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The Epistemological Significance of the Theory of Social Representations

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During my dialogues with Serge Moscovici some years ago I posed him a question concerning the relation between the theory of social representations and the minority/majority innovation. He insisted that these two theories were separate from one another and that they had different aims, purposes and concepts. Nevertheless, it was my view that these two theories shared philosophical and epistemological presuppositions on which they were built. Serge Moscovici has worked on these theories more or less simultaneously, although during certain periods he has devoted more intellectual effort to one rather than to the other. So I insisted: "These two theories have the same philosophical basis." "Maybe" he responded, "I do not think that I am split into two different persons, so they probably share something, but they are independent theories."

Serge Moscovici has been always concerned with the theoretical and epistemological basis of social psychology as well as with that of his own work, and he has written extensively about these issues. Of course, such complex questions can be approached from diverse perspectives depending on the problem under study. For example, in considering the relation between social influence and cognition, in order to make his point, he has chosen to contrast epistemologies of minorities and majorities (Moscovici, 1993). On the other hand, the analysis of common sense and scientific knowledge brings out different epistemological priorities, e.g. knowledge based on traditional thinking versus that acquired through training and so on.

Moscovici's two independent theories have had both different and similar destinies over the years. The difference in their fates appears superficially more obvious. Minority/majority theory has quickly established itself in the North American and European social psychology textbooks because it seemed to fit well into the major experimental paradigm concerned with social influence. In contrast, the theory of social representations is hardly mentioned in North American undergraduate texts. Instead, the theory attracts researchers in Latin America, Europe and more recently in Asia.

However, it is the similarities of their destinies that seem to me to be more important. These lie in the fact that both the concept of minority/majority and

the concept of social representations have travelled long *empirical* rather than *theoretical* journeys. The designs of minority/majority experiments have achieved perfection in singling out subtleties of dependent and independent variables. The concept of social representations, which does not so easily fit into experimental designs, has been empirically associated sometimes with attitudes, sometimes with stereotypes, social perception, social cognition, discourse, and others. Concerning the latter, Moscovici (2001, p. 25) felt it necessary to raise the question: "Social representations: an empirical or a theoretical concept?" Here he draws attention to the lurking "possibility of a misunderstanding of our theory" and he explains that although empirical work is important, research should pay attention to the concept of social representations as a *theoretical* concept.

In this article I want to pursue the question of the philosophical and epistemological meaning of the concept of social representations. I am borrowing Kalampalikis and Haas's title (this issue) "more than a theory" which, in my view, refers both to the theory of social representations and the minority/majority innovation. To my mind, "more than a theory" applies to the particular philosophical meaning and the specific epistemology on which both theories are based; and I shall argue that proper understanding of their theoretical meanings is precluded by their functioning in the social scientific environment that still operates within epistemology that some philosophers call *foundational* (e.g. Taylor, 1995). Briefly, this is an epistemology that searches for certainty, unchangeable universals, indubitable and objective principles which are to be discovered by the mind of the individual. Although this article is concerned with the theory of social representations, I cannot ignore that the same argument applies to the theory of minorities/majorities.

Denise Jodelet (this issue) calls the theory of social representations a beautiful invention and she refers to creative features of the theory, pointing out that it "proposes itself as an impulse to open *new discovery avenues*," giving rise to new inventions. I shall argue here that proper understanding of its philosophy and epistemology should enable us to comprehend the originality of the theory of social representations and its implications for the whole field of social psychology.

REVOLUTIONS AND DISCOVERIES IN SCIENCE

Creative ideas and discoveries in science, including social science, follow in their short or long lifetime, very diverse routes. Reasons for this vary enormously and range from those that are related to political and religious circumstances, the strength of existing beliefs among scientists and their representations of reality at a given time, to internal conditions of sciences, among other things. Let us consider some examples from the history of ideas, their fates and transformations, in order to reflect on the route that the theory of social representations has followed since 1961.

Let us start with Sir Isaac Newton, who had such a profound influence on physics, mathematics and astronomy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

as well as on beliefs of ordinary citizens about the nature of reality. He became prominent during his life and achieved immediate recognition for creating a revolution in thinking. In his analysis of common sense in science, Bronowski (1951) points out that just as in the case of Cromwell and Napoleon, Newton's achievements and recognition, in addition to his enormous intellectual capacity, were due to a coincidence—or interplay—between his personality and circumstantial opportunity. With hindsight, it seems that political crises were suitable moments for injecting creative ideas into the uncertainties in Newton's time. These, together with his complicated but single-minded personality, gave his ideas a new sense in remaking the world. Despite some controversies which his new discoveries provoked, Newton's celebration became eternalised not only in the scientific world but also in words of the English poet Pope: "God said 'Let Newton be' and all was light."

It is however more common that revolutionary ideas do not find an easy home among those that have fostered the established order of existing beliefs. Revolutionary ideas are seen as undermining order and creating uncertainty. We may also find that the scientist becomes astonished by his discoveries, and sometimes to the extent that he delays publicising his work. On the one hand, he may struggle for social recognition by his colleagues, and on the other, the more his ideas depart from the accepted way of thinking, the more he may fear persecution. This was the fate of Darwin's ideas on evolution. In examining Darwin's notebooks, Gruber (1974) shows that in addition to his own personal struggle both to maintain and to reject his religious beliefs, Darwin experienced fear of persecution and anger in developing and suppressing his ideas. "Think of persecution of earlier Astronomers" he wrote in C Notebook (Darwin, p. 123); and in 1844 he wrote to his friend Hooker, to whom he confided his discoveries, "that telling the secret of his evolutionary ideas was like 'confessing a murder' " (Gruber, 1974, p. 44). Two hundred and fifty years earlier Johannes Kepler was shattered when he discovered that planetary movement proceeds in ellipses rather than in a circle which is a symbol of god (Nicolson, 1950; Marková, 2003). He could only justify his discovery by pointing out that it is the limitation of planets that are unable to reach the perfection of their creator; all they can do is to imitate the circle by elliptic movement.

Still other revolutionary ideas emerge and live their lives quietly without their greatness being spotted. It may take generations before their significance becomes evident. The researcher himself may not even see his work as a revolutionary discovery. Such was the fate of the concept of field in physics. Einstein and Infeld (1938/1961, p. 151) point out that at the beginning, the revolutionary concept of the field in physics was "no more than a means of facilitating the understanding of phenomena from the mechanical point of view." In the language of mechanistic science, natural events were due to "behaviour" of particles leading to interaction between them. In the new language of the field this became different: it is the field itself that is essential for understanding the action of particles. The authors

show that only slowly this revolutionary concept was being accepted, until finally it was recognized that it had created a new reality; it then was seen as "a new concept for which there was no place in the mechanical description" (ibid. p. 151). The concept of field has since become one of the most important concepts of the theory of relativity.

