Judgements in Conflict
The Conflict Elaboration Theory of Social Influence[1]

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Introduction

From an applied perspective, practitioners know that most of our judgements are aimed at social communications that have the effect of changing judgements or behaviors (Cialdini, 1993). From an epistemological perspective, most knowledge must be considered as depending on social interaction: the "social nature" of judgement is not social in terms of the content of the judgements (social versus physical), but rather in terms of the social nature of the epistemic subject (Levine, Resnick & Higgins 1993; Monteil, 1993), in particular in terms of mutual social influences. Given the impressive variety of studies and theories in the field, one problem in current research is: which theory of social influence processes is to be given precedence? This contribution is an attempt to answer this question.

Social influence research has been concerned with quite different tasks: opinions, values, stereotypes, perception, problem solving, aesthetical preferences, emotions, or behaviors (see Allen, 1975; Maass & Clark, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Researchers have also used different types of sources: (numerical or social) majorities and minorities, expert versus denied sources, ingroup and outgroup sources. In addition, we find many dimensions where social influence effects have been measured: public versus private measures, immediate and delayed, direct and indirect, conscious and unconscious; they will be referred to under the generic notions of manifest and latent influence (Moscovici, 1980). Although there is partial agreement among researchers that sources with high status generally obtain more manifest than latent influence and sources with lower status more latent than manifest influence (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme & Blackstone, 1994), less attention has been given to the fact that these influence effects are a function of the interaction between the nature of the task and the nature of the source. Indeed, almost any source, under appropriate circumstances, seems capable of (with lower or higher probability) inducing any pattern of manifest and/or latent influence (null or positive).

This state of affairs by itself justifies an effort to articulate the three dimensions of social influence phenomena: tasks, sources and effects. But there are also theoretical reasons: such a conceptualization should integrate current theories of social influence. These appear to be marked by several "biases", some scholars arguing that influence is primarily due to majority status, credibility or common membership, others focussing instead on the social impact of minority, denied or outgroup sources. Let us first briefly consider these "biases" and the controversies which arise.

The majority-minority controversy. The question is whether all influence can be explained in terms of either normative or informational dependence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), that is in terms of people's motivation to be approved of or accepted by the source, or in terms of people's lack of relevant information that can thus be provided by the source. It has been argued that influence should be more generally considered as a process of collective negotiation, largely based upon the conflict-induction and conflict-negotiation styles adopted by the source (Moscovici, 1980). Moscovici gives theoretical substance to these ideas in proposing that majority sources produce more overt than latent influence (compliance effect) while minorities produce more latent than overt influence (conversion effect). In addition, he maintains that these influence processes are quite

different; while majorities obtain their influence through a comparison process (targets concentrate all their attention on what others say in order to adjust their own judgements), minorities obtain their influence through a validation process (targets seek to understand the relation between the source's response and the reality to which it refers).

In opposition to this dual approach, other conceptualizations argue that majorities and minorities achieve their influence through a single mechanism, and that they only differ in that the former elicit quantitatively more influence than the latter (Doms, 1983; Latané & Wolf, 1981; Mullen, 1983; Tanford & Penrod, 1984). The major challenge these approaches encounter is the problem of how influences at different levels can be accounted for (Maass & Clark, 1984).

The credibility-denial controversy. Moscovici (1980) also concludes that source credibility may be an obstacle to the conversion effect. In line with this idea, it has been shown that when the majority is discredited, more indirect influence occurs than when it is not (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1986; Mugny, 1984). This paradoxical effect appears only when the perceptual task is objective and unambiguous, and not when the task is more subjective or ambiguous (Brandstätter, Ellemers, Gaviria, Giosue, Huguet, Kroon, Morchain, Pujol, Rubini, Mugny & Pérez, 1991). On the other hand, studies on denial based on attitudinal themes, which are eminently subjective, demonstrate that active denial of the credibility of a persuasive message reduces the direct influence of both majority and minority while increasing minority, but not majority, latent influence (Pérez & Mugny, 1992). This series of studies strongly challenge the explanation in terms of credibility (Hass, 1981). The paradoxical effects of denial of credibility appear to be a function of the type of task on which the influence situation is based. This evidence can be of aid in the forming of a theory which integrates such apparently contradictory findings.

