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Notes towards a description of Social Representations[1]

SERGE MOSCOVICI
Ecole des hautes,
etudes en sciences sociales,
Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale,
44 rue de la Tour,
75116 Paris,
France

Abstract

The theory of social representations occupies a place apart in social psychology both by the problems it raises and the scale of the phenomena with which it deals. This provokes many a criticism and misunderstanding. Such a theory may not correspond with the model of social psychology as it is defined at present. One attempts however to show that it answers important social and scientific questions, in what it differs from the classical conception of collective representations and, from the very beginning, adopts a constructivist perspective which has spread in social psychology since. Several trends of research have confirmed its vision of the relations between social and cognitive phenomena, communication and thought. More detailed remarks aim at outlining the nature of social representations, their capacity to create information, their function which is to familiarize us with the strange, according to the categories of our culture. Going farther, one insists on the diversity of methodological approaches. If the experimental method is useful to understand how people should think, higher mental and social processes must be approached by different methods, including linguistic analysis and observation of how people think. No doubt, social representations have a relation with the more recent field of social cognition. But inasmuch as the former depend on content and context, i.e. subjectivity and sociability of people, they approach the phenomena differently from the latter. Referring to child psychology and anthropology, one can contend, despite appearances, that it is also a more scientific approach. There is however much to be learned from criticisms and there is still a long way to go before we arrive at a satisfactory theory of social thinking and communication.

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I A MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Before we set out on this lengthy exploratory voyage, let us agree on a straightforward and undeniable point of departure. The phenomenon of social representations was introduced into social psychology as an innovation some years ago. It later became the unifying component of cognitive psychology and is now spreading among other sciences as well. That alone is sufficient justification for its existence. Our field of science should be eager to stake its claim to the phenomenon rather than express more and more reservations towards it. But the fact that Gustav Jahoda devotes such virulent comment to it today demonstrates that the theory of this phenomenon touches upon points that are so fundamental to social psychology that it thereby acquires an almost subversive character. The friendship between us enables him to express himself with great frankness. I will rely on this same friendship in trying for my part to explain the undertaking which has been a good part of my life's work. My sole aim is to make the discussion move ahead, not to convince anyone.

I might begin by recalling the fact that the concepts of representation and of collective representation stand out as landmarks in the scholarly relationships between the two sides of the Channel since the nineteenth century. The British first rejected the concept which seemed too abstruse and vague to them. 'These modes or patterns of thought', Evans-Pritchard wrote, 'which in their totality make up the minds or mentality of a people are what Lévy-Bruhl calls collective representations, an expression in common use among French sociologists of the time, and a translation, I think, of the German *Vorstellung*. It suggests something very abstruse, whereas he means by it little more than what we call an idea, or a notion, or a belief; and when he says that a representation is collective, he means no more than that it is common to all, or most members of a society' (Evans-Pritchard, 1981, p. 124).

This 'little more' undoubtedly was not altogether unsignificant, since the British came to realize the value of the concept and to see in it a great stimulus to the formulation of new problems. As a result, the concept took root in anthropology, sociology, social psychology (Bartlett, 1932) and even in the history of philosophy (Cornford, 1964). There is no escaping the fact that my discussion with Gustav Jahoda cannot be dissociated from a context with a long, complex history, to which we owe more than we realize. Not that there is nothing new under the sun. But, whether old or new, there has always been a sun, I mean this problem of the relationship between mental and material elements in social life.

Ever since the theory of social representations has moved out of the shadows and spread here and there and everywhere, I have encountered two types of criticisms. On the one hand, I have been blamed for the use to which my work has been put, and for this I cannot help but feel some responsibility. If I were to shrug it off, I would deserve not to be taken seriously, as people would think that I did not attribute much importance to the theory. On the other hand, I have been faced with substantive criticism which at the same time challenges the possibility for the theory to serve as a focus of common, cohesive scientific research. These criticisms are not wholly unfounded and raise the possibility that the theory of social representations results from a misunderstanding and that it might not belong to social psychology. We must admit that it was conceived outside the sphere of influence of American social psychology, which has dominated the thinking and scientific style of most of our colleagues. It is a direct product of the classical tradition, according to which a theory

is both an approach, a way of looking at social phenomena, and a system describing and explaining them. Weber's theory, for instance, includes both a view of modern society and an attempt to shed light on its underlying ethical and political mechanisms. In the same way the theory of social representations, on its own modest level, encompasses both a view of communication and everyday thinking in the world of today and an analysis of the anonymous facts that are their counterpart. By insisting on keeping the two aspects separate, one would deprive it of all genuine significance and convert it into a topic that would be of interest only to a small group of specialists.

I can see three reasons for this misunderstanding. First there is the fact that, adopting the classical approach, I viewed social psychology as a social science, along with anthropology, history, sociology, etc. I therefore believed 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. And even less to give an unambiguous definition of each of its concepts. Does anyone know such a definition for general concepts like collective consciousness, charisma, social class, myth – to mention just a few. When I refused to be more specific in defining the phenomenon of social representation, I took these precedents into account. People then expected – they still do – me to open up a field research as if I knew in advance how things would turn out. But I had an additional reason for taking this stance. I wanted to voice my opposition to a requirement that social psychologists think they can satisfy by using the right words and whose general effect is a certain sterility. In the words of an American methodologist, 'The demand for exactness of meaning and for precise definition of terms can have a pernicious effect, as I believe it often has had in behavioral science' (Kaplan, 1964, p. 70).

There has been a disregard for the infinitely varied nature of the things with which we have been dealing, a blind faith that condensing them in a formula is all that is needed to bring them under control. In any case, it seems to me that the only criterion for judging a theory was to determine whether it was meaningful or meaningless, whether or not it helped to see things in a new light. Just as a study of meaningless syllables is not a way to understand language, stringing together well-defined but meaningless notions is not a way to build a science.

In the second place, keeping in mind the religious, political and cultural phenomena that social psychology was supposed to explain, I looked at it as a major field of science. After all, there was a time when men as different as Simmel and Freud, Lévy-Bruhl and Halbwachs, Marc Bloch and Bartlett all identified themselves with this field. The problems that these men raised and passed on to us deal with the most immediate and down-to-earth events of daily life, physical and symbolic exchanges between individuals. As these exchanges are repeated and eventually become routinized, they assume an objective character as institutionalized practices and beliefs and even as collective movements. It was to be the task of social psychology to discover the principles underlying the chain of metamorphoses from subjective to objective elements and vice versa. As a major field of science – obviously – it has to set its sights on a general theory identifying and eventually describing the phenomenon common to all these metamorphoses, just as the market phenomenon is the common ground of all our economic exchanges and power is the explanatory principle of a large number of human relationships. How could a science hope to make useful

contributions and particularly contributions of a general, theoretical nature, without such a phenomenon? Though some may think otherwise, my idea was that social representations might play this role for social psychology. Not only because they are at the core of collective memory (Elias, 1981; Markova, 1982) and of the links men forge together, but because they are the prerequisite for action in general. This is accepted in Durkheim's sociology as well as in Weber's. The latter states, in the preface to his major work that 'these concepts of collective entities which are found both in common sense and in juristic and other technical forms of thought are *representations* in the minds, partly as of something existing, partly as something with normative authority. This is true not only of judges and officials, but of ordinary private individuals as well. Actors thus in part orient their action to them, and in this role such ideas have a powerful, often a decisive, causal influence on the course of action of real individuals. This is above all true where the representations involve normative prescription or prohibition' (Weber, 1978, v.1, p. 14).

Let us move a little – but not much – farther afield and look at historical research. As anyone can see, new insights were gained as soon as one began to study mentalities. To understand the patterns of thought and the imaginary side of life as it took shape in the past, the values and crises of a period, which find their reflection in documents, must be scrutinized attentively. As Le Goff noted, 'The history not of 'objective' phenomena but of the *representation* of these phenomena, the history of mentalities, has its natural source material in the realms of the imaginary' (Le Goff, 1974, p. 86). My purpose is not to inventorize the concept. I merely want to stress this point: the concept of representation, taken over from philosophy, has found its place, in one form or another, in a number of sciences of man.

