

Taking a further extreme view, the RDP enlarges this criticism to the Social Representations Theory itself and other critical paradigms which—in line with the *zeitgeist* of post-modernism and post-structuralism—also stand in opposition

to the positivism and the empiricism that dominate in traditional science (see also the critical debate between Coulter, 1989, 2005 and Potter & Edwards, 2003).

Both the Social Cognition and Social Representations Theories have been challenged by rhetorical and discursive psychology by using *antagonistic* arguments that leave no space for compatibility (Litton & Potter, 1985; Parker, 1991, 1998; Edwards, 1991; Potter, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2000; Billig, 1993; Potter and Wetherell, 1998; Potter & Edwards, 1999). The RDP indeed *does not generate, but adopts* the critical view put forward by the Social Representations Theory vis-à-vis the mainstream of contemporary experimental social psychology and its de-contextualized and non-historical approach to the study of social cognition.

This is nothing new. In 1972 Moscovici (1972/2000: 95) stated: "The weight of positivism, the tension between observational and experimental methods, and the fear of speculation are the cause of the slow development of theory in social psychology". Again in 1984 Moscovici (1984/2000: 19) wrote: "Social psychology is obviously a manifestation of scientific thought and, therefore, when studying the cognitive system it postulates that:

 (i) normal individuals react to phenomena, people or events in the same way as scientists or statisticians do and
(ii) understanding consists in information processing.

In other words, we perceive the world, such as it is, and all our perceptions, ideas, and attributions are responses to stimuli from the physical or quasi-physical environment in which we live. (. . .). Yet its seems to me that some ordinary facts contradict these two postulates."

This critical view can be accepted as a shared starting point for the two approaches (*compatibility*), although the RDP, which appeared at least two decades after the SRT, has never acknowledged the heritage of its predecessor. Assuming a polemical style, it mostly prefers auto-referential argumentation and only refers to other authors' point of views to refute them.

However, criticism formulated by the Radical Discursive Analysis with respect to the Social Representations Theory is substantial and not reducible at the methodological level.

I.4. Some of the main pillars of the RDP's *antagonistic* dispute

 (i) RDP authors *reject the ontology of cognitivism* and any form of its reified categories (scripts, schema, prototypes, representations etc.) in favor of language and its social construction as central to an understanding of everyday speech (discourse) produced by people and the media. The radical approach of "discursive" psychology may be summed up in the sentence "*there is nothing*

outside the text"[3], although this sentence can be taken as an "ontological" or "epistemic" principle (Edley, 2001).

In carrying the socio-constructionist thesis to the extreme, the RDP upholds the main pillars on which socio-constructionism is based and which may be synthesized in the *anti-essentialist and anti-realist position*. It aims to make the most of the historical-cultural and relativistic specificity of knowledge (including therein that produced by the social sciences), centered on *language as a form of social action and a pre-condition for thought* (not vice-versa as in the traditional acceptance of language as expression of thought). It puts a strong emphasis on interaction and on social practices and, consequently, on the interactive processes that create knowledge in the negotiation of social exchanges more than on unchanging cognitive structures.

The RDP-SRT dispute originates from a "*mentalist*" *reading of the SR construct*, assuming that social representations are cognitive representations.

Starting from this singularly angled viewpoint of the construction of SR, the objective of the RDP is to substitute the approach judged as "*too cognitivist*" and "*perceptualistic*" of the SRT with a more genuinely anti-cognitivist approach.

(ii) Another key point in the theoretical dispute concerns the *relationship between cognition and action*.

The SRT has maintained that social practices reflect and create in dialogue-circular type dynamics and accepts the existence of culturally shared codes of interpretation and attribution of meaning.

"The theory is also concerned with social action. For example, in his study of the social representations of psychoanalysis, Moscovici (1961) studied communicative actions like propaganda and propagation. Jodelet (1989), in her study of social representation of madness studied not only representations as thoughts but even as social practice resulting from representations." (Markova, 2003: 205). "To a certain extent, a representation that 'stands for' can also '*act for*' or 'act on behalf of' or 'instead of' those it represents (Pitkin, 1967). Apart from being symbols, the Union Jack, the Eiffel Tower, the Kremlin, and the cross are also representations of a country, a religion, etc. "What they *do* is out of proportion to what they *are*". (Moscovici, 2001: 21)

Characterized by a drastic "anti-mentalist" orientation, the RDP instead has criticized this circular vision, maintaining the usefulness of an approach centered solely on the analysis of social practices, *tout court* identified with discursive practices. In fact, the RDP proposes to analyze social behaviors of exclusively linguistic character (texts and conversation), without any reference to mentalistic concepts (whether they be attitudes, beliefs or representations).[4]

The RDP does not deny that the cognitive processes can play a certain role in explaining behaviors and social practices[5]. It does, nevertheless, uphold the usefulness of a level of analysis and of psycho-social explanation that may be separate from those used by the cognitive sciences. For the RDP the cornerstone for constructing a really anti-cognitivist approach is focusing on action and on

social practices. Through the analysis "of language use, its functions and the way accounts are constructed", it is also possible to study the representations and the way in which they are constructed in the context of the interaction[6].

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

(iii) Another assumption made by the RDP is *variability*. The variability of the representations is linked to their pragmatic nature. If the representation is an act bound to the attainment of the aims within a specific context, on varying the contexts and the goals pursued, the representation also varies.

The consequences that the radicalism of this relativistic position leads to will be discussed further on in this paper.

I.5. Disputes and confutations

It is necessary above all to note that the polemics manifested by RDP authors concerning the SRT aroused more surprise and astonishment than counter-attacks by SRT researchers. This is common both to those who implicitly feel targeted because of their SRT based theoretical-methodological options and those who more explicitly are unrecognized or considered illegitimate as regards the accuracy of their research, especially at methodological level, and for the scant treatment of problems of using investigative techniques as well as for the interpretation of the results, not always reasoned insofar as the contextual dynamics of interaction between research subjects and researcher are concerned. Emblematic in this respect is the rebuttal to Wagner, Duveen, Themel and Verma's 1999 research by Potter and Edwards, (1999).

With the intention of clearing up a series of misunderstandings by the RDP of the epistemological assumptions at the base of the SRT, in 2000 Ivana Markova gave a decisive reply to the Potter & Edwards article in *Culture & Psychology*. According to Markova, the article contained a number of incorrect and misleading claims, which attribute to the SRT properties which it does not have and confuse different levels of scientific explanation, in particular with respect to what they call "*perceptual cognitivism*" and "*information processing*".

As more closely examined in section III, "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*." (Markova, 2000: 419–420)

The misunderstanding of Moscovici's Social Representations Theory by some RDP authors sometimes makes their reading close to a "*caricature*". Furthermore it is quite surprising that they not only disown the heritage of the critical voice expressed by Moscovici (together with other valuable colleagues) since the beginning of the second half of the last century for innovating social psychology and making it authentically European, but also the fundamental role he attributes to language and communication in the genesis, exchange and transmission of social representations.

The "*cognitivist*" and "*perceptualistc*" reading, in truth, shows little respect for the formulation that Moscovici had given to this concept in qualifying the representations as "social", not only in their *content*, but also on account of their *genesis* and the communication processes they subtend and for the *functions* they perform in relationships between groups and individuals. ". . . communication and representations are considered to be the twin phenomenon of social knowledge. (. . .) For social psychologists language is not the top priority. For most of them, cognition or thinking is language-less; for some of them, language is thought-less. Our theory has, however presupposed that a social representation is *discursified* thinking, that is a symbolic cultural system involving language." (Moscovici, 2001: 28–29)

Moscovici himself has more than once (1985, 1988, 2000[7]) acknowledged several interesting implications in the rhetorical approach, although he does not believe that linguistic repertoires can correspond exactly to the nature of the SR phenomenon since a discussion is not a representation, even if every representation can be translated into a discussion. More explicitly, to the SRT is attributed an *inclusive* position in comparison with DA, describing it as "a general theory of social phenomena" or according to the expression dear to Doise (1988, 1999) as a "*grande théorie*".

