Beyond Social Representations:
A Theory of Enablement[1]

Jaan Valsiner

Frances L. Hiatt School of Psychology
Clark University
950 Main Street
Worcester, Ma. 01610-1477, USA
e-mail: jvalsiner@clarku.edu

Social representations are simultaneously *re*-presentations (of what already has come into being, and is recognizable on the basis of previous experience) and re-*pre*sentations (of the expected—yet indeterminate—future experience). If viewed from this perspective, social representations are meaning complexes that play the role of macro-level cultural constraints of human conduct in its PRESENT → FUTURE transition. These constraints lead to the generation of micro-level constraints that guide particular thought, feeling, and acting processes. I propose a theory of enablement that treats all cultural tools—signs and instruments—as vehicles of coping with the uncertainty of the immediate future. Signification in the present is meant for the making of the future, rather than taking stock of the present (and past). Human beings create semiotic mediators that set the *range* and *direction* for further expectation of to-be-lived-through experience. The resulting meaningfully bounded indeterminacy allows the person to transcend the here-and-now setting through intra-psychological distancing.

We live in order to face the next moment—until the end. Human psychological system is adapted to facing the uncertainty of the immediate future. Our psychological functions—from the lowest mechanisms of anticipatory reactions to the highest psychological functions of planning, intentional action (and non-action), and creation of subjective universes accessible only for the person oneself—are all pre-adaptation mechanisms that have emerged in human history. Hence there is a need for contemporary psychological science to overcome the

---

[1] *Note.* A preliminary version of this paper was presented as an Invited Lecture at the *6th International Conference on Social Representations.* General Theme: *Thinking Societies: Common Sense and Communication*, Stirling, August, 31, 2002.

mechanistic limitations—encoded into computer metaphors—of the cognitive science and restore the central focus on the intra-psychological flow of experiences. The latter—pioneered by the so-called "Würzburg School" of Oswald Külpe, Karl Bühler, and their colleagues— needs to re-gain its methodological focus. This is happening in contemporary cognitive science under the influence of the *foci* of the dynamic systems theory and Husserl's phenomenology (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999; Petitot et.al, 1999; Vermersch, 1999). Starting from different roots, the socio-cultural perspectives that focus on the construction of subjective phenomena through cultural support constitute a move in the same direction (Boesch, 1997, 2003; Valsiner, 1998). It is realistic to expect that these two trajectories of research may meet at the intersection of ideas that has been diligently worked through within the framework of social representations (Moscovici, 2001, for one of the most recent expositions).

When viewed from the vantage point of cultural psychology, social representations belong to the category of pre-adaptational means—semiotic mediating devices—for regulating human conduct. Their functions cover a wide range of human psychological phenomena— ranging from immediate, momentary and temporary "flashes" of meaning-in-context to memories encoded selectively in terms of meaning complexes (Bartlett, 1932). Yet such breadth of coverage creates a problem for explicit theory building in the area of social representation study. The theory of social representation is itself in need of further development.

Social representat*ion* and social representatio*ns*

The process of social representation —or social representing— is a process of guiding ourselves towards futures, through the help of heterogeneous semiotic mediators — social representatio*ns*. Here we see the functional and structural aspects of the representing process are unified.

As structured semiotic mediators, social representations are multi-level meaning complexes, which are constantly in the process of innovation. Static depictions of those complexes —outside of their functioning in context— obscure their major function the guiding of the streams of consciousness of human beings. While being structured, they are dynamic, emerging as the end product of meaning construction. As Moscovici has emphasized,

> Whenever I have talked about social representations, my interest *has always been in them in the making*, not as already made. I would say it is essential that we study them in the making, both historically and developmentally. Second, *conflict and tension are important in the formation of social representations*, for example in influence processes between majorities and minorities, between the individual and the group, and so on. (Moscovici & Marková, 1998, p. 394, added emphases)

Moscovici's theory of *social representing* —social representation as a process— starts from the diversity of individuals, attitudes and phenomena, in all their strangeness and unpredictability. Its aim is to discover how individuals and groups can construct a stable, predictable world out of such diversity (Moscovici, 1984, p. 44). This diversity becomes organized by social representations that carry with them constructed meanings of the past, and make these available for new applications. Social representing is a process of selective construction of a meaningful view of the world, followed by its continuous verification:

> To make someone responsive to new information, there is no need to overwhelm him with large quantities of it nor to "rectify" his thinking. All that is needed is to connect it by modifying the representation of the object to which the information is related. Despite everything, psychoanalysis has colored common sense, and more than common sense, without offering any measurable data, without any confirmed fact. Facts were gathered only after the theory had gained acceptance, in order to persuade oneself and others of its correctness. (Moscovici, 1982, pp. 140-141).

Moscovici has captured the back-and-forth movement between representing and experiencing: representing is needed for experiencing, while experiencing leads to new forms of representing. Social representations are complex wholes of signification that provide the direction for constructive interpretations of life events by individuals. These interpretations entail processes of a dialogical kind, where different suggestions are in opposition with one another.

