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Taking the gilt off the gingerbread
Reverberations of the metrics cult(ure) on the theory of social representations

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ABSTRACT

There is a prevailing view that the university is transforming into an economic agent, with broad and troubling implications for scholars' future prospects. While some studies were devoted to the academic world considering its organizational approaches centered on the rationalization of universities, it is important to devote some focus to the ways these changes translate in specific cases of universities' knowledge production. It is to the description of a particular case of theory diffusion necessarily embedded within the academic world it emerged out of, developed in and still matures in, that this work will be giving priority—the case of the Theory of Social Representations. Since Serge Moscovici's 1961 seminal study of social representations (Moscovici, 1961), the theory was developed through different theoretical and methodological approaches, conceptualized through various models, and most importantly widely adopted all over the world by scholars of diverse disciplinary perspectives working in a variety of thematic fields. But the theoretical polarity between the transdisciplinary Theory of Social Representations and "mainstream Social Psychology" is reflected through an ongoing world debate, although largely held within the circles of European social psychologists. The stakes of these internal debates are high: an integral redefinition of the discipline, of social sciences, and of knowledge diffusion. Even though the theoretical core of

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Moscovici's theory is an undoubtedly valuable contribution to the social sciences, its methodological incompatibilities with "what sells" leaves it structurally ostracized, and its potential unfulfilled. This article examines the interplay of European tradition, its disciplinary legacy, and market-oriented trends which have undoubtedly impacted the developmental paths the Theory has followed.

Keywords: *neoliberalization, market-oriented academia, impact factor, bibliometric culture, social psychology, social representations*

"I viewed social psychology as a social science, along with anthropology, history, sociology, etc. Therefore believe that it should follow an analogous strategy with respect to theories and facts. In these fields, one does not strive to emulate the perfection of physics and no one feels compelled to verify a series of hypotheses one at a time, no matter how trivial they might be" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 213).

From the macro to the micro level, academia is now embedded in and imbued with capitalism. On a micro level, a now well-established culture of auditing and overwhelming bureaucracy is forging a new path for scholarly production; on a macro level, this shift in academic culture is rearticulating the current crisis in first world capitalism itself: a greater tendency towards immaterial labor, cognitive capital and so-called knowledge production. It is important to acknowledge the relationship that invisible (or cognitive) capital has with the first world and to real materialities. As Dokuzovic and Freudmann argue:

> the international economic crisis has been remedied with a knowledge economy, at the cost of those constituting knowledge production. One of the consequences of the expanse of education has been the geopolitical restructuring of spaces of education, not only as another sphere of life appropriated by capital, but in terms of national narratives on a supranational level, echoing the corporate agendas in and around education (Dokuzovic & Freudmann, 2011, pp. 1, 23).

Because universities are subordinated to an economic logic, they are being pressured to adopt the modes of the private enterprise through a discourse deeply marked by references to management (Clark, 1998; Kolsaker, 2008; Lorenz, 2012). "Good" institutional management goes hand in hand with the normalization of temporary appointments, generating insecurity and, as a consequence, cautiously conformist attitudes from young teachers and researchers who are anxious not to miss a promotion or, more simply, not to lose their jobs. Both are heavily dependent on their publication count. Increasingly random career planning and job insecurity, as well as the ensuing precarity and psychological pressure, weaken scholars both in terms of their social rights and in terms of social recognition (Trépos, 1996). This has profound consequences for those institutions—namely, that professors and researchers are forced to act as entrepreneurs (Wiscomb, 2016) rather than engaging in curiosity-based activities or promoting research for the common good. It has also placed an undue emphasis on citation metrics for research as part of a market-based approach.

Although the university is rationalized as a political entity, it mirrors the form, spirit, and issues of the economy on every level of its hierarchy. The university now has to manage its activities in terms of quality and performance in a global science market. New kinds of indicators such as impact factors, H-indexes, and new metrics emerge every so often; all promise better quality research, better quality education, and inevitably the opportunity to build a better society along with a better future. This article is to assess if the principles of the market, as applied to the sphere of academic knowledge, act as intended to optimize the value it is rendering without violating the university's fundamental values.