The ingroup-outgroup controversy. Applications of social identity theory to social influence (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1991) provide one of the most widely accepted explanations of why an outgroup achieves less overt influence than an ingroup: to the extent that it is categorized as an outgroup and evaluated negatively, a source cumulates two elements which ensure that it is overtly subject to discrimination (Mugny & Pérez, 1991).

The third axis of the debate is concerned with disagreement among researchers about the latent effects of categorization and identification. On this issue, proponents of the self-categorization theory and those of the minority influence approach hold diametrically opposed views. Turner himself (1991, pp. 102–103) summarizes the terms of this controversy: "Contrary to Turner's self-categorization theory of the role of social identity in influence, which assumes that shared ingroup identity is the basis of private acceptance and that compliance is a reaction to the outgroup identity of others, Mugny and Pérez hypothesize that shared social identity actually reduces true informational influence while categorization of others as an outgroup actually increases it".

As a preliminary conclusion, it can be stated that among this diverse set of theories, not one appears to be complete enough to invalidate the others totally and definitively. There always exists a set of observations for which they cannot account. The hypothesis that will now be developed is that all the mechanisms considered by these approaches are involved, but that their activation differs according to the nature of the task and the nature of the source.

The Conflict Elaboration Theory

The Conflict Elaboration Theory (C.E.T.) argues that, in spite of the multiple types of tasks, sources, levels of influence and processes through which social influence operates, all these factors can be understood in terms of a common, basic explanatory notion: conflict elaboration. Given that any influence process is a consequence of divergence from some relevant others (namely, the source of influence), the notion of conflict elaboration refers to the way people give meaning to this divergence. Conflict elaboration will depend on 1) the type of task and 2) the type of source introducing the divergence.

As represented in Figure 1, the general assumptions of C.E.T. are the following. First, it is well-known in social influence and persuasion research that people can be affected as

much by who the source is as by the source message in itself (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). One hypothesis is that with respect to a given task, a similar degree of divergence introduced by different sources will lead to different conflict elaborations. Second, given a similar divergence in judgement maintained by the same source but in different tasks, conflict will be elaborated in different ways due to the existence of particular epistemic expectations, as we will see. Finally, and this is the core of the theory that will be proposed here, different ways of elaborating the conflict will elicit different patterns of manifest/latent influence.

Tasks and Lay Epistemology

In "lay epistemology" (Kruglanski, 1989), specific preconceptions are ordinarily applied in order to determine the validity of judgements in a given task. Two preconceptions are of particular importance in the study of social influence. The first is concerned with whether the task allows for only one right answer, all others being wrong, or whether it is considered to be a task in which one cannot determine objectively what is right and wrong. The second preconception is concerned with whether the task is considered to be one in which responses are

socially anchoring the targets, or whether the task lacks such social implications. In anchoring tasks, judgements define membership to a social category or a social group, or assign individuals to a particular rank position within a category. Crossing both dimensions, one obtains four types of tasks, that will be referred to by acronyms (TONA, TAP, TOP, TANI). The divergence introduced by a source will be elaborated as one type of conflict or another (Figure 2) depending on the specific preconceptions of the task that are challenged by the divergence elicited by a given source.

1. Tasks: Objective, unambiguous (TONA)

The best exemplary of studies using this type of task is the well-known conformity paradigm by Asch (1956). In TONA, objectivity judgements are at stake. Subjects know that only one answer is valid, and they know the answer. They expect unanimity, that is, total consensus. These tasks are not usually relevant to differentiation of people on a social basis: judgements are facts, and different judgements are not conceived of as depending on social divisions or on category memberships.