The psychomorphic universe

That universe—actualized in the thinking, feeling, and acting of persons-- is jointly created by persons accepting certain socially suggested generic social representations which are promoted by some social institution (Moscovici, 1987, p. 164)- without doubting the general value orientations they entail. Examples of such phenomena abound in human history. For example, in Europe of the 1930s,

> The German or Russian citizens who saw their Jewish or subversive compatriots sent to concentration camps or shipped to the Gulag Islands certainly did not think they were innocent. *They had to be guilty since they were imprisoned.* Good reasons for putting them in prison were attributed (the word is apt) to them *because it was impossible to believe that they were accused, ill-treated and tortured for no good reason at all* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 45, added emphasis)

The very generic notion of "enemies of socialism" or "spies for the imperialist forces" as circulated in the social world of the Soviet Union in the 1930s lay the groundwork for the acceptance of such imprisonment. It also led to the paranoiac search for "hidden enemies" and accusations initiated by ordinary people. In history such uses of social representations are not unique-- the whole history of Catholic inquisition in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, and witch-hunting drives that have dominated particular times, are similar examples.

Social representations as fields of guidance for thinking and feeling

The psychomorphic universe is akin to the Shakespearean recognition of "all the world is a stage". Human beings create their dramatized worlds, create their roles and counter-roles in it, and attribute to their game the notion of truth, justice, honor, or necessity. All these general meanings are vague-- yet it is precisely their vagueness that gives them their power in processes of social regulation. They take the form of a meaningful dynamic between the person and their world. As Denise Jodelet explains,

> … when we concentrate on the positions held by social subjects (individuals or groups) towards objects whose value is socially asserted or contested, representations are treated as *structured fields*, that is to say as contents whose dimensions (information, values, beliefs, options, images etc.) are delimited by an organizing principle (attitude, norms, cultural schemata, cognitive structure, etc.).

> Specifically: when we concentrate on them as modes of knowledge, representations are treated as *structuring nuclei*, that is to say, knowledge structures orchestrating the totality of significations relative to the known object. (Jodelet, 1991, p. 13)

Personal interpretations of the world take the form of *objectivation*, which saturates the unfamiliar concept with reality, changing it into a building block of reality itself (Moscovici, 1981, p. 198). Objectivation entails *selective construction, structuring schematization, and naturalization of the cognitive whole* which is the social representation. When a representation emerges,

> …it is startling to see how it grows out of a seeming *repetition of clichés*, an *exchange of tautological terms* as they occur in conversations, and a *visualization of fuzzy images* relating to strange objects. And yet *it combines all these heterogeneous elements into one whole and endows the new thing with a novel and even cohesive appearance*. The key to its method of production lies in the anchoring and objectivation process. (Moscovici, 1988, p. 244, added emphases)

To relate this to current discourse studies, the process of objectivation is in terms of our contemporary popularity of social discourse—discursive construction of a relatively stable general meaning complex. It guarantees the ambiguity of the meanings-in-construction (Abbey & Josephs, 2002)—yet that ambiguity is but a phase in the movement towards non-ambiguity.

The process of anchoring entails the *grounding of the system of thought, an allocation of meaning, and instrumentalisation of knowledge*. The newly objectified meaning complexes become anchored in others, already existing, complexes. These complexes can have a long history within the given society, or groups of societies. For example, the notion of CONSPIRACY exists in societies in a generic pivotal form, to be filled in at different historical periods with different particulars (Moscovici, 1987). When a goal is set to create uncertainty within the existing social order, for example, some unexplainable or negatively valued events may be explained by anchoring these within a notion of conspiracy.

Meaning complexes are organized in ways that link abstracted nuclei of meanings with the wider fields of experience—in ways that entail multiplicity of and so a variety of meanings set up in relation to one another within the flow of experience. This is the locus for most dialogical approaches that have proliferated in psychology from the time of Martin Buber in the early 20th century, and have gained credence after these Continental European ideas were re-discovered for English-language psychology through the work of Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1981).

Consider the inherently dialogical social representation depicted in Figure 1. It is a 2-nuclei complex that creates tension at the level of immediate experiences. If we designate Nucleus 1 as HEALTH and Nucleus 2 as UN-HEALTH, reflecting the unity of opposites within a dialogical whole (see Marková, 1994, Josephs, Valsiner & Surgan, 1999), the complex HEALTH and UN-HEALTH can be seen to create tension in each and every moment of a person's immediate field of experience.

For example, a person encounters consumable objects, within a sequence: Kellog cornflakes, a hamburger, chocolate, and a cigar. The social representation complex HEALTH and UN-HEALTH guides the specific meaning-making about these concrete objects, and actions in relation to them. Kellog cornflakes may be eaten with the pride of health-consciousness, hamburger on the basis of trust in its healthy-ness granted by the McDonald's label, chocolate eaten through the use of a circumvention strategy ("it is bad, but I like it"—

