

## **Modernity & Co: Repertoires of Change**

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The theory of social representations (SRT) was considered by its author to be the anthropology of the modern world. It was designed with the intention of coping with modern postwar society. Modernity, however, lasts too long, is disparate and confused, goes through change and has challenges. It is questioned and disputed. Therefore it has begun to manifest new characteristics and be referred to by other names, indicative of the emergence of a new phase: liquid modernity, late modernity, post-modernity. One of the features of modernity has been the exponential increase in the importance of science, which, according to Moscovici, has become the new religion of our time. Science has opened up a Pandora's Box, continually disseminating its findings and new inventions. Science has become an important authority in modern times.

The theory of social representations (SRT) started to explore this transition from scientific knowledge into everyday discourse. This is evident in psychoanalysis, which became a cultural phenomenon in the 50s and 60s (Moscovici, 1961, 1976), and which since then has gradually become a part of everyday life and has built its own history – the history of social representations (SR) of psychoanalysis. However, science is not the only source of innovation that has found its way into and affects our daily lives. Wagner (1998), Wagner & Hayes (2005) have already mapped “modern mentality” (Wagner & Hayes, 2005, P. 135) and its forms of expression, which

encompass more than just representations of scientific knowledge. I will not go into it in detail here.

Nowadays the frantic speed of information and progress in information technology has transformed the way we communicate, think and build our knowledge. Our students cannot conceive of a life without a cellphone, the internet, social networking, blogs and so on. Neither can they imagine how this was possible in the past. Information and communication practices change rapidly, which affects teaching and learning methods, as well as the way we think and interact with each other. This additionally reflects on psychology and requires theoretical development. Psychological phenomena such as attention and memory go through change and need to be reassessed. What about social representation? Is it immune to such changes?

The individual goes through and is increasingly inundated by streams of information, participates in increasingly diverse and often short-lived groups and institutions. Old practices have been replaced by new ones, sociability has changed. Soccer fans have abandoned the stadium, preferring to watch games in small groups at places such as bars, restaurants, friends' houses. On the other hand, rave sessions attract crowds of people who dance and drink all night and disperse at dawn. Privacy has become public on the internet and social networking sites, where people who would never have met outside of cyberspace will get together. They share intimate details of their private lives with people they have never even met in person. This widespread information about oneself makes each person a micro-celebrity who is his/her own paparazzi and produces daily news about himself/herself. This is part of the principle of the net: information is distributed from any one point to another, with no regulatory center, no hierarchy and no limitations on dissemination.

As a result of globalization, social mobility has started to decrease. Multiple political parties and various religions, which are features of modern societies as evoked by Moscovici, become passersby, which in turn move on at a faster and faster pace. People may go from one religious belief to another, from one profession to another, from one home land to another, more than once in a lifetime.

Fixed identities no longer exist, and, despite their flexibility, they cannot keep pace with and embrace the variety that they could achieve. They are now nomadic identities, according to Mouffe (undated), Braidotti (1993, 1994) and Canclini (1998). In support of this assertion,

Canclini (1998) quotes Michel de Certeau's comparison of life with a continuous crossing of borders<sup>1</sup>.

How does this relate to the construction and dynamics of SR? Would such characteristics reduce the chances of the emergence and survival of certain representations? Is representation as we know it becoming one among many possible ways of dealing with the innovation that endlessly inundates our society? Is the concept of representation becoming too restricted to cope with the emerging forms of communication, social thought, human grouping and a sense of belonging?

Of course, I do not have the answer to these questions but wish that they could be included in our agenda and dialogue with other social sciences, as well as other fields of psychology. My presentation will tentatively touch on what is changing in the present (a present consisting of multiple points and systems of reference – late, liquid, soft and post- modernity), then will move on to some of the issues raised by our research work, and the dynamic nature of SR, its open roads on the one hand and its closed roads on the other.

This text consists of two sections. First, I will discuss modernity in present-day relations with SR. I will question modernity as a general concept and its present phase, in contrast with modernity in the 50s and 60s, when the theory of social representations (SRT) was created. In the second section, I will comment on some new definitions that challenge the SRT when coping with the social and cultural change that exists nowadays, considering new possibilities for the expression of social thought that have been opened up by contemporaneity.