In TONA, conflict elaboration will be determined (Figure 2) by two issues challenging the specific preconceptions: why unanimity is not
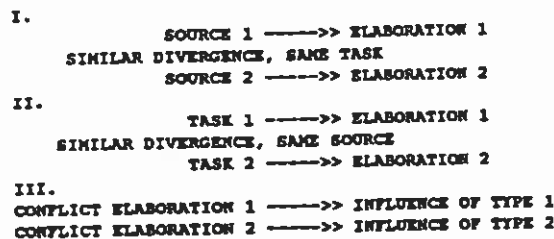
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I.
              SOURCE 1 ------>> ELABORATION 1
     SIMILAR DIVERGENCE, SAME TASK
              SOURCE 2 ------>> ELABORATION 2
II.
              TASK 1 ------>> ELABORATION 1
     SIMILAR DIVERGENCE, SAME SOURCE
              TASK 2 ------>> ELABORATION 2
III.
  CONFLICT ELABORATION 1 ------>> INFLUENCE OF TYPE 1
  CONFLICT ELABORATION 2 ------>> INFLUENCE OF TYPE 2
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Figure 1. Three general hypotheses of the conflict elaboration theory.

HIGH RELEVANCE OF ERROR

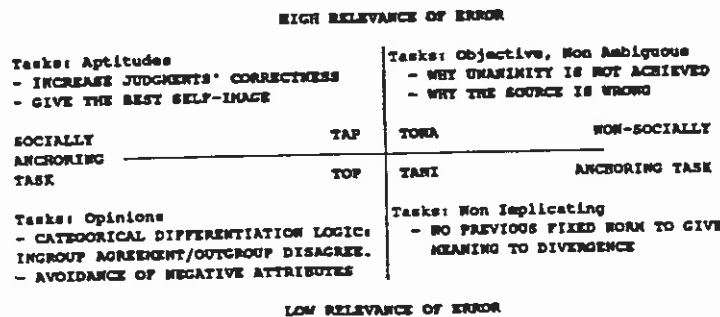| Tasks: Aptitudes - INCREASE JUDGMENTS' CORRECTNESS - GIVE THE BEST SELF-IMAGE	Tasks: Objective, Non Ambiguous - WHY UNANIMITY IS NOT ACHIEVED - WHY THE SOURCE IS WRONG	
SOCIALLY	TAP	TONA	**NON-SOCIALLY**
ANCHORING			
TASK	TOP	TANI	**ANCHORING TASK**
Tasks: Opinions - CATEGORICAL DIFFERENTIATION LOGIC: INGROUP AGREEMENT/OUTGROUP DISAGREE. - AVOIDANCE OF NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES	Tasks: Non Implicating - NO PREVIOUS FIXED NORM TO GIVE MEANING TO DIVERGENCE	

LOW RELEVANCE OF ERROR

Figure 2. Factors shaping conflict elaboration as a function of relevance of error and of social anchoring.

achieved, and why the source is wrong. Indeed, in TONA, what matters is principally the existence or absence of unanimity. Due to the absolute unanimity expectation, anyone who does not agree will always introduce a conflict. In this type of task, the most important source characteristic is not primarily concerned with who disagrees – an expert or non-expert, one belonging to an ingroup or outgroup – but concerns rather the fact that someone (one or more individuals) does not allow unanimity.

2. Tasks: Aptitudes (TAP)

In TAP, aptitude judgements are at stake. In these tasks – for instance, problem solving tasks – subjects believe that one answer must be correct or more valid than others, but they do not know initially which answer is correct and which one is not. They can feel the need to reach consensus, but disagreement among different people does not fail any expectation: divergence is the most plausible. Subjects know that there is a right answer (or at least one better than others), and their first concern is finding a way to discover it. With this type of task, social influence is also studied in situations representing an aptitude test (Festinger, 1954), an evaluation of abilities. These are tasks normally used to rank people in terms of their differential aptitudes and are therefore socially-anchoring tasks.

In TAP, conflict elaboration will be shaped by people's concern to increase the correctness of their judgements and/or to present their best self-image in terms of their own abilities. In TAP, the source's competence or expertise will then be of most importance.

3. Tasks: Opinions (TOP)

TOP refers to attitude judgements. These are tasks in which there is no objective way to determine what is right or wrong. Preconceptions here do not imply that there is only one right answer. On the contrary, a plurality of differentiated positions is expected and even considered necessary. In these types of tasks, direct correspondence is expected between different opinions and relevant social differentiations. Specific opinions correspond to each group or social category, and therefore, a specific opinion assigns people to a determined group or social category. In this way, TOP are socially-anchoring tasks.

