

Forms and Functions of Knowledge

Social Knowledge and Identity
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Jovchelovitch (2007) suggests:

Dimensions of representational processes

Representation has specific form – triadic - **Self-Other-Object**

Social life gives texture and form to both community and representation

Object: social object

Self: our own lived experience and existing representations used to anchor the object

Other: the lived experiences and existing representations of people with whom you communicate about the object

Instrumental function is based upon the **self-object** relation and **self-other** relation

Triads constitute contexts of knowing – and these contexts of knowing vary from community to community

Jovchelovitch, 2007



- Representation that forms the architecture of all knowledge
- No direct link to knowledge – we have to REPRESENT it and COMMUNICATE it
- The only ways to knowledge are representation, communication, and language
 - all knowledge is social knowledge and all knowledge is socially constructed
- Representational processes mediate/bridge between subjects and the world of objects
 - they have the power to affect the **structure** of knowledge
- Representations are ‘proposals of the world’
 - there is no single knowledge system – there is variability and diversity
- We must be aware of alternative knowledge systems
 - even if we ultimately don’t accept them

Jovchelovitch (2007) suggests:

Dimensions of representational processes

- **Who?**
 - **How?**
 - **Why?**
 - **What?**
 - **What For?**
-
- Social context - the work of representation actually taking place in real life
 - The particular architecture of self-object-other relations (social context) that is influencing different representational processes



- Interrelations between self-other-object are variable thus the types of communication that emerge in these contexts are variable



- Types of communication define how we listen, make sense of each other while we're engaging with the object world (material or symbolic objects)

e.g.

Power relations (how we're positioned by others

- How we're connected to others (the bonds we have with other people

These set up



- Parameters within which we're able to talk with each other in certain ways

Complexity

- Representation is a rich and complex social process

e.g. **Social actors who have**

- **Identities** - maintain relationships that shape what we come to know and how we come to know the world.
 - **Emotional lives** - and these are constructed through representation
 - **Reasons** behind what we do
- Representation as a practice
 - What are the dynamic components of representational processes that apply to identity, attribution, communication and other social psychological foci?



Dimensions of Representational Processes

- Jovchelovitch: representations can be seen as having three dimensions:

Affective, or personal dimension: Corresponding to the emotional bond between partners

Intersubjective dimension: Corresponding to the status and position of partners and to the type of interaction established

Objective dimension: The construction of the object-world

- Framework of Who? How? Why? What?

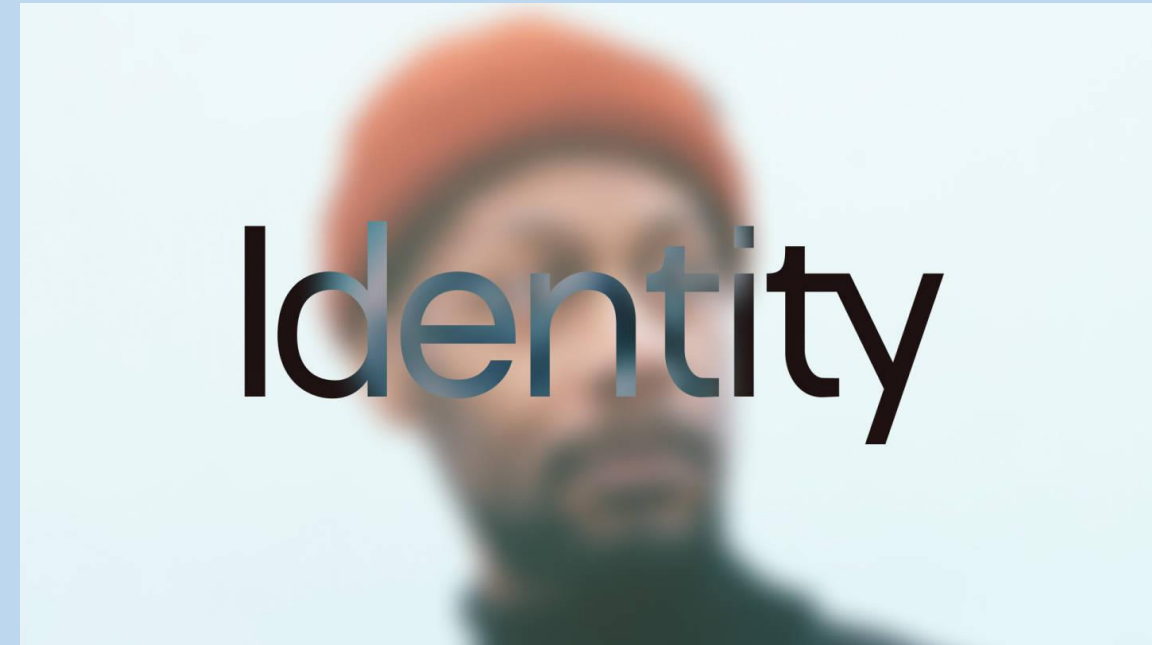
To try to elaborate upon how social representations are realised in social life