Josephs & Valsiner, 1998). Finally, a cigar can be refused in full belief of its unhealthiness. It is constructed as POISON, as one version of the unity of the WHOLESOME <> POISONOUS social representation complex that makes it possible for the cigar to be considered delicious food (Gupta & Valsiner, 1996). Such sequence of concrete (and immediate, impulsive) decisions that are made meaningful as the person moves along in the eating activity. Yet they are all organized by the dialogic relation between two nuclei within a social representation. The relations between these nuclei result in a whole range of temporary meanings, created by the active meaning-maker in concrete contexts.
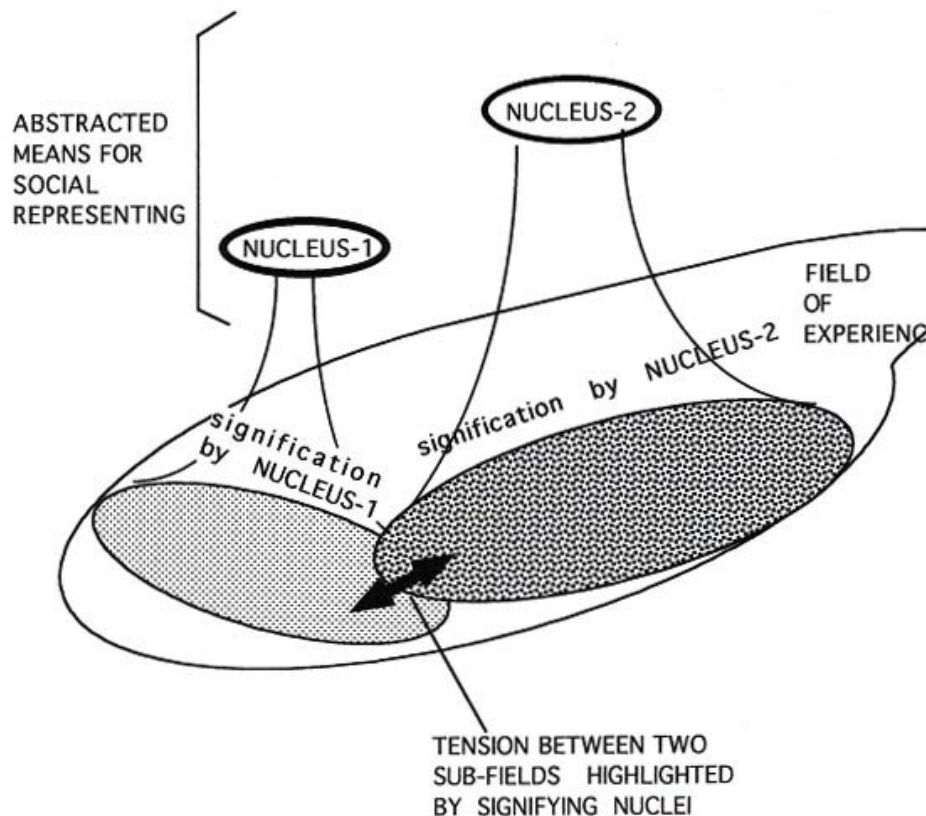
Figure 1
Social Representation: Field and nuclei

Looking at social representations: process, means, and movement

Social representation is a term of twofold character. First, it is a *process* of personal represent*ing* of one's relations with the world through the use of meaning complexes that are social in both their origin and in the process of communication. The second aspect of the term pertains to the meaning complexes (called 'social representat*ions*') that are used by persons in that process of social representing. This distinction may be obvious in the language of origin of the social representation tradition (French), but in translation into another language (English) the unity of the process and tool may become separated into two mutually exclusive ways.

So—it is time to ask a question that goes beyond the framework of the social representation theory—*what kind of scientific knowledge is the theory of social*

representation itself socially representing? Or, maybe a better question is—*what kind of new knowledge becomes available to the social sciences through the lens of social representation*? Here the distinction between developmental and non-developmental perspectives (Valsiner, 1987, 2000) makes a difference.

If the theory of social representation is put to use within a general non-developmental framework, the focus of investigation easily moves from the basic process of representing to that of the description of the tools of representing—social representations. This can take the form of empirical analyses of the meaning structures in a society (exemplified by traditional methods, such as multi-dimensional scaling or even factor analysis). As a result, the research question of represent*ing*— explicating the processes by which persons organize their lives-- becomes replaced by an entirely different question: what is the structure of the social tools (representat*ions*) that is available within a social context or encounter. A question about the process of re-presentation is replaced by a question about the structure of a representation. Much of current research in the area of social representations has made such a shift from process to structure – following trends within the rest of psychology where such shifts are common.

In contrast, if the theory of social representation is used within a developmental approach to meaning-making, the focus of investigation remains on the process of social representing. Through anchoring and objectivation, persons create their psychomorphic universes, and coordinate those through communication with others. If viewed from this perspective, social representations are meaning complexes that play the role of macro-level cultural constraints of human conduct in its PRESENT → FUTURE transition.

What happens at the boundary of time?

Time is the ultimate constraint for human making meaning of the world. It can be claimed that social representing is necessary and inevitable because there is no present time—only past, and future. This claim obviously clashes with our well-established social representation of the present (see Figure 2.A.), and it is in some sense wrong indeed (see Figure 2.B.).

The reality of time is its irreversibility—hence the notion of PRESENT can only be an abstraction out of the infinitesimally small moment between PAST and FUTURE. The inevitability of the immediacy of the dynamic between organism and environment "on line" has been captured in James Gibson's ecological psychology that emphasizes the information flow at the present, over the possibility of organism's construction of pre-adaptational devices.