There is yet another reason, possibly even more important, that can have a significant impact on the diffusion of ideas and their acceptance. Historians have often observed that political and economic revolutions can change overnight the life of citizens, but it is the psychological impact of such changes that is usually slow (e.g. Billington, 1966; Yang, 1959). We may find the same phenomenon in scientific revolutions: they are formulated, publicised in books, they become part of scientific institutions and school education. Nevertheless, their impact on the mind of researchers can be either negligible for a long time, or their internalisation into researchers' work may be very slow; additionally, their impact can be based on wrong understanding of the new theory. While the theory may be recognised and its greatness appreciated, it may remain, nevertheless, anchored into the old ways of thinking and interpreted in terms of the paradigm with which researchers and the public are already familiar.

Let us take an example from social psychology. The study of social influence dominates a large part of European and North-American psychology. While Moscovici's (1976) ideas on majority/minority influence have been quickly recognized as a new contribution to the field, the epistemological significance of these ideas has rarely been appreciated. As pointed out above, they are conceived above all as an *empirical* matter, as something to be tested, proven and disproved in laboratory experiments, while their revolutionary *theoretical* significance is hardly ever considered. Thus we find that a number of North American textbooks commonly claim something like this: In a series of elegant experiments Asch has shown the effect of conformity of experimental subjects induced by the majority. Moscovici's studies on minority influence show the opposite effect, i.e., minorities' influence on majorities: ". . . in a kind of 'reverse-Asch' experiment, Moscovici, Lage and Naffrechoux (1969) asked groups of subjects to judge . . ." (Lippa, 1990, p. 542; also Petty and Wegener, 1998; Sabini, 1995). But let us not single out North American authors of these textbooks in their interpretation of ideas pertaining to minority/majority influence—or in Moscovici's term—the minority/majority innovation. Even Moscovici's colleagues and those working in his laboratory rarely recognize the revolutionary theoretical nature of his ideas. For example, Gabriel Mugny, who has made significant contributions to the studies of minorities, points out: "This pattern of influence appears to be the exact opposite of the compliance effects found in the Asch (1951, 1956) paradigm" (Mugny, 1984, p. 354). Despite their valuable empirical contributions, such authors formulate their claims in ways that suggest that all there is to the minority/majority influence, is a different—or an additional—kind of experimental manipulation rather than a new underlying epistemology of social psychology (see below).

IN THE WHIRLWIND

In order to understand the philosophical significance of the theory of social representations, we need to remind ourselves of the situation of social psychology in 1961 when *La Psychanalyse* was published. Social psychology in France did not differ in any essential ways from social psychology in the USA and other West European countries. Having obtained institutional status in the United States during the Second World War, social psychology, searching for scientific respectability, was spreading first to Western Europe, and then to Eastern Europe and Latin America (Moscovici and Marková, 2006). American social psychology has exported, more or less successfully, the experimental model prevalent in general psychology. It has also exported empirical, largely behaviouristic concepts dominant at the time. It followed the established Newtonian thinking of mechanistic physics: searching for universally valid laws of social behaviour, decomposing complex social phenomena into small elements in order to make them intelligible, looking for causal relationships between elements and postulating categories into which events and processes could be placed. As a philosophy, behaviourism suited this model perfectly.

The nineteen sixties therefore were not prepared to adopt a theory that differed in some significant ways from the established order. Indeed, as Denise Jodelet (this volume) points out, when *Psychoanalysis* appeared in 1961, it was not acclaimed. First, its "allegiance to suspicion theories, like Marxism and Psychoanalysis, precluded its credibility; second, its focus on common sense made it not quite a science." One could add here Kurt Lewin's (1949, p. 279) observation that a scientific taboo, just like a social taboo, perseveres because of a general attitude among scientists and not because of a rational argument: "any member of the scientific guild who does not strictly adhere to the taboo is looked upon as queer; he is suspected of not adhering to the scientific standards of critical thinking."

Nevertheless, during the nineteen sixties social psychology was undergoing changes. The optimism of the nineteen fifties that followed the end of the War was replaced by pessimism and "a crisis" (how many "crises" has social psychology endured throughout its short history?). Festinger (1980) wrote about social psychology of the nineteen sixties: "instead of creating powerful and real conditions in the laboratory" (ibid. p. 250), it turned to presenting "hypothetical situations on questionnaires and to cognitive information processing." And Faucheux (in Moscovici and Marková, 2006, p. 134) thought that it was prophetic that "such giants as Festinger and Schachter" were leaving the field because experimental social psychology had become theoretically trivial and practically irrelevant. In fact, the criticism of social psychology in the nineteen sixties flourished and words like "self-flagellation" were used to refer to frequent critiques in journal articles. Taylor's (1964) book on *The Explanation of Behaviour* was directed against mechanistic and atomistic approaches in behaviourism. Similarly, the main argument in Harré and Secord's (1972) *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* was directed at the use of the mechanistic model of Newtonian physics, the Humean concept of cause, and the

logical-positivist methodology. These authors proposed that social psychology should draw inspiration from concepts in modern physics like agency, potentiality, spontaneity and power and that it should accept the anthropomorphic model of man.

Finally, "[T]he crisis in social psychology ended because everything had been said, at least once. It began to foster ennui rather than excitement" (Jackson, 1988, p. 98). Another author (Greenwood, 2004, p. 239) concludes that "[T]he crisis in social psychology was effectively resolved for many by the adoption of the 'social cognition' . . . propelled by the dramatic success of the 'cognition revolution' in general psychology." And so despite criticism of its very foundations and efforts to substitute these foundations by new ones, social psychology has remained untouched; by and large it still continues using the presuppositions of mechanistic physics. Since students are taught mechanistic theories and use textbooks which start with elementary sensation, perception and then move to more complex processes like thinking, groups, etc., they adopt this perspective and tend to interpret anything new from the perspective of this approach. Some critics (e.g. Grenwood, 2004, p. 65; Harré and Secord, 1972, p. 38) pointed out that while principles of invariance and the universality of explanation in Newtonian science were largely abandoned by the physics of the twentieth century and by various natural and social sciences, they have remained the guiding principles of social psychology. Many philosophers and social scientists in the early part of the twentieth century recognized the theory of relativity not just as a revolutionary theory in physics; they have understood that the concept of relativity has changed the conception of reality, including social reality.

