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Cognitive Polyphasia: Introductory article.

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This special issue examines the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia proposed by Serge Moscovici in *La Psychanalyse, son Image et son Public* (1961/1976). In the original exposition of the idea, cognitive polyphasia implied the dynamic coexistence of different modalities of knowledge within the same group and, even, within the same individual vis-à-vis a given social object. It was further suggested that people would use one form of rationality or another depending on the particular circumstances in which they found themselves and on the particular interests they held at a given time and in a given place (Jovchelovitch, 2001).

Purely at an intuitive level, the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia presents itself as a plausible and powerful explanation of the cognitive work involved in people's "effort after meaning" (Bartlett, 1932). One can never cease to marvel at the capacity of lay individuals to make sense of an ever more complex world, and at their ability to grasp the rudiments of technological and scientific advances and of their implications for everyday life, a sentiment summarized by Moscovici in the following way:

> *So here is the paradox: how do people get so much mileage out of so little knowledge? How can they understand things about which they have neither first-hand knowledge nor experience? They succeed by generating their own body of representations fit for everyday use, and these representations, which shape ordinary behaviour, are derived from science but linked to it by tenuous threads. And by this modality the ever-changing world of nature becomes their human world (...). (1988: 216)*

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It thus can be safely argued that cognitive polyphasia is a key concept to our understanding of how people make sense of their reality, and that it has a significant contribution to make both to the theory of social representations in particular, and social psychology in general. However, despite its potentialities being recognized by many and the works of many social representations theorists (Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 1998a, 1998b; Jodelet, 1991, 1992; Priego-Hernández, 2011; Wagner et al, 1999, 2000), the concept remains under-developed and is used in plural, sometimes contradictory ways. For instance, numerous expressions (eg, modalities of knowledge, rationalities, logics or forms of knowing, cognitive systems, forms of thought, systems of knowledge, etc.) have referred to the idea of 'modalities of knowledge' used initially by Moscovici to explain his ideas about cognitive polyphasia, creating much confusion for those trying to make sense of this hypothesis. Attempts at clarifying the key aspects of cognitive polyphasia, at defining some of its functionalities and how it could be operationalised are therefore much welcome. These are some of the aims of this Special Issue.

In this introduction to the Special Issue on cognitive polyphasia, we make an initial attempt at clarifying some aspects of this concept by proposing two developmental perspectives that provide an interesting explanation for the genesis of cognitive polyphasia and its persistence in contemporary societies:

- In the first, a diachronic perspective, cognition is viewed as being influenced by the social, political and economic arrangements found in different societies. It is argued that to specific societies correspond different types of knowledge but that, contrary to the conventional view in social sciences, the progression from one society to another, and their respective types of knowledge, is not completely straightforward. One can observe reminiscences of 'old' types of knowledge in modern societies, one way of understanding the idea of cognitive polyphasia.

- In the second, a synchronic perspective, the various functions played by different types of knowledge are emphasised and one can see why individuals, groups and societies may want to draw on a plurality of types of knowledge to make sense of their environment and fulfil different objectives. Here, cognitive polyphasia describes the use of different types

of knowledge as a result of the different characteristics they have and the different roles they play.

We conclude this introduction by presenting the different papers that are comprised in this Special Issue and highlighting the contributions each of them makes to a better understanding of cognitive polyphasia.

Diachronic perspective

Traditionally, social scientists have discussed the shift from one type of society to another by assuming a clear dichotomy between the types of knowledge associated with them and a linear progression, with lower forms being replaced by more modern ones. For instance, Bruner explains that the empiricist and rationalist traditions, which have come to dominate our understandings of "how the mind grows and how it gets its grasp on the 'real world'" (1991: 1), see mental development as proceeding in a more or less rigid linear fashion, starting from a stage characterised by incompetence and progressing towards a final competence. These perspectives, underpinned by the Cartesian tradition of thought (Marková, 1982), have also directed our understanding of how societies develop. Typically, the shift from traditional societies to modern societies has been analysed in terms of a rigid opposition, a process whereby one type of society, along with its mode of thinking and its types of knowledge, is said to disappear and to be replaced by a different mode of thinking, different knowledge and different societal arrangements[1]. Seen from that perspective, types of knowledge are categorised according to a temporal dimension that implies the idea of a progression from lesser to better types of knowledge.