## **PART 1**

### **ACCELERATED MODERNITY, UNLIMITED CONTEMPORANEITY?**

Duveen (1998, p. 467) notes that:

“The phenomenon of SR is linked to the social processes woven around differences in society. And it is in giving an account of this linkage that Moscovici

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<sup>1</sup> “...[there are] no identity cards in the United States, it is replaced by the driver's license and credit card, i.e. the ability to traverse space and the participation in a game of trust contracts between American citizens” (Canclini, 1998, p. 315).

has suggested that SR are *the form of collective ideation in conditions of modernity*, a formulation that implies that *under other conditions of social life the form of collective ideation may also be different.*” (the emphasis in the text is my own).

The contrast between two conditions – pre-modern and modern – would account for Moscovici’s choice of the concept of social representation to replace Durkheim’s notion of collective representation. Duveen elaborates on these assumptions. The central thread in Moscovici’s argument about the transformation of collective ideation in the transition to modernity would relate to the issue of legitimation. In pre-modern societies, the power of legitimate knowledge and beliefs was concentrated in two institutions: the church and the state. By contrast, in modernity, this power is scattered among different sources, and knowledge is no longer regulated in the same way:

“The phenomenon of social representations can, in this sense, be seen as the form in which collective life has adapted to decentred conditions of legitimation.[...] Legitimacy [...] becomes part of a more complex and contested social dynamic in which representations of different groups in society seek to establish a hegemony” (Duveen, 1998, p. 468).

Science has been one of the centers that regulates knowledge, although common sense is also one of them, according to Moscovici (1961, 1976). This indicates that SR would be closely linked to shared legitimacy, that is, to the power to access legitimate knowledge and beliefs. Moscovici (1961) had already mentioned that SR can only grow where people with different points of view are able to speak out and express themselves, therefore, under a severe dictatorship which leaves no room for diversity of thought, they would not develop. In other words, the emergence of social representations would depend on democracy to a certain degree.

Recent political events in Arab countries have shown how online communication – a different source of legitimacy not available when “La Psychanalyse” was written – bypassed censorship and helped to increase mobilization. This was characterized by communication

between individuals from different groups of society in a network, motivated by common thoughts and feelings about the social and political situation. The resulting upheaval was a demand for democracy. According to western standards, is this how we would define modern societies? However, this was a phenomenon of mob communication, with the web acting as an intermediary, which produced important consequences. Could it be that new social representations were emerging in relation to the country, government, politics, civil and political rights – a whole field of representations around the idea of democracy (in accordance with the jargon of western social sciences)? Also, according to Moscovici (1988):

“A representation undoubtedly shifts from one realm to the other as it takes shape, and the point of view of the observer plays an important part. But these transformations are a crucial symptom of the state of a society” (p. 222).

Debates on cultural studies have considered modernity to be not just as a state into which or from which we emigrate, but a condition that involves those of us who live in the cities and countryside, as well as in big cities in developing countries. (Canclini, 1998, p. 356). In fact, nowadays any person and any group with access to the internet may become an observer and at the same time an active participant in the web. The point of view of the observer may influence others, be influenced at any time, and become increasingly important. As the Amazonian environmental leader, Chico Mendes, used to say, he became an environmentalist and a leader because of the internet. Before information about his struggle started to go around on the net, he was just a worker in a rubber-tapping plant. He had no idea that he was fighting for the environment.

Of course, social representations existed before modernity, as cultural history has already shown us (Chartier, 1989; Pesavento, 2005; Swain, 2000). They will certainly continue to exist in the future, just as cinema did not die after the advent of television and the printed book will not disappear because e-books have come onto the scene. We still do not know how far new concepts or how deep some old ones will have to go to keep up with ongoing changes in cognition, attention, and the way the mind deals with innovation. The question is – will the “topography of

the modern mind” as Wagner put it in 1998 (p.4), be able to embrace such modifications, and how?

The assumption that social representations need a context of diversity of sources in order to flourish needs to be developed further. The concentration of sources of legitimacy may also originate in social representations, although not in the same proportion as in the context of multiple sources. It would be an over-generalization to consider modernity to be the age of democracy, as indicated by the latest events that I have just mentioned. What it does imply is that modernity is neither a homogeneous historical period, nor a homogeneous social phenomenon; not even groups can be considered homogeneous. Modernity may not be present in all places at the same time, and it may show different faces in different places. This is also a political circumstance. So it is true that some degree of decentralized power and democratic practices might be necessary in order to spread sources of regulation of knowledge and beliefs and thus enable a diversity of points of view. It is also true that political restrictions, along with popular dissatisfaction, may lead to the growth of a latent desire for change and the emergence of active minorities. The interplay of social influence would also be present here.