Historical factors are not sufficient for making us pick out a particular phenomenon or for justifying this choice. Even so they allow us to evaluate its importance and the range of questions associated with it. Social representations, as I have already mentioned, concern the contents of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas that gives coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas and the connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. They make it possible for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviours and to objectify them as parts of our social setting. While representations are often to be located in the minds of men and women, they can just as often be found 'in the world', and as such examined separately. Representations can be preserved on parchment or stone in some forgotten places without having left a trace as such in anyone's mind for thousands of years. We meet them in both guises, as the example of money in our culture shows (Moscovici, 1988). Money is the most common objectification of values of all sorts and of rational arguments. It is a good illustration of what Hume called 'the mind's property to spread itself on external objects'. There is no doubt that what we know about ourselves, about our minds, becomes an integral part of ourselves, or how this mind works, whereas this knowledge would not affect a star or a bird. Representations that shape our relations with society are in turn a component of social organization. And we all realize how much social reality, f.i. drug use, differs depending on whether it is viewed and represented as a genetic defect, a sign of family breakdown, a cultural tradition or a substance required for a group ritual. The long and short of it is that all behaviour appears at the same time as a given and a product of our way of representing it. Here we are reminded of the legend of the Chinese painter who, after painting his masterpiece, stepped into the landscape, walked along the path and disappeared in the

fogbound mountains, in the presence of the imperial spectator who felt the urge of following in his footsteps.

There is no question that I might have picked on a neighbouring and more manageable concept such as the concept of scheme. Without getting into any further detail on this point, suffice it to say that it refers to a simplified representation and is less rooted in the social world. But I was impressed by Bartlett's argument. While making use of it, he 'strongly disliked it', thinking the concept was 'at once too definite and too sketchy' (Bartlett, 1932, p. 201). The results tend to confirm his opinion.

The problem that I thought – and still think – should be solved by this theory has bothered many generations of philosophers and has become a social problem in our time. The multitudinous forms of knowledge and beliefs with which we deal every day are the outgrowth of a long chain of transformations. One could carp endlessly on their lack of logic or their absurdity, but this would lead nowhere. The only way to understand them is to reimmerse them in the actual social laboratory where they take shape, namely the social setting of communication. For the mass media, there is no question but that messages that are passed on by them need to be altered to reach a large audience. The grammar must be altered, the logical trajectory shortened, words changed into images, ideas into metaphors, if the content is to be grasped and understood (Wade and Schram, 1969). The same thing happens when a specialist speaks to an audience of non-specialists, a professor to his students or a doctor to his patients. In the same way, the text of an article is elaborated and written differently for a lecture, an interview, or a topic of talk with colleagues. The style is altered, as well as the reasoning, the examples, the nature of the conclusions to be drawn.

We derive only a small fraction of our knowledge and information from the simple interaction between ourselves and the facts we encounter in the world. Most knowledge is supplied to us by communication which affects our way of thinking and creates new contents. The philsopher Hannah Arendt rightly referred to common sense as a quintessential human attribute. Without it, we could not communicate, we could not even talk (Arendt, 1982). We reexperience this truth every time a new content takes shape in equally new words which belong solely to the language of representations. The four scientific terms 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome', f.i. merge into a single word, the terrifying AIDS, which carries a tremendous symbolic and imaginary meaning with it.

One could argue, for purposes of simplification, that, under certain conditions, especially when we are alone, we think for the sake of thinking, just with our heads. But Hannah Arendt righly objected that 'thinking is a practice that takes place among men rather than as the performance of a single person' (Arendt, 1987, p. 21). Among other persons, therefore, we think in order to talk; we think, as I dared to write, with our mouths (Moscovici, 1984). Or, to put it more abstractly, thinking and arguing amount to the same thing. The metaphor I was using is confirmed by the observations of British psychologists who stress that one acquires concepts altogether differently in daily life than in a laboratory experiment. In daily life, they wrote, 'concepts tend either to be picked up willy-nilly without conscious effort or else to be acquired by word of mouth' (Wason and Johnson-Laird, 1972, p. 72).

Most knowledge and ideas circulating in the mass media and by word of mouth are actually of more or less scientific origin. This is considered a degradation since any idea that is exposed to contact with the mass of humanity is bound to be altered in the process and will perforce rub against other ideas in brains of a different calibre than those from which it originated. The betrayal of science, vulgarization, mass culture, all

these are terms with which this practice is denounced. It is as though knowledge fell into an abyss of ignorance, from the heights of science into the bogs of common sense. When we refer to the intellectual life of the majority, we speak of bias, irrationalism, prejudices and a web of incoherent preconceptions. The conclusion is that this life could be disregarded since, according to Gramsci, it amounts to a 'fragmented, confused, inconsistent view of things, as befits the social position of the masses' (Gramsci, 1978, p. 195).

In my eagerness to get rid of this mistaken view of the intellectual life of the majority and the low esteem in which it is held as a bric-à-brac of words, I set out to investigate the place where social representations were generated, not where scientific knowledge was corrupted and distorted. The place where they linked together to form communication networks vitalizing society. Each of us, to a different extent and from his own niche, contributes to this shared knowledge which is transmitted, evolves and spreads by means of representations, becoming as ubiquitous as a rumour.

The epistemological problem raised by this process becomes a social problem in the world of today, with its permanent scientific and technological revolutions. This can be seen in an everyday paradox. It is correctly assumed that there is a sharp difference between scientific knowledge in the fields of physics, medicine, biology, economics and ordinary knowledge. Beyond differences in intellectual processes and terminological incompatibilities, there is a further obstacle, the difficulty of visualizing the phenomena in question. Practical experience tells us what Newton's prism or a pulley are like, but can we visualize the genetic code, black holes, the unconscious, or monetary parity? Can we understand the implications of a medical exam checking the chromosomal status of a woman who is above the normal child-bearing age? And yet people seem to understand. They make sense of esoteric words and look for the best way to understand inflation, why children worry, how to keep healthy, why the universe is the way it is, and hundreds of other intellectual or practical questions of this sort. Most specialized knowledge will eventually be assimilated by non-specialists – something that is considered, strictly speaking, impossible. And yet such knowledge keeps being exchanged at work, in schools, in doctors' offices, at the dinner table at home, over cocktails. It offers a topic of conversation and makes it possible to reach decisions about vital matters.

So here is the paradox: how do people get so much mileage out of so little knowledge? How can they understand things about which they have neither firsthand knowledge nor experience? They succeed by generating their own body of representations fit for everyday use, and these representations which shape ordinary behaviour are derived from science but linked to it by tenuous threads. And by this modality the ever-changing world of nature becomes their human world (Roqueplo, 1974; Herzlich, 1969, 1982; Moscovici and Hewstone, 1983; Jodelet, 1983, 1987).

Once representations have taken shape, as we know, theories about personality, the brain, the economy, the atom, the computer, etc. are integrated into everyday ways of doing things and shape the social setting in which we interrelate. They form the substratum of common sense and the shape that myths assume in our time. Scientific myths that are derived from psycho-analysis or Marxism, from cosmology or neuro-science, and to which we give full credence. We accomplish this by a process of decoding and transference from one context to another. What in science generally appears as a *system* of concepts and facts is converted in the corresponding representations into a *network* by which a greater or smaller range of concepts and facts of various sorts is held together coherently. The same observation was made by

the physicist Duhem who defined common sense as a capital which is constantly 'transformed and increased. Theoretical science contributes its very great share to these transformations and to this increase of wealth: this science is constantly diffused by instruction, by conversation, by books and periodicals; it penetrates the bottom of common sense knowledge; it awakens its attention to phenomena hitherto neglected; it teaches it to analyze motions which had remained confused' (Duhem, 1962, p. 261).

