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Representing personal and common futures: Insights and new connections between the theory of social representations and the pragmatic sociology of engagements

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Abstract

To understand social issues and practices such as those related to climate change and technological change that are clearly future-oriented – collectively experienced events that are "not yet" – and co-constructed by different actors, we need nuanced conceptualizations of how people think about, negotiate and co-create futures that allow us to understand not only what people (can) think and do about future-related issues but also how that happens, what for and with which implications. However, so far, one of the key theoretical approaches that has conceptualised how people make meaning in situations of change and uncertainty – the socio-psychological social representations theory (SRT) – has not often engaged with the future or with different forms of temporality. By contrast, the French pragmatic sociology of engagements and critique (PS) has engaged with these notions, conceptualising them in relation to materiality and a plurality of moral orientations – two dimensions often seen as key to how collective futures are made and imagined. To offer a more nuanced and systematic conceptualization of how people represent the future and with what consequences, this paper will present, compare and synthesise SRT and PS, as a first step towards

an interdisciplinary research agenda on social change and representations of the future.

KEYWORDS
futures, power relations, pragmatic sociology, social change, social representation, temporality

1 | INTRODUCTION

Current social issues, such as the climate crisis and the transition to decarbonised energy systems, demand that contemporary social scientific theories are able to understand how people relate with the present and the past, but also with the future – as whom and for whom; for what and with what consequences. It is no surprise then that in recent years there has been a resurgence of conceptualisations of future perceptions, projections and imaginaries in the social sciences (Beckert & Suckert, 2021; de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018), especially in disciplines that deal with the relation between science and society. While some approaches in this field have focused mainly on the contents or images of future representations (Groves, 2017), others have investigated how the future is anticipated and prepared by powerful actors such as governmental and corporate elites who seek to pre-empt threats to liberal-democratic life such as terrorism, pandemics and climate change (Anderson, 2010; Granjou et al., 2017). Still other perspectives have focused more on how projects of capital accumulation and technological change are legitimated by appealing to futures based on "sociotechnical imaginaries" of particular desirable forms of social life and moral order (Jasanoff, 2015; Jasanoff & Simmet, 2021). These approaches tend to emphasise the importance of institutions in conceptualizations of futures-making, rather than psycho-social processes of meaning-making or social re-presenting, with the consequence that less attention has been given to how the future is represented from other, non-expert and non-institutionalised positions and practices (Tidwell & Tidwell, 2018). The latter has been a key focus for social psychology, but also approached from very diverse perspectives, from cognitive-individualistic approaches (Szpunar & Szpunar, 2016) to cultural-collectivistic ones (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018; Glăveanu et al., 2017).

Social representations theory (SRT) has been one of the key socio-psychological perspectives concerned with meaning-making and its function in creating social change and maintaining stability (Tateo & Iannaccone, 2012), but has not so far systematically engaged with and conceptualised the question of how people re-present futures. The situation is similar with the increasingly influential French "pragmatic sociology of engagements and critique" (PS), an approach to the social world with affinities to SRT, but with a more elaborate conceptualisation of the range of ways that people practically engage with the world, and the different temporalities this involves (Mandich, 2020; Thévenot, 2007). Our aim in this paper is to critically compare and integrate SRT and PS, with a view to help identifying conceptual and analytical tools relevant to better understanding how social actors engage with the future and particularly how that happens in the relation between "expert" and "lay" spheres – a relation that is arguably at the centre of current societal approaches to "tame" or "transform" the future (Adam & Groves, 2007; Chilvers & Kearnes, 2015; Groves, 2015), as is clear with the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next two sections we will present some key aspects of both SRT and PS approaches, with a specific focus on how they have conceptualised people's relations with the future. By drawing on and integrating these ideas and contextualising them in reference to climate change and energy transitions,[1] we will then proceed to outlining our proposal for an interdisciplinary SRT and PS research agenda that seeks to understand how and why people re-present the future.

2 | THE FUTURE IN SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY

The original aim of SRT, according to Moscovici (1988) was "to determine the link between human psychology and modern social and cultural trends" by focusing on everyday communication and thinking (Moscovici, 1988, p. 225). This link is constituted by social representations, which can be defined as "network(s) of concepts and images tied together in various ways according to the interconnections between the persons and media that serve to establish communication" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 222). With its origins in 1960s France with Moscovici's (1961/2008) research on lay knowledge of psychoanalysis, this conceptualization sought to analyze how laypeople made sense of scientific ideas, while positing that the key function and consequence of social re-presentation is "familiarization", or making the unfamiliar familiar. This is based on two psychosocial processes: *anchoring*, through which new objects and meanings are integrated into prior knowledge or representations, and *objectification*, through which abstract ideas are made concrete by making an image or metaphor correspond to an object (Wagner & Kronberger, 2001).

An important distinction of this approach vis-à-vis cognitivist approaches in social psychology is that familiarization is conceived of as inherently social, the result of the dialogical relationship between self, other and object (Marková, 2003), and shaped by inter-and intra-group communication and associated power relations (Batel & Castro, 2018; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Howarth, 2006). In other words, it proposes that it is the making, unmaking, and remaking of social representations in everyday interactions – or microgenesis - and how this is shaped by structural power relations and associated positionings that both create and shape social representations as constitutive of societies – or macro-genesis – and allows them to be rethought and transformed also at the collective level and in the future (Magioglou, 2008; Psaltis, 2012, 2015).

To analyze how social change unfolds, Moscovici (1988) developed the typology of polemical, emancipated and hegemonic social representations. The latter are those "uniform and coercive" representations that "prevail implicitly in all symbolic or affective practices" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 221), while emancipated representations are "the outgrowth of the circulation of knowledge and ideas belonging to subgroups that are in more or less close contact" (ibid) with each creating its own version and sharing it with the others. Emancipated representations have a "complementary function" because they are a result of "exchanging and sharing a set of *interpretations* or symbols" (ibid, italics added), and this potentially facilitates compromises in situations of dispute. Compared to hegemonic representations, then, it could be said that their *interpretive* nature means that they involve a more active definition of re-presentation in which individuals *negotiate* between different definitions of a social object. Lastly, polemical representations are those generated and used in the course of controversy and should be viewed in the context of an opposition or struggle between groups. They are often expressed in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor" and "they entail mutually exclusive relationships" (ibid; see also Negura et al., 2020).