This dichotomous perspective has been particularly visible in the debate on rationality that marked the intellectual landscape of the first half of the twentieth century and that opposed conflicting views about the development of individuals and societies. In a succinct but thorough review of key developmental psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists, Jovchelovitch (2001) produces a clear account of how the idea of rationality evolved over the last century. She

[1] Marková attributes the relative lack of interest in Durkheim's concept of collective representations to this traditional Cartesian perspective for which collective representations belong to pre-modern societies and have no place in modern ones. She rightly points out that, in doing so, "sociologists might have ignored the compelling relevance of collective representations for complex modern societies in rapid change" (2003: 131).

begins by observing that the relation between different rationalities and the social conditions that give rise to them was explored by Piaget who showed, in his developmental psychology, how different social interactions produce different logics within children.

However, despite recognising the existence of different types of logic, thinkers of that time still adhered to a Cartesian-based definition of reason that led them to assume a linear progression towards one type of rationalism based on formal logic, symmetrical arguments and impartiality (Gellner, 1992). These views started to change with Lévy-Bruhl who showed that other logics could be as logical as the one found in 'developed' peoples, and that different logics can, and indeed do, co-exist side by side because of the different functions they play. Moreover, Vygotsky and Lévy-Bruhl both agreed on the "fundamental notion that transformation in knowledge is discontinuous and there is no replacement in forms of knowing but co-existence" (Jovchelovitch, 2001: 15). What Lévy-Bruhl and Vygotsky were able to demonstrate is that rationalities can co-exist but not in a way that entails the replacement of one by the other: "Forms of knowledge can relate to each other but they are not contiguous. They need to be understood in relation to the context in which they are used and in relation to the functions they fulfil" (Jovchelovitch, 2001: 15).

Building on the ideas developed by Lévy-Bruhl and Vygotsky and the empirical reality described in several social representation studies, one can therefore argue that the opposition between traditional and modern forms of knowledge is a false one and that the reality is more complex than the dichotomous perspective perpetuated by the Cartesian tradition of thought. As Forgas notices: "Yet as critics of Piaget's never tire of emphasizing, the assumption that all adult cognitive activity is analogous to hypothetico-deductive thinking and logical information processing is cross-cultural invalid, and is dubious even in Western societies" (1981: 263). Instead what we have is the simultaneous disappearance and continuity of traditional and modern types of knowledge in the form of remanences and deep imbrications. This phenomenon is captured by the concept of cognitive polyphasia.

Interestingly, authors outside the social representations tradition have also observed and commented on the co-existence of traditional and modern types of knowledge. For instance, the French sociologist Georges Gurvitch underlines the co-existence of traditional and more modern types of knowledge in post-feudal societies acknowledging, however, the predominant role

played by scientific knowledge, especially at the expense of common sense knowledge, starting with the establishment of what he calls 'nascent capitalistic global societies' (1971: 174-185). Gurvitch also draws our attention to the mutual influence different types of knowledge can have on each other, revealing the possibility of what can be described as 'the supply side aspect of cognitive polyphasia'. For instance, he notices how political knowledge in contemporary societies has been 'transformed' by technical knowledge through the use of ever more refined 'techniques for handling men' (1971: 204), and how a mystical form of knowledge was part and parcel of the equations, geometric analyses and quantified calendars through which scientific knowledge made its apparition[2].

Similarly, in her discussion of ideology, Moreux (1978) stresses the fluidity of the boundaries between three ideological languages (primary ideology, secondary ideology and tertiary ideology) and supports this assertion by showing how a secondary ideology can eventually become a primary one given enough time and the support from the population concerned. Going back through times, she gives the example of Christianity which, thanks to its impregnation with local cultures, transformed itself from a secondary ideology into a primary ideology, a phenomenon she designates as 'schèmes syncrétiques' and which could be argued to be an ancestor of Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia. Moreux makes a more specific reference to the idea of the supply side aspect of cognitive polyphasia when she discusses how the ideological discourse often borrows ideas and languages from science in order to be more effective with individuals who are increasingly more familiar with scientific and technological ideas and processes.

