

# **The Ego-Alter-Object Relationship in the Lived Environment: The case of the Inhabitant, the Garbage Collector, and the Representation of the Sidewalk Through the Prism of Waste**

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This text is a reflection on the article “*The sidewalk, waste and garbage collection: practices and representations of an ‘in-between place’*” by Lusson & Breux, seen from the angle of the tripartite ego-alter-object gaze proposed by Moscovici. This framework enables us to explore the relationships between these three elements in understanding the “sidewalk” as a social object. After outlining the aims of the article and the concepts used to achieve them, an analysis is proposed on the role of social representations of the sidewalk in the issues of spatial appropriation and social struggle. This analysis leads us to reconsider this geographical work within the framework of social and environmental psychology, introducing new theoretical perspectives on socio-spatial segregation and socio-cognitive representations.

**Keywords:** Representation, Socio-spatial identity, Territorialization, Appropriation, Segregation.

The article “*The sidewalk, waste and garbage collection: practices and representations of an ‘in-between place’*” by Lusson & Breux proposes an original and convincing approach to the sidewalk as a socio-environmental object, symbolizing multiple uses and conflicting intergroup relations. Defined as “the space between the pavement and the base of the facades of buildings or houses,” this physical space is examined through its social dimension, its singular

appropriations, and the specific discourses surrounding it. In this way, the authors explore the practices and social representations of the sidewalk as a focal point in the social struggle between residents and refuse collectors, a struggle that crystallizes around the issue of waste.

The authors observe that the sidewalk is an evolving space no longer merely a thoroughfare, but a place for strolling, stopping, socializing, and exposing oneself to others. It becomes a space to be valued, idealized for comfort, pleasure, and cleanliness. The sidewalk thus becomes an extension of the home, where the private and the communal, the individual and the collective merge. The article's literature review on the cohabitation of practices and the presence of waste in this space leads us to think of it as an in-between or, more precisely, as an "in-between place" (Bédard, 2002) partially practiced, partially appropriated, and a source of tension between groups.

The study of social representations of the sidewalk as an object of struggle appears highly relevant. The article demonstrates that the sidewalk is a polymorphous object shared in different ways by residents and refuse collectors, serving as a vector for both individual and collective issues. A social dynamic exists around this object, one that holds utilitarian and identity value and enables groups to interact by positioning the presence of waste at the heart of their interaction. Thus, the reflection seems to fit within the ternary framework proposed by Moscovici (1984), which positions ego-alter-object in the definition of the psychosocial gaze, while suggesting an extension through the incorporation of the lived environment. Indeed, the aim of this article is to explore the representations of the sidewalk (the object), understand how these are articulated in the relationship between inhabitants (ego) and garbage collectors (alter), and identify how the lived environment surrounding waste contributes to this relationship. Here, the ego-alter-object triad illustrates that representations not only express the social subjects who construct them (inhabitants), but also the object (sidewalk) to which they refer, and the social exchanges between people (garbage collectors) in the given context (waste). In this way, this approach aligns closely with the principles of environmental psychology (Moser, 2009).

First and foremost, it considers the dialogue between the whole and its parts. In their representation of the sidewalk, individuals carry with them all the socio-environmental influences they have experienced (e.g., from the city for the planner, from the street for the resident, from the neighborhood for the garbage collector, etc.). This concept allows for the assimilation of different levels of explanation (Doise, 1982) at various scales (micro, meso, exo, macro) to examine the individual-environment relationship and identify the diverse logics of appropriation of this space. Ultimately, this work suggests that forms of spatial appropriation

also play a role in social relations between groups (e.g., the negative representations of the garbage collector profession propagated by the media).

In this sense, this exploration of the geography of representations also seems to be rooted in environmental psychology, opening the door to broader social and spatial questions beyond those directly addressed. The study of stereotypical representations, particularly of the "exogroup" formed by garbage collectors on sidewalks, raises the question of whether this dynamic contributes to socio-spatial segregation within the city and relations of domination between social groups. The place and role of the ideologies shaping the city become central to the discussion, revealing urban space as a potential medium for objectifying social asymmetries (Bourdieu, 1993).

It should be noted that the methodology used to meet the objectives and gather social representations is varied, offering a comprehensive view of the phenomenon under study. Combining press analysis with field observations enables a focus on both the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the object. The goal is not to verify sources by confronting them, but rather to enhance the understanding of representations and the underlying issues, i.e., to obtain the most comprehensive view possible for systemic understanding. This approach is referred to as methodological triangulation, particularly relevant in the field of social representations (Apostolidis, 2005), which entails considering a research object from at least two different perspectives. The authors' methodological choices demonstrate the integrative nature of their approach to social representations, acknowledging their complexities, diverse contents, dynamics, and forms of sharing and transmission. Press review analysis of the terms "sidewalk" and "garbage collector" provides insight into dominant representations while also offering a discursive space for issues, debates, and controversies that fuel the plurality of discourses about this geographical space. Meanwhile, direct and recurrent observation of various waste collection territories—subject to different temperatures and climatic conditions—brings the physical setting into dialogue with social practices. This approach immerses the analysis in a concrete space, allowing for consideration of negotiations, constraints, and actions that help shape the representations that arise in this very space.

The results of the survey highlight representations of the ideal sidewalk, referencing a clean, standardized, safe space that should facilitate conviviality and traffic. These dimensions of cleanliness and conviviality are expressed by residents, who criticize refuse collectors for failing to uphold these ideals, as they believe the garbage collectors do not perform their jobs properly, thus undermining these values. There exists a tension between residents' negative views of garbage collectors' practices and their individual responsibility to maintain their front

yards. Waste emerges as a point of conflict in the struggle over ownership of the area. However, certain nuances temper this dynamic. Considering the arduous nature of the garbage collector's job in representations allows for a more complex understanding of the appropriation issue, involving other actors such as non-resident users or urban planners. Urban amenities and the ideologies behind their presence and design appear to have a negative impact on both the work of refuse collectors—by enhancing leisure spaces—and on the leisure space itself, by making waste collection easier. It is the socio-physical characteristics of the space and the multiple socializations of this space that lie at the heart of the explanation for the relationships between social groups.

In conclusion, the notion of "between-place" seems appropriate. The sidewalk can be understood as an urban space in the process of territorialization (Levy, 1999), where the practices and expectations of several actors enter into negotiation within built constraints and specific amenities, but also within social representations shaped by plural expectations and amenity policies. A complementary approach based on socio-cognitive representations of space could illuminate the sidewalk's role in the legibility of the city (Ramadier & Moser, 1998) in the construction of the city's image (Ledrut, 1973), and in the enhancement of the identity that this reading brings. Is it a functional space primarily supporting a practice for some, an evaluative space helping to shape identity for others, or perhaps both (Dias & Ramadier, 2018)? Is it a reference point (Rosch, 1975) in the organization of the city's spatial representation, and for whom? These are just some of the questions that need further exploration to pinpoint the issues surrounding socio-spatial inequalities. This study shows that the representation of the sidewalk is reinforced by comparison with other sidewalks, and, by extension, other cities. This suggests the highly symbolic and structuring role of the sidewalk in the development of a positive territorial identity.

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