Higher human psychological functions operate via the semiotic construction of tools (signs, social representations) that subjectively stabilize the PAST → FUTURE movement through the stability of the constructed signs. The person—while experiencing within the flow of immediate miniscule PRESENT moments—is constructing semiotic tools that allow *pre-adaptation* for future possible happenings (Fig. 2.B.). The semiotic mediator creates a state of temporary stability, based on the integration of the anticipated future possibilities and personal memories from the past. The semiotic mediator can grow into a hierarchical system of signs (Valsiner, 2001a).

A. Different versions of personal constructions of the PRESENT
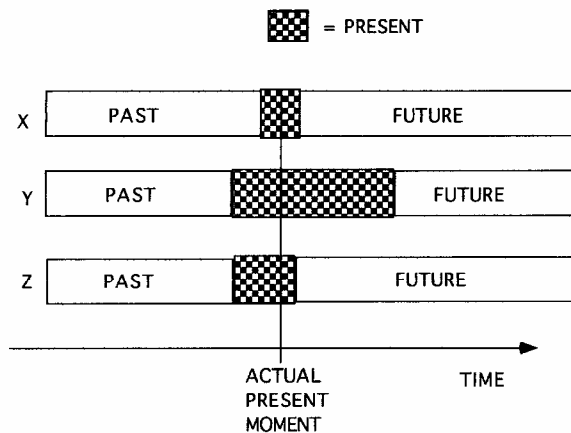
B. The reality of irreversible time flow and the process of semiotic mediation
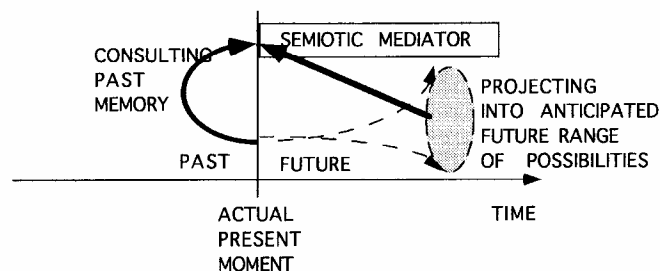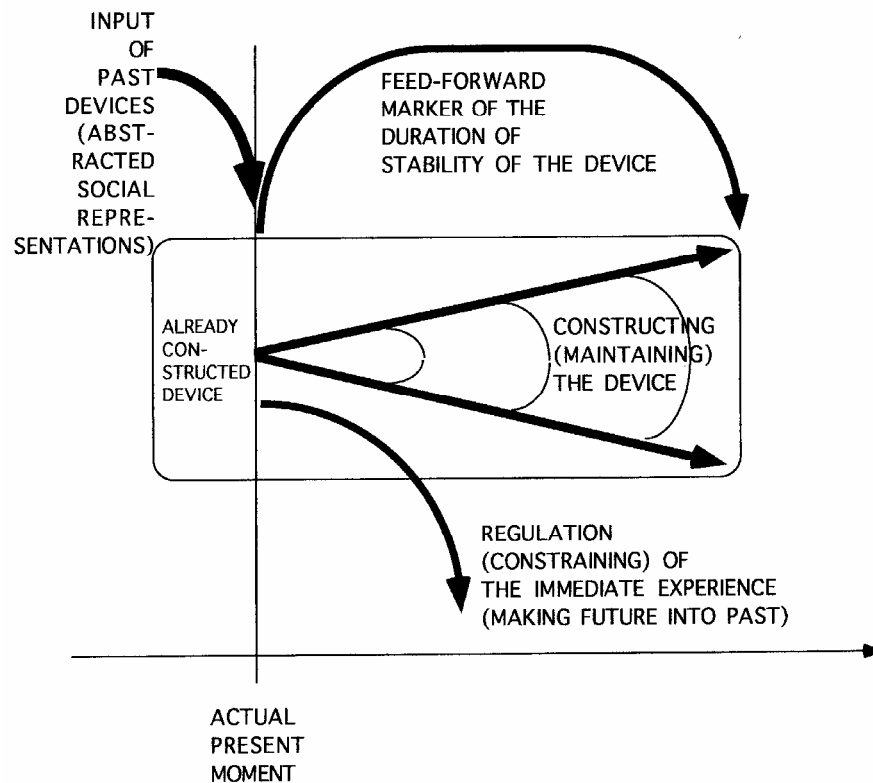

Figure 2
Time: Subjectively constructed and real

Each semiotic mediating device simultaneously fulfills three functions. First, it obviously regulates the flow of personal experience as long as the device is in place. Secondly, it regulates its own maintenance through the limits on its own re-construction. Finally, it regulates its own demise (see Figure 3).

Signs are *onto*-potent (Valsiner, 2002)—they can propose states of meaning in the future—ranging from the immediate next moment to one's lifetime (or, by way of trans-generational reconstruction of meanings—over centuries). A person feels a breeze of fresh air and exclaims "oh, liberty!". At the next moment the breeze is gone, and so is its context-bound meaning complex. On the other hand, the meaning complex LIBERTY has been re-used to provide positively flavored meaning to many bloody social events since the year 1789. Youngsters of many generations have used that meaning complex to kill, get killed, and celebrate the successes in all of those events.

