

On structuring and outlining processes in the study of social representations

Denise JODELET

Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain (CNRS-EHESS)

Réseau Mondial Serge Moscovici - Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme

ABSTRACT

The paradigm proposed by Moscovici describes three steps to the objectification process: selection/outlining/naturalization. An analogy is often made between the “core nucleus” from the structural model and the “illustrative nucleus” that results from outlining in Moscovici’s model. Many authors have developed the notion of outlining. Drawing on these contributions, we offer to demonstrate how the structural approach to social representations puts cognitive processes of outlining in a collectivist perspective.

Keywords: anchoring, objectification, outlining, structure, values.

FOREWORD

In this time of remembering our friend, I would first like to say that Serge Moscovici really hoped he could be with us today. He was still talking about it a month ago. Unfortunately his

physical condition prevented him from fulfilling his wish. During a visit before my departure, he told me that, to him, and “without sarcasm”, Jean Claude was a “master” who had brought to life, enlivened a whole field of research and that he kept as one of his most precious memories that of his loyalty.

My own memories are those of a friendly companionship which started 50 years ago with the foundation of Social Psychology Study Group, the GEPS, among the sixth division of the Practical School for Advanced Studies, which became the School for Advanced Social Science Studies. During the interview with our Brazilian¹ colleagues, Jean Claude reminded me of the role he played in the creation of this group, that rapidly became the Social Psychology Laboratory, of which we were the first two members. The GEPS was located in Montparnasse at the Reid Hall facility, the Parisian Columbia University outbuilding, where a few rooms were rented to enable hosting of research teams, including ours and one directed by Otto Klinberg². When the GEPS was founded, Jean Claude was appointed Supervisor, a position similar to that of Assistant, which existed back then in Universities. Other members from the Sorbonne Social Psychology Lab joined him: Michel Plon, Claudine Herzlich, Martine Naffrechoux, affiliated to the CNRS (national institute for scientific research). Within a year, our group was full, with the arrival of d’Elisabeth Lage, Patricia Nève, followed by Willem Doise. Other non tenured researchers went along with us: Claude Faucheux, who collaborated with Jean Claude and Werner Ackermann. We were joined later on by other scientists from the CNRS or the School: Paul Henri, Geneviève Paicheler, Renaud Dulong.

I still remember the departure of Jean Claude to Aix-en-Provence. I had heard him say “If you want to get along with Moscovici, you’d better not work with him !” This wisdom allowed him to stay a privileged middle man, an unusual and a key element to our research field, along with Willem. They did not experience the drama surrounding Social Psychology Laboratory’s move around to the new facility on 54 Raspail boulevard and its split-up, fortunately compensated by the creation of the European Social Psychology Lab.

¹ Santos, M. F. S., Almeida, A. M. O. (2014). *Entretien avec Jean-Claude Abric*. Vidéo. Recife, Brasil: LABINT, Centro Moscovici.

² « Centre international d’étude des relations entre groupes ethniques », sous l’égide de l’EPHE et du Conseil international des sciences sociales.

Jean Claude always was a loyal supporter of our international network and an experienced leader of the Euro-Phd, created in Rome by Annamaria de Rosa. Our complicity found its way to Latin America, on fertile ground, especially in Mexico and Brasil, thanks to partnerships set up with our colleagues there, some of whom are here today. During all those adventures, he always was the person you could count on, with a sharp efficiency, and always managed to stay available, nice, cheerful, sometimes teasing, but always receptive to others.

ON OUTLINING

I remember Jean Claude saying the core nucleus hypothesis had its roots in the illustrative nucleus from Moscovici's model (Moscovici, 1961/1976) and the "hidden zone" had been suggested to him by my findings from the study in Ainay-le-Chateau (Jodelet, 1989) regarding secretly held beliefs that nonetheless elicit behavior, namely contagion of madness. This explicit relation fuelled my desire to explore the possibility of further theoretical interplay between Moscovici's model regarding objectification and Abric's one dealing with the structure of representations. What I'd like to offer here is just a sketch, a few ideas that might not yield anything. Anyway, I'll take the risk. I'll take the risk carefully and with a lot of humility, because many events prevented me from going further into the readings which inspired me this problem, that I will now share with you.