What has been the role of the theory of social representations in this whirlwind? For many, the theory has opened up new avenues for research, in particular for those who worked in Moscovici's laboratory or who carried out research under his supervision. Some have found tremendous inspiration (cf. Buschini and Kalampalikis, 2001) in the theory because it is concerned with the study of complex social phenomena like human rights, democracy, HIV/AIDS, mental illness, learning disability, to mention but a few. Others thought that the theory was much more comprehensive than the study of attitudes, opinions or stereotypes. Indeed, the question of the differences between the former and the latter has been often posed (Moscovici and Marková, 2000) both by those who adhered to the theory of social representations as well as by those who opposed it. Still others wondered whether social representations were some kinds of universal "scripts" or "schemas," thus totally neglecting that social representations were group, context and culture dependent. It was largely ignored that due to these kinds of interdependencies social representations could never be "neutral"; that they are not static entities but they are shared by, say, certain kinds of "homo psychoanalyticus" or "homo economicus" who provide them with specific contents which correspond to their knowledge, beliefs, images and of course, to their particular languages (see below); and that, therefore social representations are dynamic social phenomena. In reflecting on the concept of social representations Moscovici has often discussed

it as perhaps the most used and probably the most abused concept in the history of philosophy and psychology. Different meanings of individual, collective, mental, cognitive and social representations have rarely been differentiated. In her insightful paper entitled "Why is it so difficult to understand the theory of social representations?" Maaris Raudsepp (2005) brings this issue to the fore. She draws attention to the empiricist and mechanistic epistemology into which social psychologists from the West European and North American traditions are socialised and to the dialectical epistemology that was inherent to compulsory courses in dialectical and historical materialism in countries with a Marxist tradition. It is much easier for the latter, Raudsepp carefully argues, to comprehend the nature of the concept of social representations because it comes from a philosophical tradition that is rooted in social dynamics, cultural-historical and social bases of human thinking, consciousness and the unconscious, and emphasis on social practices. She shows that socialisation into mechanistic and empiricist presuppositions in those who were educated in the "Western" tradition is very strong. Although they may be sympathetic to, and adopt the theory of social representations, these researchers do not escape from, time to time, unwittingly falling back into mechanistic and empiricist presuppositions.

EINSTEIN'S TRIANGLE OF RELATIONS

Students of social psychology have rarely paid any attention to the fact that while Moscovici was working on *La Psychanalyse*, he published, at the same time, important works concerned with the history and philosophy of science. Throughout his lifelong work we can trace his deep interest in the relation between the philosophy of science and social psychology. One example is Moscovici's (1992) observation he made on Kurt Lewin's (1931) famous article on "The Conflict between Aristotelian and Galilean modes of thought in contemporary psychology." He points out that while Lewin confronted the differences between those two modes of thinking, what is relevant to the present day psychology is the difference between Galilean and Einsteinian modes of thinking, i.e. the difference between mechanistic theory and the theory of relativity. This theme has been continuously re-appearing throughout Moscovici's work. Specifically he has been arguing that Einstein's contribution to the epistemological revolution in natural sciences and philosophy should be equally recognized in human and social sciences. This is also the main theme of Moscovici's article on *La relativité a cent ans* (Relativity is hundred years old) (2007) which still awaits an English translation. Moscovici's paper on the theory of relativity analyses, with particular sharpness, epistemological questions brought about by the Einsteinian revolution in physics.

But why exactly should epistemology of physics be so important in human and social sciences? Concepts like interaction, interdependencies among social phenomena, relations between individuals and groups, relativity of knowledge,

stability and variability—all these and many others—were part of the *Zeitgeist* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and they found their expression in other movements ranging from philosophical, biological to linguistic and dialogical. What made the Einsteinian revolution so unique among other philosophical and scientific movements of the epoch was the clarity with which it was defined and the comprehensive nature of its new concepts. In his article on "The philosophical significance of the theory of relativity" Reichenbach (1949, p. 290), emphasising the theory's "radical consequences" for the theory of knowledge points out that these consequences do not make Einstein a philosopher. Einstein was above all a physicist who saw that certain physical problems could not be solved without a logical analysis of the concepts of space and time and that this also presupposed a philosophical analysis of the Newtonian theory of knowledge. This is why the theory of relativity brought to attention the power of dynamic concepts, interaction, interdependencies among social phenomena as well as among individuals and groups, and heterogeneity rather than homogeneity in thinking and communication in human and social sciences. It has focused attention upon the importance of theory.

Moscovici has recognized this unique significance of the theory of relativity. In the article on *La relativité a cent ans* he identifies and analyses three signposts which he places into what he calls Einstein's triangle of relations. It is by means of these signposts that he characterises Einstein's representation of science. The first side of the triangle concerns the relation between epistemology and science. Attaching great importance to epistemology, Einstein states that there is a reciprocal relation between epistemology and science, one being dependent on the other. Epistemology without science is an empty scheme and equally, science without epistemology is "primitive and muddled" (Einstein, 1949, pp. 683–684). Yet it is important, Moscovici emphasises, to understand the nature of this relationship. According to Einstein, epistemology must not restrict researchers' choices in interpreting their findings. If the researcher sticks dogmatically to a specific kind of epistemology, be it dialectics, positivism or constructivism, he might tend to adapt the interpretation of his findings to that specific epistemology and reject everything that does not fit into the pre-given conception. Every new research problem poses new questions and provides the researcher with new choices. In other words, while the relation between science and epistemology is important, it must not constrain the researcher's freedom of thought.

The second side of the Einsteinian triangle is the relation between theory and experience. What is the commonly adopted view concerning the relation between theory and experience? We find, first, that researchers believe that theory should be deduced from experience or experiment by logical abstraction and second, that theory is falsified by new experimental results or by new experience. This, Moscovici points out, is also the adopted view in social psychology. However, this is not the Einstein's way of thinking. One cannot extract concepts or hypotheses from facts by logical abstraction. Einstein's main point of disagreement with the

positivist philosopher and physicist Mach was precisely on this point. Mach argued that fundamental laws of physics should be formulated in such a way that they would contain only concepts that could be directly observed. According to this, "truth" is ultimately based in the relation between physical experiment and observation. To this view Einstein strongly objected. Concepts are free inventions of the human mind and cannot be deduced by abstraction, that is, by logical means. Equally, Einstein rejected the point of view that it is the method that should guide the researcher's theoretical accomplishments. That was the perspective that was adopted by nineteenth century physics. Instead, "[s]cience forces us to create new ideas, new theories. Their aim is to break down the wall of contradictions which frequently blocks the way of scientific progress" (Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961, p. 264). The growth of science is characterised by paradoxes, by the postulation of new problems and by invention. For Einstein, Moscovici points out, what is important is "surprise" arising from invention (on this issue see also Einstein, 1949; Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961; Moscovici, 1992).

The third side of the Einsteinian triangle concerns the argument against explanations of effects by their causes and explanations of specific phenomena by universal phenomena. In Newton's magnificently conceived mechanistic science, which his followers have polished for three hundred years, science was represented as an orderly system. The belief that universal phenomena and universal mechanical forces represented a unified science was commonplace. Explanation by causes and effects embraced everything ranging from movements of planets to events in physics and chemistry as well as to shocks caused by collisions between bodies. This model, aiming at scientific unification, in and through universal causes, was adopted in the 19th century by social sciences.