The problem is highlighted even more effectively in terms of the contrast it reveals between social psychology on the one hand and anthropology and child psychology on the other. The latter fields trace the genealogy of mythic thought to scientific thought or operational and concrete thinking to abstract and rational thinking. The former seeks to understand the inverse movement which leads from science to representations under the impact of communication and the masses. This movement may be more or less pronounced in the different disciplines (Semin *et al.*, 1984), but its direction is undeniable. I am confining myself to social representations insofar as they relate to this epistemological and social problem. But social representations are not limited to this area. Society is constantly producing new representations to motivate action and make sense of human interactions that spring from people's everyday problems. And social representations can lead us to a social psychology of knowledge enabling us to compare groups and cultures. The field keeps widening around the pivotal problem. Without such a pivotal problem, neither a theory nor a scientific discipline can be conceived. Perhaps the indistinctness of social psychology stems to some extent from this fact, for, as Bartlett stated, 'It may be possible for the sociologist to be no psychologist, but the social psychologist must be alert to sociological problems' (Bartlett, 1932, p. 243).

It is apparent that the misunderstanding arose from the gap between the classical view of social psychology – whose contribution was thought to be of greater importance for the social sciences than as a supplement to psychology – dealing with a highly significant phenomenon and seeking to solve an epistemological problem that had acquired social dimensions, and the view of social psychology prevailing today. As a result, the theory of social representations lacks a proper niche, especially in a discipline where phenomena of this kind are nominally (Landman and Manis, 1983) but not genuinely treated as social phenomena. The explanation for this misunderstanding has led me to what may seem like a long digression, but was it not justified by Gustav Jahoda's initial quotation? And even if the idea that there is an era of social representations has gained some ground and is even taken up in this journal (McGuire, 1986) – alas, without any mention of research having been done along these lines over the past twenty years – the reasons for this misunderstanding have nonetheless persisted. For us representations came as a big discovery, a discovery that received its impetus from the naive enthusiasm of all new passions. Yet our naiveness did not affect the lucidity with which we viewed our progress and judged what remains to be accomplished.

II COLLECTIVE AND/OR SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

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Travellers who ventured as far as the frozen regions of the Arctic already described, centuries ago, these sudden apparitions of gigantic mountains rising out of a calm sea

in places where there were none. These apparitions we call fata morgana create the illusion that something exists where there is nothing and lure the unwary explorer to set off towards a constantly receding, ultimately unattainable goal. In Gustav Jahoda's eyes, there is a certain similarity between these fata morgana and the elusive social representations which escape our grasp as soon as we come close to them and think that we have them in our grip. This is why he is disturbed by the transition from the concept of a *collective* to that of a *social* representation. He raises the question whether the two are really separate entities, rather than meaningless terminological distinctions. He need not worry, the change of words is intended to denote a real change of perspective.

Durkheim, as is well-known, aligns representations within a dichotomy opposing individual and collective, person and society, stable and unstable (Durkheim, 1898). He assigns facts to these two different universes, the one requiring a psychological and the other a sociological explanation. This separation may have been unavoidable to affirm the autonomy of the new social science. But when social psychology makes this distinction, it is prevented from looking at the relationship between the individuals and the collectivity and their common ground. The point is to extricate ourselves from a dichotomy where we have to choose between a social entity that is more than the sum of its parts and an individual consisting entirely of internal psychological attributes and reacting to a set of external stimuli.

This is not the main point however. In Durkheim's view, the concept of representation refers above all to a vast class of intellectual forms: science, religion, myths, categories of space and time. It is actually tantamount to the concept of ideas or system, without any effort to spell out its cognitive characteristics in greater detail (Ansart, 1987). It has furthermore a certain degree of invariance and determines the variable perceptions and feelings of individuals. The concept of representation therefore presupposes what we would call today a trickle-down intellectual process. It is collective, on the other hand, insofar as it is grounded in the community where it is shared homogeneously by all members. It is communal, furthermore, to the extent that it has been shared by several generations of individuals and therefore exerts a coercion over them, as is true of all social situations. Whether in the guise of religion, myths or language, it exerts an influence on individuals and reinforces their reciprocal ties in a uniform way. Representation is thus equated with collectivity and in this conception there is a single representation and it is related to a group where no other representation prevails. This leads to its having a static character and to its being linked to a closed society (Berson, 1932).

One comment before we proceed any further. Specifically we must at least recognize that representations are in one fashion or another generated and modified. In Durkheim's conception, this occurs only exceptionally, under unusual circumstances, outside the customary social interactions. We are dealing here with effervescent states, under the impetus of a ritual, in which the society joins together in producing new ideas and feelings. These then are embedded in collective memory and inculcated by education as stable frameworks of communal life. Representations also become 'partially autonomous', with the 'power of reinforcing and repelling each other, forming all kinds of syntheses among them determined by mutual affinities and not by the social setting within which they evolve' (Durkheim, 1967, p. 34). I am simplifying, of course, but these points are well-known.

There is no denying that this way of looking at things is in keeping with a certain reality. An anthropologist like Horton, f.i. can make use of it to understand a

tradition-dominated community in which information is provided by a single one of its members. Surely at one time whole societies shared one and the same representation, gave it credence, and celebrated it by rites and sacrifices. One might add that this remains true for a certain number of sects and one-party states (Deconchy, 1984) which believe that they are the upholders of an unfallible doctrine around which a unanimous consensus prevails. This view does not match or no longer matches the historical reality with which we are familiar. It is unlikely that even in communities where tradition is still dominant, there would be as much uniformity and invariability as anthropologists formerly expected to find (Barth, 1987). Sects and one-party regimes abound today, to be sure, but they constitute only one form of political and religious association among others. In our days, therefore, collective representation as it used to be defined no longer is a general category but a special kind of representation among many with different characteristics. It seems an aberration, in any case, to consider representations as homogeneous and shared as such by a whole society. What we wished to emphasize by giving up the word 'collective' was this plurality of representations and their diversity within a group. But I shall revert to this point shortly.

Other reasons for the change in terminology are to be found in the theory's intrinsic problems. As was my original intention, we at once focused on creative processes, on the generation of new, meaningful contents arising during the transformation of mental and social configurations (Jodelet, 1984; Farr, 1987). In effect, what we had in mind were representations that were always in the making, in the context of inter-relations and actions that were themselves always in the making. That was a prerequisite for linking them with important phenomena in the modern world. And these phenomena, it must be remembered, belong to the realm of social psychology, for, to quote Weber, 'nevertheless the sociologist cannot for his purposes afford to ignore these collective concepts derived from other disciplines' (Weber, 1978, p. 13). Ours, for instance, since he names among these forms of thoughts communal concepts such as the family, the state, the nation, or the representation of what ought to be done or not to be done in a given society. Now for Durkheim and his school, any of these representations is inherently collective, irrespective almost of the interrelations and exchanges concerning it. Each group members already finds it pre-established without his intervention, which gives rise to its coercive character, and he conforms to it without restriction. In that case, one must exclude the possibility of a procedure, a normal mechanism whereby something communal takes shape and is transformed with the participation of all concerned.

Clearly, if one wanted to study how a representation takes shape or how and why a scientific or medical theory is converted into a representation, one needs had to revise the concept. A certain original diversity had to be taken into account and the emphasis shifted to communication, which enables individual thoughts and feelings to converge and allows something individual to become something social. 'It is not so much the individual or group contribution to these representation that allows us to call them social representations; it is the fact that they have been shaped by an exchange and interaction process' (Codol, 1982, p. 2). In fact, it was the need to turn the representation into a bridge between the individual and the social worlds and to link it with a view of a changing society that led to the terminological shift about which Jahoda inquires. It was our purpose to understand innovation rather than tradition, a social life in the making rather than a preestablished one. The failure to make such a

shift earlier explains in part why the concept lay neglected for half a century after its spectacular take-off.