With good reason, Petrovici laments how "social science hard-core positivism is gradually becoming dominant" (Petrovici, 2010, p. 1). Ian Parker explains that in the context of social psychology, "positivism was adopted as the method of the new science…. Social psychology also bought this story and, in its official histories, has roped in Comte from sociology to give a broader 'social' gloss to the method" (Parker, 1989, p. 32). It is also helpful to explore how social sciences have also adopted scientism in addition to positivism; this definition of scientism, which has created an

> obsession with being a natural science [leading] to an obsession with measurement and a rigid stance which holds that the study of anything which cannot be measured. (Roberts, 2015, p. 91).

These shifting orientations in the social sciences have resulted in a rejection of studying anything which cannot be measured and a concerted effort to measure things in ways that are

imprecise for the sake of having a measurement.

One important example of this shift towards metrics is the focus on getting published in "mainstream" high-indexed journals, which has interesting consequences for the study of the Theory of Social Representations: although well established in the tradition of European science and social psychology in particular, the use of the theory of social representations was sometimes concealed by certain authors. When and why did publishing articles in well-indexed journals become the first and foremost criterion to "make it" in the academia, when the calling, or vocation, of teaching and researching required so many other skills and abilities?

Sociologist David Pontille suggested using other holistic measures, such as conference presentations, teaching contributions, and administrative responsibilities (Pontille, 2016). In Social Representations, the metrics problem becomes even more intense. As Raudsepp notes, "Most of the contemporary conflicts in the world are symbolic conflicts, mediated and regulated by certain social representations and social identities related to them" (Raudsepp, 2005, p. 465). These are rarely addressed in the literature about Academia, and Social Representations Theory has strong potential in bringing light to such issues.

As the current world continues to be characterized by rapid and profound changes from the global to the local level, social science knowledge becomes even more important. The knowledge produced by the social sciences has proved to be useful in understanding and overcoming the complexity of our world, and governments and all other social and economic actors must make a more systematic use of the social disciplines. Social scientists and policymakers need to re-evaluate the contribution that social science can make to public policy, while paying particular attention to combining curiosity-based activities with activities more directly relevant to public policy. The importance currently attached to the following research tendencies should also be re-examined: should research funding be determined by publications or determined by social change?

IMPACT FACTOR AND BIBLIOMETRICS

The forms of metrics that have come to govern academic life have focused on the echo of articles, which indicates the number of citations, which is measured in many ways, including the publishing journal's impact factor, the eigenfactor, and the h-index (Gibson, Anderson, & Tressler, 2017). These factors which measure the influence of articles and journals over

periods of two to five years and are used to determine the visibility of a particular scholar can create important distortions that obscure the actual import of an individual scholar's work and devalue some kinds of scholarly productivity. These standards, which intend to create objective pictures of scientific productivity, can only create a partial view of scientific production, simplifying the complexity of the concept of "scientific quality" by standardizing research – the hegemony of the English language in research necessarily favors certain nationalities over others or a younger generation of researchers, the so-called digital natives, who are more proficient in English (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017). Although Garfield claims "Critics of the JIF will cite all sorts of anecdotal citation behaviour that do not represent average practice" (Garfield, 2006). It is true that scientometry specialists admit a strong correlation between the quality of research and the frequency of citations, but it is also known, at least since Hume, that regular concurrence does not necessarily mean law.

The presupposition here is clearly visible: the number of citations is assumed to directly indicate quality; this kind of approximation affects the social sciences. So it follows that any use of the impact factor that does not take account this choice of valuation—which can otherwise be justified—is open to criticism. It is a problem of government agencies responsible for allocating research funds: in order to make their decisions appear to be objective, they omit this premise and treat impact factors as statistical data. This is particularly troubling for the social sciences. The existing gap between the natural sciences and the social sciences in the use of bibliometric indicators and in particular of the impact factor is well explained by this distinction. Indeed, indicators are inherently linked to the experimental approach. In both cases, it is a matter of approximating a fact using a proxy or an indicator since a direct measurement is out of reach. One cannot directly measure the quality of an article; its quality is therefore approximated by its citations. This is a very common approach in the physical sciences or biology, for example, it is like the use of colorimetric indicators to measure pH (Das, 2005, p. 203). The commonality of this approach in fields like biology and medicine is probably a very important explanatory factor for why these fields are familiar and comfortable with indicators and for why anthropologists or philosophers tend to be averse to this approach. It seems that the relationship to the number largely determines the relationship to the indicator. But most importantly, for the social sciences, "scientific journals are not only means of communication but also sociological entities" (Bensman, 2007, p. 2). Indeed, scientific production in the social sciences and humanities alike, along with its analytical value, also has

> cultural, educational, social and political purposes. [...] So we can rightfully raise the question why is one commercial database (WoS), taken as a criterion for the evaluation of [...] scientific production? [...] Therefore, application of bibliometric and bibliometric's indicators should follow from the understanding of the difference of the nature of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Natural Science. This has been pointed out by many authors from C. Snow's (talk about two cultures) onwards (Pečarić, 2013, p. 352).