That is to say I am now conducting work on the representations of aesthetics, as part of an international study regarding reactions to a cinematic work, associating picture with sound "the Qatsi trilogy" which theoretical foundations I have laid during the Rome International meeting on Social Representations (Jodelet, 2015a). This work allowed me to discover that notions of figure, outline, outlining were core tools for understanding the construction of and reaction to works involving pictures or sounds. References can be found as far back as in Kant's work, but also in cognitive science. Let me give you a few examples.

In the pictorial field, art sociologist Paul Francastel (1965) uses the notion of "illustrativeness" to explain one of art's properties which consists of producing institutional ways of thinking that make up reality through the following process: it integrates selected elements from reality or its symbolic counterpart in a system that is at the same time material and imaginary. In a similar fashion to that of the social representation, illustrativeness assumes

choosing and sketch-like structuring of elements which purpose lies in a social understanding through exchange, a common creation between maker and receiver.

This analysis was applied to the field of music by Bernard Vecchione (1996), who proposes to consider the musical piece as a text, a remark made to the public with specific intentions. The musical work would then be “the illustration of a possible world”, in the same vein as plastic work and through similar ways of illustration. “Musical thinking” is now being analyzed from the category of metaphor which also underlines outlining in creation and reaction to music, while using a model coined in terms of “core and peripheral” (Spitzer, 2004). This whole intellectual movement draws on the ideas of Mark Johnson (1987), who, in line with his previous work with George Lakoff (1980), used Kant’s model as a way to introduce the role played by imagination and metaphorical thinking alongside with the body’s in cognitive processes, linking together conceptual categories and sensible perceptions.

COGNITIVE STRUCTURATION OR COLLECTIVE SELECTION

Those recent developments turned me to the idea of going back to the ways of structuration of social representations. In the announcement of my talk, I put in perspective both the cognitive and the collective. Indeed, psychological models regarding representation (scenarios, frame and other outlines) emphasize its cognitive aspects while assuming, without ever developing the collective ones. But this is not about these models. Actually, it seems to me that, in the field of social representations, there is a clear distinction if not an opposition between the “cognitive” and the “collective” in the way the organization of the representation is conceived, amongst others, by Moscovici and the Structural school. In particular, the structural approach builds up, as writes Abric in his 1994 work on “Social practices and representations”, an unbreakable tie between a cognitive and a social component in the representations we study.

Consequently, what I’m about to say might appear confusing, even provocative, but it is embedded in a reflection that goes back to Moscovici’s theory of knowledge, a part of his work which often tends to be neglected among the recent developments on social representations (Jodelet, 2015b). Here, I will stick to the way structure of social representations is conceived.

I'm suggesting that Moscovici sees this structure as the result of a socially situated but purely cognitive process, whereas structural models insist on its collective origins, even if analyzing the representation draws upon its cognitive and logical parts. By the way, Abric carefully goes back to his insight taken from the illustrative nucleus hypothesis in the work I referred to earlier. Hence, I quote: "We will see that core nucleus theory draws for large parts on the analyses of Moscovici, but does not reduce this nucleus to its genetic role. We think that the core nucleus is the key element to all constituted representation and that it can, in a way, go beyond the object of representation, rooting itself directly in values that transcend it and need not bear any illustrative, outlining or even concrete aspects" (1994, p.28).

So, you might say, why keep on talking? There are two reasons for that. On the one hand, this quotation opens an important, relatively new perspective on the background of representation genesis. This process has already been explored by scholars of the "natural logic", with a theory among which appears the so called "cultural pre-constructs", which are shared commonplaces among social systems (Grize, 1989) and gives credit to defending interpretation of a given object and its representation. By adding reference to values, Abric is the only one echoing what Moscovici immediately put up (Jodelet, 2015b), including the selection of elements playing a part in objectification and the "meaning principle" in anchoring, that is, the "value" towards which he goes back in his reflection on victimization. By doing so, Abric incites to broaden the framework on all social representations. On the other hand, despite the intuition on the role of values, the reference to Moscovici's model does not account for its complexity. In fact, this model from Moscovici formalizes the structure of representations from the objectification process. Yet, three steps are clearly specified in this process: information selection, their outlined structuring and naturalization. Only the first two steps are involved in merging Moscovici's proposition and the structural model, regarding the divide of representations between core and peripheral elements.

Information selection is linked to two main factors: cultural expertise, mostly grasped by educational level and socio economic status on one hand, and social norms on the other as in the case of psychoanalysis, norms surrounding sexual activity. Here, we find ourselves with the effect of socialization processes and communication modalities, but also of systems of values as mentioned by Abric.