I may be mistaken, but we are probably the first to have taken it up again and updated it as a contemporary phenomenon. For collective, because inculcated by an authority (communality, religious institution, etc.) and almost invariable representations we have substituted social representations: such as were created and communicated by the people, the makers of theories about AIDS, black holes, Marxism, etc.; side by side with those of scientists, doctors, politicians or churchmen, and adjusted to the circumstances. We were also the first to look for them inside human behaviour and realities, as a living trend imbedded in what appears lifeless and even physical. This state of affairs is strikingly illustrated by the tale of Sinbad the Sailor. Travellers land on an island and marvel at the pure spring water and the abundance of fruit in the orchards. Some drink their fill, others bathe. Others again light a fire and prepare their meal. They do not realize that this island is a huge fish that has been asleep for so long in the ocean that trees have grown on its back. Feeling the sting of the fire lit by the travellers, it suddenly rises up and dives down, pulling down everyone with it towards the abyss. Here we have a powerful image suggesting representations that have objectified for so long that we no longer notice them. But that does not prevent their being almost ubiquitously the substratum of everything that we conceive as materially independent and given in social life. Under the impetus of some event or change, these representations resurface. And as everything today is in flux, they make themselves felt even before crystallizing in a specific action or reality.

Let us not make too much of a case about this type of weakness in our forerunners. Still, in order to solve problems that could not have been foreseen by them, we had to rethink representation as a network of interacting concepts and images whose contents evolve continously over time and space. How the network evolves depends on the complexity and speed of communication as well as on the available communication media. And its social characteristics are determined by the interactions between individuals and/or groups, and the effect that they have on each other as a function of the link that binds them (Farr and Moscovici, 1984; Billig, 1987). By de-emphasizing each person's distinctive features and internal details, we can bring out the social characteristics of the total operation, from both the intellectual and the emotional points of view. By analogy, we could think of social representations as being produced by a collective decision committee. Its members cast their votes and can express a broad range of opinions. Each one knows how the others have voted so that he can change his mind, combine opinions. The final decision is the joint effort of the participants and expresses a sense of the meeting. There is no need to reach an explicit consensus or to submit to a rite; as long as the individual initiatives are in line with the social flow, nothing more is needed. Each individual proposition is thus tied in with the action of the group, which can give it a shape that is acceptable and comprehensible for all concerned. In these exchanges, all representations are at the interface of two realities: psychic reality, in the connection it has with the realm of the imagination and feelings, and external reality which has its place in a collectivity and is subject to group rules. The link between them is similar to the one observed by Obereysekere between the public meaning of cultural symbols and the reasons for which people use them for private ends. By studying in detail cases of mysticism and the way people experience their religion, he showed that it was possible to infuse a strong personal meaning into shared symbols which continue to be approved by a

large part of society. As he observes, 'cultural patterns and symbols are put back into the melting pot of conscious uses and refashioned to create a culturally tolerated set of images that I designated as subjective imagery' (Obereysekere, 1981, p. 169). This observation based on a different culture confirms the findings of Claudine Herzlich (1969, 1982) in her work on representations about health and illness. It is confirmed in greater detail by Denise Jodelet's research on the mentally ill sheltered in a village community (1983).

But irrespective of the mental form in question – and the range in our culture extends from science to everyday representations – certain generally accepted contents seem to keep the individual anchored in the collective element. Contents that are shared by a whole society lead each mind to draw its categories from them and these categories impose themselves on everyone. Our society f.i. favours economic contents with respect to social relations or biological contents with respect to the body or illness in general. We rely on these contents in many cases, even at times when they have no connection with the context in which the contents apply. From this viewpoint the content exerts a decisive pressure on our thinking and on the way we represent events and behaviours, because it makes us eliminate certain alternatives by branding them as implausible or uninformative. The British anthropologist Hocart remarks: 'It is because savages interpret our customs psychologically that they think us wicked, or daft, or both' (Hocart, 1987, p. 46). *Mutatis mutandis*, one might say that our attributing economic, utilitarian explanations to many things makes their explanations sound naive, absurd or irrational to us by comparison. In truth, the determinant aspect of the content tends to be disregarded in intellectual processes, though it deserves the greatest attention. From our perspective, a representation always links a cognitive form with a content widely accepted by the group.

There is a last point. According to the classical point of view, collective representations are defined by their opposition to individual representations. From our perspective, this opposition is irrelevant. There are presumably three ways in which representations can become social, depending on the relations between group members. Representations can be shared by all the members of a highly structured group – a party, city or nation – without their having been produced by the group. These *hegemonic* representations prevail implicitly in all symbolic or affective practices. They seem to be uniform and coercive. They reflect the homogeneity and stability that French sociologists had in mind when they called these representations collective. Other representations are the outgrowth of the circulation of knowledge and ideas belonging to subgroups that are in more or less close contact. Each subgroup creates its own version and shares it with the others. These are *emancipated* representations with a certain degree of autonomy with respect to the interacting segments of society. They have a complementary function inasmuch as they result from exchanging and sharing a set of interpretations or symbols. They are social by virtue of the division of functions and the information brought together and coordinated by their means. Representations about mental illness (Jodelet, 1983; Herzlich, 1982) fall in this category: here the concepts and experiences of doctors, paramedical professionals and laymen are brought together with those of the population at large. Last, there are representations generated in the course of social conflict, social controversy, and society as a whole does not share them. They are determined by the antagonistic relations between its members and intended to be mutually exclusive. These *polemical* representations must be viewed in the context of

an opposition or struggle between groups and are often expressed in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor. The social representation of Marxism in France, f.i., circulates in several versions, each of them shaped by the social polemic between believers and non-believers, communists and liberals, etc.

These distinctions emphasize the transition from the concept of collective representation as a uniform view to a differentiated view of social representations, which is closer to our reality. The contrasts between several kinds of social relations are more significant than the one between the social and individual element. That is precisely what I wanted to stress by my choice of words. A representation undoubtedly shifts from one realm to the other as it takes shape, and the point of view of the observer plays an important part. But these transformations are a crucial symptom of the state of a society.

(2)

When we speak of social representations, we have in mind a network of concepts and images tied together in various ways according to the interconnections between the persons and media that serve to establish communication (Markova, 1987). Such a network of concepts exists today with respect to the computer, which is now a dominant image, or what we might call the figurative nucleus of certain representations. Here is what one can read in the *Scientific American*: 'Modern digital computers are late-comers to the world of computation. Biological computers – the brain and nervous system of animals and human beings – have existed for millions of years, and they are marvelously effective in processing sensory information and controlling the interactions of animals with their environments. Tasks such as reaching for a sandwich, recognizing a face or remembering things associated with the taste of madeleines are computations just as multiplications and running video games are' (Tank and Hopfield, 1987, p. 104). The authors are obviously associating familiar elements, such as reaching for a sandwich, with less familiar ones, like running video games. They present computation both as a visible behaviour and an abstract operation. They fuse the two elements by a reference to a memory shared by the readers, that is, Proust's madeleine in his *Remembrance of Things Past*. Here we have a special cognitive structure which constitutes a representation. But it derives its meaning from the fact that the concept of the computer is one shared by our culture and can thus be converted from a specific device to a general model for the brain and nervous system. The computer is referred to as the endproduct of a sort of biological evolution that began with organic computers and led up to inorganic computers. You might object that this is a matter of scientific evidence, and that the manner in which we represent it and share this representation makes no difference. The best answer to this objection is Hocart's: 'Everyone agrees that savages do not believe in ghosts because they see them, but they see them because they believe in them. But it occurs to few to say that we do not believe in our principle of intertia because it is self-evident, but that it is self-evident because we believe in it; or that our economic law of supply and demand is to a great extent created by our belief in it, and not our belief created by the law' (Hocart, 1987, p. 42).

