

Imaginaries. Representations and Social Memories

MARÍA A. BANCHS

School Of Psychology, UCV, Caracas

In this article after synthetizing essential features of Serge Moscovici's Social Representations theory, Cornelius Castoriadi's theory on Imaginaries, and Maurice Halbwachs's Social Memory theory, the author compares them in terms of the objectives of each theory, the object of each theory, their conception of society, their conception of the individual, and the role each one attributes to images. Finally conclusions concerning theoretical and metatheoretical similarities and differences between them are discussed.

Keywords: *Social Representations, Social Imaginary, Social Memory*

The analysis of the relationships between representations, imaginaries and social memory emerged as a necessity among members of the Latin American research group on Latin American social imaginaries. This group completed its first project with the publication in 2007 of the work *Espacios imaginarios y representaciones sociales. Aportes desde latinoamerica* edited by Anthropos and the Metropolitan Autonomous University Iztapalapa, and coordinated by Angela Arruda and Martha de Alba. This special issue on Social Representations and Social Imaginaries has been the second project organized by this group. I decided to return here, from a more epistemological perspective, to the same issue of the chapter I wrote on that occasion with Alvaro Agudo and Lislie Astorga.

Correspondence should be addressed to María A. Banchs Calle Auyantepuy, Resd. Florissant Piso 1, Apto. 13, Colinas de Bello Monte Caracas 1041, Venezuela (email: mabanchs@gmail.com)

This article has three parts. In the first part I take up the fundamental ideas of two previous texts (Banchs, 2005 and Banchs, Agudo and Astorga, 2007) in order to synthesize essential features of the theories on Imaginaries, Representations and Social Memories. In the second part I compare these three theories, that rise from notions reflected upon by the great philosophers of classical Greece, and that in the social sciences began to be raised in different disciplines in the nineteenth century, becoming very present in theoretical discussions since the mid twentieth century. In the third part I conclude by identifying complementary and difference relationships among the three.

For the purpose of this comparison, I have chosen to work with three authors and their major works: *L'Institution Imaginaire de la Société* by Cornelius Castoriadis (1975), *La Psychanalyse, son Image et son Public* by Serge Moscovici (1961) and *Les Cadres sociaux de la Mémoire* by Maurice Halbwachs (1925). The criteria I have chosen to establish these relationships are: the objectives of the theory, the object of the theory, its conception of society, its conception of the individual, and the role it attributes to images.

I will begin with SR to establish the relationships between these three theories. From this field, with the help of Denise Jodelet (1992), we find that social memory appears as a complementary subject of SR in the last decade of the twentieth century, and at the start of this millennium collective works dealing with the relationships between memory and SR are published, such as the one directed by Stéphane Laurens and Nicolas Roussiau (2002)¹ in France and the work published in Brazil under the coordination of Celso Pereira de Sá on *Memória, Imaginário e Representações Sociais*.

Regarding the relationship between Social Imaginaries and SR, the work coordinated by Angela Arruda and Martha de Alba, and published by Anthropos in 2007, marks the beginning of a new road for the enrichment of SR and its relationships with social imaginaries. This book includes the work of a group of professionals invited by Angela Arruda in 2000 to develop a research project sponsored by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the European Laboratory of Social Psychology, with the following objectives: from the theoretical point of view, to establish the relationships between Social Imaginaries and Social Representations, from the methodological point of view, to explore new techniques for data collection and analysis focused

¹ Of particular interest in clarifying the notion of collective memory in this book is Jean Viaud's chapter: Contribution à l'actualisation de la notion de mémoire collective.

on images, and from the empirical point of view, to go deeper into a comparison of Latin American representations and imaginaries².

IMAGINARIES, REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL MEMORY BASIC CONCEPTS³

The Social Imaginary in Castoriadis

Basic concepts

In his magisterial work *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), Castoriadis resorts to the concept of social imaginary to account for the emergence of society, while he refers to radical imaginary to explain the emergence of the social individual.