Outlining records the transformation of abstract notions borrowed from psychoanalytical theory into concrete pictures loaded with metaphorical elements. It fulfills various functions: the turning of concepts into entities or concrete forces which allows for the association of abstract elements with directly perceptible phenomena, thereby bridging the gap between a theory and its representation. Moscovici talks about two “moves”: a generalization of pictures and a direct expression of concrete phenomena. The joint action of those moves allows the representation to become a cognitive frame.

One cannot help noticing a similarity between this model and the way the philosopher Kant, for the first time, formalized the notion of outline and outlining. We are especially inclined to see it if we remember how Durkheim was what we call a “Neo-Kantian”, who replaced Kant’s *a priori* categories, which are non experiential mental schemes that provide the basis for conceptual categories used in everyday reasoning, by socially constructed ones. Kant’s theory of outlining aims to answer one question: how come the categories of thought we use have meaning? The outline is conceived as procedural rule by which a non empirical concept is associated with a sensorial impression. This allows for construction of subjective intuitions, born out of experience, as representations of external objects which conception calls for imagination and the imaginary.

ON THE STRUCTURE OF REPRESENTATIONS

The interest of Moscovici’s perspective resides in its broadening to cognitive dynamics, which is absent in *mainstream* models of cognition. In fact, notions of scenario, outline, frame and so forth refer to static structures, recorded through experience, which they then standardize in order to guide behavior. In Moscovici’s work, the very process of common sense-making can be grasped by cross-combining concept with the concrete picture, or rather the insertion of concept in the picture. For, even if objectification was studied, at first, through the social seizing of a scientific theory and its concepts, it was indeed a mechanism of common sense that had been introduced and would later be taken on and further developed. It is really about the relationship between concept and experience, a socially mediated relationship.

What about the structural movement initiated par the School of Aix, and largely developed by Abric, Flament and other colleagues? I would be careful not to speak of it in front

of an audience made of distinguished representatives and contributors to this movement. I will simply mention a few points and questions my naïve reading of the texts has raised up.

A first question has to do with how the core nucleus/peripheral elements structure is produced. On one hand, data gathering protocols are in line with a collective conception of its production since the frequency of allusion to constitutive elements is key, at least to the nucleus, this even if ranking and weighting of these elements are taken into account when distinguishing between what belongs to the core and what is peripheral. Reference to the notion of outlining or outline seems less of a way to define a cognitive process than the result of a collective process of sharing elements related to an object or practices.

On the other hand, as goes for the core nucleus, constitution of its elements has always been attributed to various sources we may call collective for two reasons. First, these sources reflect groups or individuals defined by their affiliation to a group. Second, they involve collective processes, whether they are effects of ideology, memory, practice, context, condition or membership. We are thus in the presence of a conception that is based on social division or quantitative sharing which have a global impact on the structure of cognitive elements.

THE SELECTION AND NATURE OF REPRESENTATIONAL ELEMENTS

In this context, I wondered what the real consequence of Abric merging the illustrative nucleus with core was. This concern only kept growing because of the issues I have just raised. Specifically, I asked myself if this merging could rather be about selection of representational elements instead of their outlining. Especially, as research on the hidden zone demonstrated, the significance of the selection process that is: social norms condition what can or cannot be said or supported by social individuals. Here is a direct impact of the “collective” or the “public” upon cognition. Abric, thereby, adopts Moscovici’s point of view about outlining.

Besides this contribution from Abric, selection of constitutive representational elements has been little explored. Here, I think, lays an interesting field to develop. I had the opportunity to approach, in the context of health, construction of the sick’s empirical knowledge (Jodelet, 2014). It appears that relationship to medical knowledge, whether it is orthodox or alternative, learned from institutions or through personal bias, in the media, social networks or social exchange based on “bio-sociality” (Rabinow, 2010), endures significant changes depending on

the way subjects relate to their body and situation, and how they are embedded in the institutional context of care. There would be an interesting field of research to develop regarding processes and criteria involved in the selection of social representations core and peripheral elements, also reflecting the concrete experience of socially embedded subjects.

