

# SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND ATTITUDES: PROBLEMS OF COHERENCE BETWEEN THE THEORETICAL DEFINITION AND PROCEDURE OF RESEARCH\*

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*Abstract.* This paper attempts to discuss the following points: 1. A factor of resistance to the diffusion of the paradigm of Social Representations is the nostalgia for Attitude. 2. Previous attempts to integrate the S.R. paradigm and the concept of attitude. 3. Continuing this work of thoroughly examining the articulations between S.R. and attitude, this article proposes two theses, as discussion topics: 3.1 That Social Representation is both a heuristic concept and a theory, whereas attitude is a concept with different meanings in different theories. 3.2 That there is a lack of coherence between the paradigmatic definition of S.R. and its operationalization.

## 1. The nostalgia for Attitude as a factor of resistance to the diffusion of the paradigm of Social Representations

One of the most solid factors of resistance to the diffusion of the paradigm of S. R. in the scientific community can be identified (at least initially) in the fear of many researchers at having to abandon the concept of attitude, still believing it to be, as Allport did forty years ago, the most characteristic and indispensable concept in social psychology.

This fear from time to time has been expressed as a difficulty in understanding the articulations within the paradigm of Social Representation, and as *nostalgia* at losing a construct believed to be stable and definite in the name of another perceived as fleeting and polisemic, and consequently, losing a consolidated research procedure and methods of analysis tested both in the field and the laboratory by entire generations of researchers.

For what it concerns the *popularity and unpopularity of attitude*, according to Pratkanis and Greenwald:

"The history of attitude research presents a paradox. As early as 1935, attitude was proclaimed as social psychology's most indispensable construct. That faith in the attitude construct remains strong today. At the same time, the predictive utility of attitudes has been widely questioned, as researchers have had difficulty demonstrating strong positive relationships of attitudes (1) to behavior, (2) to memory for persuasive messages, and (3) to selection among items of controversial information." (Pratkanis & Greenwald, 1989, p. 274)

By reviewing evidence from diverse areas of social psychology to demonstrate that attitudes frequently serve three functions (1. *heuristic*: attitudes provide a simple strategy for appraising an object; 2. *schematic*: attitudes organize and guide complex behavior towards an object and memory for events; 3. *Self-related*: attitudes are used to define and maintain self-worth), Pratkanis and Greenwald suggest a socio-cognitive model of attitude as a replace-

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ment of previous approaches, proclaiming that pessimism concerning the predictive utility of the attitude construct is unwarranted.

However, various authors continue to advance new looks at an old concept (see inter-alia: Zanna, M.P. & Rempel, J. K., 1988). A study carried out by Rajecki (1990) on the Psych-LIT database showed that in the period 1974-88, attitudes still formed the most prominent topic in social psychology research, followed (with a wide margin) by: aggression, attribution/social cognition, individual differences, group dynamics, altruism, social influence.

Nevertheless some recent emerging trends in social psychology (such as the *rhetorical* and *conversational approaches*: Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1987, 1991a, 1993; Antaki ed., 1988; Edwards & Potter, 1992; for a review see De Grada, 1992) critically debate the consistency of attitude as a stable organization of dispositional traits, evaluative opinions and plans of action.

## **2. Previous attempts to integrate the S.R. paradigm and the concept of attitude**

Even though more than a quarter of a century has passed since the S.R. paradigm was first proposed, the fear of having to abandon the concept of attitude has not yet disappeared, despite the thorough examinations of the articulations between this paradigm and the concept of attitude (Jaspars and Fraser, 1984; Doise, 1989a; Gaskell & Fraser, 1990; Palmonari, 1991) and some other related constructs, such as ideology (Ibañez, 1988; Aebischer, Deconchy & Lipiansky, eds., 1991), habitus (Wagner, 1989), beliefs (Sperber, 1990; Farr, 1990), social memory (Jodelet, 1992).

Many researchers, even among those who have begun referring to the S.R. paradigm as a result of its increasing popularity, continue to believe that it is just a modification of the more consolidated concept of attitude, which they consider more clear and verifiable even though less ambitious.

It is true that in an inspection of the state of knowledge on 'attitudes and opinions' Moscovici (1963: 252) suggested that the concept of Social Representations could have usefully substituted those of opinion or image, which are considered to be relatively static and descriptive. However, in his study of the social representations of psychoanalysis (1961, 1976 2 ed.), as in successive theoretical systematizations of the S.R. concept, he seems rather to take the position that attitudes and opinions are sub-dimensional aspects of social representation, which is a more far-reaching and structural concept.