The Social Imaginary is what keeps a society together and gives it its uniqueness, distinguishing it from other societies and from the same society at different times “(...) it is a complex web of imaginary meanings that protect, guide and direct all the life in the society in question and the concrete individuals that constitute it corporeally” (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 213). The social imaginary, in a negative sense, is not the representation of any object or subject. It is the unceasing and essentially undetermined socio-historical and psychic creation of *figures, forms and images* that provide meaningful content and weave it into the symbolic structures of society. It is not real or rational content that takes on an autonomous life, but rather, content that is present from the beginning and constitutes history itself, raising the need to reexamine the history of human civilizations in this context. In the author’s words:

(...) this originary structuring, this central signifier-signified, source of what is each time given as indisputable and undisputed sense, support of the articulations and distinctions of what matters and what does not, origin of the augmented being of the individual or collective objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment – this element– is nothing other than the *imaginary* of the society or period concerned (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 219).

² See the comment on the work in this issue.

³ I have drawn upon two previous papers (Banchs, Agudo and Astorga, 2007 and Banchs 2005), extracting some paragraphs from them without using quotation marks.

The Radical Imaginary precedes and produces the subject, the thing. It is the ability of the psyche to create a steady stream of representations, desires and affects. As a source of creation, it is *radical*. This notion is different from any notion of imagination as a decoy, as deceit, etc., to emphasize *poiesis*, creation. The *radical imagination* makes representations arise *ex-nihilo*, from nothing, that are neither in place of anything nor delegates of anyone.

Reality is built up in the subject through the human psyche whose beginning is an indiscriminate representation of *mouth-breast-pleasure-milk* that comes from the breastfeeding experience. Castoriadis gives the name of Monad to this first contact. This monad is the beginning of a first representation that already implies the ability to imagine, to form the first images:

The psyqué is the ability to bring forth a <first> representation, a putting into image (...) it is a *shaper* that only *is in* and *by what* it shapes and *how* it shapes it; (...) –it is formation and imagination– it is radical imagination that brings forth a <first> representation from a nothing of representation, that is *from nothing* (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 413-414).

The *Radical Imaginary* allows us to think of what is possible, of what, not yet being, can be created thanks to the ability to imagine the unpredictable.

The institution of society develops in two phases that represent continuous change and stability: *the instituting social imaginary and the instituted social imaginary*.

The first accounts for a *vis formandi* power of creation, which results in the emergence of the radical new in human collectivities. It permits the mastering and channeling of radical imagination, making it suitable for life in society. This is accomplished through socialization, during which the individual absorbs the institution of society and its meanings, internalizes them, and learns the language, the categorization of things, what is right or wrong, what can be done and what cannot be done.

The instituted social imaginary is the process of sedimentation of the social imaginary. In Castoriadis terms:

Once created, both the *social imaginary meanings* and the institutions crystallize or solidify, and this is what I call *instituted social imaginary*. The latter ensures the continuity of society, the reproduction and repetition of the same forms, which from now on regulate the life of men and remain there until a slow historical change or a new massive creation come to modify them or radically replace them with other forms (2001, p.96).

In turn, society is articulated by a

(...) vast and complicated network of meanings that go through, guide and direct all its life and the concrete individuals that constitute it as a unit: *the magma of social imaginary meanings*. The magma itself cannot be segmented into a set of magmas, but is a unit in itself. (Castoriadis, 2001, p. 96)

Social Representations

Social representations theory (SRT) shares with different conceptions of the Social Imaginary its interest in the study of meaning and the construction of the signs and symbols of language, in short, its interest in the social construction of reality, to use Berger and Luckman's (1968) fortunate expression. If the latter authors and Castoriadis (1975) attempt to answer the question of how social institutions are born, Moscovici feeds this discussion by emphasizing the construction of knowledge in everyday life, so one could say that his theory is like an epistemology of common sense.

The study of SR is concerned with the global style or logical system of social thinking, its contents and its relation to the mental construction of reality. This construction is done in and through face-to-face interaction with members of those groups that give us a social identity and give meaning to our life world. Moscovici points out the imaginary, the symbolic, and the illusory as major constituents of social thought. These elements make up our social reality: "not only are our images of the social world a reflection of the events in the social world, but the

events in the social world themselves can be reflections and products of our images of the social world” (Snyder and Swann, 1978 in Moscovici, 1982, p. 21). Language plays a fundamental role in the transmission, communication, and continuous reconstruction of symbols and meanings.