In TOP, conflict elaboration is shaped by the concern to maintain the categorical differentiation logic (Doise, 1978; Tajfel, 1978), i. e., ingroup agreement and outgroup disagreement, and to avoid the self-attribution of negative attributes. In TOP, the most relevant characteristic of the source will then refer to its social background; it is of utmost importance to know whether the source belongs to the same group or social category as the subjects.

4. Tasks: Non-implicating (TANI)

TANI refer to personal viewpoints or preferences that are socially non implicating. On the one hand, they refer to tasks where judgements are not indicators of a specific social membership or ranking position. In TANI, people may feel compelled to express judgements, but this does not have any social consequences for their self-image, in particular, responses are not related to specific aptitudes since error is irrelevant. On the other hand, they are not socially anchoring tasks, and subjects only express personal preferences among a plurality of viewpoints, and not according to any particular membership. TANI may refer to questions which are quite new to the targets or which are of very low social relevance (i. e., what color telephone should I choose?). These judgements have no social anchoring: anyone, a priori, can express whatever opinion or preference they wish, independently of particular social memberships. In TANI, people have no special expectations of reaching consensus. Differing views of other people are not conflictual in themselves, and any source characteristic may interfere positively when they are socially shared credibility heuristics (Chaiken, 1987). Due to lack of conflict in these tasks, they will not be considered in the following section.

Conflict Elaboration

Let us consider now the meaning of divergence as a function of the type of task and the type of source. This will allow us to make precise predictions regarding the patterns of manifest and latent influence most likely to occur (Figure 3).
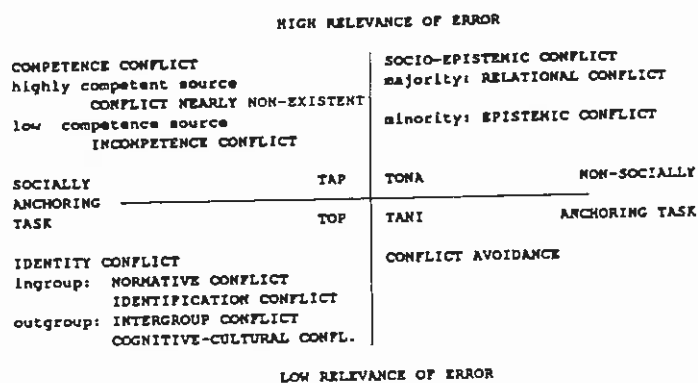
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                    HIGH RELEVANCE OF ERROR

COMPETENCE CONFLICT                    SOCIO-EPISTEMIC CONFLICT
highly competent source               majority: RELATIONAL CONFLICT
        CONFLICT NEARLY NON-EXISTENT
low   competence source               minority: EPISTEMIC CONFLICT
        INCOMPETENCE CONFLICT

SOCIALLY                    TAP    TONA            NON-SOCIALLY
ANCHORING               ─────────                  ANCHORING TASK
TASK                        TOP    TANI

IDENTITY CONFLICT                      CONFLICT AVOIDANCE
Ingroup:  NORMATIVE CONFLICT
          IDENTIFICATION CONFLICT
outgroup: INTERGROUP CONFLICT
          COGNITIVE-CULTURAL CONFL.

                    LOW RELEVANCE OF ERROR
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Figure 3. The conflict elaboration as a function of relevance of error and of social anchoring.

1. TONA. In the case of TONA, the basic conflict is one of a socio-epistemic kind: the source's answers do not coincide with what subjects see or know. But the conflict can also be elaborated with respect to the subjects' social relationship to the source. However, it will take a different meaning depending primarily on the majority or minority status of the source.

A majority source would activate fear of ridicule, deviation, disapproval or rejection (Levine, 1989). In fact, despite its basic epistemic nature, divergence takes on the meaning of a relational conflict. Subjects avoid making a deviate judgement and give priority to the restoration of manifest consensus (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1986). This conflict is usually resolved by compliance, i.e., only manifest consensus restoration (Kelman, 1958). In this case, the main socio-cognitive activity is the search for straight conflict reduction. Now subjects may experience a threat to their personal integrity, that of yielding to the other in the face of perceptive evidence. In this case, subjects will try to recover their autonomy at a latent level, i. e., when freed from majority pressure. A latent positive influence may be observed only if the relational pressure from the majority is strongly reduced (Pérez, Falomir & Mugny, in press; Pérez, Mugny, Butera, Kaiser & Roux, 1994), allowing in TONA an epistemic conflict to take place (Brandstätter et al., 1991).