Interestingly, in the nineteen twenties, Vygotsky (1927/1987) addressed the problem arising from the attempt to unify and generalise psychological findings in the "The Meaning of Crisis in Psychology." He discussed the general tendency in sciences and in psychology specifically, to turn every interesting idea into a universal law. Unification and generalisation are two tendencies in psychology that merge and are difficult to distinguish. Vygotsky explains this tendency to unify as a historical and psychological phenomenon. In the development of sciences, scientists try to establish their supremacy by spreading their concepts to encompass all possible areas and make them universal principles. He argues that researchers usually start from universal principles and assume that these are applicable in physics as well as in psychology. But from such universal principles one cannot proceed to specific psychological problems. Vygotsky continues saying that it is impossible to study the psychological differences between people using a concept that covers the solar system, a tree and a human being.

Scientists like Heisenberg, Poincaré and Einstein, among others, opposed static theories searching for universal and timeless concepts which presupposed the possibility of a grand theory that would be applicable to the whole of reality. Instead, for example, Heisenberg (2003) presupposes different "regions of reality"

with respect to the phenomena that the science in question examines. In other words, a scientific theory can be defined only with respect to the relevant "region of reality" that is based on relations among phenomena rather than on static categories. According to this idea, the difference between static entities on the one hand and dynamic relations among phenomena on the other hand, also defines the opposition between two kinds of physics. Classic physics uses hypotheses, precise and rigid concepts. In contrast, quantum physics creates hypotheses and concepts that are not "exact" in relation to reality but are most "fruitful" (Moscovici and Marková, 2006).

If these signposts characterise the vision of Einsteinian science as dynamic relations between phenomena rather than static categories, do they also characterise the theory of social representations? I shall examine this question focusing on the theory of social representations and interactional epistemology, theory and method in social representations and the diversity of natural thinking and communication.

INTERACTIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

I have already indicated that much misunderstanding of the theory of social representations arises from the fact that researchers comprehend it in term of concepts with which they are familiar and attribute them meanings that they do not have. We need to ask what is specific about concepts of the theory of social representations and how should they be comprehended. In order to do this we need to adopt *interactional epistemology.*

The theory of social representations explores social reality of phenomena in their interdependencies and dynamics; its concepts are relational. It presupposes *interactions* among social phenomena and their constituents rather than the existence of single categories as the starting point of theorising and empirical research. It assumes that natural thinking and communication are multifaceted and heterogeneous. None of these presuppositions imply concepts that would fit the pre-Einsteinian theory of knowledge. This does not mean, however, that the theory of social representations totally ignores or rejects concepts of the past. Rather, it suggests is that the meanings of traditional concepts, like, for example, interaction, thinking, communication, tension, "objectivity," among others, have been transformed into new concepts that make sense within a novel theory of knowledge.

I have mentioned earlier that it was the concept of the electromagnetic field that made a dramatic change in physics. The concept of electromagnetic field, Einstein argues, has a definite reality which cannot be viewed as resulting from "behaviour" of individual particles. It is a totality of forces that exists "between the two charges and not the charges themselves, which is essential for an understanding of their action" (Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961, p. 151). It is here that we clearly see that epistemology of the theory of relativity is based on

forces between particles rather than on *"behaviour" of single* entities. Let us listen to the authors themselves: "A courageous scientific imagination was needed to realize fully that not the behaviour of bodies, but the behaviour of something between them, that is, the field, may be essential for ordering and understanding events" (Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961, pp. 295–296).

Equally, we cannot understand the specificity of the theory of social representations without taking on board the concept of *interaction*, rather than "behaviour" of *single* entities (individuals, groups) as a point of departure. But it can be argued that the concept of interaction has been used in all sciences, including social psychology, for a long time. The concept of interaction is loaded with a range of different meanings, from statistical interaction to interactions in Husserlian and Schützean phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, to mention but a few. What makes for the specificity of interaction in the theory of social representations is its *ontological* significance. Just like the concept of electromagnetic field in physics of relativity, so the concept of interaction constitutes a new reality. The interacting components define one another as complements, whether this involves institutions vis-à-vis environment, institutions vis-à-vis groups, one group vis-à-vis another group—or to put it more generally—the *Ego* and the *Alter*. If we adopt this ontology of a new reality, i.e. if the Ego and Alter define one another as complements, this also determines their relation to an object of knowledge. This is how we must understand the basic triangularity *Ego-Alter-Object* (Moscovici, 1972a; 1984; Marková, 2003). Jodelet (2008) reminds us that triangularity of the *Ego-Alter-Object* has been part of Moscovici's epistemology of social representations since 1970 (Moscovici, 1970).

In this theory of knowledge, an object (representation) is generated jointly by the Ego and Alter. This point is important because it draws to attention that triangularity is not a metaphor (cf. Zittoun et al., 2007) but it is the epistemological line of departure for the theory. In a general sense, a metaphor, of course, is an important device in the creative work of scientists, in clarifying their ideas and inventing new concepts, and we find it in the research of William James, Henri Bergson, Charles Darwin as well as in that of Serge Moscovici. But it needs to be understood that the case of epistemology based on the *Ego-Alter-Object* is not due to dissatisfaction with a dyadic model. The argument, that dissatisfaction with a dyadic model has led researchers to develop a triadic model, figures prominently in Zittoun et al. The authors find in the end even the triadic model insufficient and they claim that it should have four components rather than three. While this could be a good argument with respect to some triadic models, it would be a total misunderstanding in the case of the *Ego-Alter-Object* in the theory of social representations (as well as in minority/majority innovation). It is not a question of three, four, five or other number of components, as various authors often suggest in their attempt to ameliorate the theory, but the question of the proper epistemology on which the triadic model in the theory of social representations is based.

We need to understand that what separates the two alternative epistemologies, the Einsteinian and the Newtonian, is the concept of *interaction* between the Ego and the Alter in generating knowledge (representation) in the former, and *independence* of the Ego in generating knowledge in the latter. This is why triangularity in the theory of social representations (and in the theory of innovation), just like in dialogicality (see below) is not a metaphor: it is a basic presupposition of the theory of social knowledge that separates it from the individualistic theory of knowledge. The presupposition of triangularity, of course, will necessarily lead to the exploration of other components in the process of generating social knowledge, e.g. time, location, cultural resources, and so on. This has been excellently documented in the model of Bauer and Gaskel (1999, p. 170; also this volume) who added "to this the basic triangle a time dimension, both past and future."

It is the interactional nature of theorising in social representations that, in my opinion, has been largely misunderstood and has led to some misguided critiques. Of these I shall give two examples.

Operational Definition

As an introduction to the first example I shall refer to a discussion between Albert Einstein and Percy Bridgman, the latter having had a profound influence on social sciences.