The purpose of these distinctions was to help investigate the dynamics of a social representation – how it forms as it "shifts from one realm to another" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 221), yet there has been little research on this process, which would necessitate the inclusion of not only a time dimension (in terms of physical or "clock time," Castro, 2015), but also, as we will argue, to consider how people pragmatically represent the future at the micro-level of (inter-)action. Indeed, in the early 1990s, Moscovici (1994) began to call for a pragmatic re-orientation of the theory, often citing the works of Max Weber. This call was soon taken up by some SRT theorists with the future-oriented concepts of "anticipatory representation" (Philogène, 2002) and "representational project" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999, 2008). The former is defined as a certain type of social representation that is "about things to come and so dominated by a forward-looking quality" (Philogène, 2002, p. 118). Because of

the uncertainty of the "yet to come," anticipatory representations let us "invest all our fears and hopes in a fashion that is much less constrained than the memories of the past or the grip of the present" (Philogène, 2002, p. 118). Similarly, the main innovation of Bauer and Gaskell's (1999, 2008) model on the representational project was the addition, to the triad of self-other-object, of a fourth element – "project". Social representations become conceived of as being "relative to a project, a 'future-for-us,' an ongoing movement, an anticipation 'not-yet' which defines both the object as well as people's experience" (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008, p. 343).

Despite the novelty of these concepts, they have not had much impact in the field, both in terms of further theoretical development of how people represent the future and in systematic empirical applications (Foster, 2011; but see Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020). In fact, the majority of empirical research that uses SRT still tends to ignore how people reflexively make and negotiate meaning (Daanen, 2009). One consequence of this is that social transformations and conflicts are analyzed post hoc instead of in a way that foregrounds the contingency of people's meaning-making. Adopting a more naturalistic – or conscious (Daanen, 2009) - approach to research would begin to reveal the relations between the projects or uncertainties that people are immersed in and how they socially re-present objects towards the future.

From a theoretical viewpoint, we can begin to address this gap between representation of objects as identified *a posteriori,* and representation of the future in the making, by re-examining the relationship between social representation and action. Castro and Batel (2008) outline three ways that this has been conceived in SRT: the "constitutive proposal" states that action *is* representation (Wagner, 1998); the "functional proposal" views representations as capable of "doing" things in the world (Howarth, 2006); and the "creative proposal" states that representations "have a role in giving rise to previously inexistent human actions" (Castro & Batel, 2008, p. 481). They also propose that the interrelations between these proposals can be illuminated via the distinction between "transcendent" and "immanent" representations (Harré, 1998), the former being a representation that exists "independently of a practice" (e.g. in legal acts such as an EU Directive which requires member states to adopt "community energy" practices) and the latter being when there is no existence outside of the relevant practice (e.g., ecological practices that are unconsciously performed for maintaining food subsistence).

This distinction between transcendent and immanent representations is useful in what Raudsepp (2005) states is an important task for SRT: "revealing the mechanisms whereby a person *uses* the system of social representations for thinking about social objects" (Raudsepp, 2005, p. 466; italics added). However, for understanding how social actors discursively and pragmatically represent the future it is important to also conceptualise how they are not always bound to the present, but can also act in a reflexive and purposeful way which can involve representing the future before action takes place, for example through positing goals or expressing hope for a better world (Jovchelovitch & Hawlina, 2018). SRT is useful in this regard because of its emphasis on co-constructed meaning-making avoids the trappings of individualistic theories of rational action. Meaning, even when action is reflexive and purposefully constructed, is always social because it is oriented also to others.

In the rest of this paper, we want to pursue this line of thinking in the development of a sociologically pragmatist approach to social representations theory, that helps in understanding how people re-present the future. In doing so, we believe that we can refine and strengthen Moscovici's (1981, p. 183) notion of the "thinking society" – which "stresses the *agency* of social beings and their constant *engagement* in the re-production and the transformation of social representations through communication and everyday discourse" (Castro & Batel, 2008, p. 479, italics added). While SRT has not often and systematically reflected on this relation between representation and agency (Howarth, 2006; Potter & Edwards, 1999), the concepts of anticipatory representation and

representational project seem to be relevant conceptualizations to take with us. For now, we will turn to how French "pragmatic sociology" has engaged with the future.

3 | THE PRAGMATIC SOCIOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENTS AND CRITIQUE

The pragmatic sociology of engagements and critique (PS), also known as "the sociology of conventions" and "the sociology of critical capacities", began to take shape in France in the 1980s after a critical break from what was perceived as the growing orthodoxy of Pierre Bourdieu's "critical sociology." This break was led by one of Bourdieu's former students and collaborators, Luc Boltanski, whose work is now receiving significant attention from anglophone sociologists (Susen & Turner, 2014).

Influenced by Rosch's (2002) research on categorization, but also by social psychology, including the works of Moscovici (Boltanski, 2018; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1983), Boltanski along with Laurent Thévenot, developed the pragmatic approach from research on the expert classification practices of government economists, social scientists and management theorists. They soon turned their attention to the meaning-making operations of persons in everyday situations of uncertainty, foregrounding their creative and reflexive use of a wide range of heterogeneous cultural resources rather than attempting to explain their representations via mechanisms of objective social structures such as socioeconomic class, group identity or field position.

Like later SRT (Batel & Castro, 2018; Foster, 2011), one of the main aims of PS was to overcome the epistemological separation of science and common sense, especially in regards to the social sciences themselves. Reflexivity was reconceptualized as not just an element of the sociologist's craft, but as a critical capacity of all actors. PS's empirical focus was then on the plurality of social forms of evaluation that people use to co-ordinate their actions (Thévenot, 2007). PS, like SRT, can therefore be described as embracing a Weberian interpretive approach to the social sciences in which representation is inextricably psychosocial, embodied, socio-cultural and institutional, as well as linked to different modes of action (Castro & Batel, 2008). At the same time, PS attempts to go beyond Weber's work by investigating why some social forms of evaluation are more legitimate than others (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000). This gave rise to three areas of conceptual development and related analytical tools that can be very useful for examining representations of the future, and that we are going to present next: regimes of engagement with the future; orders of worth within the regime of justification; and the test.