This is true all the more when our brains and nervous systems are viewed as biological computers, while technical computers tend to reproduce only a small fraction of the brain's capacity. And our faith in something, in the last analysis, is a

representation buttressed by the confidence and practice of some human group. From that perspective, believing in ghosts or believing in machines has the same roots. Donning momentarily the black robe of a judge, Gustav Jahoda warns me in his comments that I repeatedly contradict myself when I give representations this specific cognitive meaning and a more general significance. I might be tempted to reply with a Spanish philosopher's dictum: 'If a person never contradicts himself, this means that he has not said anything'. And this holds true all the more for a theory. But I believe he is mistaken about where the contradictions manifest themselves, and I fail to see their bearings in the question that concerns us here. Anyone patient enough to look through my writings will note that their guiding thread is the enigma of change and creativity. Am I contradicting myself when I stress the weight of memory and the inertia of feelings and concepts in the genesis of representations? I do not think that this is the case, inasmuch as they always bear the imprint of this tension between the tendency to maintain and the tendency to create new things. The protective layers of images and language act as filters for all the incisions we make in the present and often convert our most powerful revolutions into superficial alterations. We are fond of separating what should be kept together: conformity and innovation, resistance to change and change, relationships within and between the groups. On the contrary, the two terms of an opposition can be understood only in relation to each other. Recognizing this allows us to gain a better understanding of the strength with which archaic ideas and emotions, which keep coming back and dominating us, make us draw back from innovations. The very fact that we keep inventing fictitious pasts and chimerical recollections to sidetrack an innovation is an indication of this tension inherent in social life.

But Jahoda stresses another contradiction which I find astonishing. This involves a rather elementary epistemological question, about which I probably failed to make myself clear. I must therefore repeat my arguments for the sake of clarification. In the sociology of Durkheim and his school, representations serve to explain social phenomena. This is a well-known fact, and they have been blamed for their idealism. Generally speaking, explanatory concepts are likely to be abstract and ill-defined, as was true of the gravitational force in mechanics, the atom in physics, the gene in biology and social classes in Marxism. Their existence was assumed to be proven and then many things were explained by their intervention, although they themselves remained as obscure as ever. Let us say that they were figments of thought rather than real entities, to use a rather antiquated phrase. It was known what each of them *did*, and nobody cared what each of them *was*. But once something is conceived and endowed with an explanatory power, one must try to advance further and grasp the reality of the force or the phenomenon in question. Progress can be made no other way.

To the best of my knowledge, we have not fathomed the exact nature of gravity or of social classes even today. The gene and atom, on the other hand, have yielded a large part of their physico-chemical enigma. We are therefore not 'departing from Durkheim' or 'by contrast' to him when we set out to unscramble the structure and internal dynamics of social representations, once we have recognized their impact on society. I insisted that social psychology was responsible for this task, just as quantum physics had the task to unravel the structure and dynamics of the atom which, for twenty-five centuries, had remained an abstract entity.

Once this point is clarified, there is nothing odd about assigning an explanatory function to social representations in our discipline. Nothing odder than attributing

such a function to elementary particles in nuclear physics or to genes in molecular biology. Contrary to what Jahoda claims, there are not two contradictory versions of the explanation. In actuality, discontinuity on the theoretical level never precludes continuity on the research level, which is intended to gain a deeper insight into a phenomenon.

(3)

Everyone keeps saying that we must take the social dimension of psychological phenomena into account and grasp them in that context. But there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, between the principles one upholds and the realities that one investigates. In short, it is easier said than done. And anyone who attempts to carry out this programme exposes himself to being blamed for the very mistakes that he has tried so hard to avoid. I can only say 'just so' about nearly everything Jahoda writes about the 'group mind'. In any case, I do no feel under attack on that score. The term 'thinking society' that I used refers to something much more modest and empirical. On the one hand, the term was intended as a protest against the widespread view of an 'unthinking society'. For many believe that only individuals think and that groups think badly, if at all. There is a tendency to say that the majority of society merely reproduces and imitates the thought of its elites, its avant-gardes, and nothing more. 'Strangely enough', a French sociologist writes, 'the Marxist and functionalist elements in sociology, by trying to give prominence to economic developments, minimized or abandoned the category of representations ... The masses as a whole were *naturally* infantile or ignorant, so that truth could come only from the outside' (Maffesoli, 1985, p. 81). But there is no point in repeating what I said earlier.

On the other hand, to simplify, this concept means that one should view society as a thinking system, just as one can view it as an economic or political system. Just as one visits laboratories to investigate how the scientific community produces facts and theories, one might visit these other kinds of laboratories, namely factories, hospitals, etc. to understand how other communities produce their facts and representations. In other words, the question social psychology is asked to resolve is: 'What is the nature of a thinking society?' while general psychology must determine: 'What is the nature of a thinking individual?' In the former case, we must add other organs to brains, that is, means and institutions of communication, the material repositories of knowledge, and the rules of exchange and consensus.

The birth of philosophy is always exemplified by Socrates wandering about the market places of Athens, engaging in discussion with craftsmen, merchants or strangers in transit. In its early days, the Royal Society was a club that met regularly in pubs before becoming an official institution. But we know many kinds of meeting-places, cafés, pubs, parish halls, drawing-rooms, etc., where individuals express their sociability by talking together. In these special places, thinking is not a mere luxury but a shared effort, in which political, religious, personal or psychological topics are scrutinized. The outcome of all these exchanges then circulates in the adjoining chambers of a city or country. We are dealing here with more or less successful versions of what used to be called 'thinking societies'. These are the settings where social representations take shape and from which they spread like rumours. For society at large they have an analogous function as paradigms in the scientific community. Why not investigate them on the spot, as one studies the production of

objects in a factory, or research techniques in a research centre? I cannot go into details here, but social psychology must take into account these ways and means of producing knowledge, all the more so because social representations involve a division of labour that grants them a certain autonomy. We know that a category of persons exists whose profession it is, so to speak, to manufacture them. In their ranks one must include all those who have the task of spreading scientific and artistic knowledge, doctors and social workers, media and political marketing specialists. These professionals are in many respects the modern equivalents of the myth makers of older societies.

The reason representations are social is not only that they have a common object or that they are shared. It is also that in our society they have a certain autonomy and are the outgrowth of a codified know-how that enjoys an undeniable authority. This know-how deserves more attention than it receives, for these specialists use methods that presuppose a very valuable knowledge about the way the mind works and a coherent view of the collective aspect of society. The long and short of it is that my term 'thinking society' is empirical and modest and has nothing to do with the group mind fallacy that lives in symbiosis with the corresponding individual mind fallacy.

Nothing should surprise us in this kind of criticism. And if Gustav Jahoda, who knows better, leaves the impression that there is a simple solution to the tension between tradition and innovation, or a black and white answer to the question of the group mind, that has to be accepted. To grapple with such problems and commit a few sins, as Geertz, Harré or I have done, makes science exciting. The only proper response to the group mind fallacy is to forget about it. In short, to let it die of old age, as most questions do when they have lost their fecundity.

III ON THE COMPARISON WITH OTHER NOTIONS OR THEORIES

(1)

The main aim of the theory of social representations is clear. By focusing on everyday communication and thinking, it hopes to determine the link between human psychology and modern social and cultural trends. It has begun to arouse interest, stimulating research in a number of places, with the notorious exception of the United States. What explains this interest? The theory undoubtedly legitimates concern for social aspects and enriches the phenomenology of our discipline, which had become extremely meagre. It is better suited for dealing with specific situations than other theories that were conceived for more abstract and on the whole artificial set-ups. Because of this extension, in all likelihood, people are beginning to notice numerous points of convergence between this theory and various currents such as ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, etc. Since Jahoda insists on my explaining this convergence and justifying my use of this or that concept, I should like to make a general statement, both on the tone and substance of his criticisms. He briefly comments on the weak response to my work in 1961 beyond the small circle of researchers in Aix-en-Provence and Paris with whom collaboration has been maintained ever since. The notes that I published in the *Annual Review of Psychology* in 1963 met the same fate. 'Few would have guessed at that time that it was a seminal work', he admits.