In his essay on Einstein's theories and the operational point of view, Percy Bridgman (1920/1949), the Nobel Prize winner for physics in 1946 and the advocate of operationalism in physics, made a critique of Albert Einstein for rejecting the operational definition in his general theory of relativity. Bridgman argued that it is obvious that the structure of experience is based on the individual and the relevant event in which the individual is involved and that Einstein, in his general theory of relativity, got away from the fundamental operation of description and measurement involved in this relation. Indeed, so serious was the matter that Bridgman argued that Einstein's "uncritical, pre-Einsteinian point of view . . . conceals the possibility of disaster" (Bridgman, 1920/1949, p. 354). Einstein's response was brisk. It is not necessary to test operationally and independently every single assertion: "*de facto* this has never been achieved by any theory and can not at all be achieved. In order to be able to consider a theory as *physical* theory it is only necessary that it implies empirically testable assertions in general" (Einstein, 1949, p. 679). All one can conclude here is that one Nobel Prize winner in physics, who did not depart from Newtonian scientific presuppositions, did not understand another Nobel Prize winner, i.e. Einstein's philosophical (and methodological) position that totally left behind Newton' presuppositions of mechanistic science based on decomposing complex phenomena into elements. Reichenbach (1949, pp. 295–6) explains that all definitions of the theory of relativity are of a particular kind. Relativity means "in relation to" and therefore,

it implies "the plurality of equivalent descriptions" or "a plurality of equivalent languages and thus of forms of expression which do not contradict each other but have the same content."

However, it was Bridgman and not Einstein who won social psychology. Operationalization has become a social scientific methodological principle and operational definitions have become a requirement in our pre-Einsteinian social psychology (Marková, 2000; 2003). Bridgman distinguishes several kinds of operation, the most important of which consists of an empirical search for correspondence between observation and measurement. This particular definition has been prominent over the years as highlighted by demands for the operational definition of social representations. As a response to such demands a number of scholars (e.g. Allansdottir, Jovchelovitch and Stathopoulou, 1993; Jovchelovitch, 1996; 2007; Voelklein and Howarth, 2005, Howarth, 2006) clarified the relational nature of social representations in which the criterion of truth based on the correspondence between a complex social phenomenon and measurement of "every single assertion" makes no sense. Even today one reads that "there is no standard or clear-cut definition of what social representations are" and that "Moscovici steadfastly refuses to define the concept" (Verheggen and Baerveldt, 2007, p. 5). In their remarkable analysis of this article, the group of postgraduate students from the London School of Economics (Chryssides et al., forthcoming) explain that underlying philosophical presuppositions lend themselves to different explanations of a particular phenomenon and that understanding social representations as individual-level mental phenomena originating in actions or interactions totally misses the point.

Nominalisation

The demand for an empirically based operational definition of social representations is related to the second kind of misunderstanding based on the way in which the word "representation" is conceived. It is transparent throughout *Psychoanalysis* that the meaning of the verb "to represent"—or of a present participle or an adjective "representing"—refers to action, which is a fundamental capacity that characterises humans, just like the capacity to reason or to symbolically communicate. In and through "representing," humans search for meanings and through "representing" they construct, maintain and transform their reality.

There has been a long tendency in science to stabilize knowledge, reality or facts and turn these into entities waiting to be discovered (see below) by using the language of nouns (on this see also Billig, this issue). John Dewey called this tendency "a spectator theory of knowledge." It presupposes a relation between a passive knower and an object to be discovered. This tendency has also reified social representations, understanding them as nouns and exchanging activities for entities. And yet Moscovici in *Preliminary Remarks* of the book (2008, p. xxx) emphasises

that representations should be considered "in the active mode" and that "[T]heir role is to shape something that is given from the outside, as individuals and groups deal with objects, acts and situations that are constructed in and by countless social interactions"; that representations are modalities of knowledge and their functions are to shape activities, communication and to create reality. To conceive social representations as stable entities is the same kind of misunderstanding that has led to the first translation of Vygotsky's *Language and Thought* rather than *Speaking and Thinking*. This has been corrected in the later translation of the book.

METHOD AND THE THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Over the years Moscovici has been thinking about the nature of the method in social psychology in general and in the theory of social representations specifically. "In pre-Einsteinian science" he writes (Moscovici, 1992, p. 108), "people concentrated mainly on the agreement and disagreement with a theory or between a theory and an experiment. In short they either verified or falsified." This kind of thinking gives priority to data collection rather than to a theory. In other words, such research is *data-driven* rather than *theory-driven*. The consequence of this perspective is the focus on research method. This perspective has a long tradition in natural sciences and already in the nineteenth century it was referred to as the victory of scientific method over science. If we turn to social psychology today, we find that many fields of inquiry are defined by their methods rather than by problems (Moscovici, 1992; Moscovici and Marková, 2006). For example, researchers define themselves as conversation analysts, discourse analysts, experimental social psychologists, experiential qualitative social psychologists and so on.

Various scholars have suggested that there are two basic ways in which science is conducted: through the method by proof and the method by invention (Moscovici, 1992; see also Medawar, 1967). The method by proof, so prominent in social psychology, usually uses pre-Einsteinian procedures. This is based on testing alternative hypotheses that propose a different interpretation of an underlying theory. The role of an experiment is to discard one theory and to substitute it by a different one. However, Moscovici (1992, p. 110) argues, such a procedure ignores the Duhem-Quine principle, "according to which refuting one particular hypothesis does not dismantle the theoretical construct to which it belongs." And thus testing alternative hypotheses results in no more than in a conceptual fragmentation; the only aim of multiplied studies is to prove and disprove hypotheses. Rather than inventing something new, the "same" facts are explained differently. It is quite symptomatic that the invention of the phenomenon of innovation by minorities and majorities has been turned by experimental social psychologists into hypothesis testing. For example, they preoccupy themselves with questions such as whether experimental results of other researchers are consistent or inconsistent with Moscovici's assumptions concerning majority and minority

influence. Is majority and minority influence mediated by the same or by different psychological processes? (e.g. Levine and Thompson, 1996).

The method by invention that Moscovici poses as an alternative to the method by proof, takes a different perspective. In *La relativité a cent ans* Moscovici refers to Einstein's question about science and empirical studies. Should one use the word "discovery" or "creation" in science? "Discovery" seems to suggest something that is already in existence and therefore it does not refer to a real novelty. On the other hand, "creation" suggests an individual, or perhaps an artistic act. Instead, Einstein uses the term "invention" ("Erfindung") with reference to scientific theories. Having critically analysed the point of view of the physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach, for whom only sensations were entities constructing the real world, Einstein pointed out that for Mach, scientific laws were no more than ordering experimental material; theories based on such procedures result from a discovery of *already existing* entities and not from invention of new phenomena (Einstein, letter to Besso, 6th January 1948).