The Social in social representation

SR initiate a critical social psychology, with a historical-social sense, in which the adjective *social* refers to: a) the conditions of production of representations (mass media, face-to-face interaction, interpersonal communication, language, social practices); b) the conditions of circulation of SR (exchange of knowledge, location of people in natural groups, and also location of natural groups in specific social contexts within a social structure); and c) their social functions (social construction of reality in the social exchange, development of personal and social identity, search for meanings or construction of common sense knowledge). According to Moscovici (1973, p. XII) the SR “permit communication by providing a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying the various aspects of the world and of individual and group history”. They are rooted in culture, understood as a social construction, that is, as structured patterns of meanings consecutively legitimized by the diverse forms of social relations and practices. Representations belong to the community, and the community itself is co-constructed by people in their everyday practices and conversations⁴.

Subjectivity and the subject in social representations

The weight of the social in SRT does not lead to denying the importance of the individual, or of his subjectivity. Sandra Jovchelovitch illustrates this by inviting us to question this individual or collective social subject from various angles to understand the representations he shares:

⁴ “Representations are elaborations of social groups that serve to maintain the stability of their particular life world (...) are tied to social contexts, that is, tied to groups and their life worlds and, to situations and events that occur in these life worlds and require specific ways of thinking, speaking and acting” (Wagner, Duveen, Verma and Themel, 2000, p. 305).

If we ignore the subject, we are left facing a set of undifferentiated representations that do not speak of social life. Representations express identities and affects, differentiated interests and projects, thus referring to the complexity of relationships that define social life. To understand their fundamental connection to lifestyles means to understand the possible identity that a knowledge system assumes at a given historical moment. However, it is only in relation with alterity, with others, (...) that we can understand and explain this identity. (Jovchelovitch, 1998, p. 81).

This subject does not become what he is without the existence of an other⁵, thus subjectivity necessarily refers to otherness, and in that relationship –reminiscent of Moscovici's (1984) formula about social psychology as a discipline that breaks the subject/object dichotomy to introduce itself into the *ego-alter-object* trichotomy– subjectivity cannot be conceived as individual, but rather as social, or as many authors refer to it, in terms of intersubjectivity.

Social Memory or Collective Memory

Since the last decade of last century, collective memory (Halbwachs 1925, 1941, 1950 and Bartlet, 1932) has become a central subject for discussion in various social sciences both in Europe and in Latin America (particularly in Mexico and Brazil). Halbwachs' work on collective memory undoubtedly sets the bases for further developments in all the approaches that deal with the social dimensions of memory.

His proposal focuses on recognizing the socially constructed nature of all individual memory. This is precisely what Halbwachs brings to the topic at hand: the social settings and their temporal-spatial dimensions as a framework in which memory is constructed. For Halbwachs, although it is the individual who remembers, an individual memory does not exist, but rather a collective one. In the individual memory only fragments and images remain.

The purpose of the notion of social frameworks of memory is to explain the collective construction of memory. Between our personal past experiences and their memory stands a set of

⁵ Otherness and social representations is a subject expanded on by several authors in a compilation by Arruda (1998), in which the articles by Arruda, Jodelet and Jovchelovitch stand out.

shared representations as intermediary. What we keep as individual memory are not our personal past experiences but rather the collective representations of that past which are mobilized from present needs. The instruments used by the individual to recompose past images, consistent with his present needs, and ensuring his existential harmony and his identity, are the social frameworks of memory (family, religion, social class). To evoke memories, we need to place ourselves in the group's perspective; however the group memory only manifests itself through the memory of its individual members.

The author distinguishes collective or autobiographical memory from historical memory. We acquire the latter through written records, monuments, paintings, and we keep it alive by commemorating historical dates. In this case the past is stored and interpreted by historical institutions. Autobiographical memory is the memory of events that we have personally experienced in the past, and is stimulated by our daily contact with members of the groups to which we belong. It tends to change over time unless it is periodically reinforced by contact with people with whom we shared the experience in the past. Autobiographical memory is not rooted in institutions but in what Mead would call significant others, in other people. While historical memory is the reconstruction of the past from a critical distance, collective memory is a series of recollections shared by a particular group whose images of the past are molded by present needs.

