

ISTP Seminar Series: Spaces for Theoretical Explorations

Aim

The seminar series' aim is to create opportunities for the ISTP to reach out to existing and potential members, to make its work more visible and accessible, as well as attractive. The series wants to highlight the society's engagement, its liveliness, plurality and diversity of voices, and the passion for theory as a form of praxis that is an integral part of empirical research in academia and engaged with practical work in society.

Simultaneously, the seminar series aims to enliven the Society's scholarly activities beyond the bi-annual conferences in order to reach a large community of interested scholars, novices, and experts through purposefully dialogical activities.

Accordingly, the seminars will offer *dialogical spaces* that create a continuity between the conferences. These spaces counter the often-experienced isolation of theoretical psychologists by providing opportunities to meet kindred minds; sustaining a continuous exchange could generate fruitful connections between scholars at any level of achievement. These spaces create opportunities to meet and practice theorizing *together*, to experience this specific way of doing research for scholars not necessarily focused on theory: the spaces shall be inviting.

Concept

In accordance with the work of the ISTP, a major feature of the Seminar Series is the creation of "trans- and across"-dynamics in the following ways:

Across continents and countries, and their multiple cultural practices: Including countries in Africa, Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe.

Across disciplines, and their cultural practices: Including the humanities and natural sciences as well as recently emerged hybrid/transdisciplinary fields – all these fields and disciplinary distinctions can and will be different according to the academic traditions and cultures.

Across different kinds of academic affiliations: Including students from Graduate Programs (PhD and Masters) and more or less established faculty members. The inclusion of graduate students is key to a continuing dialogue around theoretical and philosophical questions, specifically to current debates in society.

Across languages, and their cultural practices: The seminar series is open to multiple languages, cross-languaging and translation, allowing for the mix and mutual clarification of languages specifically concerning core terms; English as the current dominant language in scientific practices can thus be put into insightful interactions. The seminar series leaves the language choice open to the organizers of a seminar.

In sum, the seminar series is conceived towards synergy effects through communication across different types of borders that allow for engaging and engaged dialogues to open up spaces for theoretical explorations. Specifically, the seminars are intended to be open to scholars and theories on the margins in terms of countries and topics.

Format

A seminar consists of a *facilitated online debate* on a suggested core topic or question that is relevant to psychology; this debate is provided grounds by *small flexible reading-discussing groups* meeting at their own time before the debate.

Debate: Call and Response

Each seminar starts with a **call for a response** to a central question regarding a specific topic. This is when and how the theoretical dialogue initiates: inviting those who are interested to think about their response. **Responses to the call** are short written positions engaging with this central question that can be submitted to the seminar organizers, so as to prepare the debate. The respondents will be offered the possibility to join a small discussion group around two readings on the topic. The dialogues taking place in these groups serve as support and grounding for the seminar's final debate in terms of content *and* in terms of atmosphere (see below for information about the reading-discussing groups). The search for responses and the discussion of suggested readings lead up to the seminar's central debate.

Intention and challenge of the series is to insist on a *theoretical debate* as an engaging and engaged dialogue that does not necessarily have answers, does not present a well-built theory and explains it, but it opens up for exploration and asks questions, seeking for answers.

The debate is about theory and it *practices theory*, theorizing or *theorein* as a common social activity of a community. The aim is to create an atmosphere in which we talk deeper about theory, also in a more personal, risky sense, i.e. beyond invoking well-known names, rather involving ourselves.

Therefore, the debate is conceived as relational dialogue in which listening becomes mutual. This is to say that graduate students and novice academics can abandon the listening-only position and, complementarily, it means that seasoned theorizers can abandon the talker-only position.

The form of debate means that facilitation is needed. This can be done more or less fluidly by the actual protagonists of a seminar, depending on the context created and developing. However, it is important that a debate is inclusive (academic status in terms of age and position; in terms of language and country; in terms of gender and socio-cultural ethnic identification; other aspects); the organizers support this intention.

Reading-Discussing Groups

It is key that people taking part in a debate are prepared so theorizing can take place. Therefore, a debate will be accompanied by preliminary reading-discussion groups: these aim at articulating ideas in exchange with others, creating, deepening, diversifying, contradicting knowledge around the reading and the question discussed. They bring ideas and concepts, theories and thinkers into interaction – not teaching, not explaining, rather exposing one's ideas. Importantly, the groups also allow for asking each other about meanings of concepts, words and specific content assumed. Ultimately, these activities support the inclusion of new theorizers.

Reading-discussing groups are offered by ISTP members who are prepared to facilitate them. Chairing a seminar is open to all members.

Frequency and Duration

There will be two seminars per year, around May and September.

A debate can have different time formats, for example 2-3 hours with a break. It can be offered with a time frame that is open to how the debate develops.

Decisions on the timing and duration of a specific Seminar are made by its organizers.

Timeline

The process for a seminar is the following:

- i. The organizers reach out to their personal networks, including PhDs, and ask who might be interested in principally participating in the series – getting a first impression of its acceptance and the way people react, which might help to organize the seminar more effectively.
- ii. **The organizers send out their initiating call to their networks inviting respondents** to submit their short positioning-questioning paper (about the length of an abstract) that addresses the topic and texts chosen for a seminar.
- iii. The organizers offer **reading-discussing groups for the texts and topic at the same time**. Respondents do not need to do the preliminary reading, they can. People from the reading group do not have to commit themselves to be respondents – this might happen as a result of the reading encounters. However, the readers should be at least an audience to the debate. **The groups meet at their own time and within their possibilities concerning frequency**.
- iv. **The seminar** takes place, ideally with those who were in a reading-discussing group, plus others to join.
- v. **A reading-discussing group** might meet again to reflect on what has been talked about and what has been missing, left out, what emerged afterwards etc. This is up to the group and beyond the facilitator(s) of a group. However, the Seminar Series' RA supports in organizing such meetings if desired.