It does not need too much imagination to see that much of social psychology has adopted the Mach perspective—and more generally—the positivistic perspective which then has translated itself into research methods based on the belief that it is already existing entities that construct the real world. Data collection in behaviouristic and social cognition approaches isolate entities into dependent and independent variables and from these they construct their models. In contrast, the theory of relativity presupposes the reality of an electromagnetic field, and therefore it formulates relations between particles in terms of patterns or wholes. Interestingly, there was, in the first half of the twentieth century, a close relationship between the Gestalt psychology and the theory of relativity (Miller, 1975). Not only did Gestalt psychology borrow concepts from physics but the main representatives of Gestalt school, Wertheimer, Koffka and Köhler, were either trained as physicists or had interest in physics. Kurt Lewin brought the concept of field into social psychology. Einstein's holistic conception of physics was highly congenial with Gestalt psychology. Let us quote here from Einstein's foreword to a proposed book of Wertheimer's essays:

> Behind these essays lies above all an epistemological requirement which derives from the gestalt-psychological point of view: beware of trying to understand the whole by arbitrary isolation of the separate components or by hazy or forced abstractions (Einstein, in Miller, 1975, p. 75).

Equally, Einstein says elsewhere (Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961) that science is not just an arbitrary collection of facts but that invention arises from intellectual struggles between old and new perspectives and through new definitions of problems. However, with the decline of Gestalt psychology, which really has never established itself in the United States, psychology in general and social psychology in particular, has not developed interest in the epistemology of theory of relativity.

In contrast, the theory of social representations focuses on dynamic patterns of social phenomena, on controversies in society, and on problems and paradoxes. The theory of social representations is open to all kinds of methods: to those by proof as well as to those by invention. Indeed, it emphasises the use of multiple methods as long as they contribute to solving the research problem in question.

Gruber (Gruber and Bedöker, 2005, p. 471) argues that philosophy, history and psychology have neglected the study of invention in the history of science. All these disciplines have been concerned mainly with conceptual and empirical advances. But what is invention? For something to qualify as an invention, he suggests, the idea must go beyond a mere suggestion. Gruber's examples of invention in social psychology are studies by Sherif et al. (1961) of the sense of solidarity and those by Lewin on patterns of behaviour in authoritarian and democratic groups (1939). We could add here both the theory of social representations and innovation by minority/majority, insisting however that they are understood in their proper epistemological framework.

NATURAL THINKING AND THE HYPOTHESIS OF COGNITIVE POLYPHASIA

Whatever Moscovici says about "la pensée naturelle" (in English both "natural thought" AND "natural thinking"), must be understood against the historical background of the time he worked on *La Psychanalyse.* The studies of thinking in the nineteen fifties and sixties were narrowly based. The classical investigations of Gestalt psychologists like Otto Selz, Karl Duncker and Max Wertheimer on creative and productive thinking were no longer in fashion and instead, new trends like artificial intelligence, strategies of problem-solving and the analysis of goals and sub-goals, were bringing new ideas from the study of algorithms, formal logic and neural nets. Explorations of concept formation focused on the study of attributes, which implied breaking down concepts into their elements. Finally, research on syllogisms and anagrams was preoccupied with finding out whether people think or do not think logically, and with the identification of biasing factors in thinking that lead subjects to make wrong conclusions from premises. The search for "pure thinking" and "logical thinking" eliminated content from these studies or made it as insignificant as possible. George Humphrey's (1951) book on thinking announced itself as an introduction into its experimental psychology. Frederick Bartlett had been studying thinking already before the Second World War—and his goal in the nineteen fifties was to develop experiments on thinking that would differ from traditional approaches. His book on *Thinking: An experimental and social study* (1958) aimed at designing experiments based on various thinking processes. Although chapters on everyday thinking and on artistic thinking are the last two in his book and are shorter than others, they go well beyond the traditional forms of logical thinking and they include religious and mystical

thinking. Nevertheless, like others, Bartlett attempted to place all forms of thinking into an experimental and scientific paradigm.

Moscovici says clearly in *Psychoanalysis* what he does not want to do. He does not want to draw up a catalogue of distortions of thinking and departures from formal logic which results only in fuelling "prejudices about the 'illogical' or "irrational" character of everyday reasoning" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 162). Such studies only show that psychologists regard syllogistic and formal logical thinking as an ideal model of human thought. In contrast to this, he makes natural thinking the focus of his research. Natural thinking is the thinking of daily life to which all humans are adapted. It is the thinking that uses knowledge shared by social groups; it focuses on human interactions and relations and therefore it takes diverse forms. Due to social circumstances it forces humans to take up their own positions and defend them; it is the thinking that judges, evaluates, criticises and makes proposals for action. Natural thinking uses knowledge and beliefs generated by established cultural and historical experiences and it makes inferences and deduction on the basis of these. Moscovici (ibid. p. 168) concludes that natural thinking is communication-centred, directional and controversial, and just like other forms of thought it implies a system of operations and a metasystem of relations, as well as it checks and validates its normative coherence. Moscovici's argument that natural thinking is not only a legitimate but a fundamental subject matter of research was a remarkable proposal at the time.

Having analysed the variety of styles of natural thinking, which revealed themselves in and through participants' interviews about psychoanalysis, Moscovici made "three disturbing observations" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 185ff.) about natural thinking. First, he found that people in interviews used their concrete (rather than abstract or formalistic) intelligence; second, adult thinking involved elements of what Piagetian studies referred to as "child thought" or syncretistic thought; finally, and most importantly, one and the same individual was using a plurality of modes of thought. Moreover, different professionals approached the analysis of a problem-situation in different ways and they used different languages to speak about "the same" problem.

We may well raise the question as to why should these be "disturbing, and ultimately, contradictory" observations. And disturbing for whom? Were they disturbing for the reader or for the author?

The reader, well educated in psychology, whether of the 1960s or in 2008, might be disturbed to learn that human thinking is full of contradictions and that people do not think according to the Aristotelian laws of thought; that they are influenced by thinking of others and by historical and cultural ideas transmitted over generations. But to this the author himself responds by saying that it is not the vocation of logic to enforce its laws on anybody; "[n]or is social psychology the guardian of the rules—even those of thought" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 163).

The author, on his part too, might be disturbed. His findings and their interpretation contradicted the established "truths" of psychological and social

psychological knowledge and might expose him as suspect "of not adhering to the scientific standards of critical thinking" (see above).

In view of these "disturbing observations" another question arises. Do these disturbing observations have something to do with the reference to "the dynamic co-existence . . . of the distinct modalities of knowledge, corresponding to definite relations between man and his environment" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 190) that determine *a state of cognitive polyphasia*? And even more so, are they related to the fact that when referring to *a state of cognitive polyphasia*, the author insists on the term a "*hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia*"? (ibid. p. 191).