According to Pereira de Sá (2005) the unifying element of contemporary studies of social memory inspired by Halbwachs and Bartlett is the supposition of their socially constructed nature. They are not fixed memories that assert themselves, but memories that are constructed over time. According to Halbwachs the construction, updating and maintenance of social memory cannot be achieved outside the social framework and, specifically, outside face-to-face interaction in the groups to which we belong and with which we share the information we receive daily from the mass media.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGINARIES, REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL MEMORIES

The theories I have referred to are very versatile and difficult to pinpoint. In them it is not possible to identify a sole objective or a sole definition, as if it were a concept. Thus, the following definitions try to reflect each one's main concern.

Objectives of the Theories: What were their Authors Trying to Explain with Them?*Social Imaginaries*

Castoriadis (2001) objective in his theory of social imaginaries is to explain the birth and evolution of history, the emergence from the origin of the radical new, to postulate a power of creation, a *vis formandi*, immanent both to human collectivities and to singular human beings.

Social Representations

Moscovici's (1961) objective when he proposes the theory of social representations is to identify in what ways the general public appropriates the knowledge produced in the world of science, and how, through this appropriation, it collectively constructs the common sense knowledge that will guide its behavior. In general, we can say that he tries to claim the value of everyday knowledge and identify the agency of human beings as participants in the social construction of reality.

Social Memory

Halbwachs' fundamental objective is to demonstrate that the past is not stored somewhere in the brain, but is reconstructed from the present, that memory is not an individual matter but a social one, that the frameworks of memory are collective and they are the instruments for "recomposing an image of the past that in every period matches the dominant thoughts of society" (Halbwachs, M. 1925, p. 9); briefly, to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of individual memory and collective memory.

The Object of the Theories: What are they, What do they Designate?*Social Imaginaries*

Social imaginaries are not representations, not real contents. They are an indeterminate and unceasing force of socio-historical creation, a permanent structuring movement that is woven into

the symbolic structures of society; structures of meaning that despite not denoting anything in particular, they connote almost everything, which leads them to be confused with symbols.

Social Representations

Social representations “are creative processes in the generation of new and significant content that has emerged from the transformation of social and mental configurations” (Moscovici, 1988, p. 219). In studying them, the author had in mind “the representations that are always in the process of coming about (by becoming) in the context of interrelationships and actions that are, themselves, becoming” (Ibid). He also intended to “rethink representations as a network of interactive images and concepts whose contents are continuously evolving in time and space” (Ibid., p. 220).

Social Memories

Social memories are:

(...) sets of representations of the past that are socially shared by a collectivity (...) they are the *shared* memory of what has been *lived in common*, as individuals and as members of a collectivity, reconstructed through social interactions and conditioned by the *socio-historical frameworks* in which it is produced. (Agudo, 2008, p. 355).

Society in the Theories

Social Imaginaries

For Castoriadis, society is an institution that has no separate existence from history and is continuously formed by a process that goes from the instituted to the instituting and vice versa, via ruptures and new emerging positions of the *instituting social imaginary* (Castoriadis, 1975). Society has a “virtually unlimited role in the development of the singular human being” (Castoriadis 2001, p. 29). The Mother who is there before birth represents society for the

newborn child. Society is a symbolic network that we can only understand if we grasp the meanings that it carries with it.

Social Representations

For Moscovici, society is also a differentiated and mobile human construction and the individuals that are part of it are defined as *amateur thinkers* who are constantly searching for meaning in the events that surround them. He defines it indirectly, contrasting his view with Durkheim's. For the latter, society as a whole is the foundation of collective representations, "these are not the common denominator of individual representations, but their origin, which corresponds to 'the way in which that special being that is society thinks about the things of its own existence'". (Durkheim, 1968, p.621 quoted in Moscovici, 1989, p. 64). Collective representations are homogenous and shared by all members of society, because the latter models human beings in its own. In Moscovici's context, society and human beings constitute each other. Human beings construct their reality in social interaction, guided by the regulations and social imaginaries of their Society.

Recognizing that social representations are simultaneously generated and acquired, we remove the pre-established, static side they had in the classic view (...). We needed to make representation a bridge between the individual world and the social world. To later associate it with a perspective *of a society that changes*. (ibid., p. 82, emphasis mine).