On the other hand, a minority source will not induce such relational conflict. First, subjects will not experience the intense relational pressure felt facing a majority, and pressure is not strong enough to produce manifest compliance. The target would especially be compelled because of the lack of total uniformity, and this addresses the basic epistemic preconception, since in TONA unanimity is constitutive of the object. The conflict is not relational but epistemic.

This explains why in TONA a self-conformity effect usually appears when subjects confront a minority. However, manifest maintenance of independence leaves the problem of judgement uniformity unsolved, since object unicity requires judgements to be unanimous in order to be fully objective. Given the epistemic conflict that any divergence creates in a TONA, subjects would be led to undertake objectivation activity, that is, to reconstruct the properties of the object in order to maintain its uniformity, now anchored in the point of view of the minority source. This explains why in TONA a minority, in spite of a lack of manifest influence, can modify the targets' latent responses, which is the case in the Moscovici and Personnaz (1986) blue/green paradigm.

2. TAP. The conflict experienced in TAP has to do with competence. The divergent point of view takes its meaning from the uncertainty subjects feel even when carrying out the task alone. Based on targets' uncertainty and inability, conflict with competent or expert sources would be resolved through informational dependence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Subjects would take for granted that the opposing point of view is more valid than their own and would adopt or imitate it directly (Butera, Legrenzi, Mugny, & Pérez, 1991–92; Nemeth, 1986), thus resolving both uncertainty and social conflict.

In TAP, sources of low competence intro-

duce a conflict that leads to most various constructivistic resolutions. In the first place, given their incompetence, they are not expected to obtain a notable manifest influence, but rather a distancing effect. However, targets feel a fear of invalidity (Kruglanski, 1989), since rejecting one solution does not provide assurance that the correct solution will be found. This conflict between incompetencies (that of the source and that of the target) leads to a series of sociocognitive activities involved in a validation process and can induce an important latent influence on task solving.

The validation process (Moscovici & Personnaz, 1986) refers to the sociocognitive operations subjects perform in examining correspondence between properties of the object and what the source says about them. Validation involves divergent thinking (Nemeth, 1986). It is characterized by the fact that subjects exposed to minority views are stimulated to consider more dimensions of the task, and in a more creative way, so that they are more likely to detect novel and higher level solutions, e. g., in reasoning (Legrenzi, Butera, Mugny & Pérez, 1991). Facing a minority, subjects can concentrate on the task and activate or construe a whole set of abilities without being paralyzed by the dominant solution, as usually occurs when the source is seen as highly competent or as a majority. Validation presupposes decentration (Huguet, Mugny & Pérez, 1991–92), since subjects must recognize that from another perspective, different characteristics of the objects might be perceived as having some probability of being adequate.

3. TOP. In TOP, the conflicts created by a source supporting a divergent judgement take on different meanings depending on its ingroup or outgroup category membership (Volpato, Maass, Mucchi-Faina & Vitti, 1990). These conflicts of an identity nature can take different forms.

When subjects expect agreement with a relevant ingroup, but consensus is not reached, a normative conflict results. This leads to intensification of the self-categorization process (Turner, 1991). The consequence will be increased conformity to the ingroup position of the source and self-attribution of the response considered as defining ingroup identity. A process of this type implies normative dependence

with respect to the source. Although some latent influence may be observed when the latent dimension is salient and relevant to identification with one's own category (Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990; Turner, 1991; Wilder, 1990), ingroup source identity can also induce sociognitive paralysis: since manifest conformity resolves the social conflict with the ingroup, no further personalized activity is needed, and no latent or private attitude change is likely to occur (Martin, 1988; Pérez, Mugny & Navarro, 1991; Volpato et al., 1990). Latent attitude change implies that the normative conflict cannot be solved through ingroup manifest conformity, as is the case when the ingroup norm is introduced after subjects have first behaved against the norm and thus appear to be ingroup deviates (Sanchez-Mazas, Mugny & Jovanovic, in preparation).