The early work on expert classification practices informed the development of an elaborate theoretical framework for analyzing how people use those different forms of evaluation – or shared moral and cultural knowledge - in order to legitimize their actions and criticize those of others in a "regime of public justification" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Like later socio-cultural psychologists examining how people imagine collective futures (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2018), these ideas were influenced by the pragmatist philosophy of Mead (1932) and, in particular, his notion of the generalized other. The latter is the basis of the "ordinary sense of justice", by virtue of which, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, action and representation are, within this regime of public justification, always oriented to the common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Put into SRT's terms, when immersed in public situations of discord or dispute – such as those when polemical representations are generated – rather than simply reverting to arguments associated with one's group, position, or individual interest, people could be said to be "polyphasic" (Batel, 2012) insofar as they can potentially deploy a plurality of social representations of the common good that are most appropriate to the situation at hand, rather than be rigidly attached to a single social representation that is determined, for example, by their social context or group identity.

PS has proposed that these social representations of the common good are "orders of worth", which can be defined as socially shared frameworks that guide behavior. Boltanski and Thévenot originally identified six orders of worth: *market* performance; *industrial* efficiency based on technical competence and long-term planning; *civic* equality and solidarity; *domestic* and traditional trustworthiness entrenched in local and personal ties; *inspiration* expressed in creativity, emotion or religious grace; and *renown* based on public opinion and fame. As with social representations, the use of orders of worth are essential to discursive practices that both enable and prevent meaningful social change, as they are the forms of practices of critique and social change (Chiapello & Boltanski, 2018).

For this perspective, macro-level social change can be said to have taken place when and where a new order of worth appears, such as the more recent *green* order of worth based on representations of an ecological world (Thévenot et al., 2000) and the *projective* or *connectionist* order of worth, associated with the rise of neoliberalism and associated technologies, based on representations of a complex networked world (Chiapello & Boltanski, 2018). Thus, following Weber, the orders of worth model is constructed against the notion of individual values which can see no other solution than the "implacable clash of personal points of view" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 221). In fact, because the deployment of orders of worth is constrained at least as much, if not more, by the social situation in which people find themselves, rather than by group identity (see also Batel, 2012), the possibility of arriving at a new agreement is never precluded, nor is the possibility of a new dispute.

Boltanski and Thévenot each subsequently developed this pragmatic approach in their own ways by going beyond the regime of justification and associated orders of worth, and conceptualizing a number of other "regimes of engagement" – socially *acknowledged* ways in which humans are committed to their environment – which are common in contemporary Western societies (Boltanski, 2012; Thévenot, 2007). It is Thévenot's conceptualization of different non-public or personal regimes of engagement - familiarity, planning and exploration - that have so far proven most useful for conceptualizing heterogenous temporalities and future-orientations (Mandich, 2020; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013; Welch et al., 2020). In turn, Mandich (2020) added to that, by systematizing the future-orientations implicit in each of these different public and non-public regimes of engagement:

> The future is "made and measured" within a logic of probability in the regime of the plan, within a logic of possibility within the regime of justification, within a logic of practical anticipation in the regime of familiarity and within a logic of discovery in the regime of exploration.
>
> (Mandich, 2020, pp. 3-4)

We take these four different forms of future-orientation together with associated orders of worth as our point of departure for a comparison and synthesis of PS with SRT. Additionally, and finally, we also take with us from PS to integrate with SRT, the notion of the test.

In PS, tests can be viewed as testing the worth of an action or discourse, this is, as testing how others adhere to that discourse and related orders of worth in a given situation. This links to SRT's ideas around the "stickiness" of representations – their ability to attract adherents and resist being ignored (Breakwell, 2014). Yet it remains unclear what exactly makes a social representation stick (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020). The pragmatic test of worth proposed by PS is a useful concept in this regard insofar as it reveals the discursive relations between social representations and orders of worth that arise in critical or testing moments (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). In other words, the "realism"- or "tangibility" (Breakwell, 2014) - of a given discourse about the future and its ability to "attract" others and make them adhere to that discourse, will be determined by the ability of the speaker to objectify social representations and make them concrete via a test of worth.

Boltanski ([2011](#)) defined three types of tests: truth tests, reality tests and existential tests. "Truth tests" are those involving representations of a coherent world that are normally deployed and objectified by institutions to maintain or "constantly reconfirm" a certain relationship between symbolic forms and states of affairs. "Reality tests", by contrast, posit a differential between what should be (value judgement based on an order of worth) and what is (factual judgement). "Existential tests" are the moments in which new ideas or deeply personal experiences that are not (yet) institutionalized in any form, are conferred with a "collective" character through sharing with others (Boltanski, 2011, p. 107).

One of our main proposals in this paper is that this typology of tests and Moscovici's typology of polemical, emancipated and hegemonic representations can be mutually enriching for an understanding of how representations of the future relate to social change. We propose that truth tests bear a striking resemblance to SRT's concept of hegemonic representation and that, therefore, a hegemonic representation of the future would be observed in a "truth test" which represents the future as the same as, or complementary with, the past and that doesn't entertain alterity. Further, truth tests can be seen as performed through reification as a communicative format (one that prescribes representations, excluding the possibility of alternatives – Batel & Castro, 2018). In turn, "reality tests" can be linked to the concept of emancipated representation in which a plurality of legitimate possible futures are acknowledged, and seen either as complementary or not, but always as different from the past. This recognition of plurality means that reality tests can be enacted through *consensualisation* as a communicative format (one that recognises the heterogeneity of representation – Batel & Castro, 2018). Lastly, a polemical representation of the future explicitly views different futures as both incompatible with each other and with the past. Whereas reality tests deploy certain emancipated representations (orders of worth), existential tests represent the critical moment when polemical representations *aspire* to become emancipated, that is, shared representations (see also Psaltis, 2012). This process would help explain the formation of a new order of worth, or of a radically new compromise between different orders of worth, or of the transformation of personal or local concerns into orders of worth. Before this can take place, the non-institutionalized nature of such representations means that they are, at least at an early stage in their micro-genesis, often communicated via artistic forms of communication, thus explaining the importance that has been ascribed to science fiction literature and other artistic forms (e.g., graffiti) for anticipating and creating social change (Davies, 2018; Glăveanu, 2018; Jovchelovitch & Hawlina, 2018).