Social Memory

Halbwachs shares this idea of a society that is changing and in a renewal process that Moscovici relies on. He analyzes the reciprocal influence of individuals and society that establish dialectical relationships and mutually constitute each other. For him society is a system structured into social classes. Martha De Alba (2011, p. 405) believes that "Halbwachs positions himself as a psycho-sociologist because the unit of analysis used to prove his theory is the individual-society relationship, whether it is because the individual remembers in relation to the group, or because collective memory is constructed and expressed in individual memories". Individuals and groups

transform each other. Like Moscovici, Halbwachs focuses on the micro-social level, without neglecting the macro-social as a background. In his definition of social frameworks he seems to attribute to them properties similar to those of social imaginaries.

The Subject in the Theories

Social Imaginaries

In Castoriadis, the subject is defined from the point of view of his creativity, that is, to the extent that he has a radical imaginary, insisting that what is, what exists, is a product of the radical imaginary. He also defines the human being as an interpreter of his reality just as he defines society as a symbolic network. The task of interpreting reality does not appear in his writings as an easy task, because symbolism, which is a human creation, is much more than a combination of signs. On the other hand, he relies on psychoanalysis to explain how the human psyche builds reality from the moment a first image emerges with his first contacts while being breastfed by his mother.

Social Representations

In Moscovici, the subject is also an interpreter and constructor of his reality. One of the aspects the author insists on throughout his discussions about SRT is precisely the innovative, restless, curious nature of the human being, and the value of the knowledge he produces in his everyday life.

Not recognizing the creative power (...) of our representative activity is equivalent to believing that there is no relationship between our <reservoir> of images and our ability to combine them and draw new and surprising combinations from them.
(Moscovici, 1961/1976, p. 46).

He defines the subject as an amateur thinker that, insofar as he participates in the world of conversation, acquires “an encyclopedic competence” regarding the objects about which he discusses (Moscovici, 1961/1976, P. 51). He explains the socio-cognitive processes through

which SR are constructed (objectification and anchorage). He mentions, but does not explain, the importance of emotions and affects, of desires, needs and hopes, of the imagined and the dreamed, in that permanent process of construction not only of social reality, but also of social identity:

Philosophers have long understood that *every representation is someone's representation*. In other words, it is a form of knowledge by whose mediation he who knows is resituated in what he knows. The alternation that characterizes it follows from there: sometimes to represent, other times to represent oneself. (Ibid., p. 63).

Social Memory

In Maurice Halbwachs the subject appears as an agent, a member of a society that he helps to construct, a member of a series of groups that give him identity and in which he fosters change at the same time as the groups change him. Martha de Alba (2011, p. 406) says: “according to Halbwachs individuals change the groups just as groups change the individuals”. The individual also changes the social contexts of memory. He is a social being, or rather, a group being; membership groups play a key role in the activation and transformation of memory. He also presents it in terms of its reflexivity: “the operation of memory consists of finding, through reflection, a systematic set of related memories” (Ibid., p. 407).

The Image in the Theories

Social Imaginaries

In the case of social imaginaries, of Castoriadis in particular, the image plays a fundamental role. At first reading, imaginaries seem to mean a set of images for him. Imaginaries are in fact sets of images, but much more than that. We have seen that Castoriadis refers to an instituting imaginary and an instituted one. The first, which is his main interest, is a force structuring images and meanings, a *vis formandis* or creative power. In the instituted imaginary, images that are there to

ensure the continuity of society are crystallized. These images are inscribed within the magma of social imaginary meanings that cross through social life.

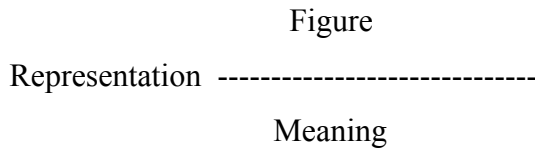
In Castoriadis, the imaginary is the possibility of making images emerge where there was nothing before. Let us recall: “it is the unceasing and essentially undetermined socio-historical and psychic creation of *figures, forms and images* that provide meaningful content and weave it into the symbolic structures of society” (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 413). And the images are the origin of social life, of socialization in the hands of the mother, spokesperson of society. The first representation or image emerges in the psyche from breastfeeding and the contact from mouth to breast. “The psyché is the ability to bring forth a <first> representation, a putting into image (...) from a nothing of representation, that is *from nothing*” (Castoriadis, *Ibid.*, pp. 413-414).