In Figure 3 the (re)constructed sign entails a feed-forward signal—the constrainer of its own longevity. Given the capability of human beings to create meanings of increasingly general kind, the crucial issue—what limits that proliferation of signs—needs to be addressed. All issue of developing systems—in biology or psychology—is that of stopping the developing system from excessive productivity of the mechanisms it creates for its own well-being. Thus, unlimited growth of tissues is dangerous for the survival of the biological body.

In a similar way—psychological meaning-making needs to limit its own generativity in order to remain functional. It is an intriguing hypothesis that each created sign sets the limits upon its own survivability beyond the immediate use.

Figure 3
The basic structure of the constructed semiotic mediating device

Social guidance of limiting meaning making

On the side of social life, the limits upon the latitude of signs can be set by the timetables for ritualized action. Mourning, as a meaning system, is a good example of this. The loss of a close person is an inevitable life event. Yet its meaning for the person who stays alive can set up limits on the feeling about the loss. For example, a middle-aged Balinese man explained (after loss of his brother):

> If you cry at death, it is like *you interfere* with God's decision. When someone dies, it is because God calls him, his *karma* is finished. The day of our death is written at birth. His sickness was not haphazard, but because it is the way to death… If you cry, the *soul will not be so happy* because [it is] still in contact with you. You will impede its progress to God. Just like with you, if you are unhappy, you cannot work so well, cannot concentrate… (Wikan, 1990, p. 156, added emphasis)

When a loss happens, the general meaning complex of mourning is set into place together with a future-oriented stable timeframe. The Balinese man made use of the meaning complex of the "movement of soul" at death in ways that limited his action (crying) and provided meaningful future for himself. The person who is undergoing deep mourning—which is a personally necessary and socially sanctioned state—encounters all events in life for some period of time through the stabilizing function of representation. Yet the time period is destined to end—the social world sets up norms for exiting from the state of mourning, and the person overcomes that generalized meaning state on their own.

Methodological considerations

Since all of the coverage in this presentation has been on how semiotic regulation operates as a dynamic process, appropriate real-life phenomena for the study of such dynamism needed to explicate the regulation-in-action as discussed here.

Step 1: The Subject gets an instruction for action

"Move from A to B"

A - - - - - - - - - - - - - ▶ B

Step 2: The Subject starts the action (accomplishing the set goal orientation-- ▶ towards B)

A — (S ▶) - - - - - - - ▶ B

Step 3: The Researcher introduces meaning conditions (setting up a force ◀◊▷ opposite to the set goal orientation-- towards B). The Subject's action is meaningfully complicated.

A — (◊ S ▶) - MEANING BLOCK ▶ B

EXPLICATED MICRO-GENESIS OF FINDING SOLUTION FOR THE COMPLICATED TASK

Figure 4
General Methodological Tactics for the study of semiotic regulation of the mental processes

Here is the usual problem of access to the phenomena—once the semiotic regulation processes are automatized, and as the ongoing flow of experiencing cannot be slowed down in reality, the study of such regulatory processes needs some artificial means of intervention—a "block" of the ongoing meaning-making process that creates a time window to reflect upon that process. This can be achieved by experimental manipulation of an action setting. First, a goal-directed action task ("do X when instructed") can be given to the subject. The experimenter then presents to the subject a stimulus field that is oriented in a direction opposite to the instructed action ("X cannot (should not) be done", or at least is difficult to do). The subject is then forced to deal with the opposition "I must do X" and "I cannot do X"—a dialogue that slows down the actual action (doing X). In a way, this notion of experimentation creates a miniscule "double bind" situation for the subject (see Figure 4).

Putting subjects into such complicated situation is necessary, but not sufficient for the study of semiotic regulatory processes. The researcher then needs to find a way to register, that is, to make transparent, the subject's "on-line" treatment of the dialogue (through recording action hesitance sequences, or eliciting verbal self-report). The sequential nature of the evidence is crucial—semiotic regulation can be studied as a microgenetic problem-solving sequence. The history of psychology is rich with efforts to accomplish the latter-- from the times of Würzburg tradition (Bühler, 1907, 1908) to the problem solving studies by Otto Selz (Frijda & DeGroot, 1982) and Karl Duncker (Schnall, 1999), developed by the Carnegie-Mellon traditions (Siegler, 1996; Ericsson & Simon, 1993) and the search for explicating processes of mental efforts continue. The innovative moment here is to link this mental process registration tradition with the experimental manipulation of semiotic kind—it is through the insertion of some meaning change ("meaning block" in Figure 4.2.) while the Subject is moving towards a previously set meaningful goal that the access to the phenomena is achieved. The person's action plan is expected to be disrupted, and s/he begins to use new—created or imported – meanings for dealing with such disturbance.

Empirical examples: To shoot or not to shoot?