Why a hypothesis? Moscovici knew perfectly well that thinking as well as knowledge manifest themselves in a variety of ways, that thinking and knowledge are argumentative, that different ways of thinking and knowing co-exist in a number of communicative actions, etc. and that it would be, as such, superfluous to call this position "a hypothesis." After all, the whole book on *Psychanalysis* is precisely about these issues, about different kinds of knowledge presenting themselves simultaneously, e.g. scientific knowledge, common-sense knowledge, different communication systems, their coexistence, controversies and so on. There can be no standards set as to how thinking should proceed: creative processes are multifaceted. What could have been perhaps surprising was the degree of diversity, the richness of styles of thinking and communicating. Clearly, however, the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia could not be concerned with the question as to whether these different forms of thinking and knowing co-exist or not.

Thus I do not think that the term "hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia" results from uncertainty as to how these "disturbing observations" will be accepted by social psychologists. In the same section on natural thought we can read that the "*coexistence* of cognitive systems should be the rule rather than the exception" (ibid. p. 189).

It is my view that we need to look for an answer elsewhere. The history and philosophy of science, as well as general philosophy, which Serge Moscovici had explored before embarking on the study of social representations, had already inculcated in his mind the presupposition of diversified modes of thinking and communication—and the findings of their existence could not be surprising as such. History and philosophy of science shows that both Johannes Kepler and Isaac Newton used the term "hypothesis" in mathematics and physics in various ways. There were logical, ontological and empirical hypotheses and there were also demands for physics without hypotheses (cf. Cassirer, 1923, p. 136ff.). Chaudbury (1962) showed that Newton had used the notion of hypothesis in nine different ways, sometimes theoretically (metaphysically) and sometimes empirically (physically). It was not therefore generally expected in mathematics and physics that every hypothesis would be empirically testable. This could not certainly be expected by Einstein when he postulated hypotheses in the theory of relativity. How could one test empirically the hypothesis that "the universe is infinite and Euclidean at infinity" (Einstein, 1997, p. 99)? Einstein adds that this is, from the point of view of theory of relativity, a complicated hypothesis.

Equally it appears to me that the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia is not something to be tested empirically. It is not the kind of concept that is used in today's experimental psychology: you postulate a hypothesis and test it. Testing a hypothesis provides a proof that something is or is not a case. In any case, Moscovici had already demonstrated cognitive polyphasia in *Psychoanalysis.* If he insists on the term "the hypothesis," we need to see it above all as a *theoretical* hypothesis, as a presupposition enabling the researcher to discover conditions which facilitate, hinder, provoke or lead to transformation of different ways of thinking and knowing rather than to verify that people use, simultaneously, different modalities of thinking and knowing. Moscovici's (2008) own study of the transformation of psychoanalysis focuses on communication as it becomes expressed by different social groups in French society. He draws on the responses of participants to a questionnaire investigation as well as on a systematic content analysis of the French media. Through content analysis he analyzes different communicative practices (propagation, propaganda, and diffusion) by which different representations of psychoanalysis are constructed and projected. It is not simply that different groups and different social contexts affect what people represent. It is the interactive interdependence between them that produces different styles of thinking and communicating.

There is yet another important aspect of the hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia to be remembered. In contrast to Piaget, Moscovici suggests that research should not be concerned uniquely with the analysis of transformations leading to equilibrium and adaptation. In contrast to balance and consistency theories he argues that tension, conflict and constraint are just as important features of daily life. Collective consensus is not the only the precondition for rationality and coherence of thought but equally, dissensus and contradiction are the other side of rational thought.

These same ideas reappear in Moscovici's work on minorities/majorities. He is critical of the focus on equilibrium in Lewin's group dynamics. He argues that Lewin's assumptions of equilibrium and homeostasis imply a static model of human activities. Studies that follow from Lewin's ideas such as those by Festinger and Schachter focus on pressure towards group uniformity that restabilizes equilibrium through conformity of the deviant. From the very beginning of his work on minorities/majorities Moscovici observed two views of social conflict. The traditional perspective viewed group formation on the basis of shared interests and as moving towards a common goal. In this situation, a group maintains a current equilibrium which results in inertia. Alternatively, however, it is "the subversive action of group members who are divergent or in the minority that serves . . . to move the group away from stasis and toward social change. Social psychologists must study not only conflict resolution, but conflict arousal." (Moscovici and Marková, 2006, p. 173).

Following the original publication of *La Psychanalyse* (1961), other researchers have presented many examples of cognitive polyphasia in common sense thinking and we can find excellent reviews of these (see e.g. Duveen, 2007; Jovchelovitch,

2007; Wagner, 2005). These examples include cognitive polyphasia in different cultures, daily situations and various contexts ranging from identification of successive representations of the same object and its transformation. Duveen (2007) in particular emphasises that communicative processes like propagation, propaganda and diffusion influence these transformations and he analyses the ways in which "the same object" becomes represented differently by various social groups.

But while these examples concern cognitive polyphasia with respect to natural or common sense thinking, Solmitz, without using the notion of cognitive polyphasia observes this phenomenon in the way of thinking of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer. In discussing the case of "Galileo versus Galileo" Solmitz finds it puzzling that Cassirer, such a critical and intellectual mind, agrees and disagrees with Galileo "at the same time and in the same respect" (Solmitz, 1949, p. 745). Analysing this case Solmitz comes to the conclusion that Cassirer is able to regard Galileo, at the same time, in two different ways. He disagrees with Galileo's metaphysics which identifies mathematics with nature. Yet at the same time Cassirer "speaks 'through' Galileo, somewhat like a dramatist speaks through a historical character" (ibid. p. 755). The ways of contradictory and manifold thinking in science are surely not exceptions and creative thinking would probably be impossible without cognitive polyphasia.

THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND DIALOGICAL COMMUNICATION

Just like different styles of thinking are related to different social representations, so it was transparent from the very beginning that specific modes of communication express different social representations. Yet it remains one of the historical puzzles as to why language and communication rarely figure in social representations research. Throughout the whole book on *Psychoanalysis* we are confronted with different communication genres which participants use without even being aware of their existence. In some research contexts participants view psychoanalysis as a conversation, confession or suggestion, while in others they conceive it as propaganda, propagation or diffusion. All communication genres involve specific interpersonal, group and institutional relations. They may be underlain by various communicative themata (Moscovici and Vignaux, 2000) which generate, implicitly or explicitly, different social representations and transform them into new ones.