In fact, its peculiarity is granted precisely by the intersection of these components in a whole that is different from the sum of the parts: informative level (opinions), iconic level (images), stereotypical oversimplifications and generalizations, prejudicial polarizations, symbolic conduct and plans of action (behaviour). These parts represent, nevertheless, constituent and vital elements of the dynamic that generates, reproduces and transforms the social representations.

Similar observations have lead Doise to assert that the approach in terms of S.R. - starting from Moscovici's work on psychoanalysis (ibid.) - has anticipated by a quarter of a century that phase of studies on attitudes which, according to the model of McGuire (1986), is driven by the concern to unite structure and content in social cognitions, linking complex social systems with individuals and symbolic relations with social actors (Doise, 1988: 106).

In a close examination of relations existing between the concept of attitude and that of social representations, Jaspars & Fraser (1984) highlight how the historical development of the concept of attitude has been distorted from an initial meaning in social and collective terms (a perspective unique to the pioneering research of Thomas and Znaniecki, dating back to 1918-20) towards an increasingly individualistic interpretation modeled on the situational and the emotional, rather than the cognitive (a perspective attributable in particular to Allport, 1954).

Having demonstrated that the turn in the literature towards defining measurement techniques of attitudes (it is sufficient to think of the models of Likert, Thurstone and Guttman) harks back to a structured vision of belief systems as a hierarchy of evaluative responses presupposing a shared representation, Jaspers and Fraser suggest considering attitudes as individual responses based on collective representations.

On the subject of the risk of being unable to distinguish clearly social representations from attitudes, particularly due to the lack of a clear theoretical-methodological discussion, Palmonari (1989: 11) has recently expressed agreement with Doise (1988: 106).

Palmonari identifies one of the reasons that cause unjustified conceptual assimilations between the two concepts, as the lack of reference in the literature to the second part of Moscovici's work psychoanalysis (ibid.) which clarifies the relationship between the structure of different symbolic systems of communication (diffusion, propagation and propaganda) and individual cognitive systems, which through opinions, attitudes and stereotypes express different forms of predisposition to action.

"In this way, opinions, attitudes and stereotypes constitute ways in which social representations can be expressed. The relationship between various systems of communication and the different forms that social representations can assume at the level of social actors, offers an example of how the links between social dynamics and individual cognitive organizations can be analyzed; moreover, the same relationship also determines how notions of social psychology that are usually considered in a 'differential' sense (that is, specific to each individual, context-independent, and therefore measurable) are in reality socially constructed" (Palmonari, 1989, p.14).

### **3.1. Social Representation is both a heuristic concept and a theory, whereas attitude is a concept with different meanings in different theories**

Continuing this work of thoroughly examining the articulations between S.R. and attitude, this article proposes two theses, as discussion topics.

The *first thesis* stresses that S.R. is both a heuristic concept and a theory, whereas the term attitude is a concept used with different meanings in many different theories of social psychology; and that therefore its consideration as a stable, sound and reliable concept is merely the result of a misperception amongst researchers or, at any rate, of poor attention to its history.

In fact, the various meanings of the concept of attitude and the ambiguity of its tridimensional nature (cognitive, emotional, behavioural) and of the supposed articulations between attitude and behaviour, have generated a senseless bipolarization between cognitive and emotional components, between conceptualizations centered on the stimulus and models centered on the response, between normative-social and individual explanatory levels.

The numerous interpretations of the concept of attitude - whose vagueness and ambiguity persuade Eiser (1980) that it is perhaps the most indistinct and superfluous concept of social

psychology - can be organized into two large classes fundamentally reducible to the behavioristic and the cognitivistic model (see the systematic reviews published in *Annual Review of Psychology* and *Social Psychology Quarterly* ).

A behaviouristic reading underlines the definition of attitude as a variable, directly observable behavioural response and, therefore not durable, rather than as an internal state; it tends towards a 'probabilistic' conception, according to which an attitude is conceived of as the probability that an observable behaviour of a determined type will be repeated, according to the model for predicting responses developed in the sphere of learning theories.