Flick (1998)[8], Castro (2003), and Mazzoleni (2003) hold a position that is strongly oriented towards an integrative vision of the SRT and RDP.

Other authors (Doise, 1993[9]; de Rosa, 1994[10]; Rouquette, 1994[11]; de Rosa & Farr, 2001[12]; Duveen, 2000[13] among others) at the same time have emphasized a position that is open to an "integrative view", but is also attentive to the *distinctiveness* and the reductionism implicit in the radicalism of DA.

The usefulness of the confrontation has also been recognized by protagonists in the meta-theoretical debate about SRT, such as Potter and Billig (1992)[14].

The need for a reconstruction of these dynamics of confrontation between different paradigmatic visions within the scientific community stems from the recognition that at times it is more a question of *monologue* than of *dialogue*. It sometimes assumes the form of a conflict unilaterally pursued by the RDP in which the views of other paradigms are rhetorically used solely to reaffirm the

right to speak by difference and legitimize oneself by a position that marks territory by opposition.[15] On the other side some *inclusive* hypotheses often rest on the *mis*understandings of the epistemological assumptions of the interlocutor, than on understanding them. In other terms, it is more an assimilation than a genuine integration, which requires an analysis of distinctiveness. This, for example, is the case of Kruglanski and Jost (2000), who, animated by a peace-making intention or perhaps by assimilative imperialism of the mainstream, seem to reduce the socio-constructionist perspective to a mere orientation of "method" (experimental versus qualitative) and to the focusing on the "contents" of the social knowledge rather than on the "processes" that determine it as in experimental psychology. This position pays little attention to the emphasis dedicated by the RDP and rhetoric approach to the discursive nature of the process and to the argumentative and counter-argumentative negotiation of meanings, rather than their content.

II. AUTO-CONFUTATION OF RADICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.

In virtue of the anti-essentialistic and relativistic positions that arise in contestualism and extreme *contingentism*, the most radical versions of Discourse Analysis appear subject to a series of auto-confutations.

II.1. Making relativism relative

The question *making relativism relative* is a great deal older. Plato already noted that the sophistic relativism occurring in a "non-relativisable" situation, went so far as to auto-confute itself. Still in a philosophical vein but in a 19th century philosophical horizon, Franca D'Agostini (1999: 285) identifies a series of "*paradigmatic anomalies*" in the context of a critical review of radically relativistic and contestualistic philosophical theories, which may be summed up as follows:

(a) "by declaring the absolute plurality of the truth, the unity of the specific assertion is presumed";
(b) "by affirming the universal contextuality of the meaning, a contextual theory of the meaning is formulated";
(c) "by theorizing the relativity of the values and of the meanings, an unconditional and absolute truth is theorized".

In other terms, being in turn incapable of being relativized and contextualized, the key propositions of relativism and contextualism seem to be self-contradictory. By declaring the absolute relativity of knowledge, the existence of an unconditional and absolute truth, is, in fact, theorized, denying the very idea of relativity.

Proceeding from these arguments, if one reflects on the radical socio-constructivistic positions expressed in Discourse Analysis, the same logical difficulties that were treated as "paradoxes" seem to arise (Smith, 2001: 82–92). One of the most frequent criticisms addressed to the RDP is based on the adoption of the *tu quoque* (or, *you too*) argument. By applying its own discourse theory to the RDP, it is possible to affirm that the absolute contingentism and relativism that characterized the discourse may also characterize the theoretical production of the RDP and the results of its research (Ashmore, 1989; Burr, 1995). Using this viewpoint, it may, in fact, be maintained that any theory that postulates the total relativity of knowledge is itself relative and contextual.[16]

However, this criticism does not seem to create a problem for the RDP. On the contrary it is in certain respects shared by its supporters, taking the form of a cautious methodology in the practice of research dominated reflexivity, observed in the sphere of the sociology of knowledge. In fact, by asserting that each discourse is a contextualized social practice directed towards the attainment of goals, the RDP recognizes the partially subjective and action-oriented character of it own works. (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 182)[17]

II.2. Reflecting on reflexivity

The practice of reflexivity implies not only a *meta-theoretical* examination, but also an examination of, say, a *meta-institutional* nature. Such as a reflection on the "strategic" role that the theoretical-methodological options perform in the scientific community, setting the various reference networks with respect to each other within a composite series of dominant, dissident and marginal positions. Among the structures that frame the researcher's experience and reflection are those of the *psycomplex*. (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985) "If we want to take reflexivity seriously, we have to "ground" it in the institutional context in which we carry out our research". (Parker, 1994: 246).[18]

The *tu quoque* or reflexivity (application of the theory to itself) argument not only makes it legitimate, but also desirable, that auto-reflective caution should become part of the deontology equipment of each researcher attentive to the problems of his specific research whatever his paradigmatic orientation may be. Nevertheless, doubts are raised regarding the way in which reflexivity is, in fact, practiced in the scientific community of Discourse Analysis supporters.[19]

From the methodological point of view, a rigorous application of reflexivity would have important consequences: "Reflexivity also refers to the equal status, within discourse analysis, of researchers and their respondents, as well as the accounts offered by each. This means that discourse analysts must find a way of building into their research opportunities for participants to comment upon their own accounts and those of the researcher. Sherrard (1991) criticises discourse analysts for not always meeting this criterion in their research." *(Burr, 1995, p. 181)*

It must be recognized that the criticisms from this side include as many of their own exponents as detractors of Discourse Analysis (inter-alia: Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Sherrard, 1991; Marks, 1993; Figueroa & Lopez, 1991; Parker & Burman, 1993; Parker, 1994). In particular Parker and Burman (1993) have produced an almost complete inventory of problems identifying a good *thirty-two problems with discourse analysis.*

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

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

Emblematic in this respect is the de-constructive analysis that Parker (1994) proposes in a key document of the *British Psychological Society*, namely *The Future of the Psychological Sciences: Horizons and Opportunities for British Psychology* (BPS, 1988). He warns that the adoption of the conceptual categories and psychoanalytical terminology (the *ego* versus *id; working through* versus *acting out, stages of development* versus *polymorphous perversity*) does not signify any presupposition of processes at the individual level and may be used only "to capture these discursive forms, within the collective, and then position individuals as subjects" (Parker, 1994: 247). Nevertheless, it is obvious that in itself the borrowing of a terminology specific to psychoanalytical theory (discourse?) or the de-constructing of the institutional discourse implied in the BPS document, confirms the need that in order to analyze a discourse, refer-ence must be made to another discourse. To decode it possession of a code is necessary and that, accordingly, a meaning of the discourse cannot do otherwise than refer back to other meanings and can never be entirely self-referential.[20]

To summarize, the theses set forth in this paragraph can lead to the conclusion that the RDP, put forward as a clearly relativist theory (thus also contextualist and

pluralist) does not affirm its relativity. On the contrary, it affirms its unconditional truth with a rhetorical strategy aimed at self-legitimization. Paradoxically, the RDP ends up re-proposing an ontological and dogmatic vision, based on the following theses:

1. radical relativism is set in a "*non relativistic*" situation;
2. radical relativism, in the self-referentiality presumed in the discourse, bars the possibility of dialogue with other theories of visions of the world.