To conclude this section and preface the synthesis between SRT and PS that will follow, it is worth pointing out that, again, these typologies of tests and regimes of engagement owe much to the Weberian tradition of the social sciences which places emphasis on individual *persons* as the "sole understandable agents of meaningfully oriented action," without ignoring notions of the *collective* (Weber, 2019, p. 89). This insight is important for our task as it confirms the need to relate psychosocial dynamics (SRT) to social forms of action (PS). Only then can we pose the question: how are both personal and common futures represented?

We will now propose how to answer this question through a synthesis of SRT and PS, by suggesting that there are four key ways of re-presenting the future for both personal and common ends: through the regime of familiarity, through the regime of the plan, through the regime of exploration and through the regime of justification.

4 | FUTURE-ORIENTATIONS IN THE REGIME OF FAMILIARITY

Many contemporary theories of time and temporality propose that, in people's everyday lives, the future is actively made in the present rather than wholly determined by the past (Adam & Groves, 2007). The

future is always "not yet" and, therefore, how people deal with situated uncertainty in their lives is a key question for the study of how they make sense of future-oriented issues. However, while SRT's notion of familiarisation is oriented to understanding how people deal with strangeness, unfamiliarity and novelty (de-Graft Aikins, 2012), there are limits to how far it can be applied to their attempts to represent an uncertain future.

As has been pointed out by de-Graft Aikins (2012), the key issue is that SRT's notion of anchoring – a key process for familiarisation – assumes that people are motivated by the desire to "be secure from any risk of friction or strife" (Moscovici, 2001, p. 37), thus implicitly treating the future as just another strange object which is "domesticated" into representations from a group's past (Wagner, 1998). This ignores other plausible reasons for the creation of social representations such as the "curiosity motivation and the attraction of novelty" (Jahoda, 1988, p. 201; see also Magioglou, 2008) or, as in PS, the "imperative to justify" or an orientation to the common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

PS addresses this issue by adopting a more naturalistic approach to the social world, in the sense that it aims to understand meaning-making in situations of everyday life, and especially in the critical or "metapragmatic" moments that may arise in them. Take, for example, an event that recently appeared in the media: climate-activist Greta Thunberg joining a protest against a wind farm that is adversely affecting indigenous communities (Paddison, 2023). What is *strange* about this for some people is that the representational link between Thunberg, wind turbines and fighting against climate change is brought into question. The reader of the news story is confronted with the possibility that renewable energy is not essentially "green", as they believed, and this may lead to a critical re-evaluation, not only of wind turbines, but of the future.

Outside such "metapragmatic" moments, certainty is maintained not only because people anchor the strange into the familiar but because, in practice, they turn a blind eye to "the strange", especially when it involves social conflict (Boltanski, 2011). For example, two friends who have previously disagreed about renewable energy avoid talking about the Thunberg story in order to maintain their friendship. This view is similar to Moscovici's (1994) late pragmatist reflections on anchoring as a social practice which posit that, in contemporary forms of everyday life, the encounter with the strange is deferred and the mode of familiarity upheld because,

> people [generally] try to avoid tensions and divergences and prefer a false consensus to a real dissensus […] nobody seeks to anchor the speakers' representations, which are left to float deliberately, everybody being ready to tolerate them.
>
> (Moscovici, 1994, p. 169)

According to Boltanski, this is true only up to a point. Action, in a regime of familiarity, has a threshold of tolerance and when this threshold is crossed actors are plunged into uncertainty (Boltanski, 2011). Thus, continuing the previous example, when the pro-wind energy friend casually states their case to a third friend who hasn't yet formed an opinion, the anti-wind friend may no longer be able to tolerate their false consensus.

This conceptualisation of how people experience the world in a mode of familiar anticipation sees representations as constitutive of actions and vice versa (Castro & Batel, 2008), but also of and by objects. For both PS and SRT, familiarisation is oriented to feeling at ease and maintaining order and fulfils a dual role of positioning the person in, on the one hand, a social group and, on the other, an environment which comes to resemble a personalised space or – when the regime of familiarity is collectivised as a "common-place" – something which is the focal point of shared attachments (Thévenot, 2014).

By bringing together PS and SRT, we can say then that familiarisation as involved in re-presenting the future, rather than being defensively oriented to the past, entails that we *live* and *feel* the future,

habitually without reflecting upon it. Our "practical sense of the forthcoming" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 211) is, above all, *affectively* experienced and expectations of the future are buried in words, actions and things. In this sense, *immanent* social representations can be considered to *constitute* the future, and empirical research aiming to uncover how the regime of familiarity is involved in representing the future should thus examine social practices in everyday practices (see Jodelet, 1991; Welch et al., 2020).

5 | FUTURE-ORIENTATIONS IN THE REGIME OF THE PLAN

As was stated above, in contemporary social life people are not always immersed in the immanence of "practical moments", where differences are tolerated and representations are constitutive of anticipatory habits or routines that are oriented to "feeling at ease". Rather, in situations characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, such as inter-group conflicts, action can also operate in "metapragmatic registers" where representation draws upon emergent elements of the world, taking on a purposive character. Indeed, in PS, where temporality is often seen as integral to people's practices, taking up a "reflexive" stance towards the future is usually seen as a pre-requisite for agency and autonomy (Archer, 2000; Joas, 1996; Mische, 2014).

The possibility of a purposive or instrumental orientation to action, or of an "explicitly anticipatory" orientation to the future, is also present in Bauer and Gaskell's (1999) concept of representational project. Their approach, presented as the "toblerone model" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999) and its later development, the "wind rose model" of social representations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008), together with subsequent applications of it (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020), assumes a primarily purposive relationship between representation and action. Their central concept – the "project" of a social representation – attempts to address the dual problem of how groups "think" about the future, as well as the ideological functions that a social representation of the future may serve.