Moreover, as various studies have shown, the social sciences often communicate differently from the natural sciences; instead of journal articles, they may use books, book chapters or even conference presentations to attain their discipline's pedagogical, cultural, or educational aims (Clemens, et al., 1995; Glänzel, 1996). But more importantly, as Pečarić emphasizes,

> The topic of research in social sciences is society, and the very purpose of social science is not to be competitive but it also has other tasks: educational, pedagogical, cultural, political, historical, preservation and evaluation of heritage, etc. [...] The subject of SSHS is determined by the social and cultural context. Their purpose is to understand culture and society, but also to serve as a public good. They generally have no direct commercial potential and serve no profit. [...] The ultimate consequence of this kind of science policy and the use of bibliometrics for that purpose would be the colonization of SSHS and their subordination to the values of globalization and profit (Pečarić, 2013, p. 355).

The "colonization" of social sciences' communication tools has had deep consequences for its scientific production and impact. The results of Hicks' analyses (2005) as well as studies by Archambault & Gagné (2004), show that books are more cited in social sciences than journals. Furthermore, statistics and mathematics are often presented as a politically and culturally neutral tool. As such, those tools have been imposed as elements of a professed objectivisation of the mechanisms governing the world. However, the very emergence of statistics and mathematics as instruments is eminently contingent on a set of decisions that

reflect the current neoliberal economic concerns and are therefore not neutral. In her latest 2016 book, American anthropologist Sally Engle Merry reflects that, "Quantification is seductive. It offers concrete, numerical information that allows for easy comparison and ranking of countries, schools, job applicants, teachers, and much else. It organizes and simplifies knowledge, facilitating decision making in the absence of more detailed, contextual information" (Merry, 2016, p. 16).

In any case, the theoretical value of Social Representations cannot be assessed by bibliometric indicators alone. To assert the theory's value, Eicher and colleagues (2011) "advise SRT researchers to engage more strongly with other researchers and theories in social psychology. They should explicitly differentiate SRT from other social psychological theories and highlight its unique added value as a research tool for understanding societal dynamics. Additionally, SRT researchers should continue to strengthen their claims by moving from descriptions of social representations to explaining their origins and investigating their functions" (Eicher et al., 2011, p. 11.16). As de Rosa maintains: "Scientific quality is critical for the viability of any discipline and for making an informed and responsible contribution to societal debates. But the sole emphasis on number of publications, impact factors, Hindex and the like, contributes to an unwelcome homogenisation of the field in general, and of European social psychology in particular" (de Rosa, 2014, p. 2).

OF REVOLUTIONS AND REFORMS

Social psychology's disciplinary toolbox has included the question of the interplay between the individual and the social among its perennial questions. There have been a number of theoretical and methodological questions around this issue, such as data collection, that remain unsolved. The "revolutionary paradigm" of Social Representations Theory (Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, Valsiner, 2015) was viewed by many as a new direction, which "[has] caught the imagination of social psychologists in Britain—the battleground between European and American traditions and paradigms—and the theory promises to dislodge attribution theory from its grip on the discipline" (Parker, 1989, p. 91), but the theory is acknowledged by North American social scientists as well: "Part of its appeal is that it emphasizes the social in social psychology, whereas so much work in social psychology emphasizes the workings of individual cognition in social situations" (Beattie, 2016, p. 145).

Because they are formed and develop within the framework of social interactions between the social and the individual, social representations are a form of knowledge that is difficult to grasp in its conceptual fullness (Jodelet, 1989). Because of the difficulty in understanding social representations, the theory has encountered ample criticism. I do not aim to reiterate here the explanations behind such vagueness already presented by a number of researchers throughout the years (Voelklein, & Howarth, 2005; Räty, & Snellman, 1992), nor to list the prospective bridging and confrontation of theoretical traditions which could contribute to overcome that "lack of clarity" and to "better face critics" (Breakwell, 1993; de Rosa, 2006; Deaux, & Philogène, 2001). Rather, I will start by asking a set of precursory questions to lead the focus of this section: What is the intellectual role of social representations theory? Is it a substantive social theory? Does it direct research and methodology? Or is it an ontology?