Social Representations

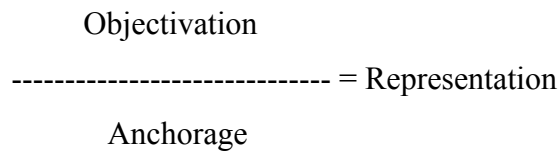
In Moscovici we find two levels of discussion of the image. The first concerns the definition of SR and the differences between SR and Image. SR are also, undoubtedly, sets of images, networks of meaning, to the point that the word image substitutes the word representation in the work that gave rise to the theory: *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and Its Public*. The second level of discussion is of the image as a figurative aspect of representation. As for the difference between the traditional concept of image and SR, Moscovici argues that “The image is conceived as an internal reflection of an external reality, a copy in the spirit that conforms to what is outside the spirit. It is, thus, a passive reproduction of an immediate datum” (1961/1976: 45). This is not the case of SR, in the first place because the theory does not propose a subject/object dichotomy, so you cannot copy an external reality; that external reality is what it is insofar as we represent it as such, it is something different for different groups. In this sense, Moscovici states:

When we speak about social representations, (...) we consider that there is no break between the exterior universe and the universe of the individual (or group), that basically, the subject and the object are not heterogeneous in their common field”. (*Ibid.*, p. 46).

The second discussion about image has to do with its role in SR. In fact, SR are signified images, sets of images loaded with meaning and bearers of meaning that guides action. Moscovici defines them as follows: “In reality, the structure of each representation will appear split; it has two faces as inseparable as the front and the back of a sheet of paper: figurative and symbolic. We write that:



“Understanding by this that every figure has a meaning and every meaning has a figure” (Moscovici: 1961/1976, p. 63). The processes that constitute it correspond to this formula:



These two processes “have the simultaneous function of cutting out a figure and loading it with meaning, inscribing it within our universe, that is, naturalizing it, and giving it an intelligible context, that is, interpreting it” (Ibid., p. 64).

In his preface to the text about Latin American Imaginaries and SR coordinated by Arruda and de Alba (2007), Moscovici points out that this work announces the design of a research field and that reading it led him to evoke theoretical reflections that he has had since the early days of the theory about its figurative dimension:

From the beginning of the theory of social representations, I have returned several times (...) to the figurative dimension of our representations, of their very core. If we try to summarize the reasons we must remember that their goal is the translation of one kind of knowledge into another, from science to common sense, which sometimes requires a completely original creation that has no equivalent in

the collective thought (...). The translation of a concept into an image precedes the project of communicating to the public, and especially that of accelerating communications. It is true, as the Chinese proverb says, that <one image is worth more than a thousand words>” (Moscovici, 2007, p. 9)

Social Memory

In Maurice Halbwachs we also find that memory is composed of images, but these images are not fixed, they are constructed and reconstructed from representations of the present and at the request of other group members. Only when we dream can we represent images that have not been raised by our relationships with others, but there are no memories in dreams:

There is a case in which man is confused by the images that he represents to himself, that is, he thinks he is living what he imagines by himself: but it is also the only moment he is not able to remember: when he dreams. (1925, p. 224).

The only image of consciousness independent of others is the one we dream. It is believed there are images that remain intact in the memory from the moment they have entered our consciousness; however this is not possible while awake:

When we are awake, time, space, the order of physical and social events, as we recognize it, is set by the people of our group, is imposed on us. Hence a <feeling of reality> that is opposed to what we still dream, but is the starting point of all our memory acts. We cannot remember except by finding the place of the past events that interest us in the frameworks of collective memory. (Ibid., p. 226).

It is noteworthy that in 1925 Halbwachs almost raised the idea that Moscovici proposes when he says that there is no image without meaning or meaning without image. In fact, in his conclusions he considers that idea and image are not two separate elements:

There are no ideas without images: more precisely, idea and image do not designate two elements of our states of consciousness, one social and the other individual, but rather two points of view where society can focus on the same objects at the same time. (pp. 228-229).

CONCLUSIONS

If we examine the origin of these concepts in history, we can see that the three specific theories we are analyzing are versions that mean to reformulate objects of study that have been concerns from classic Greece to the present. These objects went from philosophy to modern science and, led by our present guests, from modern science to a new paradigm we could call post-positivist: in Castoriadis we find the passage from image and individual imagination to social imaginary, in Moscovici we go from image and individual representation to social representation, and in Halbwachs we go from memory and cognitive abilities for remembering stored data at an individual level to collective memory.