This aspiration is shared by PS and especially in Thévenot's conceptualisation of the future-oriented dimension of action as belonging to the regime of the plan, which he also describes as "normal action", indicating its hegemonic status in contemporary neoliberal societies. Mandich's (2020) unpacking of the individual temporality that underpins engagement in a plan suggests that it is the same as the temporality posited by psychological and economic theories which presuppose rational goal-oriented individuals (Batel & Rudolph, 2021) who set themselves goals and work backwards, imagining the completed action before it is begun (Tada, 2019). This engagement in a plan relies on a "logic of probability" and, thus, as with the regime of familiarity, depends on a hegemonic representation of time as linear and deterministic, allowing plans to reliably project past knowledge and/or interests into the future.

This over-determination of the past on the future can be seen in bureaucratic institutional practices which are necessary for the functioning of everyday life but can prevent meaningful socio-technical change from coming about. Outside of the institutional arena, an important question that could be addressed by both SRT and PS is how the regime of the plan constrains the capacity for new "bottom-up" representations of the collective future to emerge. On the other hand, research could also examine how the *failure* of plans and representational projects – what Duveen (2002, p. 113) describes as an "encounter [with] points of obscurity and resistance" – facilitates new representations of the future.

Contrarily to SRT, where the relations between thinking and doing inform the psychosocial grounding of the plan and the project (see Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020), PS has emphasised instead the regime of the plan as a socio-material form which morally valorises "enterprising individuals" (Rose, 1998), as well as a situated practice that follows a logic of opportunity (Thévenot, 2007). As Mandich states,

"the centrality of the plan mirrors a conceptualisation of the future as a field that can be occupied by human agency (as something that is there and simply has to be reached)" (Mandich, 2020, p. 8) and, indeed, this representation of time is usually seen as hegemonic in Western capitalist societies (Adam & Groves, 2007). This social representation of an individually planned future manifests in a wide range of academic theories, popular philosophies and self-help guides, neoliberal social policies and educational institutions, and is facilitated by the mundane technical devices (e.g. calendars, alarm clocks, timetables) of everyday life. From this perspective, projecting oneself into the future is not a natural psychological state or capacity, but an action that depends not just on a particular meaning (e.g. of the self as active, autonomous, choosing) but also on material devices which allow a person to project themselves into the future. Thus, PS's aim is not to completely discard the idea of representations of the future oriented by purposive rationality, but to analyse the socio-material conditions in which such representations are put into practice in everyday life (Thévenot, 2007).

Something missing from this conceptualization offered by PS is that there is a dialogic coordination in the regime of the plan (e.g. a "joint project" – Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020), well shown by SRT's premise that a social representation of the future in a planning modality includes a specific instrumental orientation to others based on assumptions about how they will act. In other words, and as put by Weber, it is "through expectations of the behaviour of external objects and other people, and employing these expectations as a 'condition' or 'means' for one's own rational ends, as sought after and considered objectives" (Weber, 2019, p. 101), that we plan "with" others.

A clear example of this intersubjective dimension of the plan can be seen in Guignard et al. (2015) analysis of how university students emphasise their planning orientations to the future in self-presentation strategies, while distancing themselves from other orientations (e.g. familiarity, which may be interpreted as laziness). The future is, thus, not only a space that we can imaginatively occupy or unconsciously anticipate: we can also be reflexively aware of the possibility of doing so, for ourselves but also for others. An orientation to the future is, therefore, a (valued) social representation in itself.

What has made the instrumentalist representation of the future "stick" (Breakwell, 2014) in our societies is the nature of the test – constant truth tests that reify the hegemonic status of individuals' planning orientation to the future. In turn, this hegemony of the plan often leads to the labelling of collective, critical and utopian aspirations, based on alternative representations (Gillespie, 2008), of more communitarian and collectivistic ways of living, as "unrealistic" (Pepper, 2005).

Nevertheless, these conceptualisations still focus mainly on the regime of the plan as something individual (even if shaped by social structures and by what others think). But what about collective action in the regime of the plan? This has been partly addressed by Thévenot (2014): just as familiar engagements can become collective via *personal affinities to multiple common-places* (see above), engagements in an individual plan can also be viewed as *individuals choosing among diverse options in a liberal public* (see also, Lamont & Thévenot, 2000). In this liberal world, a personal, intimate or emotional concern about the future (regime of familiarity) has to be represented as a choice, a preference, or a stake that an individual makes between publicly available futures. Therefore, for these individual concerns or choices to become common or collective, there needs to be an "integration of differences (…) achieved by *negotiation* and bargaining between 'stakeholders.'" (Thévenot, 2014, p. 18, italics added).

This suggests the possibility of people coming together in projects of joint intentionality, understood as an alignment of concerns and expectations that results in a "community of interest", that is, one without pre-established rules, norms or group identities (Brinks, 2016). This is an important contribution and insight to SRT, given that it has historically been criticised for equating the group and its identity with a social representation and vice-versa (Potter & Litton, 1985). This has been

reiterated by recent proposals, such as Buhagiar and Sammut's (2020) "action-oriented formula" for intergroup relations research, in which the subject is always a *we* – "a collective of conscious selves and others, who come together for a project of common intentionality" (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008, p. 345). Buhagiar and Sammut embrace a pragmatist perspective which insists that both the object and its representation are always contextual. However, they do not go as far as to say that the project or a given imagined future is also constituted by the situation, as a radically pragmatist perspective would have it (Joas, 1996, p. 160; see also Batel, 2012). Instead, Buhagiar and Sammut's "pragmatic context of action" is determined already by the group project (its "motivating cause" – e.g. the societal integration of Arabs in Malta), rather than the other way around. Thus, the group posits goals and, given that they are also thinking of the projects of others, they purposively choose the social representation that is most likely to achieve them. This means that, like in theories of rational action, "actions are 'caused' by their (anticipated) consequences" (Coleman, 1986, p. 1312), and not also by embodied and institutionalised social structures or the situational availability of cultural and material resources.