Vice versa, a cognitivistic reading defines attitude as the expression of a latent variable that acts as 'guide' for our selective perception of reality, carrying out codifying and structuring functions, fundamentally tending to equilibrium and to cognitive coherence; in other words, attitude as an active structure or process in the mind of the individual, responsible for each modification at the representative and behavioural level.

With S.R. we recover a conceptual definition that emphasizes its phenomenal, variable and transitory nature: S.R. as 'ways' of knowledge peculiar to social reality, that arise in daily life in the course of interpersonal communication and are aimed at the understanding and control of the physical-social environment. This implies a theoretical option essentially oriented towards a constructivist and interactionist perspective of the genesis, functions and processes related to the construction of social knowledge.

*In other words one may be either a behaviourist or a cognitivist researcher and still use the concept of attitude (although with different meanings); but one definitely cannot use the concept of S.R. without sharing the epistemic principles of the theory underlying this concept, as summarized in table 1 below.*

### **3.2. The lack of coherence between the paradigmatic definition of S.R. and its operationalization**

The *second thesis* proposed in this article deals with some inconsistencies between the paradigmatic definition of the construction of S.R. and its operationalization in research procedure.

In particular, this proposal is intended to emphasize how, in many cases, the typically 'holistic' concept of S.R. and its multidimensional constituents which render it irreducible to its individual sub-components (attitudes, opinions, images, stereotypes, etc.) are largely not taken into account in research procedures due to the use of oversimplified and reductive methodological designs.

In spite of the significance of symbolic and dynamic order for S.R., research studies within this paradigm have often been limited to investigations of how opinions, information or evaluations vary between social groups. This has often led to the accusation that S.R. is nothing more than an alternative name for attitudes.

In general the research instruments used have been inadequate in relation to the complexity of the dimensions involved in the construction of S.R. Indeed, most studies have relied exclusively on verbal instruments (such as questionnaires or interviews) to the exclusion of investigating other symbolic activities (such as observations of symbolic conduct or projective techniques, not based only on verbal codes of communication).

**Table 1**

## Epistemic Principles of the Social Representation Theory

Integration between constructivist and interactionist perspectives	<i>and not just the constructivist perspective of the Social Cognition approach</i>
Interactionist conception based on the dynamics of interpersonal and social exchanges	<i>as opposed to an individualistic perspective which explains social behaviour by individual processes</i>
Metaphor of the subject as 'actor' of daily life	<i>as opposed to the metaphor of 'naive scientist' and 'economizer' of cognitive resources, as in the Social Cognition approach</i>
Conception of 'organized society' articulated and stratified into classes, groups, subgroups and socially located individuals	<i>as an alternative to a simplified and non-historical conception of society, as a collection of individuals or 'social atoms' linked only by interpersonal relations</i>
Social world treated on the basis of the complexity of its contents and its normative, ideological and value implications; integration between form and content	<i>as opposed to being treated in the same way as the natural world, as an object of cognitive operations and categorization, such as in the cognitivist approaches which emphasize the superiority of unvarying form over varying contents</i>
Importance given to the symbolic order of own culture: social concepts as socially and historically transmitted sets of information, re-elaborated through interaction between Individuals and groups and reconstructed by social actors on the basis of experience	<i>an alternative to the approaches which only recognize social influence as facilitating logical operations within problem-solving strategies available in own cultural context and which consider social concepts as acquired within a universal sequence of stages, not socially determined</i>
Focus on 'what kind' of representation and 'of what'	<i>not only on the 'how' and 'why' of knowledge, as in the cognitivist approaches</i>
Representations as set of rational/non-rational, logical/emotional, normative and evaluative components, with action-guiding value	<i>not just cognition as formal and logical structures, as in the cognitivist approaches</i>

Furthermore, this methodological restriction has also meant that few studies have included an analysis which considers the different levels at which S.R. are expressed. Most studies have examined opinions or attitudes measured by verbal scales, but these have rarely been analyzed in relation to other aspects of the symbolic expression of S.R..

Thus, the interaction between different components of S.R., such as attitudes, images and conduct have rarely been examined (although Jodelet's work, 1989b, is a notable exception). Indeed, some components of S.R. (such as their historical socio-genesis) seem to have been ignored altogether.