The comparisons we have been making clearly show that the three theories we have discussed offer more similarities than differences, and that there can be complementary relationships between them insofar as they share the same epistemological and ontological substratum.

- All three base central parts of their theory on a shared ancestor: Emile Durkheim, but what is most striking is that Castoriadis, as well as Moscovici and Halbwachs, abandoned Durkheim's view of an instituted and stable society that is imposed on the individuals that compose it, to adopt the view of a changing society in a permanent process of being constituted by its members in their everyday social relationships.
- For the three authors we have considered, society, and with it social reality, is a human construction and there is no inner/outer or subject/object dichotomy. This is evident in what we have said about Moscovici and Castoriadis, maybe not so much in what we have said about Halbwachs who, in keeping with the above, states:

“From the moment you put men back into society, it is no longer possible to distinguish between two types of observation: one outer, the other inner” (1925, p. 224).

- Since there is no individual/society dichotomy, the three abandon the traditional concept of image as a faithful copy of reality or as a reflection within the individual of objects that are outside of him. Moscovici expresses this idea, shared by all three, in the following words: the subject and the object reciprocally constitute each other.
- Since the image is in the person and both it and the individual are inseparable from society, and society is a magma of social meanings, there is no image without meaning. Halbwachs says image and idea cannot be separated; Moscovici says figure and meaning are two sides of the same coin.
- All three define their objects of study as systems or networks of sense-laden images. This is the case for imaginaries (magma of social meanings) as well as for representations and social memories.
- The three authors are interested in the process of instituting the world or the social construction of reality through the creation of symbolic networks. Castoriadis is located at the societal level trying to answer how social imaginaries operate to make something *new* emerge from the origin. He seems to jump from the macro social to the micro social to explain, in psychoanalytic terms, how the individual participates in this instituting process, for only he, not groups or society, has a radical imaginary, capable of making something emerge where there was nothing. Meanwhile, both Moscovici and Halbwachs are located at the psychosocial level: the theory of SR tries to explain the emergence of meaning, of sense, as it is produced daily in face to face interactions in our social world; the theory of Social Memory examines how that emerging meaning permanently reconstructs the

collective memories, making them change from one moment to the next, from one place to another. From a micro social perspective, both authors move toward the macro social and the social individual.

- Like Castoriadis, Moscovici and Halbwachs are interested in the symbolic, imaginary, poietic nature of representations. These would be the vehicle for new conceptions of the world, insofar as their dynamism and autonomy allows them to successively incorporate new ideas derived both from science and from the intriguing and unexpected events that social life has in store for us.
- Both SR and Social Memory are based on a triadic view of reality: there is no causally determined relationship between the signifier (social representation/social memory) and the signified (object or referent). Both, figure and meaning, are reciprocally constituted. Neither representation nor memory, although they are there in place of something else, re-present it, they are not a trace the object leaves on the subject. Both are mediated by an alter, so the ego does not construct them nor does it relate to its object independently of the alter. It is in the social sphere, between individuals, in the communication space, where social representations and memories are constantly constructed and reconstructed. A fundamental feature that distinguishes Castoriadis' imaginary concept from Moscovici's Social Representations and Halbwachs' Social Memory, is that the first seems to be based on a dyadic conception of reality (Instituting Imaginary and Instituted Society), while the last two are based on a triadic conception. This difference is more important for social psychology, because the break with dichotomous explanation categories, based on a triadic conception inspired by Pierce, has been proposed as its own thing, as inherent to the way of being and approaching phenomena from social psychology.

To conclude, I would like to highlight a limitation of this reflection: I know Moscovici's theoretical production much better than Halbwachs and Castoriadis' theories; because of this, I

may have made inadequate generalizations. I have taken this liberty because all three of the theories examined here are so versatile that they allow for multiple readings.

