Editorial

Introduction:
The Heuristic Value of Social Representations Theory

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By publishing his famous book "Psychoanalysis: Its image and its public" sixty years ago, Serge Moscovici initiated one of the most important research currents in social psychology. This current has gradually brought together researchers from many countries around a complex question that can nevertheless be stated quite simply: how do people make sense of the world around them? Inspired by Durkheim (1898), but also by Lévy-Bruhl (1922), Moscovici proposed a way to answer this question. People make sense of the world around them by constructing social representations. But this answer, apparently as simple in its formulation as the question that motivates it, requires several explanations. The first one obviously concerns the very notion of "social representation". According to Moscovici (1961. P. 66), social representations are "universes of opinions" relating to objects in the social environment. This rather broad definition of the notion has been supplemented regularly by different authors. Moscovici himself suggested that these social representations could also consist of information or beliefs. But today, in the light of all the studies that have been carried out on this subject, it seems important to us to note that the distinctions between "opinion", "information", and "belief" are unnecessary. It is true that opinions are more in the realm of position-taking, information is more in the realm of knowledge and beliefs are more in the realm of conviction. However, experience shows that individuals regularly confuse these three domains, especially when they concern a socially invested object. In this case, we can observe beliefs that take on the status of attested information or opinions that are strangely similar to beliefs. Thus, the boundary between "I think", "I know" and "I believe" is often fuzzy. Consequently, the contents of a representation can be qualified indifferently as opinions, information or beliefs and we can retain that a social representation is concretely presented as a set of cognitive elements (opinions, information, beliefs) relating to an object of the social environment.

To ask how "people make sense of the world around them" implies that we can specify which people we are concerned about? From the point of view of the social sciences in general and social psychology in particular, these people are obviously social beings. In other words, individuals concretely and/or symbolically inserted into human collectives. As a result, the phenomenon of social representation has an eminently interindividual, intergroup and ultimately collective character.

An interindividual character because representations are born, transmitted and evolve through close interactions. They have been referred to as "common sense" knowledge (Jodelet, 1984) and it is indeed in ordinary conversations that this knowledge, shared by the greatest number of people, is expressed best of all. An intergroup character because the objects of representation are at the heart of social interaction. They structure it or threaten it and, in doing so, they constitute issues for the different groups that make up a society[1]. In this way, everyone is led to take a position on them not as an isolated individual, but as a member of a given group. A collective character because social representations are first and foremost instruments to understand the social environment. As such, the guarantee of their efficiency lies in their shared nature. How useful could be a system of the social world interpretation if we did not share it with others ?

What is said above leads us to believe that the study of social representations can reasonably dispense with the exploration of the personal dispositions of individuals (personality, intelligence, etc.). Social representations have very little to do with individual psychology. Basically what matters here is the social facet of identity and not its personal facet (Deschamps, Moliner, 2012).

However, we must also give several clarifications concerning the phrase "making sense".

First by noting that social representations are always inscribed in conceptual or ideological landscapes that pre-exist them. This is necessary because knowledge cannot be useful if it appears incoherent. Social representations are one of the forms of knowledge that we can have about our social environment. Thus, from their emergence to their transmission, we constantly adjust them to the other knowledge we have about the world around us. These adjustments have an important consequence. They lead to correspondences between social groups (defined by sociodemographic, socioeconomic, socio-practical or ideological affiliations) and distinct contents of representation.

Then by questioning the status of social representations in the eyes of those who share them. Today in the light of the thousands of studies that have been carried out, we know that social representations are never perceived as elaborate intellectual constructions about reality. They are not perceived as "universes of opinions" or particular points of view. For sharing them individuals they appear as objective reflections of an obvious and indisputable reality. To convince oneself about the reality of such a phenomenon, the historical perspective gives rich lessons. Works of Robert Mandroux (1968) on the judicial treatment of witchcraft between the 17th and 18th centuries, or of Georges Vigarello (1985) on personal

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[1] It should be noted here that in this perspective, it is not enough for an object to be present in the social space for a social representation to emerge. It is also necessary for this object to have a stake value for a social group which will then need to elaborate a representation of this object.

hygiene since the Middle Ages, teach us that conceptions that we consider to be completely erroneous today were perceived as unavoidable truths at certain time. Thus, unlike other systems of knowledge of the world (e.g. scientific representations), social representations leave little room for doubt insofar as they provide us with a sense of self-evidence which is ultimately the basis of what we all recognise as "common sense".