An example of the use of this general tactic comes from a study by Nicole Capezza (Capezza, 2002; Valsiner & Capezza, 2002) on the microgenetic construction of a violent or non-violent act (play "shooting" of different objects). Young adults—university students in Northeastern United States and Northern Estonia—were asked to aim a play gun at a screen, onto which different previously unseen images of objects were projected (sequence of 18). They were told to describe each appearing image and any feelings or thoughts that they have towards the image, and make a decision to shoot or not to shoot at the image. Whether they decided to shoot or not, they were instructed to explain immediately how they reached their decision. The "meaning blocks" were introduced in the study by the selection of images of different recognizable symbolic values. Some were neutral for shooting (regular "bull's eye" target for shooting), others were expected to work against the shooting instruction (e.g., photograph of a young girl, or an old man, or a live duck). There were also two stimuli which were expected to complicate the shooting suggestion by way of collective-culturally overgeneralized meanings—a person wearing a KKK mask, and a picture of a man with a moustache (recognizable as Adolf Hitler). Needless to say, none of the subjects had direct experiences with World War II or with the racial conflicts that occurred in southern states of U.S.A. some decades before they were born. Hence the "meaning block" function of these two stimuli is fully based on the narrative traditions that carry social representations within the two societies (USA and Estonia) about socio-historical events.

The following examples are selected from the empirical records, for an illustration of how the semiotic regulators operate within the shooting situation—with added emphases.

> US#1 (female): Dahhhh… [pause 2 sec.] Well clearly that is something that *calls to mind a horrible umm... period in American history*. Although it may not be an actual photograph from that period. It *brings to mind the Ku Klux Klan*. And that's not a happy image however in bringing that to mind it raises the *question that do you fight violence with violence*? Umm… so I think that even though my emotions are definitely negative towards that, I have a strong negative valence associated with that photograph. Umm… I *would choose not to fight it because…* I choose, I would not see… I would choose not to shoot it. Because I would see that as *creating more of the same ugliness that that represents*. However the initial [pause 1 sec.] impulse is to shoot at it.

Two hyper-generalized (field-like—Valsiner, 2001b) meaning systems are brought into a dialogue within this person's solution efforts—VIOLENCE (KKK=history of violence) and NON-VIOLENCE (how to counter violence). Auxiliary meanings ("same ugliness") emerge in the process of finding a solution.

> US#2 (male): Well, that's a member of the Ku Klux Klan. And uhh… what is going through my mind right now is *that person probably deserves to be shot*, but I probably, *but I don't really agree with that*. It is just *sort of a moment of anger*. Umm… but I wouldn't kill somebody like that. Or umm… support anybody killing that person. Umm… so I'll just stop there. Umm… but *there was sort of a ambivalence of saying yeah why not shoot but then that is not really very humane thing to do*. This is a game of course, but I guess I'm kind of starting to interpret what I'm doing as um… sort of a symbolic of what I… what I tend to think about certain thing. And trying to be consistent with what I think about things.

Here the person uses a circumvention strategy (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998)—" deserves X" – "but I do not agree"-- mediated by the hyper-generalized meaning ("humane"). The virtual nature of the setting ("game of course") sets up the ease of finding a solution.

> US#11 (female): WOW, (pause 2 sec) there is a *person* maybe from, not *maybe I am sure it is from Ku Klux Klan* the KKK and umm… my first thought was *maybe I should shoot* that person but in my immediate thought was *why should a shoot that person*, it's *another person*, the only difference is he has a mask and *he is trying to defend something*, but inside, he is behind that mask *it's another person* so *why should I shoot another person*, there is no reason why so I don't feel like shooting either.

Here the dialogue is created at the "KKK member" (negative valence) "another person" (positive valence) intersection, through the hyper-generalized meaning field ("why SHOULD I do X?" implying its opposite—"I should NOT do X"). The power of such hyper-generalized semiotic fields can be reduced under influence of education, as that replaces them from dialogical to monological overgeneralization, as the following example shows:

> US#23 (female): Uh… that's a *KKK member so* (shoots at image). I only would shoot at it *because I am learning in class right now how much aggression and hostility* and I guess these bad feelings that they've projected over the years amongst black people and I think *they are just horrible horrible human beings*.

It is not a coincidence that all warring sides in the history of humankind have presented their enemies as sub-human and horrible monsters ("just horrible horrible human beings")—semiotically supporting the violent acts against them and so not letting any doubt or dialogical opposition emerge in the minds of the actors.

The evidence from Estonia provides interesting contrasts. There have been no issues of racial conflict or violence present in Estonian history, so all knowledge about KKK is mediated through communication channels. It is not surprising that Estonian subjects (N=40) in general found the KKK figure more distant from their personal affective fields than the U.S. subjects did. At times the figure was not recognized as KKK, but assumed to be a figure from some mediaeval time, or movie. Two cases of clear anchoring of the image within the realms outside of the meanings of KKK are notable:

> E#23 (female): Eah, I don't know the word in English, but in Estonian it is *timukas* (hangman). He *is the man or she is who kills other people for living*, it is *his job* and I *don't want to shoot because he is human* and why should I and *he's doing his job* and after all I think it's not real, it is not in the real life, *it's kind of movie or something…*

By anchoring the image within the framework historically known in Europe (such as a hangman) the person easily eliminates the possibility of shooting by the combination of "human" + "doing his job", adding to it the artificial nature of the situation. In a parallel case,

> E#13 (female): It is *some kind of demonstration…* yes I think it's demonstration because the person is holding a flag, I guess. Otherwise I would think of *some person who rescues someone or those who disinfect mines*, but since he is holding a flag, it's some kind of demonstration. And since he has a mask he/she wants to keep their anonymity for some reason. I wouldn't decide to shoot.