Let us now imagine an alternate universe where researchers' work would not be regulated by the "laws of the market" and where the scientific community researching social representations could let go of the system that requires them to fulfill publishing quotas and find research niches. These social scientists would do best to understand social representations theory as an abstract description of the nature of the social world—an ontological framework. The theory stresses the prevalent heterogeneity of social phenomena, but it does not provide us with a substantive grammar of what those components are, nor with valid methods to grasp those dynamics in between the individual and the social in their entirety—the critics are right in noticing that. Rather, if the theory of social representations were viewed as a unifying "Grand Theory" (Doise, 1993), an ontology, or an umbrella theory, it would coordinate with other sociopsychological theories, each of which are based upon substantive principles about the fundamental structure of social phenomena. Or as Beattie phrases it, "For social representations, all psychological phenomena are of explanatory interest to explain how socially-shared information is formed in and affects society" (Beattie, 2016, p. 135). Instead of working as a rival discourse within the field, the ontological power of social representation would encompass a more concrete sociopsychological set of ideas. However, the theory is indeed methodologically helpful in that it gives a course to multi-theoretical and inter-disciplinary approaches, favoring the study of component systems and underlying social processes, as well as encouraging researchers to investigate the features of social phenomena within the realm of communication by determining the dynamics of its components. While these accounts are unavoidably partial, because they ignore many of the components of social oneness, they are also potentially explanatory, if the dynamics being

researched have the ability to generate characteristics of continuity. The above approach has the potential to let us envision an epistemology of such constructions in the social world. Instead of searching for an ungraspable unity and coherence in a larger social entity, such an ontology could guide researchers in uncovering its underlying heterogeneous and independent processes.

If disengaged from the current modus operandi in the sciences, the theory's vagueness could become its strength:

> Being a scientist requires having faith in uncertainty, finding pleasure in mystery, and learning to cultivate doubt. There is no surer way to screw up an experiment than to be certain of its outcome. […] There is a tendency for us to come up with questions for which we think there is an answer, perhaps because ignorance seems embarrassing. […] What if we cultivated ignorance instead of fearing it, what if we controlled neglect instead of feeling guilty about it, what if we understood the power of not knowing in a world dominated by information? […] As a scientist, you don't do something with what you know to defend someone, treat someone, or make someone a pile of money. You use those facts to frame a new question. […] Success in science, either doing it or understanding it, depends on developing comfort with ignorance (Firestein, 2012, pp. 34,132).

A radical change and a new paradigm seem inevitable at the cost of further delaying the understanding of humans' relationships with others and their environment. If there does seem to be a general idea rooted in the social under the guise of social thought, it is on the level of methods that this holism is left impaired. Indeed, despite the on-going debate and numerous scholars who are critical of those ambiguities, a certain number of researchers who are theoretically committed to the project will still deviate from studying the processes of social thought.

DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THEORY AND METHOD

Since both the Structural and the Socio-Dynamic approach address social representations not only in terms of intergroup relations, but also in terms of content (Abric, 1987; Echabe,

Guede, & Castro, 1994; Doise, & Sinclair, 1973; Van Lange, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2011), it is necessary to address both at the same time. First, I will briefly describe that which characterizes each of those two approaches, and then merge the comments about their common critical aspects in terms of reverbarations of the metric cult(ure) on the theory of social representations.

The Structural Approach

Based on Moscovici's objectification process, the structural approach, "Central Core Theory" or the "Aix School" of Social Representations was inspired by the work of Claude Flament—among others—and further developed by its central figure, Jean-Claude Abric (Abric, 1976, 1993). In this approach, the social representation is seen as a hierarchisation of elements, dichotomized according to two components, one central, the other peripheral. The first component, the central component of representation, is also called the central nucleus (ibid., 1976, 1987). When he proposed the concept of a central nucleus, Abric took inspiration and developed the concept of a figurative nucleus initiated by Moscovici (1961). In this model, the central nucleus consists of one or two elements that determine the meaning of the whole.