Identity and the ‘who’ of social representations

- The ‘who’ of knowledge refers to who is doing the representational work and what relationships are involved
- Relates to individual and social identity, and also to status and positioning of people in a social field
- Representations are always constructed by someone in relation to someone else (Jodelet, 1989)
- And every representation is linked to the effort of people and communities to represent **themselves** - even when the focus isn't specifically on them
- Representations pull together identity, culture and history of a group of people
- Social memories and recognisable narratives reassure people of their belongingness



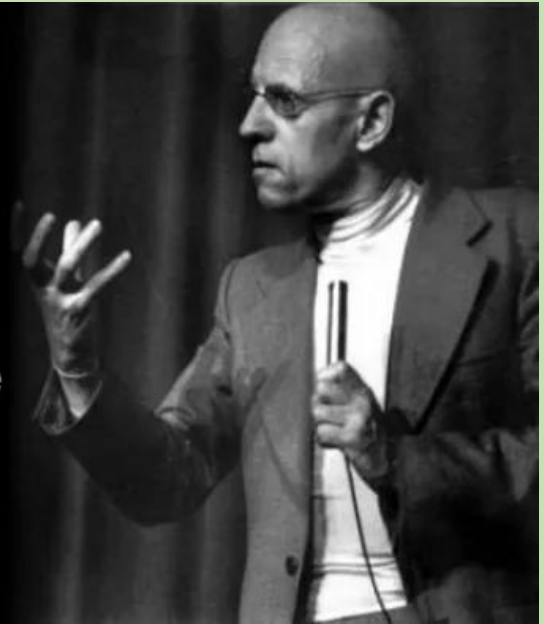
- Jovchelovitch goes as far as to state that there is no process of knowing that does not project the identity of the knower
- So knowledge represents the people who carry and use that knowledge
- Sometimes representations more linked to those doing the representing than the object of representations
- Example: Traditional knowledge systems / collective representations – continuation of traditions and knowledge of ‘who we are’
- Subjectivity



- Other knowledge systems – try to marginalise the identity of knowers
- This means that a representation of the object world can go beyond
 - Dependence on locale
 - Subjectivity of knowers
- Example: science – based on distance between knower and knowledge (aim for objectivity)
- Position and engagement of actors within a representational system highlights
 - Different 'textures' of knowledge systems
 - Weight of subjectivity in a knowledge system

There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

Michel Foucault



Communication and the 'how' of social representations

- The different ways in which “actors communicate and interact to produce the representation in question”
(Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.104)
- Representations always produced through communicative action
- Communication - central unit of analysis for understanding the form and functions of a knowledge system
- Moscovici (1961) 'Psychanalyse'. Different communicative strategies/forms of social influence:

Diffusion: Urban liberals; communication merely intended to inform

Propagation: Catholic; limited concessions; limits set

Propaganda: Communist; conflict; negative stereotypes

BUT – people are not passive – we make choices regarding information



- Patterns of communication shape a particular view and knowledge of the world

e.g. asymmetric and symmetric peer relations influence the way that a child can think and their developmental trajectory (Doise et al, 1975)
- How do different kinds of social interaction result in the construction of different types of social representations?
- Piaget (1995a): extreme types of social interaction
 - social constraint (asymmetry)
 - cooperation (symmetry)

Cooperation (reciprocity in perspective) results in creative knowledge
- Duveen and colleagues: SRT approach to social structure of the classroom

- Hsu (1999) – different types of knowing in the field of Chinese medicine

Form and content of medicine associated with the ways in which people 'relate to each other in the process of knowing'

(Jovchovitch, 2007, p.106)

- Different modes of transmission between masters, practitioners and apprentices:
 - Secret
 - Personal
 - Standardised
- Linked to symmetry/asymmetry of relations
- Evidence of variation and plurality of styles of knowing – even in field considered traditional and perhaps homogenous



- Ideology
- Asymmetric relations – lead to domination – leads to determination of knowledge frameworks
- Thompson (1990):
 - Connections between meaning and relations of power
 - How meaning is used to establish and sustain relations of domination
- Symbolic function of representations provides the reason and logic underpinning knowledge systems
- Symbols give meaning and invest with emotion
 - Might not be coherent with cognitive rationality e.g. myths, religion