II.3. The subject's role in a radical "contingentism" perspective

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

As already explained, one of the main aspects of the RDP is to deny the existence of an internal guide of a cognitive type that orients the social individual's behavior (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; Potter and Edwards, 1999). To a typically cognitivist conception, the RDP opposes the assumption that the same cognition may be a characteristic of the social action (Potter and Edwards, 1999). "DP rejects perceptual-cognitivism in favour of a systematic reformulation of cognition as a feature of participants' practices." (Potter & Edwards, 1999: 449). The idea that "cognitive facts" are an action (and more precisely a "performative" activity of discursive type) is moreover closely linked to the assumption of the variability. On varying the contexts the social practices also vary. "We merely have to deal with a socially occasioned variability from one time to another." (Middleton & Edwards, 1990: 43)

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

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

This concept, although extremely well developed, seems to raise a problem. Paradoxically, in criticizing cognitivist ontology, the RDP ends up by creating a

new ontology, this time of the contestualist variety based on two complementary assumptions: *all is a social practice, all is relative and variable.*

What position does the subject have within this new ontology? In our opinion, in the RDP the subject:

(a) is transformed, from a *constructor* of reality, into a *construction* of reality;
(b) from a *speaking subject*, he/she is transformed into a subject constantly *spoken to* by contextually variable micro-discourses.

The individual's role, which in the constructivist approach was intended to be actor and protagonist intentionally active in the scenario of social life, in the RDP becomes problematical. On one hand, the individual seems to be conceived as a rhetorical manipulator who builds his discourse to attain personal goals and, therefore, is endowed with a certain capacity and autonomy in managing his actions, at least the strategic-discursive ones. On the other hand, given the emphasis attributed to the contextual variables, he/she seems to be described as a passive entity, spoken to by his or her own discourses, guided by the characteristics of a contingent and extremely viable situation. (Burr, 1995: 59)[21]

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

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

If a representational map of meanings (even antagonistic one to the other) that might guide the recovery of the interpretative repertoires from the network of social communication does not exist, to what extent may the individual who "uses" them call him/herself an agent entity (at least of a choice)? If these repertoires are acquired in terms of the characteristics of a contingent impersonal context, is it reasonable to uphold that the individual is a speaking entity, and not merely an entity spoken to by the discourse?[22] If the discourses (and their contents: opinions, behaviors, representations, etc.) reflect the constant pragmatic adaptation to contingent and variable situations, what role does *past experience* have in directing the action? If in the discourses every aspect of the individual personality varies in relation to the context, and of the goals linked to it, if not the bearer

of a social identity (considering the negation of any structured intra-individual heritage of psychology), to what extent can the individual still call him/herself a social person with his/her own history, which is a fragment of a wider social and collective history?[23]

II.4. The "totalizing" and "reifying" role of discourse-action

Insofar that it is beyond question that cognition is manifest in the action, to totally identify the cognition of the action seems to be an operation no less criticizable that the opposite one, namely to lead back the action, *tout court*, to an underlying cognitive process. Potter and Edwards (1999) explain this passage, demarcating once again the conceptual territory that separates the DP from the SRT. "In SRT, representations are primarily *cognitive phenomena* (. . .) which enable people to make sense of the world (. . .). In DP, representations are *discursive objects* which people construct in talk and texts. (. . .) Cognition is a feature of participants' practices (. . .). The sense-making role of representation is not excluded in principle." (Potter and Edwards, 1999: 448–449)

These statements deserve reflection. The operation of "putting" a representation into "shape", of translating and developing it in a discourse or in another textual modality, exerts an influence on the representation itself, transforming it. It is, accordingly, reasonable to uphold that the representation may be also a characteristic of an act of construction. It is equally obvious that in a socio-constructionist perspective this cannot occur as a mere exchange of information in the neural networks, but as exchange of meanings symbolically connoted in a social scenario. However, in the perspective of the SRT, the representation is not only a product of action. It also guides the action, determines the choice of the objectives and of the means, builds the inter-action context, and steers the contents of the discourse. And it is, above all, this capacity to steer and guide the individual more or less, that makes the *action* and *social practices* something more than, and diverse from, the elementary construct of *behavior* (see Jodelet, 1989b; Amerio, 1991, 1996; Amerio & Ghiglione, 1986; von Cranach, 1992; Wagner, 1993, 1998; Abric, 1994; Rouquette, 2000; Flament, 2001; Flament & Rouquette, 2003).

II.5. Communication and Representations: from the "interdependent" assumption in the SRT to the RDP's "tautological" model

(i) From the "interdependent" assumption in the SRT to the RDP's "tautological" model. In the SRT, there is "no communication without representations" and "no representations without communication" (de Rosa, 2001). The social representation guides the act of communication, but, at the same time, is *generated within* and *transformed by* the communication. The relationship is circular, or better dialogical,

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

If both communication and representation are supposed to exist, then in the SRT the key is to investigate the inter-relationships between representations, communication and the media, "The question is not to wonder whether one acts upon the other, but what is acting upon one and the other. The famous circularity or mutual selection existing between media and their audiences offers no other sense: people do not chose media that choose them, but the relation between them comes from determinations which are deeper and appear also in other fields." (Rouquette, 1994: 226)

If, on one hand, *Social Representations* are more than isolated cognition, we can define SR as: "forms of social thinking used to *communicate*, understand and master the social, material, and intellectual environment. As such, they are analysed as products and processes of mental activity that are socially marked. This social marking refers to conditions and contexts where representations emerge, to *communication* by which they circulate, and to the functions they serve. This form of knowledge is constructed in the course of social interaction and *communication*. It bears the mark of the subject's social insertion. Collectively shared, it contributes to the construction of a vision or version of reality that is common and specific to a social or cultural entity. This form of knowledge has practical aims and social functions. It operates as a system of interpretation of reality, serving as a guideline in our relation to the surrounding world. Thus it orients and organises our behaviour and *communication*." (Jodelet, 1993: 184)

The *mutual interdependence of social representation and communication emerges from this comprehensive definition that recognizes the fundamental role of communication in the genesis, transmission and circulation of social representations*. "Any consideration of social representations also means a consideration of communication; social representations originate in communication, they are manifested in it and they influence it." (Sommer, 1998: 186)

If, on the other hand, we adopt a definition of *communication* as something more than "transmitting information" from a source to a receiver, which includes an exchange of meanings, it becomes "a process of symbolic interaction, in which the possibility of transferring messages occurs on the basis of signs, according to culturally and socially shared rules, i.e. according to codes conventionally defined on the basis of the use or criteria previously selected". (Crespi, 1996: 209).

In this light both the linear-reflecting communication models (C $\Rightarrow$ S.R.: communications as the source of social representations; C $\Leftarrow$ S.R.: communications as means for expressing/reflecting social representations) and tautological models (C $\equiv$ S.R.: communications and social representations as identical) are

epistemologically incompatible with the theory of Social Representations, which calls for a circular-dialogical model of communication-representation (C ⇔ S.R.: communications and (social) representations in a relation of mutual implication). We attempted to demonstrate developing an empirical investigation on polemical representations "of" and "on" Benetton advertisement campaigns (de Rosa, 2001).

(ii) The rejection of the concept and metaphor of "communication" in the RDP. If the SRT stresses the importance of adopting a "circular-dialogic model" based on the mutuality of the relation between communication and social representation, in the RDP all the questions related to the nature of this relation are simply nonsense. The RDP adopts, at the end, a "monological model" centered on the discourse and a "tautological model" where the power of the discourse builds the reality and the subject itself. This has the consequence of destroying the thinking subject as well by reducing it to an unstable and contextually determined "position in discourse" (Burr, 1995; Jovchelovitch, 1996).