In sum, the regime of the plan as a way to represent the future can help understand how people may take up an instrumental, purposive, or self-interested relation to the future, but as a *regime* it also helps to explain why people may do so. That is, as a socially valorised mode of acting, it foregrounds the ideological primacy of technocratic planning, individual interests and "joint projects" in neoliberal societies. Yet, the regime of the plan still does not fully allow us to conceptualise how people might move from "joint projects" for the future, to representing collective futures based on a vision of the common good. In fact, by instead thinking about the project as just a particular type of orientation to the common good, we can begin to understand how distinct groups in conflict might mobilise incommensurable representations not always because of their pre-established interests or a desire to protect their group, but because of their situational understanding of what constitutes the common good. It is this which we will examine in more detail next.

6 | FUTURE-ORIENTATIONS IN THE REGIMES OF EXPLORATION AND JUSTIFICATION

Pragmatic sociology has shown that social change does not necessarily entail emancipation from hegemonic forms and systems of domination (Boltanski, 2011; Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1976). Boltanski (2011) describes this as "dominating by change" – the process by which a hegemonic group embraces uncertainty about the future and supports change at a superficial level, while maintaining and reproducing asymmetrical power relations at a structural level.

One example of this is the current "green" energy transition, which is mostly being performed by proposing a surface change in the move to renewable energy sources, but while doing it in a "business-as-usual", neoliberal, capitalist and economic growth-oriented way (Batel & Rudolph, 2021; Sareen, 2020). This raises questions not only about how such social changes are legitimated by powerful actors, but also about how people can come to resist them, contest hegemonic regimes and representations, and enact their alternative visions of the future (Nicholson & Howarth, 2018).

Likewise, from the SRT perspective, it has also been emphasised by Batel and Castro (2018) that meaning-making is not independent of power relations and often works to reproduce them, but can also work to resist and contest them and, through that, create social change (Batel & Castro, 2018). It is therefore imperative to acknowledge that representing the future is deeply constrained and intertwined with structural power relations and hegemonic ideologies (such as instrumental plans), but also that there are other ways to imagine futures in order to create emancipatory socio-political change.

To understand how such representations can come about, we can foreground the *regime of exploration* – in which people are practically oriented to discovering *new* ways of doing things – and

the *regime of justification* – in which they reflexively represent these new practices as *possible* by anchoring them in orders of worth. It is our contention that, while each of the orientations to the future described in this paper – familiarity, plan, exploration and justification – can be both personal and collective, it is the exploratory and justificatory orientations that are most important for resisting domination and for socially representing for emancipatory change.

In theorising the distinction between exploration and justification and how they concretely relate to each other, it is useful to first view them as modes of action that are constituted by anticipatory representations (Philogène, 2002). The anticipatory quality of representation is particularly important when people are oriented to the future in an exploratory and creative mode. Thévenot (2007) emphasises the *personal* nature of this type of engagement, but cultural psychologists have theorised how it can also have a collective dimension (Glăveanu, 2015), for example in innovative and radical social experimentations in which people pursue new forms of life, cooperation, and struggle. In these contexts, existential tests and polemical representations are important (as discussed below), but it is also possible that a prior stage of "prefigurative" politics (Monticelli, 2022) involves exploratory practices which *defer* tests. Boltanski (2011) has pointed out that the deferral or suspension of tests is a strategy of domination, but researchers who want to accompany critical projects could also examine how people defer tests, i.e., how they refuse to anchor new practices into established representations, in order to maintain unfamiliarity and explore it (de-Graft Aikins, 2012).

Such prefigurative political practices that embrace an exploratory orientation to the future often have radical potential but, as Centemeri (2022) writes, they may need to be linked to more general representations of the common good if they are to create meaningful socio-political change. This takes us back to the regime of justification and the orders of worth – *market, industrial, civic*, *domestic*, *fame, inspired, ecological,* and *connectionist.* Each order of worth also has its own relevant temporality, for example linear and long-term in the industrial order of worth; "future-generations" in the ecological order of worth; or short-term profit in the market worth. An important point here is that this idea of a plurality of orders of worth with different temporalities supplements Philogène's (2002) proposal about the *emergent* quality of anticipatory representations by providing a range of possible alternative reference points for people to actively anchor their lived experiences in, thus strengthening the claim that anticipatory representations highlight the "dynamic and normative force" of collectively oriented efforts aimed at changing reality (Philogène, 2002, p. 118).

Thus, and to give an example, faced with the claim that a certain energy infrastructure will secure their community's future by providing cheaper electricity (market order of worth), a resident might take up a longer term representation of the future of the infrastructure by highlighting its relatively short lifespan (e.g. 30 years) and the lack of a decommissioning plan. The promise of short-term savings is irrelevant from this perspective of a *civic* and *ecological* critique of the long-term *industrial* deficiency of the project – a representation of the possible future impacts of the infrastructure on the community and on the environment.

We can see with this example that the regime of justification suggests that the functional power (Castro & Batel, 2008; Howarth, 2006) of social representations comes from their capacity to impose a given order of worth and its associated temporal order onto the world, or to replace one order of worth with another. A key research question to be addressed by a joint SRT and PS research agenda is therefore to establish the discursive strategies by which people actually use orders of worth in order to justify or contest certain proposed actions.

A second key question pertains to how people come to be engaged in the regime of justification. What are the conditions whereby people represent and resist the oppressions and power relations imposed and obscured by a particular order of worth, especially when the latter is constitutive of a representation of the future? One way to explore this is by examining how personal experiences

and representations for personal futures can or cannot turn into collective demands or representations for the collective future. This would involve a more nuanced empirical focus on the pragmatic context of representation, in which the emergence of uncertainty becomes the primary condition for the re-imagining of the future.

To continue the example above, the industrial order of worth as materialised in the green energy transition and the related deployment of large-scale wind and solar farms near rural communities, is clearly encroaching upon people's engagement in the regime of familiarity. This happens, namely, by disturbing communities' relations with the places where they live and the futures they look forward to in those places (Groves, 2015), and by accentuating inequalities between urban and rural communities (Batel & Küpers, 2023). As suggested by Boltanski (2011), the *sense of shared injustice* and increased level of reflexivity created by this disruption, motivates the creative contestation of hegemonic institutions in the regime of justification, in which a speaker posits themselves as "a spokesperson for a potential future community" (Boltanski, 2011, p. 100). It seems then that the spark that initiates the psychosocial process in which a new representation emerges for a collective future is the crossing of a threshold in which "floating representations" – that is, those which have failed, or have not yet been subject to a *test of worth—*can no longer be tolerated (Moscovici, 1994; Weber, 2019).