REFERENCES

- Agudo, A. (2008). Imaginarios sobre el origen y el dinero en una comunidad rural venezolana. In A. Arruda y M. de Alba (Coords.) *Espacios imaginarios y representaciones sociales. Aportes desde Latinoamérica* Barcelona: Anthropos y Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa. División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades.
- Arruda, Angela (1998) *Representando a alteridade*. Petrópolis: Vozes
- Arruda, A. y De Alba, M. (Coords.) (2007). *Espacios imaginarios y representaciones sociales. Aportes desde Latinoamérica* Barcelona: Anthropos y Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa. División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades
- Banchs, M. (2005) Em busca dos sentidos: do imaginário social as representações sócias. In C. Pereira de Sá (org). *Memória, Imaginário e Representações Sociais*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu da República Editora.
- Banchs, M.; Agudo, A. y Astorga, L. (2007). Imaginario, Representaciones y Memoria Social. In A. Arruda y M. de Alba (Coords) *Espacios imaginarios y representaciones sociales. Aportes desde Latinoamérica*. Barcelona: Anthropos y UAM Iztapalapa, México
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering: a Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Berger, P. y Luckman T. (1966/68). *La construcción social de la realidad* Buenos Aires: Amorrortu (First ed. in English, 1966)
- Castoriadis, C. (1975). *L'Institution imaginaire de la société* Paris: Editions du Senil.
- Castoriadis, C. (2001). *Figuras de lo pensable*, Buenos Aires. Fondo de Cultura Económica. (First ed. in French, 1999)
- De Alba, M. (2011). Representações Sociais e Memória Coletiva: uma releitura. In A. Almeida, M. de Fatima Santos y Z. Trinidad (Orgs). *Teoria das Representações Sociais. 50 anos*. Brasilia: Technopolitik

- De Alba, M. (2002). *Les représentations socio- spatiales de la Ville de Mexico. Expérience urbaine, images collectives et médiatiques d'une métropole géante*. Tesis doctoral. Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes em Sciences Sociales
- Halbwachs, M. (1925/1994). *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* Paris: Albin Michel (Primer Ed., 1925)
- Halbwachs, M. (1941). *La topographie légendaires des evangiles en terre sainte. Etude de mémoire collective*. Paris: PUF
- Halbwachs, M. (1950/1968). *La mémoire collective* Paris: PUF (Primera edición 1950)
- Jodelet, D. (1992). Mémoire de masse: Le côté moral et affective de l'histoire. In *Bulletin de psychologie*. XLV, (405), 239-255.
- Jovchelovitch, S. (1998). Re(des)cubriendo o outro. Para um entendimento da alteridade na teoria das representações sociais. In A. Arruda (org). *Representando a alteridade*, Petrópolis. Vozes.
- Laurens, S. et Roussiau, N. (2002). *La mémoire sociale. Identités et Représentations Sociales* Rennes. PUF
- Moscovici, S. (1961/1976). *La psychanalyse son image et son public* Paris: PUF.
- Moscovici, S. (1973). Foreword. In C. Herzlich. *Health and Illness: a social psychological analysis*. Londres. Academic Press
- Moscovici, S. (1982). The Coming Era of Representations. In J. P. Codol y J. P. Leyens (Eds.). *Cognitive approaches to Social Behavior*. La Haye. Nijhoff
- Moscovici, S. (1984). Introduction. In S. Moscovici (Dir). *Psychologie Sociale*, Paris: PUF
- Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes towards a description of Social Representations. In *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 18, 211-250
- Moscovici, S. (1989). Des representations collectives aux representations sociaux. In D. Jodelet (Dir.). *Les Représentations Sociales* Paris. PUF
- Pereira de Sá, C. (2005). As memórias da memória social. In C. Pereira de Sá (org) *Memória, Imaginário e Representações Sociais*. Rio de Janerio: Museu da República Editora.
- Viaud, J. (2002). Contribution al'actualization de la notion de mémoire collective. In S. Laurens et N. Roussiau. *La mémoire sociale. Identités et Représentations Sociales*. Rennes: PUF

Wagner, W., Duveen, G., Verna, J. & Themel, T. (2000). I have some faith and at the same time I don't believe. Cognitive poliphasia and Cultural Change. In *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology Special Issue: Health, Community and Development* . 10 , (4), 301-314.

MARIA AUXILIADORA BANCHS is a teacher-researcher of Social Psychology in the School of Psychology at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. She teaches also at the Phd program of Education at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. She gained her Ph.D in Social Psychology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France.