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

Several researchers within the mainstream of social cognition have recognized the individualistic, atomistic and de-contextualized approach to the study of social knowledge as nothing more than "cognitive psychology applied to social objects". In 1983 Forgas (1983: 131) argued that ". . . recent social cognition turned out to be even more individualistic than its predecessors". Ten years later in 1993 still others complain that: "The rise of blackboard models and connectionist theories (Rummerlhart et al. 1986) has provided new and enriching metaphors, such as the "society of mind" (Minsky, 1986), but the focus has remained on the individual as a solitary and, for the most part, purely intellective being." (Levine, Resnick and Higgins, 1993: 586)[24]

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

However, while the cognitivists start to complain of the rare attention given to communication and probably start to recognize that language and communication are more than exchanging a "bit" of information, in the RDP the communication metaphor is rejected as inadequate for dealing with the complexities of action and interaction. (Potter & Edwards, 1999: 449)

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

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

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

(b) The RDP vocabulary, by denying the role of the cognitive and of the socio-cognitive in orienting the social practices and interactions, reifies the communication processes considering them to be observable "actions". The vocabulary expresses, moreover, the assumption that *nothing exists external to the action and the discursive practice*. The rejection of the communication concept is linked, consequently, to a voluntary omission, namely the exclusion of the interpretation codes and of the attribution of meaning in orienting and producing the discourses and the social practices.

The metaphor of communication is also rejected because, although it is possible to agree with Middleton and Edwards (1990: 41–42) that the discourse analysis may not have a solely descriptive purpose, the focusing of this approach concerns exclusively that which is observable. As Middleton and Edwards (1990: 43) affirm in their study of the *relationship between discourse and remembering: "like the behaviourist, our analysis remains at all times close to the observable, recorded conversational*

record". It is accordingly evident that aspects not directly observable (but constitutive of the communication) are conceived as an emerging feature of a discursive practice, and not as an "external" item of the discourse itself. In this view everything is inside the discourse: the cognitive phenomena (the memory, the purposes, the representations) are "objects" of (or within) the discourse (Potter and Edwards, 1999).[25]

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

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

In other words:

    a. the discourse is a representation in talks and texts;
    b. the representation is a discourse in talks and texts.

III. FROM "*MONO*LOGICAL" TOWARDS "*DIA*LOGICAL" PERSPECTIVES "WITHIN" AND "BETWEEN" THE RDP AND SRT PARADIGMS.

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

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

But it is to be asked how exponents of such a radical socio-constructionist approach can invoke "external" criteria that re-echo the role of the "independent variables" specific to the experimental approach they reject. It is also surprising how they ignore specific contributions and research traditions developed in the field of SRT to articulate social representations and the positioning of the groups (Doise, Clémence and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Clémence, 2001).

The circularity of the SR theory is considered a "dialogism" precisely because, unlike in the RDP approach, a totalizing role is not attributed to the social representation. The SR does not deny, but integrates all the other constructions and processes (behavior, opinion, common sense, communication, cognition, action, memory, etc.) and levels (individual and social, interpersonal and intrapersonal, external and internal, past-present-future, stability and change, etc.). On the contrary, to the extent to which it recognizes them and assumes them, it can articulate them *dia*-logically (Ragnar Rommetveit, 1984; Markova, 2000[26], 2003).

Whether the *dialogic* conception derives from classic Hegelian *dialectic* (as in the position taken by Markova) or instead exceeds the linearity (as in the position gradually developed by Morin, 1994[27]) is a philosophical question of some importance.[28] The relationship (or differences) between dialogism and dialectic is an exciting philosophic question with which, however, we shall not deal with here. What is important to highlight is that the existence of a dialogic relationship cannot be presumed unless the existence of the dimensions or entity establishing the relationship itself is also presumed (e.g. representation and communication, communication and social practices, cognition and action, etc.), however inextricably entwined and dynamically mutable it may be. "The claim that social representations could be seen as being a pragmatic presupposition of communicative genres (Moscovici, 1994) does not mean that one is talking here about layers with representations lying beneath and communication above. Rather, one must view them as interpenetrating and diffused: genres affecting thinking and thinking shaped by language." (Markova, 2000: 453)

On the contrary, writing off *communication* as a mere metaphor (Potter and Edwards, 1999: 449) implies that:

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

(2) this reductionism, or discursive immanentism, generates "tautological mono-
     logues". With its totalizing dimension the discourse re-proposes a new
     "essence" in a proposal that is founded on "anti-essentialism".

Although the role of *action* and of social practices cannot be denied in the
construction of semantic scenarios for our representations of the world, radical
anti-mentalism and the RDP's pragmatic reductionism once again generate
several inconveniences. Action does not explain everything. It is certainly possible
to refer a representation back to the social and cultural practices already given,
as "prescribed and regulated communication." (Moscovici, 1999: 223)[29]

It is, however, hard to maintain that the social representation does not itself
perform a role in orienting action and that its role is not merely as a *re-producer*
(the representation as mnemonic repertoire of the interiorized social practices
reflected in it), but at times an *innovator* in relational contexts. These contexts are
certainly regulated by normative systems of expectations, social prescriptions, etc.
(Doise, 2001), yet are also possible *scenarios of change* (Purkhardt, 1993; Moliner,
2001). The action produced in a present relational context is also an evocation of
actions previously performed (and of discourses spoken), but may also modify the
scripts of the past, introducing new repertoires thanks to the *anticipating* represen-
tation of events. All things told, language itself is a dynamic fact and at the same
time a stable and changing element in a culture.

"One could say, following Rommetveit (1974), that ordinary language provides
us with culturally and socially transmitted drafts of contracts. We categorize states
of affairs within the multifaceted social world and optionally elaborate and realize
these drafts of contracts. Communicative genres, like social representations, are
only partially determined, allowing them, in each situation, to be modified, cre-
ated and re-created." (Markova, 2000: 456)

In the absence of every pre-given entity, another aspect that risks being phago-
cytized in the RDP's "discursive imperialism" is the *temporal dimension*, (i.e., the *role
of the past* in orienting practices and contingent discourses as well as the *role of the
future*). The individual can be considered a "*position*" in a contingent argumentative
context, but the discourses spoken in the past or those imagined and projected
into the future influence the discourses or linguistic games in the present. It is
hard not to consider the role of memory, both personal and collective, in produc-
ing interiorized repertoires of scripts that orient present action and the role of the
imagination in changing the registers of discourse-actions. We know to what extent
this also has been true in the logic of scientific discoveries.

According to the RDP, the SRT could be characterized by scant attention
towards the constructive role of discourse and social practices. This criticism
seems unjustified for a series of reasons. The Social Representations Theory
(SRT) and Discourse Analysis (DA) are to a large extent both focused on the study
and analysis of social discourses, but with a different theoretical-methodological
option.

The RDP starts from the assumption that by using various *interpretative repertoires* human beings produce discourses and representations of reality that are ever changeable in relation to the situations (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).[30] Consequently the RDP is mainly interested in the study of the *contextual variability of the discourses* and of the bond between the discourses and the contingent goals suggested by the impersonal context.