There is no ambiguity generated through such anchoring of the image. All the implicit negatively loaded value system that easily surfaces in the U.S. is by-passed in these cases. It is important to note for all of these cases that the arrival of the KKK image was not anticipated in the series (it occurred in position 6, after 5 "non-overloaded" images), hence the meaning-making mechanisms triggered by the image were working from a "fresh" base.

A theory of enablement

Why create this—yet another—theory? It is often the case that labels become social representations within a science, and acquire a life of their own (see the case of 'co-construction'— Markova, 1994; Valsiner, 1994a, 1994b). By linking or anchoring the ideas of semiotic self-regulation within a label that emphasizes the potentiality for the future, the time perspective is hopefully retained in theoretical discourse.

The theory of enablement can be formulated by way of the following set of statements:

1. Human beings (like all organisms) relate with their environments in the context of the irreversibility of time;
2. All adaptation efforts are oriented towards the immediate future—they are pre-adaptations to conditions that are not yet known;
3. Signs are created to delimit the uncertainty of the immediate future;
4. Sign construction is guided socially—through social representation;

5. The means of psychological adaptation—signs—become organized in complexes that may be communicable across persons and generations. These are social representations.
6. Social representations are inherently heterogeneous, including opposite meanings and signals for their own contextualization.
7. This heterogeneity within a social representation creates the basis for dialogicality of social representing.

Constraining enablement

The theory of enablement is based on the notion of *constraining*—delimiting domains of phenomena from other domains (Valsiner, 1987). Constraining operates so as to highlight the enabled part of the field while dis-enabling the rest. In human development many meaning-making patterns become established long before they are used by the young children. An observation like the following is no exception in our everyday life:

> Most societal rules and norms go against basic instincts, particularly in the realm of sensuality and things related to the human body. I recently witnessed a bunch of toddlers arrive at a swimming pool, led by three adult supervisors. One of the little girls impulsively took her swimming suit off and splashed into the water. The immediate reaction of the nearest adult supervisor was to say, "Shame on you! Girls do not swim with nothing on!" The little girl did not yet seem to have a clue as to what shame is, but within a few years she will learn which circumstances she is supposed to feel shame according to societal norms. (Moghaddam, 2002, pp. 118-119)

Basically nonsensical (at the time of the event) action restrictions, combined with general suggestions (social representations like "shame", "dirty", "evil eye", "unhealthy X", etc.) create the guidance structure for the developing mind. The constraining of action is paired with constraining of how the target of constraining is supposed to feel and think about the "in-ruled" domains. They may feel and think about these domains in a variety of ways, but the *direction* of such activity is imposed on them unambiguously. It is the function of social representations to provide such direction or regulation.

Conclusion: Constrained and self-constraining dialogicality

Following on from the story about the theory of enabling, thinking society is a society filled with multiple semiotic constraining devices that are invented to create a myriad of constraints upon our thinking that a society needs for its own organization. It is not surprising that social constraining of thinking emerges through the lens of the social psychology of social representation—rather than from its cognitive and increasingly a-social neighboring discipline of "cognitive science". Highlighting social context makes it possible to observe the unity of opposites in the process of constraining social thinking. Moscovici's observation would fit here:

> Our society is an institution which inhibits what it stimulates. It *both tempers and excites* aggressive, epistemic, and sexual tendencies, *increases or reduces* the chances of satisfying them according to class distinctions, and *invents prohibitions together with the means of transgressing them.* Its sole purpose, to date, is self-preservation, and it opposes change by means of laws and regulations. It functions on the basic assumption that it is unique, has nothing to learn, and

cannot be improved. Hence its unambiguous dismissal of all that is foreign to it. Even its presumed artificiality, which might be considered a shortcoming, is taken, on the contrary, for a further sign of superiority, since it is an attribute of mankind. (Moscovici, 1976, p. 149, added emphasis)

Here Moscovici has pinpointed the central issue for the maintenance of stability within an open system—such as a society. The dynamic regulation of social stability is guaranteed through the unity of the opposite functions within the same cultural-psychological meaning complex—a social representation. This leads to the need to consider social representations as dynamic systems—each of them contains a point-like dominant meaning, and its opposite (field-like) counterpart (see Josephs, Valsiner & Surgan, 1999). The critical question for further development of the SR theory is to create formal models of the transformation of the current construction of oppositional structures into something new.

Social representations enable the persons—in their individual ontology (personal culture) and social ontogeny (based on internalization/externalization) to guide themselves in the next moment's encounter with the environment, and to orient that guidance itself, by enhancing its direction or letting some other directions from the past diminish.