The thought occurs to me that part of his arguments rest on the feeling that he missed out the potentialities of the theory at that time and failed to benefit from it. It seems rather odd to me that I am blamed for not looking to models postdating my contribution for validation, when others relied on my contribution to liberate themselves from the dominant models that I criticized. I have trouble understanding how the development of research and theories in the field of cognitions, attitudes and the analysis of common sense can buttress arguments against my positions – which in fact are not only mine – when these developments merely catch up with them. Instead of asking me to be more modest, should not Gustav Jahoda, on the contrary, vouchsafe me the right to fair comments, even if they are critical, by virtue of my prior claim to this approach? The cognition models had to undergo the transformation of the new look and the so-called cognitivist revolution, as Markus and Zajonc (1985) point out. Just to get back to what? To the framework that was proposed in 1961! Our two American colleagues show how the behaviourist S – R model grew increasingly complex as it went through the S – O – R schema, where the organism occupies a variable mediating position between the stimulus and the response, to end up with the O – S – O – R schema, where the subject, who is designated as organism (much could be said about this terminology) is expected to define the S and the R by his constructive activity. Which is precisely what the $S_R < {}^{S}_{R}$ model proposed at that time, thereby asserting the constructive role of social representations that we share as active subjects and makers of our society. To the best of my knowledge, the concept of construction itself was not yet recognized in social psychology at that time!

The same comments apply with respect to attitudes, for which it is said that social representations are analogues and substitutes, in short not to be differentiated from them in a system. Even if this were true, that would imply a broadening of the definition of attitudes to the point where they have the same characteristics as social representations. To reach this point required an evolution (McGuire, 1986; Fraser, 1986) resulting in a definition of attitudes as (1) socially shared, (2) endowed with a content, and (3) forming a system. I am quite willing to admit the resemblance, provided that this resemblance is ascribed to a realignment of the analysis of attitudes in the course of this research. I was therefore surprised when Colin Fraser wondered: 'But why should the bold new enterprise of social representation research wish to tie itself to such familiar and perhaps tired notions? What will be learned about social representations by conceiving of them as a set of attitudes?' (Fraser, 1986, p. 9).

Well, perhaps nothing will be learned from it. On the other hand, to a certain extent, social representations made their entrance on the scene of social psychology to breathe new life into this tired notion and broaden it. There can be no uncertainty about this point: the interconnections between them have been stressed repeatedly (Doise, 1982; Farr, 1984; Jaspar and Fraser, 1984). And attitudes have become an essential dimension for anyone who attempts to define a social object. When we represent an object, we take a stand towards it at the same time. The most harmless object, a glass of water, a tree, will be imagined and described from the standpoint of at least favourable or unfavourable reactions to it. As a matter of fact, this is inevitable, inasmuch as the language we use in daily life as well as in philosophy is never neutral. When Bergson tried to represent two kinds of society, describing one as closed and the other as open, he immediately induced a reserved attitude towards the former and a congenial one towards the latter.

It is not at all surprising therefore that attitudes and social representations are so closely knit. The former have the latter as their precondition. We can become

favourable or unfavourable towards something only after we have perceived and evaluated it in a different way. This concluding observation means that we are in no position to choose between attitudes and representations, since we cannot use the former without the latter (Fodor, 1981). Beyond that, it is is a matter of mere words and a misplaced striving for originality. To end the matter, I believe that Deutscher (1984) or Harré (1984), whose concerns are very similar to mine, disentangled these questions of the relatedness of the various approaches in an excellent way.

(2)

Although Jahoda's comments are short, they call for detailed replies. He piles up a large number of questions that are quickly raised and no less quickly settled in an off-hand way. How could I have proceeded to show the underlying connection of so many concepts, among them ideology? In the vast literature that deals with ideology, it is treated exclusively as a system of representations (Althusser, 1972, Dumont, 1972; Doise, 1982). As to the self-contradiction with which I am charged, it is more a matter of words than of substance. The analytic framework of the chapter in question was general. Why did I not mention ideology in connection with Marxism? Was it because 'it would not readily be fitted into the scheme?' On the contrary, it would have fitted it only too easily. I considered it more fruitful, of greater scientific and even political interest, to look at Marxism as a social representation. In other words, in terms of its having become in a few countries (France, Italy, probably Spain) a part of the culture, of the ways of thinking and acting of a large number of people in their everyday life. Or at least a shared reference point for interpreting events and relationships in their society.

Berger and Luckmann's work is one of those that cannot be treated in an off-hand way. The reproach that I treated it in this manner is undeserved. I limited my remarks about it to noting that the principle of social reality construction takes on an arbitrary meaning and has no empirical prospects, as long as the representations of the members of a society are left out of account. I stressed particularly that what the authors identifiy as a field of research to be opened up by sociologists had already been widely investigated by French social psychologists before the publication of their work. In truth it is a matter of pointing out possibilities for a common ground between our disciplines, which have been out of touch for many years. But nowhere do I claim that the theory of social representations is already tested or that it is empirically well-founded. As to Schutz, he is a 'forerunner' who has been resurrected only recently and whose role it is to validate *a posteriori* the anti-functionalist consensus in the social sciences.

I must admit that I am struck by the animosity with which my critic goes about robbing this theory of its distinctiveness. Of course he is neither the first nor the only one to take this stand. I was already familiar with people's mentioning it and then referring back at once to Durkheim, to demonstrate that there was no need to look at our research. As though referring back to Democritus dispensed one from looking at subsequent atomic theories and especially at the work of atomic theorists since his time. As if, I might add, adopting the concept of social representations were equivalent to adopting Durkheim's sociology and sharing his views on it. Gustav Jahoda has taken another tack. It consists in charging me with having thought up and opened a field of research ahead of other social science research currents and independently of them. Instead of admitting that this convergence validates and sanctions the

distinctiveness of the theory of social representations, he considers it a sign of its redundancy and uselessness. In his opinion, perhaps everything that bears its label could be 'reported without the label of social representation and its absence would have made little, if any difference'.

Jahoda is free to think what he wants, but it is a fact that the label was there prior to other labels and that its presence made and continues to make a difference. Jahoda's stance, which has nothing to do with either knowledge or criticism, will not stop me from continuing to build up a theory whose approaches are already 'taken for granted and commonly shared'. Nor will it prevent me from wishing to keep intact its distinctiveness in the common research effort that tends to confirm rather than invalidate the orientation it has followed from the start. A family resemblance is not the same as an identity, as seems to have escaped our critic – and not him alone. But let us forget about these polemics and finally come to the point which might be the beginning of a dialogue. For Gustav Jahoda, notwithstanding his exaggerations, is concerned with the same questions as we and realizes what difficulties stand in the way of their solution.

IV GETTING FAMILIARIZED WITH STRANGENESS

(1)

Representations meet a great variety of social needs. Some of these needs are of a purely intellectual or cognitive (to use the consecrated term) order. They can be envisaged as *Vorstellungen*, substitutes or reflections of what is in people's minds. Others, of a practical sort, involve rituals and actions carried out in common. These are *Darstellungen*, wholly public performances and stagings of matters of a social sort. Just as a play performed on the stage of a theatre or a ceremony supplies a representation in which the group can recognize itself or a power manifests itself. Either way, representations shape what is loosely termed a social consciousness, the consciousness of a period, a class or a nation as a whole. Awakening consciousness about a problem, an historical situation, does not mean revealing something hidden but creating representations that make this revelation possible Yet this consciousness has not, to my knowledge, been deciphered adequately. Even so, it makes us realize the extent to which we must change our perspective. As a French physicist said, scale is what creates the phenomenon. There is a world of difference between representations envisaged at the person-to-person level and at the level of the relations between individuals and group, or at the level of a society's common consciousness. At each level, representations have a completely different meaning. The phenomena are related but different.