The SRT is interested in the study of both the shared elements and those dynamically different that characterize the discourses, i.e. those elements that make the discourse produced by various social groups recognizable and reveal the taking of position between the multiple and pluralist views of the various social discourses. "(...) *linguistically mediated social representations to some extent are negotiable and border on our imperfect knowledge of the world*. What is made known by what is being said in a particular context of human discourse is thus to a considerable degree contingent upon negotiated specification of linguistically mediated general drafts of contract concerning categorization. Negotiated specification, moreover, allows for adjustment of categorizations in accordance with *private and contextually determined perspectives*. Mutual understanding will always entail a residual of "*presupposed commonality with respect of interpretation or faith in a common world*." (Rommetveit, 1984: 357–8)

Therefore, although negotiating the meanings of the communication in terms of the situational and immediate interactive context, for the SRT each participant aims to express a point of view that also reflects previous social influences on the here-and-now interaction. The SRT does not deny that viewpoints may be negotiated, justified or masked inside particular discussions and in terms of particular immediate goals. The SRT merely holds that these viewpoints are fed even by previous discourses and social influences that orient the discursive production developed in the course of specific interactions and inter-group relations[31]. If it is true that discourses vary in terms of micro-temporal contexts, it is also true that, in many ways, these same discourses reflect the viewpoints fed by previously spoken discourses. These are re-elaborated in relation to a wider raging personal, social and collective memory and in terms of semantic contexts activated by imaginative capacities.

Thus, both the connection between *relational micro-contexts* and *socio-cultural macro-context*, and the roles of *social and collective memory* and *imagination* come into play. The structural role of *context* is theorized both by the RDP and by the SRT. In both paradigms the context is referred back with priority *to the common places of daily life*, rather than those artificially recreated in laboratories with little ecological research validity. However, some research based on Discourse Analysis is performed in laboratories on ad-hoc created groups and some SRT developments do not rule out also this experimental approach when the SRs are isolated in the research designs and treated as independent variables. However, the context is considered in a rather different way. Even more than conversational analysis, the RDP studies the way in which, in *relational micro-contexts*, socially *negotiated* discourses are produced at a particular time. On the contrary, the SRT mainly studies the

way in which belonging to a *macro-cultural macro-context*, and more specifically the multiple belonging to various groups and social institutions, influences discourses produced in the micro-context of the here-and-now situation. For the SRT, discourses spoken and proven in the micro-context reflect the dynamics of the social exchanges spoken and proven in the macro-context, but meanwhile are also the dynamic element of social change. The RDP, with its contingentism, seems to neglect the pre-structural role of an interiorized discourse anchored to cultural membership within a temporal perspective that is not only autobiographical, but also pluri-generational and historical-collective.

With regard to *memory*, the position of discursive psychology is rather complex, despite the recognition that "the role of memory has an important epistemological role". However, once again, the role of "*remembering* can be seen as a set of *social practices* related to a range of actions and providing a particular kind of accountability" (Potter, 1996: 216). "The study of remembering in conversation affords unique opportunities for understanding remembering as organized social action. Reports of past events can be studied as pragmatically occasioned versions whose variability is due not only to the nature and vicissitudes of individual cognition, but to the conversational work that those versions accomplish." (Middleton & Edwards, 1990: 43)

In the SRT's view, representations are produced by the communications and by the experiences that take place within specific social contexts over a relatively long period of time. However, conceivable as situated and able to be situated items of knowledge, representations orient the behavior and communications produced in the course of a specific "here-and-now" interaction. On the other hand, to consider discourse as a total contingent and variable fact and to radically deny every cognitive-representational capacity, means to overlook the importance of *memory* as a virtual dislocation of the subject in times prior to the discursive situation "acted" in the *hic et nunc*. Linguistic repertoires do not have a mental or mnemonic nature, they are *acts* performed in a particular time and social context: "From the socio-constructionist and discoursivist point of view, the action of remembering is in the first place, in fact, an action that is undertaken as part of a complex process of negotiation (as much between diverse individuals as in the context of the individual thought) between the possible explanations of the past." (Mazzara, 2000b: 35)

By denying the pre-structural role of the past, the social individual risks being considered as *an entity without memory*, "an empty person" (Burr, 1995: 59), who is moved solely by his immediate interests. Consequently, a vision of man is expressed that is, to a certain extent, "opportunistic" and "cynical".

Although subject to the *games played* in the interpersonal situation, it is evident that the memory of previously performed actions (and discourses previously spoken) may influence the social practices produced in a particular time and, contribute towards creating the same interaction context. The characteristics of the interaction exert an influence on memory that is no less than what memory does in structuring

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

The development of the concept of "*themata*" within the Social Representations Theory (see Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994/2000[32]) is in contrast to a certain narrow and solipsistic way of conceiving knowledge. But, by not denying it, highlights its socially and historically situated aspect and opens it up to symbolic meanings that go well beyond those of a merely informative nature. This permits an interesting integration with the construct of social memory, creating a bridge between collective representations and social representations and diachronic and synchronous perspectives (Jodelet, 1993; de Rosa, 1997, 2004, 2005; de Rosa & Mormino, 2000; Bellelli, Bakhurst, Rosa, 2000; Laurens, Roussiau, eds. 2002; Liu, 2004).

Both the Social Representation Theory and Discursive Psychology visions could be considered *complementary* only on the condition that the contingentist radicalism declared by DP does not prevail, denying the assumption itself of communication, i.e. the existence of that reciprocally shared field of meanings and representations already dear to Mead. Billig (1987: 251, 1991: 57–9) explicitly recognized on several occasions the fact that the two paradigms should have been able to be *integrated*. He has devoted chapter three of his *Ideology and Opinion* to "exploring" the points of contact between the Social Representations Theory and the rhetorical approach, underscoring the argumentative and rhetorical dimension of what Mosovici calls "social representations".[33]

Altogether difference is the position of the more radical exponents of Discourse Analysis, who, on many occasions, have emphasized the *incompatibility* with *SRT*. "We believe contrasting rather than merging the perspectives will lead to more clarity in theory and analysis." (Potter & Edwards, 1999: 448)

The methodological consequences deriving from an option oriented towards the *integration* of the two paradigms are obviously completely different if they focused on exasperating the *incompatibility*.

On several occasions we have discussed our point of view regarding the need for acquiring and developing a critical modality concerning survey and data analysis methods and techniques in terms of their coherence with the theoretical paradigms of reference and of the conditions of application, besides the purposes pursued by the researcher. The multi-methodological option hoped for on a number of occasions as a kind of meta-theoretical instrument for a critical analysis of data collected and results obtained (de Rosa, 1990, 1994) should not be confused with a summation of data collection and analysis techniques. The habit of conducting

large numbers of sophisticated analyses on data collected without any critical precaution regarding the paradigm of reference and the specific context of carrying out the research is already too widely spread in psycho-social research. Developmental and clinical psychologists and not only they, are often (rightly) horrified at how social psychologists sometimes conduct interviews.

In this sense, the attention paid to these aspects by discursive and rhetorical psychology is precious, departing from the assumption that "interviews are easy to do, are hard to do well and hard to analyse" and trying to answer the question "Are interviews essential? Can naturalistic records be obtained or generated?" (Potter, 2005b; see also Rapley, 2001; Maynard, Houtkoop-Steenstra, Shaeffer, van der Zowen, 2002; van den Berg, Wetherell, Houtkoop-Steenstra eds. 2004; Puchta, Potter, 2004). The integration of the discursive and rhetorical psychology approach in SR research design would be possible *if* and *when* positions expressed do not end up transforming radical socio-constructionism into a new form of *methodological behaviorism*, which is more attentive to recording the rules of verbal, textual, and conversational behavior of *discursive facts* than to their meanings for the subjects. A balanced position has been expressed describing the requirement for a conversational/discursive approach (especially referring to the French research tradition) in the study of social representations articulating the linguistic socio-interactive dimension (and therefore of action) with the representations and their contents (Mazzoleni, 2003).

