

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS*

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Dear friends, this is a great day! These are the only words I find appropriate to express the meaning of the conference which gathers us together for the first time in this wonderful setting. But at the moment of opening my score, I dare not rely too much on the power of words to convey my feelings regarding such an event for the field of research which is common to all of us: social representations. It has a symbolic load, for an obvious reason. When I look back over the evolution of social psychology, as Pepitone once did in this very place, I cannot help noticing that the life duration of a theme of research ranges from five to ten years, after which it drops out. We are surprised, even disturbed, that ours should be an exception. How could one not wonder at the fact that since the early researches in Paris and Aix-en-Provence, Geneva and Bologna, the circle of new researchers has kept widening in nearly every country in the world. Including the USA where social psychologists of the stamp of Zajonc, Gergen, Markus, Nisbet and even Kelley recently refer to the theory of social representations no longer as to a curiosity but as to a theory worth exploring. Now whoever has practiced the history of sciences is aware of it, the attachment of researchers to a theory for over thirty years could hardly be explained if this theory did not express some truth and did not touch upon something profound.

When gathering the participants to this conference, Pina Boggi Cavallo and Augusto Palmonari to whom we express our intellectual and friendly thankfulness have established the evidence of duration and continuity in everybody's eyes. My heartfelt thanks also go to Fran Elejabarrieta and to Wolfgang Wagner who have directly suggested the idea of this meeting and worked so hard for it to see the light of the day. Believe me, these are not empty formulas, they express my deep gratitude for an initiative which will mark an epoch and to which everyone's name will remain associated.

Thinking back over these thirty years, and how could I help doing so? I vividly live again the moments of enthusiasm and discovery. But also the moments of doubt, followed by those of discouragement facing the silence of some, the sometimes insidious criticism of others, or else the scorn with which certain people greeted our researches and ideas whose outlandishness shocked them. In those times of loneliness and even ostracism, the trustful, obstinate friendship of Denise Jodelet, Mariza Zavalloni, Claude Flament, Willem Doise, Robert Farr, Jean-Claude Abric, Mario von Cranach and always Augusto Palmonari have helped me to remain hopeful and go on along the chosen path. I want to give here unemphatically testimony to their intellectual and moral courage all through those hard years and tell them, with my esteem, how much I owe to them. In this sense, the Ravello conference celebrates a work of friendship as well as of science. It will remain engraved in our memories and we will remember with pleasure those bright days which initiate a new chapter in the history of our field of research.

* ...at the First International Conference on Social Representations, Ravello, Italy, 1992.

So here is what I wish for: let this conference be the opportunity for reflecting in common upon the notions and methods which are important to us. In truth, the opportunity for outlining the contours of a program of research that can be a source of inspiration for everyone according to their inclinations and creativity, and with which new researchers will feel inclined to be associated. From this viewpoint, what I want to tell you today merely aims at contributing with a few signposts to the main line of this program. In this respect, it seems impossible not to overstress the following point: the theory of social representations is both a general theory and a particular theory. It is in the first place a vision of the whole of society. And in this vision stamped by the symbolic and the ritualistic, social representations are constitutive of bonds and common actions. They can be likened either to ideal systems or to matrices in which collective institutions are inscribed. This is why Mauss could write that "social facts are causes", because they are representations, and even Weber asserts that the "collective structures which partake of daily thinking are representations and have "very considerable, often even dominant causal importance". Though they are not self-explanatory and have to be explained by social conditions, social representations are part and parcel of political, religious, economic practices and considered, in Crespi's words, as "forze operanti ed efficaci".