The central nucleus is characterized by different properties. On the one hand, the core is stable and the elements that compose it are coherent. These notions of stability and coherence imply that the nucleus evolves little or not at all over time, thus allowing the perpetuation of the representation. Additionally, the notion of stability implies homogeneity, a consistency of the group with respect to the object of representation. Finally, a consensual aspect characterizes the central nucleus, that is to say, it is composed of elements very widely shared by the subjects at the origin of the representation. In general, the central nucleus consists of cognitive and normative elements (Roussiau, & Bonardi, 2001).

The second component, the peripheral system, is organized around the central nucleus and maintains a direct relationship with the latter. In contrast to the nucleus, which results from a consensus between the members of the same group, the elements that compose it are more dependent on individual positions, personal experience, and individual history. Thus, two people may interact differently with an object, without, however, having a different representation of it. In other words, two subjects can share the same representation of an object even if the peripheral elements that compose it are different (provided they are

organized around the same central nucleus).

Moreover, the peripheral system inscribes the social representation in the real. Thus, behaviour can depend on the situation and adapt to it. For Flament (1994), the elements of the peripheral system have a dual prescriptive and conditional character. They are prescribers of practices, but these requirements are conditional on the situation.

Within the structural approach, the most important factor in the transformation of social representations are social practices. When social practices change then the social representation evolves under certain conditions. For Flament, 3 theoretical figures of the transformation of a social representation can be considered: the gradual transformation of social representations ,the brutal transformation of social representations, and the "resistant" transformation of social representations.

In his study of similarity analysis (Flament, 1981), Flament attempts to identify the central elements that make up the representation. For him, the analysis of similarity makes it possible to determine the central elements by identifying those who maintain a strong link between them. In this type of study, it is not the object in itself that arouses the researcher's interest, but the way in which the elements combine. Thus, Flament apprehends the social representations and more particularly the central elements which compose them in an essentially methodological, almost exclusively technical, perspective. Contrary to the ethnographic approach which uses several methods (interviews, press analyses, questionnaires ...) in order to obtain a very rich representation of the object, researchers using the structural perspective attempt to develop a standardized, rigorous— and, if possible, automated— method for collecting and structuring a representation.

The Socio-dynamic Approach

The sociodynamic approach initiated by Willem Doise — also called the "organizing principles theory", or "Geneva School"—defines social representations as principles that generate positions in accordance with a specific set of social relations (Doise, 1992; Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992; Lorenzi- Cioldi, & Clémence, 2001) and "cannot be conceived as mere descriptions of contents of knowledge but rather as forms of socio-cognitive ruling, as principles that generate positions within a set of social relations and organize the symbolic processes that take place within these relations" (Miguel, Valentim, & Carugati, 2012, p. 1246). Indeed, Doise was more interested in investigating the social

relations of dominant and dominated social groups, which determine the practices linked to an object and which will determine the social representations of an object, than he was in investigating the object of social representation itself.

In this approach, the concept of representational and relational dynamics, already present in the approach initiated by Moscovici (1961), which Doise (1986) has taken up and developed, is central. The idea is that social representation serves as an articulation between various explanatory systems operating at different levels of identity on a continuum that goes from an individual pole to a social pole. Indeed, for Doise (1986), one cannot separate the references to the multiple individual and group processes from the notion of social representation; it is also impossible to separate social representation from the ideological processes that often resonate with each other and whose overall dynamics become social representations (Jodelet, 2003). In other words, representations are constructed according to the social insertions of individuals, and at the same time the categories or groups in which individuals are inserted regulate the social relations between these same individuals or groups of individuals. When the subject changes his/her social position, s/he may—under certain conditions—change his/her social representation insofar as his/her sociocognitive functioning is governed by social principles.

Finally, for Doise (1992), the psychosociological anchoring corresponds to the variations of representations existing between different social groups. These variations result both from the position of a group towards an object and from the links that this group has with other social groups. The insertion in these various groups makes it possible to identify the way in which individuals symbolically place themselves in relation to more personal relationships.