The psychosocial approach to crowd electronic communication still needs to be developed. Is there a digital contagion effect? How does electronic intermediation influence the kind of response provided by the correspondents? Does social representation emerge as a result of this process, or is the process that results from social representation already there, evolving during a long period of overwhelming experience under this kind of regime and united through the internet? It is probable that both of these cases are true, but we need more research on this.

World War II took us aback with the occurrence of events so painful and shameful that we preferred to regard it as a disruption of modernity in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 1930s through to the end of the war, along with the huge advances in technology that pointed to future developments, the war produced a set of ideas, beliefs and practices that were considered to be taking the world back to ancient times. When the war ended, modernity seemed to resurface, brought to the fore again, even though it had never left the scene. The war was but the result of a certain socioeconomic development, a sociopolitical situation and a series of psychosocial phenomena produced historically as well as contingently. The war was part of the logic of modernity, and therefore a development of modernity itself.

If we put aside the psycho-political contribution of Reich in “*The mass psychology of fascism*” (Reich, 1946), the influence of fascism on the general masses was yet to be explained beyond socio-economic and geopolitical boundaries in the 1950s. The power of belief was yet to be understood as a psychosocial phenomenon within a societal perspective. It is approximately at this time that, after living under Nazi oppression during the war, Moscovici started the research work that would result in the elaboration of the theory of social representations. Science occupied an important place in our lives and communications developed into a non-stop activity since the end of the war. These were two major ingredients for the social representation process. They were also two of the most important sources of the legitimacy of knowledge, as they helped disseminate the raw material of common knowledge.

We can therefore say that the impact of the war on Social Psychology was not just limited to the exile of a number of promising scientists who had to leave the continent and landed up working in American universities, thus influencing American social psychology (Farr, 1998). This impact was not limited to the USA. It also hit Europe. Moscovici and Marková (2006) describe in detail the interesting relationship between European and North American social psychology that started after the war. Regardless of this, Moscovici himself was a link in the chain connecting the position of the exiled generation in relation to social psychology and much of what happened in subsequent developments in European social psychology (Moscovici & Marková, 2006). In fact, SRT was a development of European social psychology concerned with contexts; the societal view and the critique of the field itself became more prevalent in the 1960s. It was embedded in its historical time and, as Moscovici (1961) showed in his book, the social representation of psychoanalysis was closely linked to the organization of French society at that time.

In the 1950s, the three major forms of communication identified by Moscovici in written media (dissemination, propagation and propaganda) confirmed that the transition from a major contemporary source of legitimation of knowledge – science – was assisted by other, intermediate sources. These intermediate sources, which were players in the process of transition – the Catholic Church, the communist party, mainstream media – were an expression of the intense debate that was going on in society, which led to the construction of social representations. The good old church came onto the scene again, wrapped in a different package.

Moscovici's study thus identified traces of the centrality of legitimacy in the transition to the next phase. The church had also changed and thus remained as one of those sources, because it still had a relatively large following. Nonetheless, its impact was restricted to its own followers, the number of which continued to reduce in size. Moscovici's choice of media channels showed that: sources of legitimation multiply, they do not have an equal influence, they do not target the same public, and they do not have the same scope. Therefore, they may have more or less significance in helping to produce SR.

According to Duveen, what distinguishes the modern era from the pre-modern, "and helps to distinguish social representations as the form of collective ideation distinct from the autocratic and theocratic forms of feudal society" is the production and dissemination of ideas within these various forms of communication (Duveen, 1998, p. 469).

Duveen was thinking about modernity in European industrial societies in contrast with feudal societies. Fifty years after the publication of "*La Psychanalyse, son image, son public*", we may ask: is modernity still the same in the third millennium? In light of the multitudes that meet virtually in cyberspace to take a stand, as was evident during the Arabian political spring, and the ability to contact people all over the world in real time all the time (McLuhan's idea of the global village come true), can we still claim that SR is the typical manner of thinking in these societies? Do you not have the feeling that even though communication has never been an important focus of SR studies, – SR research outcomes in general (including my own research) make it seem as if we were still living in the pre-digitalized world of printed media, in which television and films were the latest advances in mass communication?