References

Abbey, E., & Josephs, I. E. (2002). Perception of ambiguity: Strength through dialogue. Paper presented at the ISCRAT Conference in Amsterdam, June.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, Tx.: University of Texas Press.

Bartlett, F. (1932). *Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boesch, E. E. (1997). *Von der Sehnsucht*. Saarbrücken: Privatdrück.

Boesch, E.E. (2003). Why does Sally never call Bobby "I"? *Culture & Psychology, 9*(3), 287-297.

Bühler, K. (1907). Tatsachen und Probleme zu eine Psychologie der Denkvorgänge. I. *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie, 9,* 297-365.

Bühler, K. (1908)..Tatsachen und Probleme zu eine Psychologie der Denkvorgänge. II, III *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie, 12,* 1-92.

Capezza, N. (2002) The Cultural-Psychological Foundations for Violence and Nonviolence. Paper presented at the 15th World meeting of the International Society for Research on Aggression, Montreal, July 31.

Ericsson, K.A., & Simon, H. (1993). *Protocol analysis: verbal reports as data*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press.

Frijda, N. H., & DeGroot, A. D. (Eds.) (1982). *Otto Selz: His contribution to psychology*. The Hague: Mouton.

Gupta, S., & Valsiner, J. (1996). Myths in the hearts: implicit suggestions in the story. Paper presented at the Second Conference for Socio-Cultural Research, Geneva, September, 14.

Jodelet, D. (1991). *Madness and social representations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Josephs, I. E., & Valsiner, J. (1998). How does autodialogue work? Miracles of meaning maintenance and circumvention strategies. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 61*(1), 68-83.

Josephs, I. E., Valsiner, J., & Surgan, S. E. (1999). The process of meaning construction. In J. Brandtstätdter and R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Action & self development* (pp. 257-282). Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage.

Marková, I. (1990). A three-step process as a unit of analysis in dialogue. In I. Marková & K. Foppa (Eds.), *The dynamics of dialogue* (pp. 129-146). Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.

Marková, I. (1994). Mutual construction of asymmetries. In P. van Geert & L. Mos (Eds.), *Annals of theoretical psychology*. Vol. 10. New York: Plenum.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2002). *The individual and society: A cultural integration*. New York: Worth.

Moscovici, S. (1976). *Society against nature: The emergence of human societies*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.

Moscovici, S. (1981). On social representations. In J. P. Forgas (Ed.), *Social cognition* (pp. 181-209). London: Academic Press.

Moscovici, S. (1982). The coming era of representations. In J.-P. Codol & J.-P. Leyens (Eds.), *Cognitive analysis of social behavior* (pp. 115-150). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds), *Social representations* (pp. 3-69). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moscovici, S. (1987). The conspiracy mentality. In C. F. Graumann & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Changing conceptions of conspiracy* (pp.151-169). New York: Springer.

Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes towards a description of social representations. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 18*, 211-250.

Moscovici, S. (2001). The phenomenon of social representations. In G. Duveen (Ed), *Social representations* (pp. 18-77). New York: New York University Press

Moscovici, S., & Markova, I. (1998). Presenting social representations: A conversation. *Culture & Psychology, 4*(3), 371-410.

Petitmengin-Peugeot, C. (1999). The intuitive experience. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 6*(2-3), 43-77.

Petitot, J., Varela, F. J., Pachoud, F. J., & Roy, J.-M. (Eds) (1999). *Naturalizing phenomenology: Issues in contemporary phenomenology and cognitive science*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press.

Schnall, S. (1999). Life as the problem: Karl Duncker's context. *From Past to Future: Clark Papers on the History of Psychology, 1*(2), 13-28.

Siegler, R. S. (1996). *Emerging minds*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Valsiner, J. (1987). *Culture and the development of children's action*. Chichester: Wiley.

Valsiner, J. (1994a). Culture and human development: a co-constructionist perspective. In P. van Geert, L. P. Mos, & W. J. Baker (Eds*.), Annals of Theoretical Psychology*. Vol. 10 (pp. 247-298). New York: Plenum.

Valsiner, J. (1994b). Co-constructionism: what is (and is not) in a name? In P. van Geert, L. P. Mos, & W. J. Baker (Eds.), *Annals of Theoretical Psychology*. Vol. 10 (pp. 343-368). New York: Plenum.

Valsiner, J. (2000). *Culture and human development*. London: Sage.

Valsiner, J. (2001a). Process structure of semiotic mediation in human development. *Human Development, 44*, 84-97.

Valsiner, J. (2001b). Cultural developmental psychology of affective processes. Invited Lecture at the 15. Tagung der Fachgruppe Entwicklungspsychologie der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie, Potsdam, September, 5.

Valsiner, J. (2002). Irreversibility of time and ontopotentiality of signs. *Estudios de Psicologia, 23*(1), 49-59.

Valsiner, J. & Capezza, N. (2002). Creating arenas for action: videogames and violence. Invited lecture at 5th International Baltic Psychology Conference -- *Psychology in the Baltics: at the crossroads*, August 23, Tartu, Estonia.

Vermersch, P. (1999). Introspection as practice. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 6*(2-3), 17-42.

Wikan, U. (1990). *Managing turbulent hearts: A Balinese formula for living.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.