To the question: 'Why did Mary eat her steaks?' the two explanations 'because they were delicious' and 'because they were too raw' supply causes that lie outside the thoughts of the person who ate. One can disregard the fact that this judgment implies rules of gastronomy, that Mary is a young woman, and what her reasons are for answering in this way. This is a private matter which concerns only a few people, among them a logician and an experimenter. But the case is entirely different when we investigate a phenomenon that has collective implications. Here we have a hospital patient who is being interviewed by a journalist and replying to a question of general concern. The patient says: 'Listen, I've got this theory about AIDS. The disease is

man-made. It's a world-wide government plot to exterminate the undesirable. They want to commit genocide on us' (*New York*, Nov. 30. 1987). Here too we have an explanation that relies on an external cause. However, it immediately registers the relationship between individual and society and the state. It is determined by the context in which the patient, a veteran of the Vietnam War, is perceived, a context in which he seems to be an undesirable. His reply presupposes a content that was left unstated, the representation of a society in which undesirables are put away and then eliminated by whatever methods are convenient. Disease is one such method, hence its 'man-made' character. It thereby acquires a political rather than an organic character; and a person struck by such a disease appears then as a victim, not a patient. In fact, the interviewee started out with: 'I've got this theory'. He has thus elaborated a representation, which has actually been circulating for some time as a rumour. In this sense, it is a social representation, and the interview unintentionally amplifies this social character.

There is no need to amplify this point to stress the fact that on the scale where we usually encounter representations, mental and social aspects take on a different air (Moscovici, 1987) than they do on the level of one or two individuals. It is obvious why the problem-solving model is inadequate for studying these aspects. It is common practice in social psychology to look at cognitive phenomena in daily life from this angle, this is, as puzzles and pragmatics (Turnbull, 1986). The scientific model is transposed to the study of 'lay' theories. But the carry-over is incomplete since scientists solve their enigmas in the context of a paradigm shared by the scientific community, whose equivalent for us would be a social representation.

Anyhow, in this light, individuals are expected to solve problems, spurred by the urge to 'seek the truth' and make correct judgments on facts (Higgins and Bargh, 1987). With the rectification, however, that people perceive and think about the social world in a different way than they would if they relied exclusively on observation and rules of logic. In short, they think less correctly about the stock market than about ocean tides, about the signs of power than about the signs of rain. But actually, when we move to a different scale, we also move to a different model. When we are talking about individuals, it is possible to make a clearcut distinction between what is correct and what is incorrect, what is normal and what is abnormal. This is true because a society or scientific community has legitimate definitions for the criterion according to which something can be considered true, normal or real. The same cannot be done for groups, societies or cultures. When a war is said to have begun through a miscalculation or the concentration camps are called an error of Stalin's with respect to socialism, that is a misuse of language. It presumes that one knows the true path of history, just as one knows the true trajectory of planets. The motive for this misuse is to create the impression that these events were mere accidents. They could be corrected, as one corrects an experimental error or an equation in a theory.

As I stressed at the very beginning: we are dealing with knowledge whose objective it is to 'create a reality'. Communication is not an expression of thoughts and feelings secondary to these thoughts and feelings. The action underlying them is a communicative action, even though it may be instrumental or purely ritualistic. It modifies or creates a reality and is converted into a practice which objectifies thoughts and feelings as soon as they are communicated and shared. Our everyday life is interwoven with that of other people who act on us. The reason we know our life is that we create it day by day.

We must therefore rid ourselves of the idea that representing something consists in imitating by thoughts or language facts and things that have a meaning outside the communication that expresses them. There is no social or psychological reality 'as such', no transparent image of events or persons unconnected with the person who creates the image. For this very reason, the person who represents them at the same time represents himself or herself in and by them. It therefore seems difficult to claim that their knowledge results from the solving of a problem or from a recognition. This paradigm does not apply to everyday situations and exchanges. The Russian literary critic Bakhtin uses the dichotomy: 'thought about the world and thought in the world' (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 162). When we move from representations as means of recognizing things to representations as means of constructing reality, we move from thought about the world to thought in the world. In these dimensions, a representation leaves its mark both on language and practices. This mark does not constitute a side-effect of mental and social functioning. The act of acquiring knowledge never takes place in a vacuum; it exists and can be recognized only by its outcome, in what is directed towards others and preserved. Mental states that are shared do not remain mental states, they are communicated, take shape, tend to materialize, to become objects. In that light, they acquire power. There is a 'power of ideas' (Moscovici, 1988) that makes itself felt in its highest form when representations acquire the intensity of a belief.

In short, what is represented and how it is represented is given a meaning in terms of the position of the person who enunciates it. When someone takes clearcut positions and has firm values, the role of concepts and images constituting a representation is truly crucial. Rather than using them as symbols, as means of interpreting real observations, people see elements of reality in them, and their conceptual and figurative components become secondary in relation to the main concern: acting and communicating. They see nothing but the object or being that they have in mind and they discuss it as though it made one with the concepts and words. By stating that representations must be viewed from this perspective of an almost material effectiveness, I am restating something that has already been pointed out without receiving enough attention: 'It is time', Hocart wrote, 'that those feelings and ideas which, never embodied in metal or stone, live in the mind alone, should be acknowledged as realities as real as those that can be touched and capable of being treated with the same rigor as anything that falls under our senses' (Hocart, 1987, p. 60).

There are two ways in which a representation can constitute something real. On the one hand, like language or symbols, it is *performative*; by virtue of being shared, it defines a given situation. We behave towards a charismatic leader as though he had a definite quality. This puts him under the obligation of presenting himself and speaking as is prescribed for him. On the other hand, a representation is *constructive* to the extent that it selects and relates persons, objects in such a way as to meet the stipulation of the group, enabling it to communicate and act in keeping with shared concepts and images. The representer is thus present in the thing represented, as money is present in the object that is bought and sold and to which it attributes a value.

It was shown that one's representations determine the cause one attributes to a given illness and the treatment to be applied. A clinician trained in psychoanalysis will localize the patient's problem in his life history; a psychiatrist will see it as a genetic disorder or the result of the patient's current situation. In the former case, the tendency

will be to change the patient and protect society. In the latter, the inverse tendency will assert itself: an effort will be made to protect the patient and change the social situation (Batson, 1975). All of this presumes a selection and creation of information, which in turn determine the reality in which people live.

When a theory is disseminated and changed into social representations, it has analogous effects. It generates situations and informations that confer a man-made reality to it. The theory of the split brain was popularized and caught the imagination to such an extent that it not only served as a way of interpreting facts but also became a source of daily practices. Two American authors summarize its evolution in these terms: 'Thus the perennial tug-of-war between emotion and reason, 'heart' and 'mind', Freud's 'primary process' (primitive, mythic thought, as in dreams) and 'secondary process' (rational analysis) seemed to have a real embodiment in the twin hemispheres. Joseph Bogen was among the first to hail the dual brain as a fundamental human dichotomy ... A widespread cult of the right brain ensued, and the duplex house that Sperry built grew into the K. Mart of brain science. Today our hairdresser lectures us about the Two Hemispheres of the Brain and mail order pop-psych urges us to awake the latent creativity of our neglected right hemisphere. We even met a psychologist who runs a workshop for people who are sloppy or neat because of right- or left-hemisphere dominance and who are mated to a person with the opposite tendency. Is any of this true? Well, some of it' (Hooper and Teresi, 1986, p. 224).