A review of the research inspired by the S.R. paradigm published in three Italian journals (*Giornale Italiano di Psicologia*, *Archivio di Psicologia*, *Psichiatria e Neurologia*, *Rassegna di Psicologia*) between 1980 and 1990 showed that many of the points relevant for the investigation of socio-genesis of S.R. have been largely ignored. In particular:

a) from a *methodological point of view*, the instruments used in such studies have not been adequate for the complexity of the different dimensions implicated in the construction of S.R. Indeed, most of the studies have exclusively employed more or less structured verbal instruments (such as questionnaires or interviews) and have subjected the data to content analysis or have investigated it statistically through correspondence analysis;

b) the *constituent elements of the paradigm* of S.R. have not yet all been investigated: for example, many studies in this area analyze levels of images, opinions or attitudes, but there are few studies of the process of transmission, genesis and change of S.R. Some components remain largely ignored, such as the historical aspects of representations (e.g. Jodelet, 1989b) or the emotional dynamic of S.R. (e.g. in the functioning of institutions: Carli, 1990);

c) the *processes of anchoring and objectification* have generally only been presented as constitutive of the paradigm, but they have not been investigated in relation to the existing belief systems of subjects.

d) as regards the *unit of analysis*, only in a few cases (Emiliani, 1982; De Paolis, Lorenzi-Cioldi & Pombeni, 1983; Amerio & Ghiglione, 1986; Depolo & Sarchielli, 1986) was the research undertaken with actual institutional groups. The great majority of studies were undertaken with individual subjects assumed to be representatives of the social categories to which they belonged (e.g. males and females, upper and lower social class, etc).

e) for the most part, studies of S.R. have been concerned with adult *populations* and very few have examined the development of social knowledge in children from this perspective (for further discussion of this point see: de Rosa, 1992a, 1992b; Duveen & de Rosa, 1992).

In the article "*Per un approccio multi-metodo allo studio delle R.S.*" (*For a multi-method approach to the study of S.R.s.*) (de Rosa, 1990b) I proposed adapting the methodological approach to the polyvalence of levels of dimensional analysis implicit in the definition of S.R., and making the results of the research problematic through an interactive reading of methods used, data, and statistical analyses. I discussed this proposal on the basis of results of an articulated research plan on social representations of mental illness in naive and expert populations, which also anticipated interesting cross-cultural, comparative developments (Ayestaran, de Rosa & Páez, 1987; de Rosa & Schurmans, 1990a, 1990b). These results suggested a notable interaction between communicative codes (verbal or nonverbal, linguistic or figurative) activated as a function of various techniques and levels, either more or less peripheral or central, variant or invariant, of the representations elicited; the latter, however, resulted as either more or less similar or differentiated not only as a function of the population variables considered (age, sex, social class, area of residence, training, professional role, etc.), but also as a function of the research instruments used.

Among the various proposals of a primarily technical-statistical nature present in the literature (Degenne & Vergès, 1973; Flament, 1986; Di Giacomo, 1981, 1985; Le Bouedec, 1985;

Amaturo, 1987; Mannetti, 1990; Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992; Fife-Schaw, C.R., 1993; Purkhardt & Stockdale, 1993), my proposal for the adoption of a multi-methodological approach was aimed in the direction desired by Moscovici (1986), who indicated that he was favorable towards the adoption of a continuum of methods and not a spurious summing-up of various methods. In other words, the multiple administration of various investigation techniques on the same population, with the goal of studying the interaction of techniques with results and with various dimensional levels of the S.R. construct, would always involve the introduction of a series of hypotheses connected to the specificity of the methods used in the elaboration of research plans as a function of various levels of analysis of the same 'object' of representation (images, opinions, behaviours evoked, evaluations, emotional polarizations, symbolic behavior, etc.).

It should be noted that most research inspired by this paradigm is focused on revealing the components of 'information', 'opinion', 'social judgment', 'stereotypical images' relative to the most varied objects of representation; that is, on the most explicit contents which constitute the representational field and, possibly (but much less so) on systems of propagation, diffusion and propaganda. Much rarer in the literature produced up until now is attention to more latent dimensions which are not limited to the socio-cognitive mediations operated by language (with its procedural constraints implicit in primarily textual productions, but also in conversational productions), on irrational components, on symbolic valences and unconscious processes which, by the very definition of the construct, are constitutive of social representations and are involved in processes which generate them and of the functions of regulation of social exchanges (see Kaes, 1984, 1989; Giust-Desprairies, 1988; Dan Sperber, 1989; Carli, 1990).