With regard to Latin America – which probably applies to other continents too, including part of Europe and the USA – I would like to highlight some points. Firstly, modernity is neither completely widespread nor is it homogeneous. It is never totally attained either. Pre-modern, modern and post-modern conditions (if we want to use the term 'post-modern', that is), do co-exist in our countries. Modernity is not the same everywhere. It takes after the place where and the time when it comes into being. We have had waves of modernization occurring mainly after the independence of the Latin American countries, but generally modernization and



democratization affected a small minority of the population<sup>2</sup>. It brought about limited expansion of the market, a renewal of ideas, but poor efficacy in social processes (Canclini, 1998).

Why all this talk of modernity? Because it is the condition for the intense circulation of social representations, but there is no such thing as modernity with a capital letter: “Modernity”. Presently we only know of its nuances and diversity. Some authors even consider that we have never been modern (Latour, 1994), and I tend to agree. In our countries, and probably in most countries around the world, it was difficult to match cultural modernism with social modernization. The so-called structural changes between the 50s and 70s helped transform this relationship, albeit not in the same way or at the same pace everywhere.

There are possibly two movements which are apparently opposed, but complementary. One consists of the proliferation of sources of legitimation of knowledge, with the exponential increase of specialties. These emerge and die away continuously, giving way to new ones, which are even more specialized (for example, Oral Health Care in some countries has given rise to a series of specialties, such as dental assistance, dental therapy, dental hygiene, dental surgery). The multiplicity of sources leads to the multiplicity of innovations to which they may give rise. Astonishing changes in the pace and intensity of individual and social communications should also be considered here.

Another briefly mentioned movement accompanies the multiple changes many individuals go through in their lifetime, such as changes of profession, religion, place of residence. They are indicative of pluralism. This movement is related to self-representation, group affiliation and the outcomes of a blend that Latour (1994) would call “hybridization”, production of hybrids - theories, ideas, institutions, objects, persons. Both movements have to do with pluralism, which is another feature of modernity, according to Berger & Luckmann (1995). It implies a high degree of diverse forms of living in a society that does not share common values (to a much higher extent than in other situations such as the Roman Empire, for instance), with the existence of a number of alternatives to be chosen. Increased alternatives may provoke a crisis of meanings in a community. At the individual level, this might lead to the fragmentation or de-centering of identity, the displacement of the subject. The subject loses its place and identities

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<sup>2</sup> If we compare Brazil to Europe, by the end of the 19th century illiteracy was at ca. 10% in England; 84% in Brazil in the same period, and was still at 57% in 1940. However, this does not signify that there has been a delay or deficiency of our level of modernity in relation to European countries (cf. Canclini, 1998).

lose their stability. This is considered to be a characteristic of the here and now (whether this is referred to as post-modernism or late modernity) by authors who are interested in cultural studies, such as Hall (2002), Mouffe (no date) and others. As a matter of fact, the subject became an issue in human and social sciences that was expressed by influential authors such as Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, who reject the unitary vision of the modern subject as a rationalist self-regulating entity (Braidotti, 2010), and advocate for the emergence of decentered, multiple, nomadic subjects as new types of subjectivities.

The phenomenon of SR is linked to social processes woven around differences in society. It is in giving an account of this linkage that Moscovici has suggested that SR are *the forms of collective ideation in conditions of modernity*, and Duveen inferred that this formulation implies that *the form of collective ideation may also be different under other conditions of social life*. (the emphasis in the text is my own).

In this first section, I started with Duveen's words, which claim that modernity is the ideal condition for the emergence of SR. I tried to discuss the modern condition, commenting on the changes that have taken place in the past 50 years. I focused on two main aspects. The first consists of the polyphasic nature of modernity: different modernities co-existing with each other; modernity did not eliminate what came before it, nor has it fulfilled its promise so far. The second aspect consists of the transformation brought about by the digital revolution and its influence on social communications, human relations, ways of thinking and knowledge. These two aspects led me to raise some questions about conditioning SR to modernity, and the potential of SR to deal with changes in modernity – if this can still be referred to as such. I will move on to the second part of my presentation.