Thus, under the diachronic perspective, cognitive polyphasia can be understood as the persistence of traditional types of knowledge in modern societies. The rise of modernity has brought a number of discontents and the use of traditional types of knowledge alongside modern ones is conceptualised as a reaction against the new types of knowledge brought by modernity. In particular, scientific knowledge, through its domination and its prominence, is assumed to trigger a movement of opposition encouraging individuals, groups and societies to draw on other types of knowledge.

[2] de-Graft Aikins (2005) discusses a similar phenomenon in her research on diabetes in Ghana and points towards the appropriation of biomedical knowledge by ethnomedical practitioners in order to increase their professional credibility.

Synchronic perspective

From a synchronic perspective, cognitive polyphasia becomes a positive feature of contemporary societies, as opposed to being a reaction against the rise of modernity, and thus can be described as a cognitive style that enables lay people, groups and societies to draw on various types of knowledge in order to fulfil different functions and make sense of their social reality. The synchronic perspective requires the examination of types of knowledge through other dimensions than a temporal one and puts the spotlight on the different functions and roles each of these types of knowledge can fill. Several attributes can be used to that effect but we suggest that some of them offer a greater explanatory power vis-à-vis the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia. In particular, Bruner's distinction between narrative and paradigmatic modes of cognitive functioning (1985, 1986, 1990, 1991) represents an interesting platform from which to explore the appeal that different types of knowledge can have by highlighting different ways of apprehending the 'truth'[3].

For Bruner, the narrative and paradigmatic modes of cognitive functioning must be viewed as two fundamental and irreducible ways of making sense of our experiences and of constructing reality. One of the instigators of the cognitive revolution of the 1950s, this renowned psychologist and educationalist has, however, distanced himself from this movement which he sees as having been gradually taken over by technological emphases and issues.
His movement away from the first cognitive revolution rests on the development of a cultural psychology that acknowledges the existence of different domains, each with its own knowledge and skill, and the fact that mastery of one domain may not automatically be transferable to other domains. Seen in this way, domains become a "sets of principles and procedures (…) that permit intelligence to be used in certain ways, but not others. Each particular way of using intelligence develops an integrity of its own – a kind of knowledge-plus-skill-plus-tool integrity – that fits it to a particular range of applicability" (Bruner, 1991: 2). Brought together, these domains

[3] Readings from both sociology of knowledge and epistemology (Gurvitch, 1971; Horton, 1993; Lehrer, 2000; Lyotard, 1979) highlight the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of agreeing on a definition of knowledge and of the different forms it can take. Questions about knowledge have been linked to discussions about the nature of reality and of knowing, which, although fundamental, exceed the purpose of this introduction.

represent the tool kits of a particular culture, and different cultures will put the emphasis on developing a number of specific domains depending on their particular physical and material circumstances.

Bruner then goes on to discuss how one such domain, described as logical-scientific or paradigmatic, which has been successfully used to explain the natural and physical world, has come to dominate other domains, in particular, the narrative domain, which he sees as more suited to an explanation of the human and symbolic world (Bruner, 1991). Indeed, he argues that:

> *We organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues, and mentors. (1991: 4)*

For Bruner, the paradigmatic and narrative modes of cognitive functioning represent two fundamental and irreducible ways of making sense of our experiences and of constructing reality and, as such, are each given the status of 'natural kind' (1985: 97). The natural character of these two modes derives from the fact that under minimal contextual constraint, they appear spontaneously in the functioning of human beings; they can be identified by common sense without any particular expertise; and one notices their absence in those rare instances when they are not there (Bruner, 1985).

The main difference between these two modes resides, according to Bruner, in their procedures for verification. Whereas the paradigmatic mode relies on empirical verification and logical rules of thought, narrative constructions rely on the idea of 'verisimilitude' or 'plausability' and are governed by convention and 'narrative necessity' (Bruner, 1986, 1991). Expressed differently, one can see how arguments based on the paradigmatic mode will convince people of their truth, while stories will convince people of their lifelikeness (Bruner, 1986). Each mode implies a different type of causality: the paradigmatic mode will focus on universal truth conditions; the narrative mode will look for "likely particular connections between two events (...)" (Bruner, 1986: 11-12). When using the latter mode, people use a different type of evidence to ascertain an issue, one based on what they see on an everyday basis: "Here, thought processes

proceed in a bottom-up, inductive fashion, starting from observations of phenomena in everyday life and arriving at possible explanations or conclusions (...) often focusing on human actions and intentions" (van Bavel and Gaskell, 2004: 429).