One final point should be done about the phrase "make sense". Since social representations are produced and carried by social groups, since they are adjusted to the norms, values and prior knowledge of these groups, the knowledge that they provide us with about the world is always socially useful knowledge. Unlike the sciences which are intended to provide us with universal knowledge with the sole aim to understand the world, social representations are intended to provide social groups with knowledge that is closely interwoven with the logic of social relations. In other words, they do not simply allow us to understand the world. They allow groups to understand it in a way that also allows the justification or rationalisation of their practices, social differentiation and the identification of individuals.

In the context of this special issue devoted to social representations, our introduction cannot provide an exhaustive presentation of the theory proposed by Serge Moscovici. Readers who are insufficiently informed about this theory can refer to two texts published in English (Moliner, Bovina, 2020; Rateau et al., 2011) where they will find the necessary complements. However, we would like to make two remarks about the social representations theory. In our view, these are two important remarks because they have inspired the philosophy of this special issue.

The first strength of the social representations theory lies in the fact that it addresses almost all major issues of social psychology, from the question of identity to the role of the media. This eclecticism of the theory was perhaps a part of Serge Moscovici's initial intentions when he made his proposal 60 years ago. But it can also be seen as a response to the need to embrace all the facets of an eminently complex phenomenon – that of social representations – which lies at the heart of the functioning of our societies. In any case, the inclusive nature of the social representations theory has variously been interpreted by the scientific community. For some, it is the undeniable sign of a relative vagueness of the concepts that constitute this theory. In this sense they tend to think that a theory that deals with so many issues cannot be a good theory as far as, by touching on everything, it ultimately explains nothing precisely. For others, the eclecticism of the theory is seen as a threat. They see in it a hegemonic, even imperialist, desire to reduce certain issues in social psychology to the bare minimum. Finally, others, including ourselves, have seen in the inclusive nature of the social representation theory an opportunity to try to begin a work of unification of our discipline (Augoustinos, Walker, Donaghue, 1995; Rateau, Moliner, 2009). We believe we can say today that it is the latter who were right. Since 1991, more than 7000 articles have been published on social representations (see Moliner, Bovina, 2020) and among these numerous works, many highlight the links between the phenomenon of social representation and other psychosocial phenomena. The cartography of the scientific publications, recently undertaken by A. De Rosa convincingly demonstrates that the social representations theory has found its supporters and followers on all continents (De Rosa, 2016).

But Serge Moscovici's theory has another peculiarity which has contributed to its success. Perhaps because of its initial position, which placed it slightly outside the main stream of social psychology research. Or perhaps precisely because of the relative flexibility of its concepts, this theory has had, and we will see in this special issue, a formidable capacity to inspire new reflections, new depths, new research avenues and new ideas. One of the most flagrant demonstrations of this reality is provided by the work of the "School of Aix" (Abric, 1987; Flament, 2003) and the "School of Geneva" (Doise, 1990; Doise, Clémence, Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992). In both cases these works proposed a new theory of the structuring of social representations; that of the "Central Core" in Aix and that of the "Organising Principles" in Geneva. In each case, these theories have in turn given rise to a great deal of research and publications. But this is not the most remarkable thing, because what is striking about these two theories is that they are both in the exact continuity of Moscovici's initial propositions. Thus, although these two theories consider the question of the structuring of social representations from radically different angles, neither of them challenges the basic postulates of the initial theory. On the contrary, they are inspired by them, develop them and draw all the conclusions from them. And if we need to be convinced of the reality of this state of affairs, it would suffice to turn to a more recent proposal which, although it does not exactly deal with the structuring of social representations, has followed the same epistemic path as the theory of the nucleus or that of the organising principles. We are referring here, of course, to the "dialogical approach" proposed by Ivana Markova (2003). Being passionate about the dialogical communication proposed by M. Bakhtin, she puts in the focus of analysis the notion of dialogicality defined as "a fundamental capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of the Ego-Alter" (Markova, 2003. P. 93). This capacity is a result of phylogenesis and of the socio-cultural history of humans. Developing the idea of dialogicality Markova underlines the importance of dialogical communication in relation to intersubjectivity formation.

We could multiply the examples of such developments that can be found in the articulation between the social representations theory and Tajfel's theory of Social Identity (Doise, 1973; Deschamps, 1973) or between the attitudinal dimension of representations and the classical approach of attitudes (Moliner, Tafani, 1997). All these examples show us the work of researchers who, in order to explore new territories, were inspired by the bricks of the social representations theory without having to question the initial structure. The heuristic value of Serge Moscovici's theory appears to us through these examples.