## **PART 2**

### **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MILLENNIUM: CHALLENGES AND CHANGES**

New definitions became more influential in the social sciences, philosophy, and cultural studies in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For reasons of time and space, I will only mention some major trends that embrace the critique of modernity, and present some epistemological affinity among them.

I am going to mention only contemporary concepts of the subject in quite a simplified manner, given that some of them constitute fields of study and research and are part of rather complex epistemological and theoretical projects, which I will not be able to discuss in depth. Perhaps we are facing a wide field of studies of subjectivity, whose foundation is the figure of the *multiple and fragmented* subject, in contraposition to an essentialist and immobilized view of the subject. The contemporary subject is not unified, neither is it constantly identical. This perspective is supported by a critical view of all the hierarchies and dichotomies, which does, however, question the binary construction of western thought, based on structure and order. Modern science goes against the grain of the search for universalism, sometimes claiming that difference is a value. These ideas cut across all of the concepts that I will mention later and, having impacted on feminism in the 60s and 70s, continue to be the epistemological foundation of many critical theories. One of its areas of evolution would be around movement, a state of transition, with two angles. One consists of *nomadic identities and subjects* (Mouffe; Braidotti, 1993, 1994), which cut across, among various possibilities in time and space: changes of profession, belief, address (city, state, country), resulting in the fragility of identity-based definitions which are linked to these possibilities. The nomadic subject is characterized by mobility, changeability.

Another angle that is generally part of the field of Cultural Studies in Anglophone studies can be synthesized as the *post-colonial subject*, theorized by intellectuals who were born in colonized countries and questioned the colonial condition and the western world view of these countries. This is what was emphasized by Edward Said (2003), Stuart Hall (2002) and Homi Bhabha (1998), for example. Non-white women, whether or not they originated from the same countries, also added to this perspective as they felt as if they were defined as “Others” in the model of the standard western subject: white, male, dominant/colonizer. Thus anti-colonialist and feminist positions were blended together, adding to the so-called *subordinate subjects* (Spivak, 1988). Observe that all of these categories of subjects can be incarnated in active minorities who attempt to achieve visibility and respect. They disseminate dissident ideas in society, and may function as one of the factors of transformation of representations. They are theories, like that of Gayatri Spivak (1988), bell hooks (1989), Gloria Anzaldua (1987), Rosi Braidotti (2010).

The second evolution which, although it continues to have similar foundations to the previous part, embraces more “radical” definitions, consisting of: *subjectivity without a subject*, and the *post-humanist subject*, which is described by some post-structuralists. Foucault (1982) hardly acknowledges the subject, although some of his readers have tried to point out that it is present in his work (Patton, 1992). Deleuze and Guattari (1995) consider the collective production of subjectivity, in which the subject is a mere circumstance, an intersection of forces.

On the other hand, in the actor-network theory by Bruno Latour (2005), whereby humans and non-humans are equal actors bound together by networks, we have the *post-human subject*. Agency is no longer the sole domain of human beings. Actors can also be objects, forces, ideas. The foundation of the theory is the refusal to reduce explanations to natural or social categories, since they are totally interlinked in artifacts, hybrids, or “quasi-objects”, another central concept. They are simultaneously real, discursive, and social.

Most of these concepts have common ground in the idea explained by Maffesoli (1996), in which identity was an adequate notion for modernity, because the individual had plans and future expectations, but in post-modernity, due to the saturation of the modern individual, there is no longer a single, unique identity: what emerges are identifications and people. The intrinsically plural person (*persona*) shows different masks according to the circumstances, through multiple identifications. Post-modernity would bring about acceleration, which precipitates and weakens; pluralism which removes territorialism. According to Hall, in later modernity, “...identities are never unified”... but “increasingly become more fragmented and fractured; ... never singular, but constructed in multiple forms during speech, practices and positions which can intersect each other or be antagonistic [...], being constantly in the process of change and transformation.” (p. 108).

This set of perspectives brings with it questions and affinities with the SRT, which I shall touch on now, as I reach the end of my presentation.