Obviously this integration is desirable, if the field is cleared of scholastic orthodoxy and one can begin to understand what, in the theoretic perspective and in the methods specific to the paradigm which is proposed as an alternative, can throw into crisis and critically render dynamic our paradigmatic convictions and research practices. It is, perhaps, not by chance that this requirement is so strongly felt by the newest levy of researchers being trained (Ph.D. students) who with increasing frequency show interest in both for the RDP and for the SRT and wonder why these schools do not collaborate in joint research projects. The practice of reflexivity invoked by the Discourse Analysts teaches us that perhaps this occurs because doctoral students are not shut up within the often-divisive logics of academic circles and of the virtual communities that bind researchers' intellects in paradigmatic belongings even when whole continents separate them.

If one assumes the semeiotic view of data as signs, the researcher may accept that "no data can ever fully represent the phenomena. They do not need to, either—it is the inductively over-determined view of science as progressing through data accumulation that idealizes the massive collection of data. In contemporary qualitative orientation in psychology this may have its equivalent in the idealization of "rich descriptions" of the phenomena through ethnographic methods, creation of qualitative 'data banks', and the like. A qualitative turn in the social sciences that merely replaces a quantified form of empiricism by its qualitative (ethnographic, narrative or any other) counterpart may change a fashion in the social sciences. Yet it cannot advance the knowledge of these sciences. (. . .)

Qualitative psychology can be productive if it reverses the tradition of method-dominated psychology in favour of an epistemological inquiry where all parts of methodology are mutually related" (Valsiner, 2005: 41, 39).

On the other hand, the accusations of epistemological "rigidity" and of "*methodological monotheism*" do not seem equally applicable to the Social Representations Theory. It is true that pluralist liberalism and "*methodological polytheism*" have often been misunderstood. They have been encouraged by the founder of the SRT who has never desired to claim himself as an "*owner of his own theory*" with the power to legitimize or de-legitimize the work of researchers who inspired him (Moscovici, *personal communication*). If this has positively led to opening the field to a great variety of approaches and has developed it by resorting to all social science methods (Viaud & Roussiau, eds. 2002; Abric ed. 2003; Moscovici & Buschini, eds. 2003), it has also introduced a conceptual "laxism", including an incoherent use of the paradigmatic constructs in rendering the SRT operative in research plans. These in some instances have motivated the reconstruction of the inventory of the criticisms, at times deserved not so much by the SRT itself, but by the way in which researchers have banalized it (de Rosa, 1994), making absolutely necessary the "*need for a theory of method*" and a meta-theoretical analysis of all the scientific production based on this paradigm (de Rosa, 2002).

On the basis of these critical observations and challenged by the dispute between RDP and SRT, researchers who are inspired by the SRT can no longer fail to reflect on whether they intend to continue to use SRT, but also if they intend to develop it. By not taking extreme positions targeted towards the organization of psychology constructs within the wide scenario of socially generated and situated knowledge, the SRT puts forward a study perspective based on a *dialogical relation*, not on a *tautological* one:

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

It is undeniable that organizing these aspects or "truths" (communication, context, representation, structures, contents) is extremely difficult because of the inextricable nature of the cultural processes that put all these factors into a dialogic relationship. However, the advantage of continuing to ascribe worth to all factors lies in the assumption of a non-totalizing perspective, which opens itself to the accusation of theoretical or methodological dogmatism.

To summarize in this paper an initial effort has been made to trace the lines of the lively current debate in which different paradigms of social psychology are compared and sometimes clash. In this respect, particular attention has been

devoted to positions assumed in this debate by authors who uphold the socio-constructionist theses in its most radical version as expressed by Discursive Psychology (RDP) and by those who refer themselves to the Theory of Social Representations (SRT).

After having analyzed several positions which seem to suggest *compatibility* and interest for finding common ground between the two paradigms, because of their conceptual reductionism, some of the most extreme theses put forward by the RDP end up producing self-confutations and make it impossible to propose a terrain of integration with other paradigms, including that of the SRT (*incompatibility*).

Then the interest has been pointed out for a "*dialogical*" perspective not only in the terms peculiar to the SRT, but also for a "cross-fertilization" between the researchers inspired by the less radical approach to discursive psychology and those inspired by Social Representation Theory, highlighting the effect of the methodological implication that this would entail if researchers with various "school" memberships would instead of *speaking* and *writing* for their own academic circles would also learn to *listen* and *read* each other with respect.[34]

The issue to be resolved in putting this dialogue into *action* concerns the cost to be paid in terms of "school" identity, especially on the part of the extremely consistent RDP, in the perspective of getting around its R (radicalism) and opening the borders of its original territory. As we stated at the beginning of this article, if DP cannot simply be assumed to be a research tradition that uses Discourse Analysis as a method or technique, can RDP survive as a paradigm if it learns to recognize and have a dialogue with other paradigms providing them a *critical theory of method*? The *thrust and parry* between Hammersley (2003a, 2003b) and Potter (2003)[35] already seems to provide an answer to this question.

Rather than effectively engaging in a monologue behind rhetorical-dialogic appearances, whether interest in a dialogue between separate paradigmatic positions is genuine and fruitful or not will only be known in a long-term perspective. Only the fruits that will eventually result from implementation of social practices that ritualize opportunities for exchange and comparison within the scientific community (such as joint meetings, publications stemming from a genuine confrontation of positions and not of juxtapositions or sterile counter-positions, development of joint research programs in which a number of plans of analysis are articulated with the specific methodologies of the different approaches etc.) will tell. We hope that this discussion will provide encouragement in this direction.[36]

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NOTES

[1] ". . . social constructionism more than a rebellion against experimental social psychology has to be considered an expression based on the major lessons in this field. The main difference between the two views lies in the fact that experimental social psychologists use objectivist methods for studying subjectivity, whereas the social constructionalists use the evidence on the fallibility of human perceptions to reject the methods of the science itself. (. . .) We argue that even though the differences between these 'two subcultures' of social psychology may appear to be incommensurable, upon closed inspection, there seems to be a variation in emphasis rather than a disagreement about fundamental principles of human behaviour. We argue that the two approaches are compatible at the level of both the substance and the strategy of research, and we underscore their joint potential for contributing to a social psychology that is critical, rigorous and well-informed about the historical, cultural and political contexts that shape human thought and behaviour". (Kruglanski and Jost, 2000: 50–51;67)

[2] "The contingent—but surmountable—limits of the present forms of socio-constructionism (SC) consist, in my opinion, in the radicalization of the opposition of SC to the tradition of the cognitive sciences and in making a limited and reducible use of the potentialities offered by cultural psychology (. . .). I believe that the encounter between SC and the recent developments of cognitive psychology may not only be possible but also profitable for both.