Then the theory is a particular theory of the collective forms of thought and belief and of the communications produced under the constraint of society. Society alone can inhibit mental options by making things unthinkable because it prohibits them, or thinkable with opprobrium - just as it can foster symbolic creativity by rituals or other means. Figuratively speaking, the general aspect of the theory can be associated with Durkheim and the particular aspect with Lévy-Brühl. The paradox of the theory of social representations, i.e. being both general and particular, is by no means the effect of chance. On the contrary, it is due to the profound nature of the theory and explains its power. But that is not really the point I want to make. The point is that during the last decade we have dedicated many efforts to highlighting the general aspect of social representations, so as to contrast our theory with the individualistic, non-social conception prevalent in our science. We wanted to show that the social is something different from number, "inter-subjectivity", "the interpersonal", which screen the difficulty of thinking about society in social psychology. This phase is now over since everyone asserts they are converted to the social, and everyone overbids everyone else as each wants to be more social than his or her neighbor. So time is ripe for turning, rich as we are in acquired experience, toward the particular aspect of the theory and breathe new energies into it. Anyhow, that is the spirit of my present contribution to our common reflection. For I am morally certain that decisive progress will be made by the research which can keep the balance even between the two aspects, between what concerns society and what concerns representations.

So let me begin with stating my argument as boldly as possible, the better to examine its consequences. Convinced as I was that no science is stable and worthy of being pursued unless it is dedicated to a significant, quasi-universal phenomenon, I have tried, at the beginning of my career, to single out the one that could be ours. In the mental atmosphere of the times, I made that simple observation: there are two basic modes of human cognition: language and commonsense or folk knowledge. Each provides a distinct way of ordering experience, communicating and building up reality. Thus it seemed to me, innocently, but it still seems to me that just as the former refers to the field of linguistics, the only science concerned with the latter as its vocation is social psychology. Yes, the only one, for this mode of human cognition is non-individualistic, social in its form and content. From these

observations it appeared obvious that a theory of social representations alone could describe and explain the way in which people produce and structure knowledge which, as Chomsky remarked, "is acquired by everyone rapidly, effortlessly, in a uniform manner, merely by living in a community". This accounts perhaps for my conviction that discourse and analysis, ideology or social cognition have greater chances of success if they are not grounded in such a theory.

Once this is said, several lines of research force themselves upon our attention. The first and most urgent appears as soon as one wonders: but how can you represent to yourself something - an object, a situation - of which you have not an adequate representation or no representation at all? Indeed, how is it possible to represent knowledge and its content? One might have thought that schemata, scripts and other devices for stereotyping information and routinizing thinks are useful, and many have used them. But now the situation is this: concrete researches and the discussions of philosophers of mind have shown that they cannot be useful for several reasons. First, if you observe that commonsense is generated through dialogues and conversations, it is difficult to think - and Billig is right - that people will do it just by exchanging clichés, platitudes and stereotypes. Then, if we take into account what Putnam, Fodor or Dennett declare, obviously schemata, scripts and other prototypes are quasi-syntactic structures - narrow context, technical idiom - independent of the content. Whereas a broad content is dependent on contexts and determines their extent. You can create or represent content only if you start with content, not with syntax. As Spinoza said, to make a hammer you need a hammer which needs another hammer und so weiter. At last the content of folk knowledge is both metaphorical and literal, even if it is a stereotype, since, as Schank remarked, the idea of a restaurant script is too simple because there is not one restaurant script but thousands of them. The mystery which I will solve in a minute is, how do you know they are all about restaurants, not about hotels? Of course I do not deny that schemata, scripts and all stereotypes are related to content, but they are not contents in a significant way.

It is not strictly mandatory that you should agree with all that in order to take into account my proposal. With misleading brevity it could be asserted that there is always in a community or science a potential content which we cannot express but which we can handle so as to represent a present or absent object, or make people believe that it exists. Besides it is noteworthy that this potential content is concentrated in verbal propositions and pictorial images identifying what it refers to. Moreover they are combined in units that the philosopher of science Holton identified as themata which constrain individual scientists to look for special kinds of facts and explanations. Themata are quite enduring and stable cognitive units which shape particular scientific representations and transform them.

Using this notion as a clothes-hanger, I will say that folk knowledge is grafted on canonic themata that motivate or compel people in their cognitive search. This is what comes to their minds when some unfamiliar item of information strikes them and what they communicate about. As Robert Merton wrote: "Both in the special case of science and in the more general case, similarities and differences in themata may help explain the sense of congeniality and incommensurability of ideas experienced by people in interaction". Yet it goes with our saying, doesn't it? that there are many other reasons that I cannot list here for recommending this notion to your attention. On the one hand thematisation is one of the main linguistic operations that denotes a certain arrangement of words around a subject which is not the syntactic subject, so that it is perceived by those who examine it. On the other hand every reasoning by analogy and its rhetorical use are geared to reveal the structure of a theme and

establish its value. As happens when one tries to think of God and his powers, basing oneself on known relations between man and his powers, or the black holes in the universe., basing oneself on what seems to correspond to them on our planet.