Moscovici, with regard to questions of method, has explicitly stated that each of the three classes of S.R.s so far identified should be susceptible to a particular methodological treatment which respects the conformation and dynamics peculiar to each class, namely:

- 1) *closed* social representations whose elements are found in a uniform and similar way in an entire population; 2) *agonal* or *critical* social representations whose elements are more or less the same in an entire population, but whose significance is determined by different and even contrasting values; 3) *open* social representations whose elements are distributed among the various categories of the population, such that it is necessary to put them together to find their coherence. (Moscovici, 1986, 3).

He believes that the study of S.R.s should ideally lead to a procedure that resembles that of an anthropology or a 'clinical sociology', aimed at establishing 'psycho-social archives' of the culture as a stock of basic material for the 'analysis of values, of affect and social thought'.

Thus, if S.R.s are also to be gathered - beyond their purely informative elements - in terms of their symbolic dimension and irrational components, in a continuum of levels from the individual to the collective, the limits of the methodological approaches based on questionnaires and verbal interviews are evident. Furthermore, as the new conversational approaches and the rhetorical analyses of discourse have shown, very often even verbal productions are treated in an a-problematic and a-critical way by researchers. According to Potter and Billig (1992; 16):

The risk is that attention will be directed towards cognitive events within individuals rather than features of argument and conflict taking place within talk, texts of other symbolic media and distributed across different social practices. This trend can be observed in the adoption of cognitivist notions (or notions reconstructed via cognitivism) such as prototype, image, memory, and, of course, representation itself. The concentration on such matters draws attention away from the tasks of theorizing and analyzing the 'unceasing babble': talk is taken as unproblematic, something we as

researchers already know about. Indeed, this particular formulation is notable for the rhetorical work it does in characterizing talk as something chaotic and messy, something that has to be categorized from a distance rather than engaging with its moment-to-moment orderliness (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Once the researcher draws on the ontology of cognitivism, which has been refined in the decontextualized, desocialized and uncultured universe of laboratory experiments, there is no unproblematic way to connect these ideas to processing of talk. By contrast, once the pragmatics and rhetoric of talk and texts are theorized and analyzed, the traditional ontology of cognitivism itself starts to look fragile (Edwards & Potter, 1991). Indeed discourse analytic work poses important questions for cognitive psychologists concerning what might count as an adequate explanation (Edwards, 1991; Edwards, Middleton & Potter, 1992).

Specific critiques, such as this, which are aimed at refining the epistemological choices connected with the adoption of certain methodologies, are welcome. Research on S.R.s can only benefit from such a level of methodological-theoretical problems. I believe that rather than being alternatives to S.R., these contributions help to integrate and improve the S.R. paradigm which - precisely because of the complexity of levels of analysis which it claims to encompass - must be able to move to theories and more precise and refined methods supported by the theories which permit making problematic the specific processes and stages of psycho-social research.

The position assumed by Doise (1982, 1987, 1988, 1993) is balanced and open to a multidimensional view of scientific research in the area of the critical-methodological debate, which for some years has echoed the success of Moscovici's proposal of the S.R. construct as "a large theory...a general theoretical orientation. . ."

The value of an explanatory system always derives both from the analysis models used and from their links with methods of operationalization; there is no reason to think that one sort of analysis of discussion will be more apt for studying social representations than the analysis of responses to an open or closed questionnaire. One can also think that a more heuristic approach consists of an imbrication of these different methods" (for an attempt in this sense, see Grize, Vergés & Silem, 1987)" (Doise, W., 1988, p. 100).

By underlining the validity of an approach which is not sectorial, but which integrates coherently the various methods in use in psycho-social research with the various levels of analysis of objects studied, Doise's position also takes into account the specificity and relations of the construct of S.R.s with respect to other concepts of social psychology.

In line with the considerations so far made regarding the choice of methods inherent in research on S.R.s, a recent article by Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell (1992) entitled "*The use of different methodological approaches in the study of social representations;*" supports the multi-method approach presented above. The reasons put forward by Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell for the adoption of various methodological approaches in the study of S.R.s can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The very nature of social representations implies that we do not have a simple construct that could be investigated through a single method, successfully. Instead of a simple construct we have one that involves ideas, beliefs, values, practices, feelings, images, attitudes, knowledge, understandings and explanations.

Furthermore, one has to consider the social (shared) nature of social representations as well as their functions (i.e., to enable individuals to orient themselves and master their material social world and facilitate communication by providing a code of naming and classifying (Moscovici, 1973).