As convergences we have, in the first place, the social constructionist approach, which at the same time contemplates three broad theoretical pillars. The first would be the end of dichotomies such as the individual/society, subject/object, reason/emotion and the adoption of the ego-alter-object triangle as players in the construction of meaning. At the same time, Moscovici’s position in launching the theory of SRT, with fluid contours, like a work in progress, is in

harmony with the spirit of denial that science is a finished truth. SRT does not adopt the dominant form of science-making, establishing the movement which is at the core of its construction. This is the second theoretical pillar.

These fluid contours are accountable for the possibility of further development of SRT and of facing the contemporary innovation concept. From this point of view, SRT is attuned to contemporary approaches, making its mark on the critical and innovative position that Boaventura Sousa Santos (1989, 2000) called the emerging paradigm of science. With regard to the dilution of the standard occidental subject, this is a challenge to us. SRT does not adopt as a subject the figure that is disputed by the authors of cultural studies and feminist theories, with which they converge anew. As the anthropology of the modern world, moreover, it moves away from the grand generalized explanations when it uses the micro-views expressed by the multitude of “groups” that formulate them. As a backdrop for the recovery of every-day knowledge, it takes as its subject whoever is able to provoke, produce or disseminate social representations, without establishing hierarchies among types of subjects, and with no asymmetry existing between types of knowledge. Thus, the dilution of the subject occurs. SRT cannot embrace the elimination of the subject, which is its main protagonist. SR cannot dispense with the figure of the subject, although this is not necessarily an individual, neither is it a solipsist subject that isolates itself from society, but a subject that traverses through and is traversed by it.

Contemporary dilution and fragmentation – the liquid modernity that is defined by Bauman, reinforces or revives in a different way the old debate regarding who is eligible to produce social representations (Harré, 1984; Moscovici, 1976; Wagner, 1998). The variation of representation is not just a function of different groups with different points of view of the same innovation, but also arises from a situation, an interlocution. The place of individuals in the construction of SR cannot be disregarded – from a historical and social, as well as a situational and circumstantial point of view. Representation is put in perspective even if its authors do not have different points of view, because, in the first place, all groups represent different levels of membership, of belonging, amongst their participants. Social representation is not exactly designed in the same way by all the members of the same group. Among the variations of representation existing in what is referred to as a group, there is an air of family that is identified, which is similar to different points of view. But would it necessarily have to be guaranteed by a

single nucleus, or could it have a more flexible composition, at times consisting of elements which will not always be exactly the same for everyone? Can there be varied combinations amongst these elements, maintaining an articulation which brings about similarities among those who are in a relationship? The air of family does not need to constitute a constant standard and can be featured as the result of a combined analysis.

In the second place, representation is constructed by finding a new way of positioning the subject, which, as is known, is not permanent, nor is it monolithic, because no one remains fixed to a unique, permanent identity. For example, a health professional is not just defined by her profession. She is at the same time a woman, a mother, Portuguese, rooted in Brazil, evangelical, which means that she can be positioned in different ways, depending on what is activated by the encounter with innovation, other people, the interviewer. Apart from the heterogeneous nature of groups, the subjects are also heterogeneous, polyphasic and respond to contingencies, interlocution (Orvig, 2003). Position theory clarifies the following: the answer to the question about who one is depends on the positions made available within one's own and other's discursive practices and, within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives (Davies & Harré, 2007). Heterogeneity, positioning and perspective walk hand-in-hand and are elements of the dynamic of representations as well as the relative fluidity of the boundaries of groups.

In discussions and thesis jury panels, colleagues have criticized what they consider to be a naturalization of subjects in SR research, which takes the group for granted, regarding it as stable and having the tendency towards homogeneity – an entity in itself. The categorical definition of the group is called into question.

Provencher (2011) observes that this concept of the 'group' "...may be perceived as too rigid and misaligned with what is happening in contemporary societies" (p. 270). In this regard, the SRT has been slow to acknowledge and address the implications of a situation that is increasingly found in such societies. People choose to define themselves using more than one dimension:

“[...] the categorization of individuals in terms of a single dimension (e.g. their religious faith) ignores the fact that people are always complex, multifaceted

individuals who select their identities from a wide range of economic, cultural and ideological alternatives. The theorization of the social individual's relationship to groups has, therefore, to be reworked to take into account this notion of multiple and volatile group memberships" (Provencher, 2011, p. 270).