My original research interest was language and thinking, and only more recently I have become involved in the study of social representations. Having turned to the latter I observed some philosophical convergence between certain trends in language studies, specifically the Prague School of Linguistics and the dialogism of the Bakhtinian Circle on the one hand, and the theory of social representations on the other. Both these language trends and the theory of social representations prioritise the study of language in and through discourse and

communication, and their heterogeneous styles; they emphasise different forms of the Ego-Alter interaction and their transformation. Both the theory of social representations and the dialogical approach draw attention not only to the social nature of humankind, but they place a considerable weight on the plurality of thinking and communication in creating social reality and on the expression of human life experiences and emotions. The philosophical background of these priorities in the studies of language can be traced back to Giambattista Vico through to Herder, Hamman, Humboldt, and the Neo-Kantians of the Marbourg School, among others. Most explicitly, the neo-Kantians coined the term "dialogical principle," the idea of the co-authorship between "I" and "you" in communication (Marková, 2003).

When Moscovici conceptualises language and communication in the first edition of *La Psychanalyse* in 1961, he makes references to anthropological linguistics, mythology, symbolic nature of thought, to Ernst Cassirer of the Neo-Kantian Marburg School, to Ferdinand Saussure and his students, and to Emile Benveniste, among others. In contrast to focusing on Saussure's structuralism that, at the time, was influential in French linguistics, Moscovici appreciated Saussure's perspective that a science "*that studies the life of signs within society* is therefore conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently, of general psychology; I shall call it semiology" (Saussure, 1915/1959, p. 16). However, it was Benveniste's ideas about language as reproducing social reality, about polarity between the I and you, the role of the third person in the discourse, and about symbols and naming that have created a very fertile environment for the development of Moscovici's view on language and social representations. Above all, for Benveniste (1966/1971) the symbolizing and representative capacity of humans is the basis for abstraction as well as for creative imagination. In arguing against the image of language as the instrument of communication Benveniste (1966/71, p. 224) says:

> All the characteristics of language, its immaterial nature, its symbolic functioning, its articulated arrangement, the fact that is has *content*, are in themselves enough to render suspect this comparison of language to an instrument, which tends to dissociate the property of language from man.

Such views of language and communication were inspiring for the author of *Psychoanalysis*, but this was not the perspective that in the 1950s and 1960s dominated the French structuralist linguistics. French structuralism was based on the tradition of Ferdinand Saussure and the structuralist analysis developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser. These models were formalistic and tended to mathematise linguistic and social relationships. As early as in 1972 Moscovici (1972b) deplored, in the *Psychosociology of Language*, the fact that social psychologists were not interested in language, and linguists were not interested in social psychology. The *content* of thinking and of language that is

fundamental in the theory of social representations has been of no interest in either of these disciplines. Linguistics was—and still is—concerned with descriptive features of language. Social psychology was—and still is—preoccupied with content-less processes and universal principles.

When Moscovici was working on *Psychoanalysis*, he did not know the work of Bakhtin's Circle, which was still awaiting its resurrection that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, we can observe remarkable similarity between the ways Moscovici and Bakhtin express their ideas about language. Thus Moscovici writes about social representations: "The fact that they generate specific languages is one of the signs of their specificity" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 162). And as we have seen above, different individuals, professionals and social groups use *different* languages to speak about "the same" problem. Against the accepted assumption in the psychology of thinking and problem-solving that people approach the problem from a uniform position and that they retain a uniform position in the process of thinking and dialoguing, the analysis of interviews in *Psychoanalysis* shows the exact opposite. Speakers are not homogeneous and they mobilise their specific positions depending how they represent their interlocutors, whether individuals, groups or institutions. Speakers are not necessarily authors of their discourse and others speak through their mouth. In a single dialogue we see confrontation of different languages carrying and referring to various kinds of socially shared knowledge and social representations.

It is the plural "languages" used in *Psychoanalysis*, rather than a more common word "language," that recalls Bakhtin's rejection of the notion of a unique language because it refers to no more than an orderly system of signs. Instead, Bakhtin used the notion of "heteroglossia," by which he meant a multiplicity of languages in a single individual, in dialects, professional languages, social classes and ethnic groups (Bakhtin, 1984).

Neither for Bakhtin nor for Moscovici can dialogue be neutral. We find the rejection of communicative neutrality throughout Bakhtin's work and in particular in his analysis of utterances in his essay "On the problem of speech genres" (Bakhtin, 1986). Neutrality can be only artificially imposed but daily speech is always judgemental, evaluative and orientated to creating new meanings. Since words are always doubly orientated, i.e. towards the self and towards the other, they are always open to different interpretations. Equally, we find in *Psychoanalysis* (Moscovici, 2008, e.g. p. 167) that dialogue is interplay of questions and answers expressing opinions "for" and "against," shaping ideas in controversy, and decreasing and increasing distance among speakers.

It has been only during the last decade or so that some French linguists, building on and developing Bakhtin's ideas, have started analysing utterances and discourse using a dialogical perspective. For example, the linguistic distinction between locutor and enunciator (Salazar Orvig, 2005; Vion, 1998; 2001; Bres, 1998; 1999; Bres and Verione, 2002), i.e. between the one who utters "I" and the one who presents the point of view of others, respectively, may indicate closeness or

distance with respect to representing a particular phenomenon. What is said by the two participants does not belong to them only; it necessarily draws on the third person (not in arithmetical sense as Bakhtin explains) or the third parties and on groups to which they belong or which they reject. Through the use of various grammatical structures like modalisations, positioning, deontic claims and other means, speakers can take distance from, or closeness to, what they are actually stating (Salazar Orvig, 2007; Salazar Orvig and Grossen, 2008). Participants may jointly construct utterances which may suggest that they assume sharing a social representation. Alternatively, in and through a joint construction of utterances they may question limits of their shared knowledge (Marková, 2007). They may refer to beliefs, super-addressee (god, generalised other, consciousness), the law and its different kinds, rules and norms, morality and ethics, traditions, habits and stereotypes. By using nouns rather than verbs they may express a fixed belief or a relatively stable and unquestioned social representation (cf. Seriot, 1986; Leroy, 2004). In and through dialogical sequences we can observe themes being developed or dropped, repetitions and analogies. Such studies are promising because they point to ways of bringing together dialogical linguistics and the theory of social representations into a new paradigm.

In the *Preface* to *Psychoanalysis* Moscovici stated his intention "to use the phenomenon of social representations to redefine the problems and concepts of social psychology by emphasizing their symbolic function and their power to construct the real." If we reflect on the scientific route of the theory of social representations, we find that the theory has, for nearly fifty years, attracted many and has been rejected by others; has been criticised by some and defended by others. Yet, it does not need to be defended. What it needs is the understanding of its interactional epistemology. As a theory of social knowledge, it creates its own specific concepts that are suitable to the study of social phenomena. But it is not enough to understand its epistemology and its concepts. Only if we as researchers internalise the theory, can it achieve its full potential: to redefine the field of social psychology and turn it into a proper social science.

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