It is thus the articulation of these different notions (metasystem, objectification and anchoring) in a three-dimensional approach (individual, categorial, intergroup) that is at the center of the study of social representations in this approach. The social metasystem that acts on the cognitive organization of individuals' metasystem consists of a set of rules, norms and values, specific to each group, which are derived from the objective structure of social relations. Moreover, the concept of metasystem resonates with Bourdieu's principle of structural homology. Indeed, for Bourdieu, "practical knowledge of the social world […] implements classificatory schemes […], historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). Therefore, the groups at the origin of a representation elaborate the latter according to their

social position and the place they occupy in the social structure, through the intermediary of the metasystem. It also allows researchers to study social representations from different perspectives (individual, categorial, intergroup relations), offering, in theory, a fairly complete view of the object of representation. In summary, for Doise, the analysis of the regulation made by the social metasystem in the cognitive system constitutes the proper study of social representations (Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992). The approach of the organizing principles postulates that the values and norms characterizing the social or categorial participate in the elaboration of the social representations and modulate the relations between the groups. In addition, the perspective proposes a great deal of methodological flexibility through the multiplicity of statistical methods used (factor analysis, inferential statistics, etc.). But how coherent are the theoretical conceptualizations of the socio-dynamic perspective with its methodological approach? Indeed, the unquestionable theoretical contribution of this perspective is somewhat blemished by the monopoly of quantitative methods over it and the exclusively experimentally oriented research applied by the proponents of the "Geneva School" and points to the implicit difficulties of measurement in social representations theory in relation to bibliometric trends.

Critical Aspects

Scholars of Social Representations Theory run into many challenges created by the current climate of the university, which is obsessed with metrics and productivity. Whether those difficulties are the result of implicit factors, ideological incompatibility, negligence or other factors, such as the pressure to publish—we can only speculate. Although there is no conclusive data available, the structural approach and socio-dynamic approaches clearly have an advantage over the qualitative approaches in the neoliberal grant dependent research, obsessed with the positivism of experimentation and quantification. As Ron Roberts notes, commenting on the British context of research:

> "In the UK, the state-sponsored systems of regulation of academic workers, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and Research Excellence Framework (REF), actively support this distinction. Work using anything other than quantitative methods and which enquires into forms of human subjectivity is automatically rated as being of a lower quality by academic

> assessors so thoroughly conditioned into market requirements that they frequently assess the supposed quality of such work without even reading it" (Roberts, 2015).

While the collection phase of the ethnographic approach is essential and uses many different sources and forms of document analysis (public and private archives, press, novels, dictionaries, films, interviews, etc.), the structural and sociodynamic approaches simplify data collection by using very basic approaches such as word associations, multiple choice questionnaires and scales (Wagner, Duveen, Farr, Jovchelovitch, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Markova, & Rose, 1999). Free association, which consists of giving an inductive word to the subject by asking him to associate the words that come to her mind, is commonly used. De Rosa (2005) defines it as the spontaneous production of terms evoked by means of specially chosen stimulus words in relation to the object of study. This approach involves a specific second phase, during which the subjects are asked to organize the elements of the field of representation themselves. This treatment performed by the subject (to be differentiated from the analytical methods used by the researcher) concerns the items associated with a large number of subjects. As a result, this phase cannot be placed in the same session as the collection phase (le Bouedec, 1984).

In relation to this social character for the basis of individual behaviour, Moscovici asserts that even if many will disagree, there is no such case of strictly rational individuality, which according to the greatest authority in the field of social representations, represents the collapse of one of the most widespread beliefs (Gonzalez-Rey, 2008). This statement should serve as a warning against the studying of social representations through individual opinions and questionnaires that rely on conscious and direct responses, a dominant methodological tendency in the study of social representations that Moscovici has analysed critically and with particular emphasis in some of his latest works (ibid). The closed-ended questionnaire is very restrictive in terms of responses that can either be "yes" or "no", or a Likert-type scale on which the subject must position itself (eg "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree").

Data analysis methods are also numerous and varied. They can either identify the elements composing the central core of a representation, the other elements being relegated to the periphery (analysis of similarity – Flament, 1981), prototypical and categorical analysis (Vergès, 1992), induction (Moliner, 1993), or study the central nucleus of social representations by assuming that there are links between inductive word and induced words

and that the subject is able to evaluate them herself and the basic cognitive schemas (Guimelli, & Rouquette, 1992). While Moscovici's approach centered on the formation of representations, Abric's focus is mainly on their structure once established. As for the theory of organizing principles initiated by Doise, it is more focused on an explanatory perspective than the approach of the school of Aix, which is more in a descriptive and content-centered perspective.