Returning to the example of the green energy transition and the increasing contestations of the deployment of large-scale renewable energy infrastructures in rural communities (Batel & Rudolph, 2021), whether or not a community can successfully con*test* the deployment of those infrastructures depends, firstly, on their capacity to transform their forced *disengagement* from a regime of familiarity into an *engagement* with the regime of justification, namely, by making their personal concerns about the future representable to others. This *existential test* might be done discursively and with the help of material objects, for instance a visual image of the impact that the infrastructure will have (e.g., Devine-Wright et al., 2019, see also Blok & Meilvang, 2015). Once the representation enters the realm of public justification, becoming *emancipated*, the success of the community's dissent will depend on the social legitimacy of their critique, and on the anchoring of their vision of reformist or radical alternatives in a *reality test*.

Reformist alternatives are those proposed within the order of worth that is being deployed by the out-group. For example, the in-group may denounce as inauthentic the out-group's claims to a common good based on *green* justifications (e.g., the claim that lithium mining is essential for mitigating climate change because it is necessary for electric car batteries and for renewable energy storage), because the future represented (through lithium mining) fails the *reality test* of that order of worth (*current and future generations* and *eco-systems* are adversely affected by lithium mining). Such an emancipated representation becomes particularly powerful when it is objectified in a phrase like "greenwashing".

Radical alternatives are constructed when the denunciation of the projected future is made from an order of worth different to the one promulgated by the out-group or the one that the in-group alternatively represents as implicit in the out-group's project (Gillespie, 2008). This might happen, for example, when the in-group uses the *domestic* order of worth to represent and critique the *industrial* nature of the out-group's project. In order not to be viewed from the perspective of the industrial order of worth as rigidly stuck in the past or of being a self-interested "NIMBY" (*Not In My Backyard*; Batel & Rudolph, 2021), the in-group must elaborate an alternative vision of the future that connects the world it seeks to defend with the problem the out-group claims to be solving – climate change – by redefining this problem as, for example, a consequence of the loss of traditional modes of life such as subsistence farming and local economies. Key to the success of such a discursive strategy is the ability of the in-group to represent a *realistic* future, not only in which such practices can be resuscitated and widely adopted in society, but in which they can address the threat posed by climate change in a more desirable – e.g., socially just – way than the ones proposed by the out-group.

This *emancipated* representation will only *stick* (Breakwell, 2014) and become *hegemonic,* then, by compromising, in radically different ways and via *reality* tests, with other orders of worth. Indeed, a creative new compromise between the *domestic* and *green* orders of worth seems to be at the core of a new representation of an ecological society, as shown for example in the transnational permaculture movement – based on representations of community and care – and other prefigurative, exploratory engagements such as those relating to the notion of degrowth and "the commons" (Centemeri, 2022; Centemeri & Asara, 2022). We thus contend that any such new and creative recombination of orders of worth in the context of a specific dispute or struggle against a hegemonic representation emerges in the wake of a *polemical repres*entation. Such creative representation will then aspire to become emancipated through *existential tests* and the formation of new collective projects. The latter will be decisive in the ability of the newly emancipated representation of the future to become, via *reality* tests, *hegemonic representations* of the future.

7 | CONCLUSION

In this paper we have analysed and compared two different social scientific approaches to meaning-making and social change through the lens of future-oriented representations - Social Representations Theory and Pragmatic Sociology. We have highlighted the affinity between the two approaches and suggested directions for integration (see Table 1), with a view to promote a more systematized interdisciplinary research agenda on how people re-present the future, and specifically how that happens in the relations between expert-political and lay spheres. As both PS and SRT research has shown over the years, scientific-expert-political systems often have the power to pre-empt the future in accordance with their own agendas, often conflicting with the familiar or disruptive representations of the future of affected communities and individuals. For the latter, re-presenting the future might involve all the ways of engaging with the future at the same time, even if to different degrees, depending on available resources. In fact, in current neoliberal capitalist societies, well-being and the good life often depend upon a mix of maintaining familiarity and engaging with existent normative demands of "projecting and planning ourselves into the future", as well as in the increasing needs to create disruptive change that addresses collective grievances and injustices (Fischer, 2014). This implies then that, when analysing representations of the future, and as proposed in Table 1, it is useful to use the analytical tools from SRT and PS discussed so far to identify which types of future are being represented, for what and with what consequences for individuals and groups/the collective.

At a more theoretical level, a key contribution of this paper to SRT is to systematize and advance the discussion on the different roles that anchoring and objectification can play as key processes in social re-presenting within different temporalities and for different aims. Based on and expanding Bauer & Gaskell's "wind-rose model" of SRT, we propose and illustrate how anchoring takes place in social representations of the future in ways that go beyond only familiarisation (de-Graft Aikins, 2012), with different elements of the "wind-rose" becoming more or less prominent in different situations: when proposing, criticising and justifying new ideas and practices based on existent orders of worth, within the regime of justification, the other is primary for anchoring; in the regime of the plan, it is the project or goal which plays the pivotal role in determining how the subject anchors the unfamiliar object (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008; Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020); and in the regime of exploration, the object is primary – the process of anchoring is deferred and the object's strangeness embraced. In turn, SRT can also be useful to PS for further specifying the macro-level processes

whereby a new order of worth comes about and providing tools to better understand the micro-level dynamics of representation in interaction.

At the empirical level, we have provided a brief sketch of how a combined approach of PS and SRT can be used in the study of socio-political and cultural change and practices, thus showing its relevance to burgeoning research on collective futures. As proposed, we believe that such inter-disciplinary research could contribute to further understand the relations, clashes, and evolutions between distinct modes of representing the future in the everyday situations of social life and how those then relate

TABLE 1 Typology of social representations of the future and examples for research.