Belonging can no longer be regarded as unequivocal. Some alternatives are suggested, albeit timidly, such as the idea of fluid (fuzzy) groups, already expounded by Jesuino (2002) and Wagner (2005), although we have not yet reached the stage where they are put in practice. Indeed, as Provencher (2011) reminds us, Duveen and de Rosa (1992) had already raised the possibility of a more flexible framework in which to examine the membership of individuals in different groups and their adoption of multiple social identities, depending on the specific goals and tasks being pursued. In a contemporary society characterized by the fragmentation of the self, as Hall (1992) puts it:

“the assumption that beliefs, attitudes and values will be shared in the same form and to the same extent by all the social individuals who are part of a specific group cannot hold anymore. One must also accept the possibility that social individuals will hold what may appear, to some, as contradictory beliefs as a reflection of their multiple memberships” (Provencher 2011, p. 84).

We are all polyphasic subjects and thus tend to also be social identifications and identities in societies in which the de-regulation of work continues, inequality persists, but there is an increased number of specialties, we are living increasingly with the help of science and technology, spending more and more time in the virtual world, where we can make purchases, read books, visit places and people, study and get engaged, receiving increasingly more information.

Here I will not enter into the discussion on the groups that produce SR, like at the end of the 80s, but would like to reintroduce some proposals which are already going around in the field, which will have an effect on the extension of our research habits. An element such as the concept of the subject and identity blends engineering with theory. It has an impact on the resistance to

identities, on the way a theme or “object” is approached, on the way to research. It points to an advance in the emerging paradigm, touching on the understanding of the construction of knowledge and consequently also has an impact on the methodological foundations of the theory.

All social representation represents someone, and this someone constitutes the encounter of various forces – political, social, cultural and other forces, which are expressed in practices, exposure to the media, institutional links, etc. All SR carries the mark of this someone and depends on this someone for its construction. It considers the multiple and varied subject which consists of nomadic identities that are in a continued state of change, without ever being “ready”.

These characteristics cannot be generalized, because, as well as modernity, the current phase, whatever it may be called, is also not established everywhere, neither does it have the same intensity wherever it is occurring. Neither is it the intention to disregard digital exclusion, among other exclusions. However, just as in the description of modernity, here we have some significant traces from this period, and they cause the destabilization of institutions which were previously regarded as solid, such as identity, the great narratives, progress, the neutrality of science. How do we translate the complexity of the contemporary, with its multiplicity of prisms, in our research on SR?

The methodological habits of the field of SR present limitations when dealing with the acceleration and fragmentation that occurs when living with innovation. Apart from the objectification of the “group”, another issue is that the tools of the theory make it better suited to *ex-post* confirmation, the identification of processes when (and if) SR is structured. Despite its dynamic nature and history, SR has difficulty in capturing the processes of its preparation in progress. The “methodological culture” of Social Psychology contributes to these limitations, to the extent that the result, the evidence, is more important than the creation of the path, the making of the path, the construction of the path - “the making of”. SRT works with the “making of” part of this. Thus, conceptual tools tend to follow this path, following the film in movement, rather than frame by frame. Most of the time, we handle a camera even though we need a film-maker. The observation, the participatory observation, when they occur, tend to serve as points of support or points which are complementary to what is being researched by interviews, questionnaires, free recollections. Rarely does the observation become the object of analysis for the study of the movement of SR. Wagner and collaborators (2008), in an inspirational analysis



of the film “The Crucible” (1996), based on Arthur Miller’s play and directed by Nicholas Hytner, observe that interviews with people who can be expected to share a representation provide a static view of a SR; this procedure would only reveal the shadow of a representation if it is not accompanied by observation of a focused social interaction over time. Traditional representations are conceived of as rigid, locally integrated units with clear boundaries. Dynamic units may be fuzzy, they possess emerging properties which go beyond and underline the formation of the unit. SR in action can be modeled as dynamic units of volatile interactions.

Change, the movement of knowledge from one sphere to another, the transformation of innovation and the matter at the foundation of the creation of the theory by its players, continues to be the motivation of most of the studies that are referenced in it. I will now go on to succinctly list some of the efforts that have been made with a view to elaborating profound examinations which aim to fill some of these gaps.