This special issue is a further illustration of what has been said above. It brings together articles written by researchers from different countries, all of whom propose developments or deepenings of the social representations theory. Although these nine articles selected for this special issue do not represent the full spectrum of the social representations theory, however they nicely illustrate some key points of the theory and demonstrate its utility for the challenge of the modern society.

The first reflections in this special issue concern the question of the individual and the collective. ***Denise Jodelet*** (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, Paris, France) proposes a reflection on the notion of "common". By exploring

the different extensions of this notion, as they have been discussed by the social sciences, she points out their coincidences with the axes of development traced by Moscovici for the social representations theory. ***Saadi Lalhou*** (London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK; Paris Institute for Advanced Study, Paris, France) questions the reasons behind the similarity of individual representations. To answer this question, he mobilises his installation theory to explain that individual representations are necessarily representations of a given object in a given population. Individual representations are therefore interconnected because of the social practices of the object in the population in question and because of the process of social construction of the object in this population. In another direction, by developing the notion of "meta-representation", ***Wolfgang Wagner*** (University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia) and ***Maaris Raudsepp*** (Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia) explain that in order to be able to found the social, social groups need to have reciprocal visions of the world, independently of the nature of their relations. To interact with others, even if it is to oppose them, it is necessary to understand their representations.

Serge Moscovici's seminal work is full of ideas that have only been partially explored to this day. Among these, the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia is undoubtedly one of the most attractive because it refers to a phenomenon that many researchers have been able to observe: the same person can think about an object in different ways and hold different discourses about it. In a work on mental illness***, Tatiana Emelyanova*** (Institute of Psychology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia) and ***Tatiana Israelian*** (Center for Psychological Assistance, Insurance Company "RESO-Garantia", Moscow, Russia) suggest that the emotion aroused by an object of representation and the ideological anchoring of the representation could be determining factors in the phenomenon of polyphasia. With the hypothesis of a "re-anchoring" process, ***Dorra Ben Alaya*** (Tunis El Manar University, Tunis, Tunisia) enriches this reflection by proposing the idea that in certain cases, the appearance of a new ideological framework could contribute to the modification of words and objects meaning that are nevertheless familiar to us. Finally, ***Patrick Rateau*** (Paul Valéry University Montpellier 3, Montpellier, France) and ***Grégory Lo Monaco*** (Aix-Marseille University, Marseille, France) address the issue of the differentiated expression of social representations through the notion of "mute zone". They present the main debates and results of 20 years of research on this phenomenon and propose several avenues for the future.

As we have already mentioned the eclectic nature of the social representations theory is probably stems from the complexity of the phenomenon that it addresses. As we know, it is an inter-individual and inter-group phenomenon which contrasts with many psychological problems which often refer to intra-individual phenomena. But it is also a phenomenon intimately linked to communication between people and between social groups. The question of communication had been considered by Serge Moscovici from the beginning of his reflections on social representations and this question is probably the one which could give rise to the greatest number of developments today. ***Alexander Dontsov*** (Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia), ***Olga Zotova*** and ***Lyudmila Tarasova*** (Liberal Arts University – University for Humanities, Yekaterinburg, Russia)

introduce this issue by going back over the role played by the media in the formation of representations of coronavirus. But nowadays, addressing the issue of communication around representations implies thinking about the links they have with images. The first of these links is undoubtedly the one concerning the capacity of images to express representations, which should attract the attention of researchers. **Elena Volodarskya** (S.I. Vavilov Institute for the History of Science and Technology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia) demonstrates this phenomenon in relation to representations of science, while **Ida Galli** and **Roberto Fasanelli** (University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy) present two techniques for integrating images in the study of social representations.

The researchers who developed the Brain Storming technique (Osborn, 1953) understood that creativity has a mortal enemy and a faithful ally. The enemy is called the censorship of ideas and the ally is called the profusion of ideas. This is why they had the intuition to dissociate what most of us do spontaneously: produce an idea and then criticise it. As we all know, with the Brain Storming technique, the first thing to do is to generate as many ideas as possible without criticizing them, and only when all the ideas have been expressed the criticizing and selection phase takes place. With this special issue we have tried to encourage a stage of idea production around the social representations theory. It remains for the readers to take charge of the criticism stage. We shall see what ideas will remain from all those presented here. Let's simply hope that they are as numerous as possible.

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Введение: эвристический потенциал теории социальных представлений

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