The methodological question: to set quantitative and qualitative against each other seems to me a very crude way of settling the problem. There are diverse levels of analysis and diverse objects of analysis and diverse contexts of research (. . .). SC will consider the theoretical assumptions (and the methodologies) of the current psychological research as "one" of the possible arguments (not as an invalid argument, except for its claims to exclusivity." (Mantovani, 2000: 124–125)

"As a matter of fact, there is a tendency to underscore the importance of these two preferential associations (cognitive-quantitative and constructionist-qualitative) and to reduce consequently the difference between the two approaches to a difference essentially of methodological practices (. . .). It is, instead, the intention of this contribution to support and briefly describe how the crucial difference is not so much in the type of method as such, nor in the more or less prominent role that the qualitative method assumes within each approach, but rather in the *purposes* with which it is used in each approach (. . .): Whereas the qualitative technique of the *focus group* is used traditionally for the purpose of making the phenomena considered individual and stabile emerge, in an approach of socio-constructionist type, such as that of discursive psychology, the same technique is used for the purpose of bringing to the surface the way in which these supposed individual and stable phenomena are the outcome of negotiations among the speakers and of the specific rhetoric-discursive strategies used by the conductor of the interview." (Bonaiuto, 2000: 122–123)

[3] There is no general consensus also among the authors of the Discursive Social Psychology about the definitiion of what a "*discourse*" is (as shown in the debate between Parker, 1990 and Potter, Wetherell, Gill, Edwards, 1990) There are also significant differences in the two approaches, called *Conversational Analysis* (CA) and *Discourse Analysis (DA)*: the former focussed on the mechanisms of socio-regulation in the interaction, the latter focussed on interpretative repertoires, as textual constellation of elements related to a cultural theme, assumine the experience of the reality as built "*in*" the discorse and "*by*" the discorse. Moreover there are considerable differences not only between, but even within the two approaches of the CA and DA and the possibilitiy to integrate them: De Grada and Bonaiuto (2002) provide a review of these differences. However a comprehensive

definition which helps to understand what a "text" is in the discursive psychology is the following: "A discourse about an object is said to manifest itself in texts—in speech, say a conversation or interview, in written material such as novels, newspaper articles or letters, in visual images like magazines, advertisements or films, or even in the 'meanings' embodied in the clothes people wear or the way they do their hair. In fact, anything that can be 'read' for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as a 'text'." (Burr, 1995: 50–51)

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

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

[6] "The concern will be with description and representations as they are built in the course of interaction." (Potter, 1996: 104)

"I do not think that analyst of fact construction need do more than consider reality constitution a feature of descriptive practices; the question is with interaction, such that philosophical questions of ontology can be left to the appropriate experts." (Potter, 1996: 178)

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

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

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

[8] "By taking account of the influence of scientific knowledge on everyday perception and thinking, social representations returns to the central theme of the discussion of the historical character of social psychology. Lastly, knowledge is not reduced to a purely cognitive phenomenon, as in information-processing model of the mind. Rather, knowledge is understood and studied both as result and the object of interactive processes,

and as a cognitive stock. Here we find a combination of the psychologies of knowledge and language. As the charter by Harré and Potter and Wetherell shows, rather than presenting a clearly distinct alternative model to social cognition research, discursive psychology should be seen as enlarging and detailing a central aspect of the theory of social representations. For the three lines of discussion outlined above—social psychology as historical, cognitive, and discursive science—social representations theory offers a model that takes into account the social and communicative character of social psychology of the social." (Flick, 1998: 5–6)

⁹ "However discourse analysis can indeed enrich social-representations studies (. . .). Therefore, I agree with van Dijk (1990) who has this to say (. . .): In my opinion, no sound theoretical or explanatory framework can be set up for any phenomenon dealt with in social psychology without an explicit account of socially shared cognitive representations. Whereas discourse is of course of primary importance in this expression, communication and reproduction of social representation . . . , this does not mean that discourse or its strategies are identical with such representations." (Doise, 1993: 168)

¹⁰ "No doubt interest in the conversational and rhetorical approach has permitted 'a lucid and efficacious rereading, in this specific perspective of many classical themes and problems in social psychology, for example that of attitudes, social categorization, accounts' (De Grada and Mannetti, 1992). However, over and above the undoubted interest of the contextualization of verbal exchanges, which these types of approach permit by largely ignoring intraindividual cognitive processes, the proposals which would confine the study of SRs exclusively to conversational analysis risk being limiting and reductionist". (de Rosa, 1994: 288)

¹¹ "The inventory of a representation, understood as an exhaustive summary of its discursive expressions, has no operative meaning (. . .). The 'competence', if you like, overruns the 'performance' (. . .). The analysis of the representations must of necessity exceed the simple discursive phenomenon considered as such (. . .). That the statement may be an effect, a concomitance or a trace of the representation does not imply that this possesses all the properties that can be discovered in the statement. (Rouquette, 1994: 170–171, *my translation*)

¹² "Although on several occasions we have maintained—and still maintain—interest for a constructive integration of the theoretical and methodological prospects of discourse analysis in the wider framework of the Social Representations theory, we hold this 'monotheistic' option to be excessively limiting. If within the human species the word is a privileged channel for defining, objectifying and constructing the reality, the reality has not been exclusively defined by means of the word: images, sounds, conducts, rites . . . are other ways for generating and communicating 'multiform' aspects (not necessarily complementary and, in some cases, antagonist) of social representations." (de Rosa & Farr, 2001: 238) "The extreme consequence of the discourse analysis theorist's thesis is the tautological identification between the discourse, the reality and the subjects: a perspective which implicitly adopts an ontological and dogmatic presupposition based on the religious statement 'In the beginning was the Word' (Word = God)." (de Rosa & Farr, 2001: 238)

¹³ "(. . .) it matters little for these critics that the theory of social representations has always insisted on the symbolic character of cognition (see Moscovici, 2000). Here the vagueness of social representations is held to be its insufficiently radical departure from a mentalistic discourse, but as Jovchelovitch (1996) has observed, the rush to evacuate the mental form from the discourse of social psychology is leading to the re-creation of a form of behaviourism." (Duveen, 2000: 14) "From this point of view all social psychological processes resolve themselves into the effects of discourse, and the fleeting achievements and reformulations of identity which it sustains. It is the activity of discourse alone which can be the object of study in this form of social psychology, and any talk of structure and

organisation at the cognitive level appears as a concession to the hegemony of information-processing model." (Duveen, 2000: 17)

[14] "It is precisely a sign of health of this debate that it has revolved around competing theoretical frameworks. It has not remained at the level of many psychological debates, which focus exclusively on empirical adequacy. The intellectual debate of the 'thinking society' should neither be characterised by 'monologue', nor 'dialogue striving after a common goal'. Instead, there should be searching and vigorous argument which explores the adequacy of different positions." (Potter and Billig, 1992: 16)

[15] "They seem to use SRT to create a contrast with which to construct their own approach as distinctive, by discursively pushing the frontiers of SRT towards close proximity with the idea of social cognition". (Castro, 2003: 39)

[16] "Relativism of discourse theory makes it difficult to justify adopting one particular reading of an event or text rather than others. This is a problem that occurs because of the theory's own reflexivity, that is, the way that the theory is applied to itself and its own research practice (discourse analysis). A discourse analysis cannot be taken to reveal a 'truth' lying within the text, and must acknowledge its own research findings as open to other, potentially valid, readings." (Burr, 1995: 180)

[17] "How should we deal with the fact that our accounts of how people's language use is constructed are themselves constructions? (. . .) It is possible to acknowledge that one's own language is constructing a version of the world, while proceeding with analysing texts and their implications for people's social and political lives. In this respect, discourse analysts are simply more honest than other researchers, recognizing their own work is not immune from the social psychological processes being studied." (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 182)

[18] "The way that social research is contextualized now will also look a little more complex, for the 'context' is, in this account, not an objective background against which the researcher renders an account of the phenomenon in question. Rather, the context is the network of forms of subjectivity that place contradictory demands on the research. In social psychological research there is an array of competitive interests and agendas that frame the production of proposals; the expectations and demands of 'subjects' or co-researchers; and the career investments and projected autobiographies that exist in tension in the academic world. (. . .)." (Parker, 1994: 250)

[19] "It would not be helpful, in this case, to write off experience as just another social construction, or to reduce the expressed dissatisfaction with positivism as a rhetorical trope, discursive position, or warrant. It is here that the political limitations of social constructionist (Gergen, 1985) and some discursive analytic approach (Edwards and Potter, 1992) become apparent. It is necessary to reflect on the structure of the institution of psychology as it operates now." (Parker, 1994: 240)