Needless to say there are many canonic themata in the sciences - the atomicity of matter, the unity of natural forces - and in our domain - conspiracy mentality, economy of effort, the mind-body duality, etc. But the most convincing reason for reflecting on this notion is that we have been using it constantly in our studies about social representations. If I am not mistaken, I think this was the case in Deconchy's studies on what men think of the human opposed to the animal, in Jodelet's studies on AIDS in which contagion pops out, or again in Flament's studies showing the persistency of the theme of the unanimous community, if not in Zavalloni's research on identity. I can also mention studies by de Rosa and Kaes in which the verbal aspect and the iconographic aspect of one and the same theme are seen to appear quite distinct. If I remember well, Kaes has shown that group photography, group portrait offer a new way to pinpoint what is shown off in a group.

I will not go into a thorough examination of this point. Suffice it to say that, if we consider such canonic themata, we may think of comparing the contents brought to light in the different studies, which has not been done so far, and of a research on what underlies diverse representations concerning the phenomena of identity and discrimination between men and women, ethnic groups, and so on. To be sure, I know what you will say: "That's all right, but how does the potential content pass into the actual content of a representation?" It does not pass, it sneaks, as Fodor said, into the shared content by mentioning it. But again? Well, it seems that the process of anchoring is among other things designed to do just that. I have often enough been reproached with despising the quantitative character it has, associating it with vague networks of meaning and ill defining it, not to rejoice at seeing it mentioned almost everywhere as a very useful factor, or, to quote Fodor again, "despite or may be because of not being well-defined".

In fact, what does experience tell us? It shows that an object in the broad sense - thus madness - identity or AIDS - enters in the field of our exchanges on condition that we consult the register of themata so as to pick up the one - anomaly, deviance, contagion - that allows us to represent it to ourselves, nothing more. Once the object hooked on a theme which is radically unutterable, because its only content is potential - I say potential, not tacit or implicit - it becomes the actual content of a representation when it gets anchored to a context, a network of meanings. To be anchored means that it has a reference and receives a determinate semantic value. For instance. contagion by AIDS among homosexuals, young people, etc. You can also do the reverse, start with an anchored content, do away the anchoring, and you end up with a new content. Start with a French restaurant script; take the personal service away and you end up with a new sort of restaurant, a self-service restaurant. Repeat the operation and you have the thousands of scripts mentioned by Schank which are generated neither by a prototype nor by a stereotype but by a theme called restaurant. By the way, this also defines the generative power of themata by the diversity of actual contents into which each can be transformed according to the context. Think of the power of contagion: in the context of AIDS it designates sexual transmission; in that of mental representations an epidemiology of representations à la Sperber; in the context of masses, imitation, and so on.

So much for this proposal. I like it, because it seems to me a fecund perspective for studying how new contents are generated, leaning on some aspects of linguistics, rhetoric and philosophy of mind which are not enhanced as yet. A comparative study of social repre-

sentations could even be envisaged, which has not been done so far, and would justify recourse to qualitative methods. Even more it incites us to include in our research program a different approach of commonsense and folk knowledge in a specific, not global manner. Instead of handling them in the usual global manner, they should be tackled specifically by grasping folk- or ethno-sciences. This means, we should proceed to design a frame for approaching them as autonomous disciplines, folk rhetoric, folk psychology, folk logic, folk politics, folk economics, folk nuclear physics, etc. and bring to light their structure. By seizing maxims and representations, guided by canonic themata, they shape our actions, embody our ways of thinking and provide the text of our culture. Especially when they emerge, are shared, carefully guarded against attack and prescribe ways of life for their users, it is possible to glimpse at what could be a social psychology of knowledge.