Reason and the 'why' of representation



- Representational processes allow construction of knowledge with a structure that contains both subjective and inter-subjective dimensions
(*'polyvalent'* structure = many functions)
- Why? What is the rationality behind interaction?
- The symbolic function of representation connects knowledge and personal and emotions reasons
- e.g.
 - The 'logic' of science is still not free of subjectivity (Bachelard, 1938, 1971, 1987)
 - But the world of myth shows clearly the symbolic processes involved in maintaining systems of knowing
- Multiple rationalities e.g. competing social representations

The Object and the 'what' of representation

- How is the object constructed? Race, gender, work place, people...and everything else
- Our world has to be constructed by us for our use – leads to objective reality for people – objectifying
- Need to understand that there is a history and a future trajectory associated with the issues and objects we engage with. History – offers us the social fact, which needs to be recognised
- “All knowledge systems deal with the solidity and historicity of the object, albeit in different ways” (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.111)
- Few objects in the social world that have not previously been represented – so there will be existing stocks of representation
- Social representations (everyday forms of knowledge) draw on previously recognised knowledge through the process of anchoring
- Also allows for the construction of new ways of thinking about objects

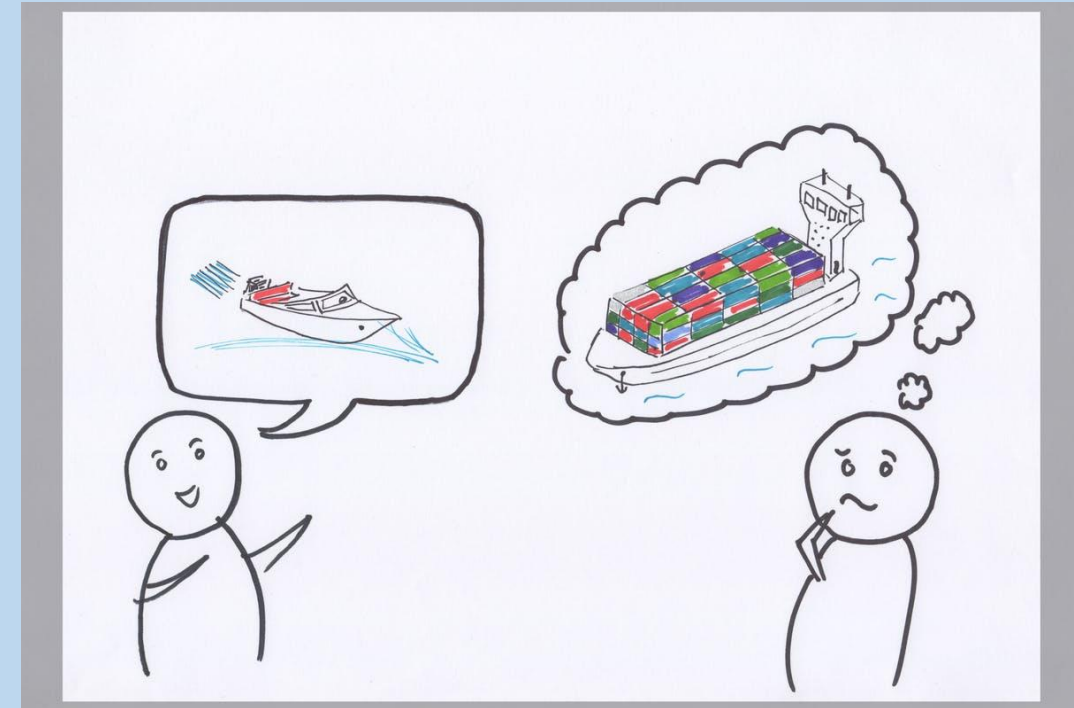
Making the unfamiliar familiar: function and the ‘what for’ of representation