- 2) The fact that social representations acquire meaning, structure and image through verbal expression and communication creates one more complexity that has to be taken into account in the selection of methodology.

- 3) The nature of the construct leads researchers to ask different research questions both about social representations (i.e., what IS a social representation) and within social representations (i.e., how they



function, how they are created, changed and so on). These different research questions need to be tackled by different methods. So, often, it is the specific target of the research that will define the research method(s).

This need for multi-methodological studies has been understood by many researchers who often suggest that although their results provide some answers to the questions they set out to investigate, other methods from the one(s) they employed might give more and better understanding. (...)

(...) our aim is not to diminish the value of any single method of gathering data, but to suggest ways of using many different methods, acknowledging each one's advantages and limitations, for a fuller understanding of social representations." (Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell, 1992, p. 30)

However, apart from their evident affinity for the adoption of a multi-method approach, it seems that Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell (1992) limit their methodologies of data collection to verbal (questionnaires, in-depth interviews, attribute checklists) and textual instruments (analysis of the press), at least judging by the example they report of their investigation of Social Representations of European Unification. Neither does it seem that they dedicate sufficient attention to the formulation of specific hypotheses of a methodological nature which permit forecasting results as a function of methods used; they seem more oriented toward a descriptive and summing-up type of approach on the various techniques.

Similar criticisms have been expressed by Uwe Flick (1992) who, in reply to Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell's article, judged *"the combining of methods as lack of methodology"*, or better as the lack of a connected theory of technique. To support his criticism, Flick presents the model of triangulation of the traditional versions of the "Multi-trait-Multimethod-Matrix" as strategies to validate empirical procedures and/or results and not so much as an additional epistemological source, from the use of "reflexive triangulation" in ethnographic research, to recourse to triangulation "as an alternative to validation" as in the latest reworking of the concept by Denzin (1989).

For the latter, "the goal of multiple triangulation is a fully grounded interpretative research approach. Objective reality will never be captured. In-depth understanding, not validity, is sought in any interpretative study. Multiple triangulation should never be eclectic. It cannot, however, be meaningfully compared to correlation analysis in statistical studies" (Denzin, 1989, quoted in Flick, 1992, 46)

The points raised by Flick to Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell's (1992) do not tend to a demolition of the multi-method proposal for the study of S.R.s, but to substantiating it by means of an interpretative approach which does not reduce it to pure eclecticism or to a summing of methods which are presumed to be different purely as a function of the levels of analysis of the object they intend to investigate and not because of their specificity.

"Questionnaires, interviews and attribute check-lists are operating more or less on the same track, even if the levels are different: all these methods produce verbal or written reports of subjective standpoints (knowledge, feelings, images). Analyses of the press give access to the social contexts and background of such standpoints and so offer a different type of data, but still resting on the level of knowledge. But, the potential of triangulation different approaches lies in combining different perspectives of research and in focusing on aspects of the subject under study which are as different as possible (...) This goal can be reached, when we combine perspectives and methods aiming for two central and different aspects of social representations: (subjective and social) knowledge they consist of and activities through which they are produced, circulated and applied." (Flick, 1992, p. 47)

I completely share this orientation and hope that the increase in investigations based on a meditated multi-methodological design can help research on S.R.s to leave behind an eminently descriptive view of the objects studied, and to approach an interpretative dimension which takes into consideration the articulation among the various individual, social and historical-cultural levels that intervene in the structuring and differentiating of S.R.s as complex symbolic systems.

However some of the points at issue raised by Flick and myself to Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell's (1992) find a more clear answer in the wider chapter "*Aspects of methodology and their implications for the study of social representations*" introducing the recent book edited by G. Breakwell and D. Canter (1993). Each of us, I suppose, might agree with this conclusive statement:

"The main question should not be which method to use but how to integrate findings drawn from different methods. When methods reveal somewhat different elements of a social representation, there are very real problems facing the researcher who tries to incorporate them into a single picture. The epistemological status of information gathered by each method may differ. Where methods generate contradictory images of representation, there is the question of how to prioritize disparate information. (...) In determining the viability of a method, it is important to bear in mind the particular theory it examines and the precise reason for its use. A method must be evaluated in terms of its capacity to achieve specified objectives within a particular scientific epistemology." (G. Breakwell & D. Canter, 1993, p. 6)

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