But that is enough on this point. I am now coming to the second line of reflection which directly prolongs the first. It touches upon the obvious creativeness of representations, on the way in which their contents are generated and transformed; No doubt we have a hypothesis, that of the central core, to serve us as a guide in this matter. It supposes, as everyone of you knows, that a representation comprises central elements - themata? - which are autonomous and salient and whose causal role is to produce peripheral meanings and images associated with them. It strikingly resembles the idea of "core belief" of semanticists, which enhances its interest and ought to encourage us to make this hypothesis one of the hot points of our research. The question is now: how to render it more interesting and powerful? I do not claim any originality in the eventual answers, apart from my particular formulation of the road to follow in order to find them. To begin, if we seek, in fact, how people proceed to produce significant contents, we have to express which is the constraint exerted upon the mental processes in the case of social representations.

I will explain what I mean by having recourse to a short digression for which I apologize. What I have in mind is the evolution of researches on social cognition of which one has the feeling that they have been undermined, not by their failure, but by their success in revealing the shortcomings of commonsense. Supposing that there is only one way of going about the business of reasoning, a considerable amount of research has proved that our everyday representations are the fruit of defective reasoning and illicit inferences from insufficient data. Consequently these representations are a set of errors resulting from deficient rationality. We are all aware of it, but what you may not know, since it is seldom mentioned, is that Nisbet, anxious at seeing that all this was leading to a dead end, asked the cognitivist philosopher Stich to find a way out. Now we put his finger on a paradox. In fact, if people are prone to all these biases, faulty heuristics and other illusory correlations, do we still deal with thinking? The question has to be asked, since it would be impossible, in good logic, to assign any interpretation to what they say and any content to their mental states. Mustn't we think, then, that these people in their cognitive miserliness do not engage in any real reasoning at all, but only in "reasoning-like" mental processes? On the contrary, let us suppose that they think about something, attribute a content to their representations. Then we have to admit, according to Stich - and this is the way out he proposes in the book "Fragmentation of reason" - that there is no unique cognitive process that they should use, because various modes of reasoning and representing to oneself, differing from one another, should be equally good.

Thus the answer to Nisbet's anxieties brings us back to the theory of social representations; more exactly to Lévy-Brühl's solution from which Piaget and Vigotzky drew inspiration. Though the American philosopher did not realize it, this theory explains the differences

between modes of thought by a constraint imposed upon cognitive systems, such as Lévy-Brühl's famous "rule of participation". All I want to say is that we still have to know, regarding the hypothesis of the central core, which is the constraint peculiar to social representations with a view to producing a content which has some qualities and not other ones. Wanting this, it remains too imprecise. To say that is indeed to say something positive, even cheerful for those whom difficulty stimulates.

Let us go further, and allow me to make another short digression in order to explore the new consequences of this hypothesis. Since we are between ourselves, I can confess that one of the reasons why I have clung to the notion of social representation is the wish to put an end to the famous black boxes in social psychology. When I was later asked to define the notion, I sincerely answered that there are deep, difficult problems about understanding social representations, and that we should try together to solve these deep, difficult problems by gradual research. But that was not the answer people expected from me, and consequently they said: "If there are deep, difficult problems about social representations, then we won't have any representations". Quite naturally then they began to contrive white boxes, supposing that all everyday understanding is to be found outside in the language of culture. Thus no presupposition whatever has to be made regarding the mental content of the language user about any "representations", "meanings", "intentions" he may have. Every word, every text gains its meaning from social dialogue and negotiations in a community. I am willing to believe it, but I have to insist that, even for Wittgenstein, language is always anchored in a form of life and there is no dialogue independent of this substance. And also, which is important for my present contention, there are non-negotiable meanings, intentions or rules. If everything was negotiable, submitted to criticism, even Rorty admits, normal discourse would be impossible.

Be however reassured, my digression stops here. Its only aim was to stress the fact that every communication, every representation comprises a duality between meanings, ideas, some of which are negotiable and others are not in a group at a given time. It turns out that it is of great consequence for the hypothesis of the central core that implies such a duality, since it understands a radical difference between its contents. As radical as the difference between a belief and a cognition. How can I illustrate this difference in such a short time if not by leaning on Wittgenstein's reflections about religious and extraordinary beliefs?

First, what does naive experience tell us on this point?