Furthermore, Bruner stresses the fundamental nature of the narrative mode by showing how it is used to help individuals develop a sense of their own self "and a sense of others in the social world around us" (1986: 69). Atkinson makes a similar point by highlighting how "stories help us understand our commonalities and bonds with others as well as our differences" (2002: 122). This is achieved by the ability of narratives to define the variety of canonical characters, the environment in which they evolve, and the actions that are accepted and comprehensible, thereby providing "a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought and self-definition are permissible (or desirable)" (Bruner, 1986: 66).

Complementary perspectives to Bruner's are provided by Schutz (1966, quoted in Flick, 1998) and Moscovici (1992a). In his discussion on the social distribution of everyday knowledge, Flick (1998a) elaborates on Schutz's proposition that the worlds of different subjects differ because not only of what they know but also because of how they know the same facts. Thus, Schutz distinguishes between three types of knowledge: expert, lay and well-informed, but stresses the fact that these do not form a hierarchy. On the contrary, everyone will use each of these styles in turn depending on the particular issue to which it is applied and its relevance for the individual concerned. Indeed, Moscovici (1992) explored this idea further in his presentation of the hypothesis of cognitive division of labour. In this book chapter, Moscovici attributes people's reliance on 'non-scientific' reasoning to the cognitive division of labour, which means that in everyday life individuals do not need to know as experts using a rational form of knowing. Going back to our presentation of the diachronic perspective above, we have seen that various thinkers had started to acknowledge the possibility of individuals, groups or societies drawing on a diversity of types of knowledge to make sense of the world around them. Moscovici formalised some of these ideas by proposing the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia along with the presentation of his theory of social representations back in the 1960s. At the time, cognitive polyphasia was presented as a reaction against the assumption that rational knowledge and the logical operations that sustain it should be the norm against which to assess the quality of other types of knowledge such as social representations, beliefs, myths, etc. Over the years that

followed, it gradually came out as a very efficient and precise way of characterising the hybrid form of thinking found in modern societies, a form of thinking where traditional types of knowledge, along with their associated modes of thinking, live along more modern ways of knowing and thinking. Cognitive polyphasia emerges as a feature of sense making in conditions of modernity. Thus, Moscovici describes the variability in the cognitive tools used by individuals and groups as an inevitable result of the increased complexity of the problems faced by individuals (Moscovici, 1976: 286). A similar point is made by Wagner who highlights the significance of cognitive polyphasia by describing it as "the characteristic form of modern mind [helping] people to cope with the fragmentation of time, space and life-worlds" (1998: 321) and as especially well suited to explain the representational strategies adopted by individuals in today's complex world, a world characterised by the co-existence of different modes of knowledge, each representative of different ways of life and different traditions. In particular, cognitive polyphasia fills a gap in social psychology's understanding of the reality as lived by individuals and opens the way for a greater respect for the social rationality they manifest. The hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia also allows for a re-conceptualisation of power in the sense that what we see in empirical studies is the persistence of traditional knowledge(s) as a powerful component of people's thinking in contemporary societies even when faced by the power of science. The asymmetrical nature of the relations between different rationalities and the impact of this asymmetry on the communication and assessment of knowledge highlighted by Jovchelovitch (2001) must therefore be qualified.

In addition, an important question remains about the nature of the interaction between these different forms of knowing. Jovchelovitch (2001) discusses how issues of power will affect this interaction and will often create a hierarchy of rationalities where, typically in developed societies, rational and scientific rationalities will dominate. However, the reality at the individual level is assumed at this stage to be more complex. So far, social representations studies have concentrated on its operation at societal and group level. Provencher (2008, 2011) has gone some way towards that objective by proposing a conceptual model that combines elements of the theory of social representations with social cognition. However, much work remains to be done in this area.

