

Concepts and Theoretical Inspirations

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LSE July 2011

Sociabilities

Social Representations

Imagination

Psychosocial Cartographies

Sociabilities is a notion derived from the concept of sociability, introduced by sociologist Georg Simmel to describe the play-form of social life and the joy and imagination that accompany the experience of the social.

Sociability is defined by Simmel as the play-form of sociation, that is, the pleasurable, joyful and delightful experience that comes out of people's interaction in society. Imagine the perfect social situation, when you are having fun with peers, chatting, laughing, joking and enjoying the sheer delight of being together. For Simmel this experience is the essence of sociability. This pure pleasure of sociability is possible because we are able to detach ourselves from the real, material and concrete forms of social life that involve structures and positionings, usually related to hierarchies and inequality in social fields. If we abstract from wealth, position and power, if we forget status and other burdens of 'real' life, then we can playfully engage in the game of sociability, of enjoying the presence of others, or playing the conversational and relational games that make conviviality and shared experience. Simmel mentions social games, coquetry and conversation as typical of this state of playing society that is sociability.

In **Underground Sociabilities** we engage with the concept of sociability at various levels:

→ we seek to uncover the sociability of favela life, usually hidden by social segregation and exclusion. Underground sociabilities tend to remain invisible and thus underground; they take place behind a curtain of segregation that does not permit its forms to come into the full light of an integrated public sphere. This project shares the goal of making the invisible visible and crossing symbolic barriers in segregated urban spaces.

→ we seek to identify how the bonding and playful energies of sociability operate as a tool for re-writing individual lives, regenerating social spaces and connecting the city. A central marker of Brazilian culture, sociability as playfulness is particularly present in favela culture, both as expression of cultural identity and as an act of resistance against harsh conditions of living.

→ we draw on Simmel's analogy of sociability with play, game and art to emphasise the power of the imagination as a central resource for regenerating individual and social lives.

Underground Sociabilities are fighting back, bringing to the surface of the city the voice, the conversations and the playfulness of favela culture.

Key Source:

Simmel, G. (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated, edited and introduced by Kurt H. Wolff. London: The Free Press (in particular chapter III of Part I: Sociability)

Social Representations are systems of ideas, values and practices constructed by social groups with the twofold function of enabling orientation and communication. The concept was introduced by social psychologist Serge Moscovici in a study about how ideas change in the public sphere.

Social representations are ways of thinking and acting in the world; they express the mentality of a group, the thought and behaviour, the identities and the culture of a community. Our contemporary world is made of a plurality of social representations, each expressing projects, identities, ways of life and different levels of power in social fields. How representations meet, compete and transform each other in public spheres is one of the most interesting problems of our time.

In **Underground Sociabilities** we investigate the social representations developed by different Rio's communities about themselves, their individual trajectories, their neighbourhood, the city of Rio and the future. We are mapping out how favela communities are staging representational struggles in relation to the overall public sphere of the city, trying to re-signify how they are seen and perceived by mainstream society in Rio. Central to the experience of Afroreggae and CUFA is to transform social representations of favelas and 'favelados', actively demonstrating that crime, drugs and violence are far from being the dominant features of favela culture. By pushing what is invisible into the open public sphere these groups are challenging dominant symbols and stereotypes and making a significant contribution to changes in social identities and inter-group relations across the city.

At the same time we are researching how different actors in the city, including academia, NGOs, international organizations, the media and the police construct representations about favela life and the work of Afroreggae and CUFA. Our key

focus is the crossroads where different representations, stemming from different constituencies in the city, meet and transform each other.

Key Sources:

Bauer, Martin W. and Gaskell, George (2008) Social representations theory: a progressive research programme for social psychology. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 38 (4). pp. 335-353. Read it [here](#)

Jovchelovitch, S. (2007) *Knowledge in Context: Representations, community and culture*. London: Routledge. See it [here](#)

Marková, I. (2003) *Dialogicality and Social Representations*. Cambridge: CUP. See it [here](#)

Moscovici, S. (2000) *Social Representations: explorations in social psychology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. See it [here](#)

Moscovici, S (2008) *Psychoanalysis, its image and its public*. Cambridge: Polity Press. See it [here](#)

Wagner, W. & Hayes, N. (2005). *Everyday Discourse and Common-Sense—The Theory of Social Representation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. See it [here](#)

Imagination is the human capacity to go beyond the immediate present and play with possible realities. It involves the projection of hopes and anticipation of futures that challenge the present and actual configuration of things.