Each of us has normal beliefs, cognitions about the fact that it is raining, that women are discriminated, that the earth is round... Some probabilities can be attributed to them and evidences supplied, while some people may question them. Beside these normal beliefs there are others, extraordinary ones, which stand out by their irresistible character, such as the belief in reincarnation for a Buddhist, equality for a democrat, etc. For these it is not a question of hypotheses, high probability, any more than a question of knowledge. To contradict them is not to supply an argument to the contrary, but to oppose notions, images quite different from them, since in fact they cannot be contradicted. "Controversies, Wittgenstein wrote, seem quite different from normal controversies, reasons seem completely different from normal reasons". This may be because opposed beliefs belong to a different representation. If, for instance in one God created the species and in another it was selection, each of them supports a different world. In the meaning in which Goodman understands it when he writes in this respect: "What is represented is always represented in a frame of reference or another system of representation".

Now, and I revert to Wittgenstein, extraordinary beliefs have also the particularity of leaning not on a fact but on a rule of life: I say I act in such a way. At the same time, he wrote: "Not to believe in them is considered as something serious". Why it is serious, Durkheim tells us: it is because societies prohibit every criticism of some elements of a collective representation, so as to put them above the others and confer authority to them. One can believe in them without knowing or discussing them, just as you believe that $E = mc^2$ is valid without knowing what $E = mc^2$ is if you are not physicist. So I will tell you that close examination of the content of social representations has brought me to think that side by side with cognitive beliefs we grasp something distinct which does not come down to either cognition or language, something with a supra-individual reality which imposes itself on everyone: such are normative or extraordinary beliefs. Of them William James was able to write: "Our faith is faith in someone else's faith, and in the greatest matters that is the case".

Now we can conclude that everything is not cognitive in cognition. Which gives me the right to suppose that the central core is made up of different kinds of beliefs from those of peripheral elements. And even to propose that you should avail yourselves of the study of identity, ethnicity, even political phenomena to explore in depth those normative or extraordinary beliefs. To explain social representations also means to explain why some cognitive beliefs, submitted to discussion and reflection, change their nature and become normative or extraordinary, as happened with the rights of man some twenty years ago.

But I would be angry with myself for evading the question you undoubtedly ask yourselves: but what is not cognitive in cognition? Well, it is what articulates a belief with a cognition or judgment, i.e. a value, which, as Charles Taylor pointed out, is only lightly open to "radical reflection". Restive to the appraisable dimension, social psychology, with the exception of Lewin and Rokeach, lost interest in the notion itself. But if, as appears from what I have said, normative beliefs act like commutators to generate the content of social representations, it rests upon us to make room for it in all our studies and theories. All the more as values probably form an important part of the central core - and I interpret the observed effects of belief in a just world in this sense - and as most of our reasoning in societies depend on categories of right or wrong more than on those of true or false. However, even for an individual reasoning by himself, Pierce remarked, "The distinction of good and bad he always has in mind when he infers".

I think this is a new consequence of the central hypothesis when taken seriously. Yet I willingly recognize that taking into account what has just been said would be to shift the emphasis we have put hitherto on the cognitive explanation of phenomena - sometimes under the dominant pressure - and on the reference to the "outer" world. But when one will absolutely understand what one is provoked to observe, stick closely to the interior human world, then one has to include values. For, as Putnam strongly put it: "Without values we would not have a world".

I know, for having on them, that these are deep, difficult questions of today. It lies in no one's power to express them by one of those ready-made propositions of deceptive simplicity of which social psychology is not sparing. To be sure, I would have liked to have more time to convince you that these questions should be tackled seriously and given preference in our agenda. On this condition the field of research that is common to us will shake off its own habits and assert itself at the level of quality that is expected from it. I have sometimes wondered whether we are united by such a will, whether we shall succeed in making our energies converge. But I have also understood that I cannot know the answer by myself.

Beside these deep, difficult questions, some urgent ones are posed to us. People tell us sometimes: "Your representations are all right, but that is only an appearance. On closer inspection, you have to agree that they concern only individuals". This expresses the disappointment of those who think that the link we have established with communication is no longer present or visible. Here are stakes enough for a third line of reflection which is to be followed fervently so as to recover this link. Let us bear in mind that our representations are not grounded on the things and situations they mention, they are grounded on communications about these things and situations. In this sense they are socially shared before they are grasped by individuals. This makes it fully clear why the process of communication shapes and transforms our shared representations. I note in passing that if at the individual level such transformations are achieved by rules of inference, at the collective level they are achieved by rules of communication. Then I will suggest, without argument, that explaining the processes of communication is and should remain a part of the general explanation of social representations.