From the point of view of the dynamics of SR, I will focus on later contributions to the so-called three schools of SRT, that of Paris, with Moscovici and Jodelet, that of Midi, with Flament, Abric, Guimelli and Rouquette and that of Geneva, with Doise, which is already quite well known. However, recently the dialogue and thematic perspective on the one hand makes dialogue the focal point of construction of SR (Marková, Jovchelovitch), and on the other, adopts themata (Marková) as key ideas, the backdrop of thought, which one would resort to or use when required by social thought.

One of the last contributions to this line of thought, which is also present in the discursive line (Wagner, 1999, 2000), is the development of the concept of cognitive polyphasia. The hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia, as named by Moscovici (1961) when launching the theory, seems to be increasingly real and less hypothetical, and has become the target of recent significant developments, like that of Jovchelovitch (2008), Provencher (2011) and Priego-Hernandez (2011). These analyses clarify the dimension of this process in the dynamic of SR, and as they are associated with other SRT and research issues, open the way to dealing with obstacles that have already been identified. Thus, the work of Provencher, who found four examples that are characteristic of different ways of making sense and of engaging in cognitive polyphasia when dealing with the controversy over the MMR vaccine, an immunization shot against measles, mumps, and rubella, proposes an alternative concept of the social group, one that

brings together people who share a common stand with regard to core background beliefs and the typology of cognitive polyphasia. Inspired by Duveen's reflections, it proposes a more flexible perspective of the notion of groups, which is more in line with the fluid identities of modern contemporary societies: epistemic communities. They would be "loose associations of social individuals who share similar cognitive strategies in terms of their positioning in the cognitive polyphasia/monophasia dichotomy, the types of knowledge they use to deal with a specific issue, and the social representations they use to delineate this issue" (Provencher 2011, p. 271). These communities enable the expression of the social individuals' ability and agency to choose cognitive strategies adapted to their specific circumstances. The form of social knowledge they produce takes on the shape that goes with the objective that they (the epistemic communities) wish to attain.

The developments around cognitive polyphasia introduce diverse positions, such as that of Priego-Hernandez (2011), which departs from the model of knowledge encounters proposed by Jovchelovitch (2008) and considers cognitive polyphasia to be the possibility or option of drawing on different types of knowledge. She considers that even if one's choice is apparently unequivocal, focusing on only one alternative, this choice tends to take into account other forms of knowledge, intersected by dialogue. Cognitive polyphasia, however, is the intrinsic result of dialogism, going through exchanges and the influence of others, possibly even that of active minorities. Priego-Hernández manages to capture the movement of the formation of polyphasia, resorting to an extensive and sensitive observation of young indigenous Mexicans in good interviews whose contents demolish the classic traditional-modern dichotomy.

The capturing of the movement, however, seems to be a strong area of concern and renewal of SRT at the time. The toblerone model, for example, that is proposed by Bauer and Gaskell (1999) goes on to introduce the view of temporality contained in the project, emphasizing a new element of dynamism, although the project is still difficult to apply.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, and on ending, modernity is no longer the same as it was 50 years before, and the SR typical of that time needs to be reformulated so that it can be placed within the context of the

new contemporary panorama. Changes that the world has gone through have caused new conceptualizations in line with the acceleration of life, communication, time. Some of these conceptualizations call into question the SRT and its research style, revealing difficulties in keeping up, coping with them. At the same time, the theory has in its repertoire elements which open up a promising development, since they seem to be in good harmony with the characteristics of contemporaneity, reinforcing the understanding of the movement and dynamic of SR. Understanding this movement implies considering the dynamic of subjects, “epistemic communities”, the pace of construction of knowledge. Cognitive polyphasia seems to be one of these ways of approaching the dynamo of change, but hopefully is not the only one. Could it be that the innovations and controversies which emerge at any time are continually being overturned, changing forms of knowledge and producing knowledge, which will still produce SR? Do they have a structure, a figurative or central nucleus, which demonstrates its existence as SR, and will still be the characteristic form of contemporary and future thought?

These are some of the questions that are asked of us. The situation in which contemporaneity places us is similar to the affirmation by the Brazilian poet and composer Tom Zé, who was always post- and pre-modern:

“Eu tô te explicando pra te confundir,  
Tô te confundindo pra te esclarecer...”

(I am explaining this to you to confuse you  
I am confusing you to clarify this for you...)

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