A second question has to do with composition of the core nucleus that, if I read correctly, may contain elements referring to items related to the conceptual nature of the represented object, items related to concrete aspects of this objects, specifications, associated concrete situations or values, and even affective elements triggered by it. In a study on representations of cancer, drawing from a general population sample of more than 1400 people, we found with Kalampalikis (see Mazières et al., 2015) metaphorical expressions (for instance the color black) reflecting the feelings, cultural, aesthetical and affective images associated with the disease. I do not know if there has been work shedding light on how abstract, concrete, affective and valued elements of the core nucleus are structured, but it seems to me that this level of analysis might help bridging the gap between the two models. We would then depart from a structural description to the structuring processes assuming a direct social impact in the form of pre-existing representational referents, of values and norms controlling the knowledgeable and the 'speakable', of symbolic expressions of social relations, of emotional impact when mentioning or dealing with the object.

STRUCTURING CONTENT AND FORM OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

A third concern regards the relationship between meaning and logic. Structural models approach the problem of sense from meaning that is conveyed by the core nucleus and affects the whole representational field. Concerns with the logic underpinned by the structure of elements composing the representational system allowed for shedding light on a number of relations in the form of basic cognitive outlines or rhetorical structures that maintain the representational system's consistency. These approaches continued to build up without ever showing how socially marked processes carried by the nucleus affect peripheral elements.

The way representational contents and certain cognitive processes are socially affected has largely been demonstrated. The concern I am raising is about the possibility of observing and studying the way that, in social representations, cognitive forms are socially shaped, and

understood not its logical but conceptual aspect that deals with values and norms, as shown in the works of the Aix School, on one hand and with sensible, experiential, contextual components and the social order on the other.

I tried to do it in my study of social representations of madness in the countryside, but I was too concerned with understanding how the three-party system “brain-nerve-world of flesh and bones”, which is often designated as an illustration of core nucleus, was being used with different meanings reflecting the type of relationship established by a population defending its identity and the mentally ill. I borrowed the term ‘focal’ from acoustics, not for matters of originality but in order to specify the dynamic, versatile and generative aspect of this source of semantic vibrations that can be found at the basis of all discourse regarding sick people who were housed within a population defending itself from risks of being associated with them, and from integrating the sick to their group. This is a commonly used structure and always in the same terms, whether when having to describe conducts to be displayed or obtained, to explain observed disease conditions, or to establish relationships in the management of everyday life. It was possible to demonstrate the interplay of this structure, according to its use, in different settings, displaying several meanings that defined the various dimensions of the mentally ill taxonomy:

- In the behavioral sphere, the three party structure « brain-nerve-body » allowed to infer coping abilities of the sick, depending on the level of nerve or brain dominance supposedly guiding obedient or aggressive conducts.
- In the axiomatic sphere, it was used to explain the disease. Its etiology reflecting ways of life foreign to local values had effects at the brain and nerve levels, which prevented true social integration.
- In the ideological sphere, when passing judgment on the social status and roles available to the sick. The lack of brain control then legitimized the establishment of social relations based on exploitation and rejection.
- In the symbolic sphere, the reappearance of beliefs about contagion of madness, implying risky body contact, allowed to maintain social distance and order preserving the group image.

The context of the Ainay-le-Château monograph allowed the controlling for all social dimensions involved by the construction and use of a three way system “brain-nerves-body”. That is not always an easy thing to do in any experimental or field work. I simply referred to it in order to agree with what Jean Claude stated in the quotation I used, suggesting that, to fully grasp the extent of core nucleus, one should “go beyond the context of the represented object to directly find its origin in values that are located well above it”. One could specify the various fields of reference reflecting values and add to it the acknowledgment of conceptual frameworks that guide the understanding of represented objects, such as systems of thoughts in a given social unit, cultural pre-requisites, imposed balance of power, allegiance to social affiliations, identity affirmation and defense.

A LAST TRIBUTE

These thoughts were inspired while going back to Moscovici’s contribution to a theory of knowledge, a return made very late while commemorating the 50 years of his publication « *La psychanalyse, son image et son public* ». It is too late to start a direct talk with Jean-Claude Abric. I would like to believe he would have appreciated a discussion about themes that were put forward here, and if I allowed myself to develop a few propositions it is because I am convinced there is a path here. A path largely uncovered by our missing colleague, who, for sure, would have been curiously following. Some may wish to follow, in his memory, that leading path.

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BIOGRAPHY:

DENISE JODELET is a Director Emeritus in the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) where she headed the Social Psychology Laboratory. Her work explores in a uniquely manner the dynamic of social thought and has a strong international recognition. Contact Email: denise.jodelet@wanadoo.fr