But it is worth considering what precedes not only as a reminder of principles but above all as a task for our research program. Let us fill in some details. Of course one can start with paying attention to close communications during which words and thoughts are conventionalized as elements of conversations, and conversations themselves as they change these words and thoughts into a part of our everyday relations, of our *Umgangssprache*, the language circulating among us. What I have in mind is, on the one hand, conversation in as much as it seizes the words and ideas that have been displaced from a philosophical, artistic complexion and brings them back to their common use and meaning. In the sense in which Wittgenstein wrote: "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use".

It may not be useless to pause sometimes to consider the rules of conversation and discourse as shaping the representations which offer directly to public consciousness and channel them into a coherent system. But that would not be enough if one were not convinced of the necessity of understanding which "thematic" and "stylistic" qualities make certain theories, verbal phrases or images win in the competition and become part of our commonsense and everyday language. How many candidates compete at one time for the role of governing the stream of conversation, public imagery of clichés - call this the historical power to go on - as their authors aspire at becoming cultural authors? They are numerous and no doubt there are ideological or social reasons favoring one or the other. But these are not enough to explain the difference in their grasp on language and common knowledge, or the charisma they acquire. As for instance, the contrast between psychoanalysis and Marxism seems to show. There is this resonance to some profound themata, there are unfamiliar metaphors with their garish images and even their elusive concepts, such as the unconscious, relativity or paradigm are to be considered. Honestly Kuhn acknowledged about this concept: "Part of the reason for its success, I regretfully conclude, is that it can be all things to all people".

In themselves these observations are not interesting, except to indicate what is not a small matter to understand, and yet is the task devolving upon us. Moreover we have to go on by examining distant communications either through the media, or the rhetorical practices, and others such. I do not say that the informality of conversation is not more significant than the formality of the discourse and actions from institutions. These however, as I once suggested, use systems of communication - propaganda, propagation and diffusion - in order to create a structure for representations. I view them as different directions in which a human group shapes its membership and constructs its singular reality. Here perhaps is room for suggest-

ing to think about these systems of communication, express them in more refined ways and put them again to work. Or even go further and relate the ideas which are now firmly planted concerning the power of minorities to the genesis and change of social representations. That this corresponds to various practices, especially in cultural movements, is sufficiently well-known so that I need hardly apologize for wishing to unite our two trends of research as long as they can genuinely highlight one another.

So let us bring those several lines of reflection to converge. On one hand we start from a potential content, the themata, provided by collective memory and language, quite enough to launch a bridge toward an actual content which, once anchored, allows one to represent to oneself and refer to something unfamiliar which has just entered in one's mental world. On the other hand, the content of representations appears to us made up of beliefs which are concentrated and directly collective as they are set above the others, owing to the fact that they cannot be questioned and prop up rule of life or a ritual. Yes, above the other beliefs which are distributed among the members of a group and can be reinvented all the time, growing again like plants as long as their root has been safeguarded - I mean their hard core. This is how I see the hypothesis of the same name as soon as you agree that, in a society, we deal with a particular mode of thinking and representing in which the connection between knowledge and valuation, fact and value, what is and what should be, is so intimate.

Here is what it is about: social representations not only refer to meanings and knowledge but also to extraordinary beliefs which, Bain once said, are action and are as irresistible as physical forces. In one of his latest books, Gellner mentioned their compulsion on our reason. What seems to me obvious, at least, is that communication so to speak secretes the structure of a representation by changing the potential content into an actual one and part of the ordinary beliefs into extraordinary beliefs, some notions or images into values. That is to say it generates our commonsense in which nothing is taken for granted, everything has to be reinvented and reconfirmed for people to reach a consensus and hold firmly to this consensus - until they suddenly waver in their consensus and try to change it as everyone knows. Of course social representations determine the content as well as the form of commonsense, but also the language associated with it, what Wittgenstein called in the *Tractatus* *unsere Umgangssprache*, which we have to prevent from standing still, freezing, turning into unspeakable language, no man's language.