[20] For the same reason, the concepts of "false conscience" and "ideology" elaborated from the Hegelian-Marxist tradition do not seem applicable, at least in the notion of "true" and "false" negated at the start by socio-constructionism. "If we say that people are living in a false consciousness, we are assuming that there is a 'reality' (in which they are oppressed) which lies outside of their understanding of the world; i.e. it is a version of events that is more valid or truthful. (. . .) But the idea that there is one version of events that is true (making all other false) is also in direct opposition to the central idea of social constructionism. (. . .) Because there can be no truth, all perspectives must be equally valid. Different viewpoints can therefore only be assessed in relation to each other (hence 'relativism') and not with respect to some ultimate standard or truth. (. . .) Given that an explicit aim of the social constructionist is to 'deconstruct' the discourses which uphold inequitable power relations and to demonstrate the way in which they obscure these, it is difficult to see how it is possible to do this without falling back upon some notion of 'reality' or 'truth' that the discourses are supposed to obscure." (Burr, 1995: 80–82)

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

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

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

[23] "However, in this reassessment of the context, the socio-constructionist option, especially in its more radical versions, risks excessive restricting of the analysis to the immediate precincts of the communicative exchange, in which the contingent factors (. . .) end up by obscuring the importance of wider-range contextual elements, which are deposited in the long-term collective memory, but also as the outcome of one's own personal history, and which form a reference framework from which the process of negotiating the meanings cannot, in any case, be left out of consideration." (Mazzara, 2000a: 125–6) On the relations between social representations, identity and social memory see also: Laurens S. and Roussiau N. (eds.), 2002.

[24] Levine, Resnick and Higgins' critical review *The social foundation of cognition* aims to outline "the future of the new field of socio-cognition. This includes any social interaction as simply stimulating cognition or as deeply constituting cognition". It is no accident that at the end of their review, quoting Moscovici's theory of social representations, they are ". . . prepared to argue that all mental activity—from perceptual recognition to memory or problem solving—involves either representations of other people or to use the artefacts and cultural forms that have a social history" (Levine, Resnick and Higgins, 1993: 604).

[25] "Analysis has concentrated not on the sense-making role of representations (although this is not excluded in principle), but on the way the representations are constructed as solid and factual, and on their use in, and orientation to, actions (assigning blame, eliciting invitations, etc.). Representations are treated as produced, performed and constructed in precisely the way that they are for their role in activities." (Potter & Edwards, 1999: 448)

[26] "(. . .) the theory is based on an epistemology which brings to the centre of attention the dynamic interdependence between socio-culturally shared forms of thinking, communicating and acting and 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 phenomenon in social change." (Markova, 2000: 455)

[27] "Hegel revealed to me a vision of the truth which met my needs (. . .), the truth was a totality; a totality that was always in movement (. . .). The dialectic represented the force of adhering to this movement that characterized the totality, tackling and assuming the contrary ideas, freeing them from the dross and fertilizing one with the other for giving birth to a "synthesis", which should go beyond them." (Morin, 1994: 57, my translation) "From 1948 to 1950 I ended up the prey to contradictions that my Hegelian "forma mentis" was no longer in a position to overcome (. . .). It was then that the system broke

up into fragments. This rupture drove me towards the original contradictions, inducing me to elaborate a conception that set itself anew to confrontation, without trying to overcome it at any price." (Morin, 1994: 59, my translation)

[28] Even if Markova identifies the *dialectic* with the *dialogue*, it can be observed that the latter (at least in the acceptation given by Morin) is "opposable" to the "linearity" of the Hegelian conception of the dialectic based on the succession of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. In fact if *dialectic* implies an exceeding of the contradiction and a synthesis of the contraries in the context of a historical process definable as "antinomy in movement" (D'Agostini, 1999); the "*dialogism*" of Morin (1994: 63) expresses on the contrary the idea of a confrontation and interchange between concepts (or elements) "paradoxically" antagonist, and at the same time complementary, not "dissoluble" one into the other "Finally it is in the method that the dialogue clearly takes the place of the dialectic; in this work I elaborate and define the dialogism as association of examples at the same time complementary and antagonist." (Morin 1994: 63, my translation)

[29] "(. . .) I have not started from the individual, or rather cognitive, representations. And because I do not believe that, by association, by relationships or statistical diffusion, these may generate a coherent and stable social representation. In effect, this is a fact of institution, of prescribed and regulated communication. Fundamentally, as Gellner wrote: "we think what we must think". Our culture thinks in us. Both conceptually and verbally we are exceptionally well prepared." (Moscovici, 1999: 223, my translation)

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

[31] About the role of social influence and inter-group relations in the representational dynamic see, among others: Vala, 1998; Mugny, Quiamzade & Tafani, 2001.

[32] "Themata" never reveal themselves clearly; not even a part of them is definitively attainable. They are so intricately interwoven with a certain collective memory inscribed in language, and are so much composites, like the representation they support which are at the same time both cognitive (invariants anchored in our neuro-sensory apparatus and our schemes of action) and cultural (consensual universal of themes objectified by the temporalities and histories of the *longue durèe*). (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, eng. transl. In Moscovici, 2000: 182)

[33] "At first sight, the rethorical approach's stress on argumentation could be inserted into Moscovici's vision of a reconstituted social psychology. (. . .) One of the most important developments in European social psychology has been the emergence of the concept of 'social representations'. (. . .) The rhetorical perspective, it will be suggested, can complement that of the social representations theorists, regardless of whether the universal or particular concept of social representations is adopted." (Billig, 1991: 57–9) And even before in *Arguing and Thinking* (1987) "However, it might be profitable to explore the rhetorical dimensions of this theoretically important concept of social representations." (Billig, 1987: 261)

[34] An attempt in this direction can be found in Mazzoleni C., de Rosa, A.S. (forthcoming) Costruzione e gestione conversazionale di rappresentazioni sociali: analisi interlocutoria di processi discorsivi in ambito politico." This contribution can be seen as a signal of continuity of the auspice of an inter-paradigmatic dialogue, a theoretical and empirical cross-fertilization among the less radical approaches inspired by discursive and conversational psychology and research inspired by Social Representation theory sustained in previous work (de Rosa, 2003, this article), in order to translate this intention of viewing the study of interpersonal discursive production as a "natural tool to share and create social representations" (Mazzoleni, 2003b: 110) into an emblematic case, sustained by empirical evidence.

[35] "Hammersley (2003) criticizes a particular style of discourse research for developing as a distinct paradigm, yet lacking the coherence a paradigm would require. He suggests a range of problems in relation to constructionism, reflexivity and the 'thin' model of the human actor, and argues instead for methodological eclecticism in which discourse analytic methods are supplementary to alternatives. This commentary highlights a range of confusions and misunderstandings in this critique. In particular, it highlights the way discourse analytic work is connected to a range of theoretical notions, most fundamentally in its theorizing of discourse itself as a medium oriented to action. It identifies important sources of incoherence that can arise when mixing discourse analytic and more traditional methods. It reiterates the virtues of constructionism, particularly when considering the operation of descriptions, stresses the value of exploring (rather than ignoring) reflexive issues, and emphasizes the rich and nuanced approach to psychology that has been developed in this tradition". (Potter, 2003: 783)

[36] A positive feedback to the preliminary version of this article circulating as unpublished paper presented in a small meeting[36] was a very respectful e-mail having as object "boomerang" I received from Jonathan Potter on 4 march 2003 together with two draft versions of his new articles, whose comments could originate a new article (Potter & Hepburn, 2003 and Wiggins & Potter, 2003).

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