It thus can be argued that, despite the centrality of the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia to the theory of social representations, relatively little attention has been paid to it. It can also be seen that there exist several slightly different definition and interpretations of the concept and that this plurality warrants the different attempts presented in this Special Issue to clarify and elaborate on this concept. Thus, this Special Issue aims to contribute to this endeavour by bringing together papers that explore alternative conceptualisations, take a critical approach to current understandings, provide a fresh perspective on classic work, and/or make connections with other aspects of social representations as well as general social psychology.

The first paper by Diana Frilling attempts to clarify some ideas associated with the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia by juxtaposing it against other key concepts from the theory of social representations and, interestingly, by contrasting it with Festinger's ideas about cognitive dissonance. This exploration is done against the empirical examination of the views and beliefs held by Israeli Jewish parents about their sons' mandatory military service in the Israeli Defence Force's combat units.

The adaptability and relevance of the concept of cognitive polyphasia is explored further by Carla Moura and Paula Castro. Through an examination of the different ways that legal innovations about biodiversity conservation have been received and implemented in Portuguese communities living in protected sites, these authors propose that cognitive polyphasia concerns not only the encounter between scientific knowledge and traditional one, as has been usually presented, but also in other domains such as the legal one. Using data from focus groups and interviews with local actors and professional agents, they discuss how cognitive polyphasia may be a factor in slowing social change and, as such, a mechanism by which lay people can manifest their opposition and their support for specific aspects of the status quo.

In 'Cognitive polyphasia, themata and blood donation', Gail Moloney and her colleagues add to our theoretical understanding of cognitive polyphasia by exploring how the thema of self/other gives rise to a heterogeneous field that manifests as polyphasic responses bound to the salience of the social context. Here, a key notion is the situated nature of knowledge, that is, the idea that it is inextricably dependent on the context of production, echoing Jovchelovitch's ideas about the 'how', 'why', 'when' and 'where' of knowledge production (Jovchelovitch, 2007). By highlighting the salience of the social context, these authors also respond to Moscovici's call in

La Psychanalyse for an examination of the conditions within which sense-making efforts take place. Interestingly, they highlight the idea that inconsistency lies between ways of thinking and not within ways of thinking making clear that we need to acknowledge, understand and respect different rationalities.

Further theoretical development of the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia is provided by Arthi through her investigation of the social representations of mental illness among Tamil Singaporeans. Anticipating the work of Priego-Hernández (2011), the author describes different categories of cognitive polyphasia and examines their connections to identity. Here she builds on Gillespie's (2008) notions of semantic barriers and promoters and how these intervene in order to encourage or prevent a dialogue between different competing representations.

In his paper entitled 'Notes on a social psychology of thinking: a comparison of Bartlett and Moscovici', Brady Wagoner explores the qualities and dynamics of everyday thinking through the work of Frederic Bartlett and Serge Moscovici. In doing so, he makes a number of parallels between the two scholars. Interestingly enough, through this reflection, he elaborates a point made in 1988 by Jahoda in 'Critical notes and reflections on social representations' to the effect that Moscovici used Bartlett's ideas on everyday thinking without giving him the credit. The historiographical work of the theory of social representations still has to clarify that point. Building on the work done by Bartlett later in his career on methods for the study of everyday thinking, Wagoner explores how these could be used to pursue the exploration of this hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia. Here, he echoes Moscovici's call for the analysis of the correspondence between social context and the modalities of knowledge (1976: 287).

The article by Ama de-Graft Aikins questions one of the key assumptions of the theory of social representations, that is the principle of familiarity by which lay people are assumed to feel threatened by the unfamiliar. Through her review of anthropological evidence found on the African continent, she questions the universality of this principle and considers the challenges to the theory of social representations posed by an eventual rejection of this principle. She offers up cognitive-emotional polyphasia as an alternative conceptual framework.

Finally, in her commentary to the Special Issue, Susana Batel built on the different interpretations of cognitive polyphasia proposed by Mouro and Castro and Moloney and her

colleagues. In particular, she discusses how alternative perspectives on this concept might contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of agency.

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ARTHI completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge. Her thesis examined representations of mental illness within the Tamil community in Singapore using a mixed-method research design. Her findings suggest that representations were structured around the notion of control and controllability. She also argues that there exist different cognitive polyphasias with identity playing a key role. Arthi's other interests are in suicide and prejudice.

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