Imagining other worlds is a key adaptation unique to modern humans (Bloch, 2008). Counterfactual thinking coincided with significant increase in hominid brain size some 300.000 years ago. Imagining a range of possible outcomes for different actions and ‘seeing’ in the mind something that could happen in a future time-space combination would have the selective advantage of controlling the environment and not having to use the physical energy to do so. Around 50.000 years ago a proliferation of human artistic activity and the effects of a ‘symbolic explosion’ expressed in cave paintings, ritual, songs, dance and body ornaments demonstrated the onset or sudden acceleration of a new and distinctive human cognitive capacity: the imagination.

In children the human capacity to imagine alternative possibilities and to work out their implications emerges early and fundamentally transforms children’s developing conception of reality. It allows children to switch between frameworks, from reality

to make-believe and back, and establishes a relationship of mutual inspiration between pretend-play and reality. For the child, pretending is not a distortion but a playful relationship with reality that is central to a healthy cognitive, social and emotional development. Fantasy, play, day-dreaming and imagining are essential for the healthy development of thinking and rationality.

We are studying how the work of the imagination contributes for regenerating individuals, communities and public spheres and how underground sociabilities use the arts for effective community development. We know that representations contain a future-making function that allows the cognitive anticipation of things to come, constructing knowledge of the future cognitively, socially and emotionally. Through projects communities cognitively imagine things to come; through utopias they project visions about how things should be in times to come and in hope they sustain the emotional field in which anticipation operates.

Art, wrote Vygotsky, is the organization of our future behaviour. In his study of the psychology of art Vygotsky discusses musical activity as action that creates the impetus for more action, an action that “opens the way for the emergence of powerful and hidden forces within us; it acts like an earthquake as it throws open unknown and hidden strata (...) Although music does not generate any direct actions, its fundamental effect, the direction it imparts to psychic catharsis, is essential for the kind of forces it will release, what it will release, and what it will push into the background. Art (...) forces us to strive beyond our life toward all that lies beyond it” (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 252-253).

Key Sources:

Harris, P. (2000) *The Work of the Imagination*. Wiley-Blackwell: London. See it [here](#)

Vygotsky, L. (1971) *Psychology of Art*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. (part of this book can be found [here](#))

Bloch, M.(2008) Why religion is nothing special but is central. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*. 363(1499): 2055–2061. See it [here](#)

Winnicott, D. (1978) *Playing and Reality*. Routledge: London. See it [here](#)

Psychosocial Cartographies is a notion derived from the work of Brazilian social psychologists Sueli Rolnik. Inspired mainly by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, it combines a psychological and geographical perspective to express how lived worlds can be encompassed in territories that are both spatial and psychosocial, that

contain languages and behavioural patterns that define a certain landscape requiring understanding and unpacking. In our 1st Dialogue Seminar Paula Castro talked about Psychosocial Landscapes (Paisagens Psicosociais), which can be related to the notion of psychosocial cartographies in many ways.

We use the notion to describe a space or territory in its subjective and objective totality: its languages, representations, practices, emotional investments, behavioural patterns, modes of relating within and outside its boundaries as well as its geographical materiality, where it stands in a certain space and how it establishes borders and crossings in relation to larger spaces and wider territories.

The notion of psychosocial cartographies was the last to arrive in [Underground Sociabilities](#). We found it inspirational at the point of data analysis, when it became clear through the qualitative examination of the semi-structured interviews with favela residents that each one of the communities we studied was revealing to us a specific psychosocial cartography, that was both psychological and territorial. At the moment we are in the process of drawing these cartographies; we take Rolnik's advice that cartographies are "not representations of an static whole – is a drawing that accompanies and creates itself at the same time as the transformation movements of the landscape" (Rolnik, 1989).

Key Sources:

Suely Rolnik (1989) Cartografia sentimental, transformações contemporâneas do desejo, São Paulo: Editora Estação Liberdade. See it [here](#)

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004) A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia. Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. See it [here](#)