- Need to make sense of the world

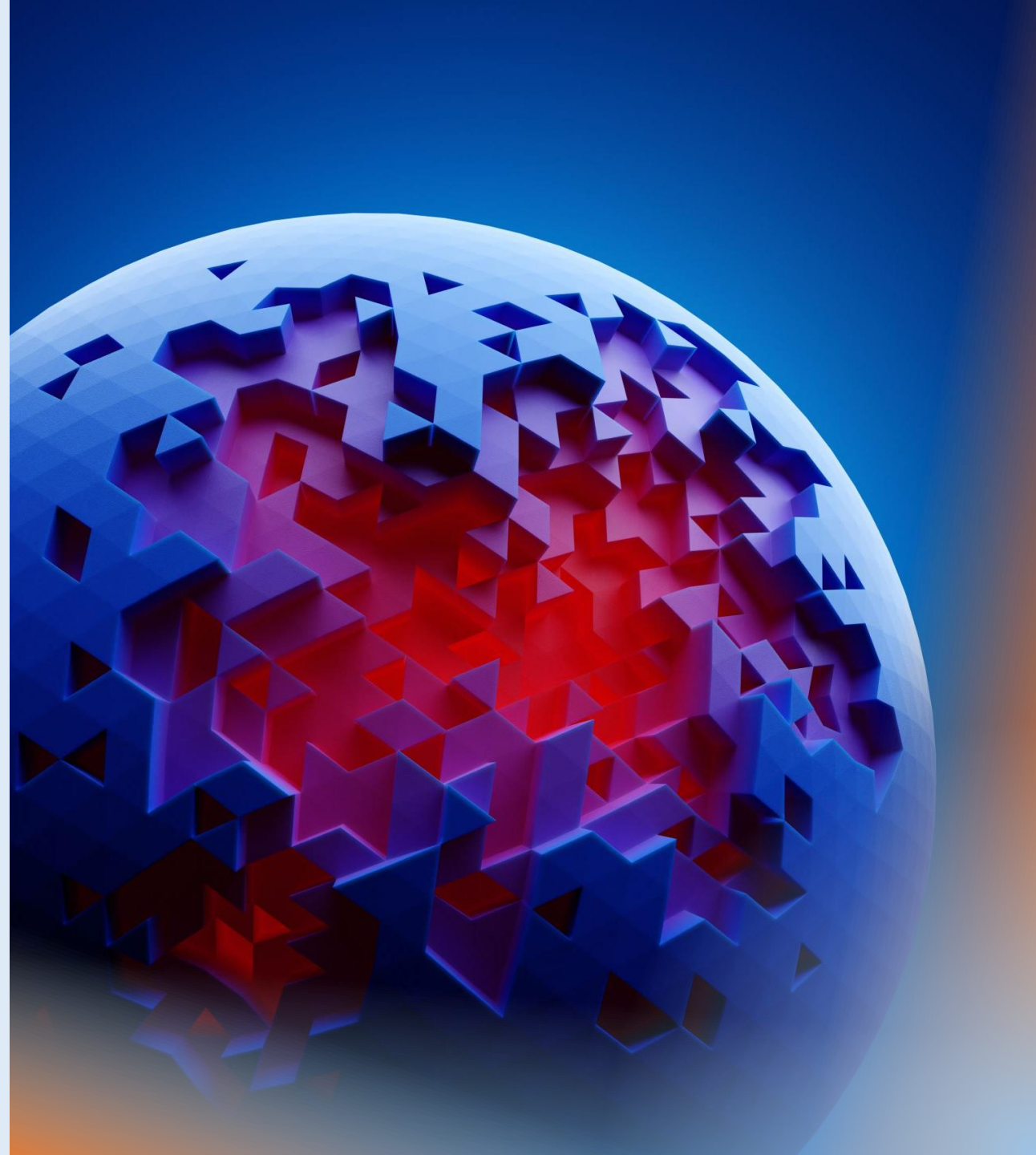
“Representations bridge the distance between social actors and the world by creating sense, tools and understanding; they tame the object world and make it known”

(Jovchelovitch, 2007, p.113)

- Name, identify, categorise
- Representations set within cultural practices and institutions provide patterns of cognition and recognition
- So - knowledge and communication provide the resources for the construction of the self and of reality



- Through constructing reality, representations convey identity and frame the thinking and action
- This constructs a shared system of knowledge with which to make sense of our shared world
- We feel a sense of belonging to a world due to shared frame of reference (even if we disagree with some dominant discourses, we can communicate to argue them with others)



Social psychological dimensions present in knowledge systems:

Identity - representation, knowledge underpins possible identities – recognition of others

Community - shared, distinct knowledge constructs a shared world of community

Social memory – objectification provides the basis for anchoring within communities

Imagining/constructing futures – cognitive, social and emotional construction of the future

Ideology – asymmetric power relations, contested power relations

(see Jovchelovitch, 2007, pp.113-114)

- This lecture was based on:

Jovchelovitch, S. (2007). *Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture*. London: Routledge.

Chapter 4: The forms and functions of knowledge (pp. 98-126).