Future-orientation	What is the future being represented for?	
	Personal good	**Collective good**
Anticipation in the regime of familiarity	Maintaining self-identity and ease/ safety coming from habituation	Shared attachments and commonplaces (e.g., defending the identity of a specific place or of Earth)
	Representational Contents: Non-conscious and conscious expectations of continuity expressed in practices/immanent representations	Representational Contents: Identifying representations of familiarity and security (e.g. representing as threats to collective well-being a future that departs from tradition; proposing solutions that maintain attachments)
	'Self' plays primary role in anchoring process	
Probability in the regime of the plan	Self-projection through individual plans	Shared plans or projects (e.g., Arabs' integration in Malta, as proposed by Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020)
	Representational Contents: Reflexively setting a goal and defining steps; probabilistic "if-then" reasoning and transcendent representations (in a neoliberal, plan-oriented, society)	Representational Contents: Identifying representations of freedom (liberation of a group from domination by the other group)
	'Project' plays primary role in anchoring process	
Possibility in the regime of justification	Forming self-identity as group/ collective identity based on participating in the common good and belonging to a specific order of worth	Shared injustices and exclusions (e.g., Black Lives Matter within the Civic Order of Worth); proposing change within existent societal structures
	Representational Contents: Identifying orders of worth (Market; Industrial; Civic; Inspiration; Domestic; Renown; Green; Projective; others?) through analysis of anchoring and objectification in communication processes (i.e., meanings, images, metaphors, grammar in e.g., interviews, everyday practices, campaign posters…); discursive polyphasia (how tensions between orders of worth are negotiated or not)	
	'Other' plays primary role in anchoring process	

T A B L E 1 (Continued)

Future-orientation	What is the future being represented for?	
	Personal good	**Collective good**
Discovery in the regime of exploration	Excitement by novelty/creativity	New social representations (e.g., based on afro-futurism)
	Representational Contents: Suspension of self-identity through perspective-taking; taking on the identity of the other and/or the object	Representational Contents: Shared creative uses of language and objects for representing new ideas, pre-figurative practices or concerns – for constructing a new order of worth/radical change
	'Object' plays primary role in anchoring process	
How are representations of the future 'tested'?	Truth tests – If hegemonic representations; Reification is used as communicative format (e.g., National governments repeatedly stating the need to "accelerate the energy transition"); objectification is tautological and immediate	
	Reality tests – If emancipated representations; Consensualisation is used as communicative format (e.g. workers in closing petrochemical industries arguing for a "just" energy transition); objectification is critical and reflexive, differences recognised and potentially accommodated within existent orders of worth	
	Existential tests – If polemical representations; objectification is rejected (because not yet possible) in favour of exploiting contradictions and agonism (see Barry & Ellis, 2014) as communicative format (e.g. defending local intangible and affective attachments by contesting the validity of plans and industrial and market orders of worth)	
	Deferring tests - Maintaining unfamiliarity and exploring it, rather than immediately objectifying it with a pre-established social representation of the future	

with and create socio-political and cultural change. More specifically, our proposals can help to critically identify and decode which representations of the future are being put forward by different voices regarding given social issues and objects, for what and with what consequences, namely, in terms of justice, inclusion and wellbeing, and potential for radical change. In this paper, we have highlighted the importance of a conceptualization of representations of the future for the so-called green energy transition and the politics of climate change. Within this empirical domain, the framework we are proposing could be used to analyse controversies such as those related to the lithium mining projects currently being fostered in different countries under the banner of the green energy transition. Electric vehicles and renewable energy storage devices demand rechargeable lithium-based batteries; however, lithium is a non-renewable metal that needs to be mined and this is a process that consumes substantive amounts of water and energy and can pollute the air, soil and water with chemicals and heavy metals, thereby leading to several negative socio-ecological impacts. As such, lithium mining is often contested by local communities living nearby, and by other citizens and environmental groups, as they seek a greener future. The proposal here presented helps researchers to critically unpack and give voice to which futures are being represented and with what consequences not only for the 'green energy transition' as envisaged by proponents of lithium mining, but also for individuals and communities near mining sites, for communities globally and for ecosystems, in the short and longer terms.

While it has not been the focus of this article, it is important to briefly reflect on the nuanced methodological differences between SRT and PS and their ramifications for our proposals. Reflecting on the positionality and values presupposed in the researcher's gaze and in their concepts and methods – often understood as reflexivity – is a practice that is well known in sociology, and growing as standard in qualitative social psychology. Indeed, reflexivity is built into the PS perspective, with particular types of research associated with particular orders of worth. But since pragmatic sociologists also consider reflexivity as a capacity that belongs to research subjects themselves, pragmatist research designs tend to favour interpretive methodologies and qualitative methods, such as interviews and participant observation, which reveal the critical reflexivity of subjects, and eschew the use of large-scale survey instruments which do not. While the latter are extensively used within certain approaches to SRT, critical approaches (see Castro & Batel, 2008) also favour qualitative methodologies. We do not, therefore, see any incommensurability between the two perspectives when it comes to the question of how people represent the future: these analyses can surely be performed by using the methods that more critical approaches to SRT have been using to explore SRs – focus groups, individual interviews, media and policy analyses – but it also opens up the opportunity to combine those methods with other techniques and tools that have been prevalent in PS, such as participant observation, case studies and those flourishing in other fields and which are particularly helpful in exploring meaning-making about the future, such as material methods (Ravn, 2022) and design fiction (Hebrok & Mainsah, 2022).

Lastly, we have aimed to emphasise in this paper that a renewed critical agenda for SRT should not only pursue the plurality of future-orientations in social representation, but also their entanglement with a moral dimension of social action, especially the common good – re-enforcing Jodelet's (2021) recent call for SRT to investigate discourses of the "common" in the field of politics. In fact, the proposal here presented demands that the future and its representations are considered not only as a 'representation of' or a 'representation for' (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020), but also as a 'representation with', within and across groups, including the commons and alternative collective futures.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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ENDNOTE

[1] In other words, and as will become clearer throughout the paper, our aim here is not to propose how and why people represent 'the future' as an object of representation in itself (as in 'what is the future?'), but instead how objects 'located' in the future, that are not-yet, are re-presented, such as a climate-changed and a carbon neutral world, which are focused as examples of objects of representations of the future in this paper.

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