My mistrust in the paradigm of stereotypes concerns its mistrust in the power of beliefs and languages, its indifference toward the deep complexion of the social fabric. I once tried to show that shared representations in the sphere of behavior, language, are part of the view people have of themselves and of their relations with others. And that these representations, whether conscious or not, are constitutive of their social world. These are the last lines of *La Psychoanalyse, son image et son public* in which I made precise that these representations are social not because we find similar ones in every individual consciousness - which would have been anathema for Durkheim - but because they are collectively generated and practiced.

Then I can hear a question that may well be posed now: "Do you really think that social representations are so important that nothing else matters in your opinion?" In a way this is utterly false and in another way this is utterly true. There are indeed things in the world beside social representations, such as perceptions, ideologies, languages. But representations are present wherever we find ourselves, meet, communicate, which means everywhere in the social world. True is that, as Wittgenstein wrote, "The concept of representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at

things". The word translated here is *Darstellung*, it puts emphasis on him who represents, not on what is represented.

My attention has several times been attracted to the fact that I am too much concerned with the theory and too little with the meta-theory. It is not out of aversion but, curiously, a part of what passes today for meta-theory is already built up in the theory such as I inherited it, I could say. And then to resume Bergson's *Leitmotiv*, live first, philosophize after. Haven't you the feeling that we have first to make sure of our existence before trying to make it better or avoid the worst, epistemologically speaking? Just the same I think that soon we will have to tackle the problem we have inherited: that of the rationality of a collectively produced form of knowledge and its bearing on science. Meanwhile I hope that we will never stop choosing significant topics of our society for our work, considering them as such and not as pretexts for clever hypotheses and methodological achievements. What incites us to go and would require creativeness is to treat these topics not as a mere bundle of attitudes, notions, etc. about neighborhood, AIDS or computers, but as embryos growing and coming forth, being realized further as wider consensual universes of our culture about identity, human rights, the body, intelligence, ideology, power, discrimination, and so forth. We ought even to try and seize these consensual universes in *statu nascendi*, whether they are about computers or AIDS, carried not only by ideas, by articles in magazines or television programs, but by the special practices created by computers or AIDS when brought into the home.

Since we do not deal with something we have already known, the task is really, to mention only the example of the computer, to see how the theme of the mind as a machine is anchored in the intimacy of the relation with the machine, with other people, individuals using computers in their world and in the building up of their identity. I am understandably haunted by a tendency we have to consider only "serious" topics and showing no interest in other consensual universes, such as those of art, fiction or design which powerfully shape our habits, our sensibility, etc. After all people seem to have started making representations before having them - painting, moulding clay, carving idols - and in everyday life they remake those diffused in the culture. Anyhow our daily objects are the public representations of artistic objects and one could think of a study on the transformation of surrealism into a social representation of our exterior life analogous to the study I once undertook on psycho-analysis.

It seems to me that exploring these consensual universes could enlarge our vision and show clearly to what extent the theory of social representations is a part of the comprehension of our culture, of the culture to which it actually belongs. One can even hope at times that the field study will help to bring better to light the affinities between social psychology, anthropology, sociology and history. Between those sciences the separation of which has lost, in my opinion, much of its reason for being and of its fecundity. If you allow me to give free rein to my fantasy on this topic, you will not deny the further steps. I mean that the phenomenon and the notion are common to those disciplines, that they have discovered them, sometimes under other denominations - mentality, conception of the world, belief systems, etc. - so as to designate the same collective forms of thought or action.

Is it speculation? No doubt it is. But speculation called for by the incessant assaults of the present world on the meaning we attach to science, on our idea of how things must be. What there is still for me to say, just now, is that during all those long years the theory of social representations has been something I fancied to be part of myself, which could not be taken away from me without a feeling of loss. And here, being together, we reach a momentary

end, since we are beginning again at our beginning. We shall succeed if we are patient, committed to a field of inquiry so exacting and particular, if we follow a track as a succession of steps to go as far as possible in what is from now on our common endeavor and our common effort. In what I still dare call the quest for truth.

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