When identification with extreme ingroup members or deviates – in short minorities – implies negative connotations, any proximity to them means the self-attribution of characteristics that threaten positive self-image. This is a case of identification conflict. The elements of this conflict are, on the one hand, the search for a positive self-image, and, on the other hand, the pressure to maintain ingroup cohesion (Hogg, 1992). When subjects' activity is primarily focussed on the creation of divisions within their own membership category, dissimilation can absorb all their sociocognitive activity and prevent latent as well as manifest influence, as in the case of psychologization (Papastamou, Mugny & Pérez, 1991–92). This is a typical case of indissociation between social comparison and validation (Mugny & Pérez, 1991).

When an outgroup source introduces a divergent point of view, the conflict is one of an intergroup nature. At the manifest level, subjects generally maintain or accentuate social differentiation between groups (Doise, 1978; Tajfel, 1978). This outgroup discrimination can have several paradoxical effects. Two types of activities can produce latent change (i. e., the so-called conversion effect; Moscovici, 1980).

The first sociocognitive activity whereby an outgroup can produce conversion is the process of dissociation between social comparison and validation (Mugny & Pérez, 1991). Dissociation refers to the fact that subjects process "in two steps" the social and cognitive conflict created by the source. Before they can elaborate the

cognitive conflict induced by the positions of the outgroup, they must have resolved the intergroup conflict, in general at the expense of the outgroup. Only then can subjects focus their attention on the content of the minority position, in particular on its organizing principle. It has been shown that the best conditions for the emergence of conversion are when the cognitive conflict is experienced after being dissociated from the social conflict (Pérez & Mugny, 1987). The paradoxical prediction here is that in case of dissociation, the more intense the conflict (e. g., because of denial; Pérez and Mugny, 1992), the more the latent change. Furthermore, this process is most likely to occur with outgroup minorities than with ingroup minorities (Pérez & Mugny, 1990).

Second, overt discrimination of an outgroup minority source can lead to a cognitive-cultural conflict, as far as it is a group or social category "protected" by the Zeitgeist. This is a cognitive conflict in that the double functioning of categorization would lead subjects to differentiate themselves from the outgroup (Tajfel, 1978); it is a cultural conflict in that a set of widely shared values of justice and equality does not allow open expression of such minority discrimination (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981). Thus shame may be elicited, due to the manifest discriminatory resolution of the conflict created by an outgroup minority that can only be resolved at the most latent level. In several studies it has been found that the salience of manifest discrimination that runs counter to shared values induces a normative conflict likely to attenuate latent, "new" racism (Pérez, Mugny et al., 1993)

Conclusion

The theory of conflict elaboration has been developed in order to integrate a broad range of social influence phenomena. It derives from the body of controversial theories and apparently contradictory empirical evidence. In some circumstances, majority, expert or ingroup sources elicit only compliance, imitation or manifest conformity. In others, it has been demonstrated that they can cause deeper changes, even without manifest influence. In some circumstances, minority, denied or outgroup sources appear to induce conversion, in others

they do not. In order to account for the existing alternatives – theories and facts – C.E.T. articulates the nature of the source in connection with the nature of the specific tasks under influence. Such articulation allows us to consider a variety of specific conflicts leading to specific manifest and latent influences.

Some new predictions deriving from the model have already been tested empirically (Pérez, Mugny et al., 1993). Latent majority influence – instead of mere compliance – can be obtained in TONA under the condition that, at the manifest level, informational and normative dependence has been reduced (Brandstätter et al., 1991). In TOP, ingroup conformity leads to sociocognitive paralysis, unless overt yielding is made impossible (Sanchez-Mazas, Pérez, Navarro, Mugny, & Jovanovic, 1993). In TAP, minority constructivism is no longer at work when subjects believe themselves to be competent and no longer experience uncertainty (Butera & Mugny, in press). In all cases, and this could be a general conclusion, latent influence is more likely to appear when conflict cannot be resolved at the manifest level, and is then interiorized and elaborated at a "personalized" level.

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