There is a widespread tendency to interpret social representations as the mental content of individual minds. At the same time, the Theory stresses the representation's necessary connection to social practices through communication and interaction. "Moscovici regards socio-genesis as a primary criterion of social representation ('elaborating a social object by a community'), because a social representation is an integral part of everyday practice, as an inseparable complex of thinking and behaviour, reflecting (the history of) social practices through which they are also transformed" (Raudsepp, 2005, p. 461). While Abric and Lalhou claim that "Decomposing a SR into elements is a way to understand its nature in relation to these elements. This is a description of the phenomenon, and not its final decomposition into atomic units", (Lahlou, & Abric 2011, p. 20.5), two main points, which have already been the subject of criticism or reflection by the internal and the external field of social representations, are worth underscoring.

The first is the almost exclusive focus on the semantics of language: can one truly "find" a social representation? Doesn't analysis target in vain that which is necessarily beyond grasp (Rouquette, 1995)? The discourse that one collects can indeed only be partial and entire elements of the representation will inevitably escape the researcher, which, of course, poses particularly delicate methodological problems (Monaco, Piermattéo, Guimelli, & Abric, 2012; Rizkallah, & Collette, 2015). For analysis, the researcher, using a set of sociodemographic variables external to the act of enunciation (sex, age, score on a scale, etc.), aims to identify clusters between said variables and linguistic themes. While these methods might have a heuristic value, they are far from exhaustive. For to remain in its socio-constructivist framework, the study of the social cannot simply be limited to an analysis of the social thought without also investigating the continuity of social thinking (Rizkallah, & Collette, 2015). The second ambiguity, evoked by Jodelet, concerns the place given to the "subject" in the work on social representations (Jodelet, 2003), whereby the two concerned perspectives both endorse the importance of the individual. It is worth remembering that although social representations are a socially elaborated and shared form of knowledge,

certain difficulties endure regarding the place attributed to the individual and to that of the cognitive in the emergence of social representations (ibid). Indeed, it can be difficult to conceive of social thought without thinking about the individual, as much as it is impossible to conceive of social representations as graspable through a summation of individual responses. Furthermore, while the concerned authors' theorizing of the social and individual dynamic, from the part of both perspectives to which this section is dedicated, appears to be clear on this issue, epistemological difficulties emerge from their methodological approaches: which reality is being depicted by the results of such studies if the dynamism of social representations is lacking a key element, even in the so-called sociodynamic approach?

Another advantage for both approaches, related to the pressures of serial publishing, is the rate at which such methods produce results, as compared to a longitudinal or ethnographic study. "Funding policies force shorter periods of fieldwork", anthropologist Livia Jimenez argues in, "Trapped in the rat race: slow science as a way of resistance for European anthropology" (Jiménez, 2016, p. 362). But "there is no shortcut for establishing engaged human relations", she maintains, "taking our time is the only way.[…] Grants and funding for research that allow short fieldwork periods are not compatible with ethnographic requirements. […] Unfortunately, the reading of classical ethnographies feels like a nostalgic exercise of admiring how beautifully anthropology was handcrafted in the past" (ibid).

The idea that social representations cannot be studied directly from conscious representations of the person has many methodological consequences that have not yet been dealt with in depth in the literature on the topic. Related to this, Ian Parker asserts in a regretful tone that "social psychology has not learnt the lesson that the result [of a structuralist influence on the study of social representations] is a positivist approach to meaning which conceals within it a phenomenological individualism, [while] postmodern pluralism recognized that it is not reality which is too complex or too rich but that there is always something more to be said" (Parker, 1989, pp. 103-137). Paradoxically, individual subjects are responsible for the encompassing character of social representations as one of the privileged ways of expressing social subjectivity. But it is impossible to study social representations in a space of shared action, institutionalized or not, by omitting subjects that represent an active moment of contradiction, resistance and change within these spaces. This is a change that ought to be studied over time, which is impossible or difficult in the current academic environment. Yet, without understanding this dynamic, it would be very difficult to study social representations in their real complexity. If we do acknowledge that the

neoliberalization of the university is impacting the development of the Theory of Social Representations in the ways this paper argues, what follows is the incompatibility of intellectual freedom with the current system. If it is so, we must critically engage with the dominant socio-economic policies which affect not only our work but society at large. It is by realizing its critical potential and contributing to change that the Theory of Social Representations will regain its legitimacy as the "revolutionary paradigm".

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