This example illustrates how people transform a piece of knowledge, create information that confirms it, and simultaneously objectify it in their everyday practices. We have clarified this phenomenon in several of our studies (Moscovici, 1961; Herzlich, 1969; Jodelet, 1984; Mugny and Carrugati, 1985). What we took as premises for our research appears as the conclusion of a set of experiments carried out independently: 'More crucial attention', the authors write, 'must clearly be paid to the ways in which perceivers *create* and *construct* the information in addition to the ways they *process* that information. When individuals are processing a piece of information that they have created as a group, what happens 'out there' may well be as much the *effects* of our perception of those events as they are *causes* of these perceptions' (Snyder et *al.*, 1977, p. 664). The term perception is inadequate in this context and makes sense only because these facts were considered outside the social context.

All this leads us to believe that 'creating' a reality means that we generally experience and think in terms of 'potential' worlds which are set in 'real' worlds. What I mean is that our worlds, such as they are or such as we think they are, are partly constituted by recollections of what they used to be, mixed in with anticipations, calculations, and alternatives that bring us together and make us act. The greater the extent to which a representation of this world is shared with other people, the more this world which is of our making, 'in here', seems to be autonomous, existing on its own, 'out there'.

In effect, social representations, to rephrase a common expression, are ways of world making. There is nothing arbitrary in this process, since the regularities of thought, language and life in society all act together to delimit the possibilities. That is why the concept of construction, once it is trivialized, loses its exact, emancipating character, if it is envisaged as a simple product of talking and of consensus among individuals. It anything goes, then the act of constructing is less a creative liberty of reality than an illusion about the conditions of this liberty.

(2)

We still have a long way to go before we understand the psychology of cognition, in which creating reality is more important than testing reality. This view of what goes on in the world entails setting up provisional concepts to apprehend the phenomena. Jahoda is aware of this need. He presents the ones I have suggested as though I had done nothing but jot them down, without rhyme or reason. The opposition between a consensual and a reified universe may seem odd or disturbing. Or it might be assimilated to such opposites as spontaneous and organized, formal and informal, etc. But does it fill any intrinsic need? When we adopt the model in which thinking creates reality, we must spell out the categories defining this thinking. Every representation, to be sure, takes shape in a culture that divides persons from things and that imposes a framework on all thinking and behaviour in a set of societies. For a long period of time, this was the case with respect to the framework defining the sacred and the profane, the supernatural and the natural. The framework was reinforced by human actions and interrelations, which submitted to certain imperatives of the mind and feelings that went along with it. In modern society, the representations that have taken the place of myths and popular knowledge constitute our world in a different framework.

Under the lead of science, one might imagine that the categories of rational and irrational have taken over some of the functions and even of the prestige of the sacred and the profane. They encourage a model of human nature as a mechanism that solves problems and then tests the solutions against reality. But these categories apply mainly to the individual. As to those that we shape in common, we might say what Lévi-Strauss asserted about myths: 'To be elevated into a myth, a creation must be more than an individual creation' (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 56). They still bear the mark of an antagonism between human and non-human meanings, between what belongs to us as human beings and what seems to come from outside us, what seems to be objectified. More generally, there is a certain antagonism between the consensual category to which the former belongs and the reified category to which the latter belongs. And representations reflect the gap which separates these two categories.

Let us come back to the case of the split brain. Moving beyond the findings of biology and genetics, people have ventured to consign the right-hand brain to the category of the consensual, and the left-hand brain to the reified category. I am not saying that this is erroneous, but the representations contains a dichotomy whose content can be expressed in tabular form:

Left hemisphere	*Right hemisphere*
analytic, deductive	dialectic, synthetic
exclusive (either/or)	inclusive (both/and)
convergent	divergent
order from order	order from disorder
system, text	environment, context
words, numbers, letters	models, plans, pictures
literal	figurative
logistic	recognition
objective	subjective

This may all sound like a just-so story. Yet, in view of its wide dissemination, which has made it become part of our common view of things, the question arises what made

it fall into place in this way. We are then confronted again by the above-mentioned framework and the categories that define it, exerting their compelling influence on thinking and images with the force of evidence.

One often wonders why people are so cavalier about validating their judgments, so forgetful of statistical rules, and so unconcerned about correcting their mistakes. It would seem less peculiar if one looked at people not only as biological organisms but also as social organisms. The question arises in what sort of universe dilemmas are formulated and what is the position in this universe of the people who must resolve them. In a consensual universe, the communicative function of thought is highly important, since it contributes to the exchanges that are constantly taking place between people about events that influence their lives or arouse their curiosity. It allows a continuous flow of deliberations between persons whose opinions and moods are always in flux. Conversation gives a human meaning to what matters to them, preferably outside the social hierarchy. 'In familiar speech, since speech constraints and conventions have fallen away, one can take a special, unofficial, volitional approach to reality' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 97). Under these conditions, representations assume a configuration where concepts and images can coexist without any attempt at uniformity, where uncertainty as well as misunderstandings are tolerated, so that discussion can go on and thoughts circulate.

People are producers and users of representations all in one. There is a crucial factor underlying their relations, namely confidence. The same holds true in political and economic life. Paper money, checks, or other symbols are passed on freely, under a thin fictitious cover. Intrinsically valueless paper derives its value from something else which is intangible. Similarly, we do not check on the information given by a colleague or friend, the main thing is that it sounds correct. In the consensual universe, these representations have a *fiduciary* truth, which is generated by the trust we place in information and judgments when we share them with other people.

In the reified universe, we must supply a definite structure and consistency to our knowledge of people and social events. Thinking, in this context, means organizing and incorporating each special example into a more comprehensive framework. This calls for a hierarchy and specific communication rules which organize information into a unified or even a unique representation. This representation becomes a base of operations and shapes official reality, from which irrelevant features and troublesome alternatives have been banished. The brain may be described as a computer, but it is impossible to reify thinking as such, nor can it be defined by operations that are basically mechanical. In this universe, all truth is *legal* truth in that it is confirmed by its conformity to prescribed procedures and terminology. Rules are trusted, not persons, even if the conditions for applying the rules are not fulfilled.

The theory of social representations has adopted in large part the perspective of the consensual universe, which means that the reified universe is also taken into account. Both universes act simultaneously to shape our reality. When we speak of the alienation of man, of bureaucratic abuses, we have in mind a reified universe confronting a human being living in the consensual universe. And the contrast between these two universes finds an expression in the distinction between soft and organic medicines, clinical and experimental psychology, soft and hard sciences, narrative and paradigmatic thought (Zukier, 1986). For a purportedly culture-blind social psychology (Pepitone, 1986), our categories are superfluous. The biological equipment of human beings, which is its reference point, does not vary from culture to

culture. But representations are envisaged on a scale where cultural differences do matter in shaping the human family and its world. Once these differences in categories have been recognized, the question arises; what purpose is served by represention in general?

(3)

To answer this question, I proposed the hypothesis that all representations arise from our need to turn the strange into something familiar. Our attention is caught by oddities, incongruous things, fascinated by the monstrous, the unusual, natural catastrophes, miracles of science or the creations of artists and novelists. Science itself rejects the trivial in its theories and experiments. Realizing how deeply rooted this tendency is and how it is reinforced by the customary demands for novelty, I was hesitant to advance the above hypothesis. I was led to do so recently, in the light of a set of studies addressing questions such as: What grip do representations have on our feelings? What affective urge must they fulfil? What satisfaction can be expected from them?

To cope with this kind of material, one does not turn to books for answers or concepts. In fact, one avoids them, to keep an open mind, a freshness of thought in looking for a solution. Despite Jahoda's remonstrances, I therefore have no qualms about my failure to read Schutz's work or about not having referred to Bartlett, in whose work I subsequently found much that supported my conclusions. Jahoda admits that he finds my hypothesis interesting, but this step forward is followed by another step backward. He insists that I do not give sufficient evidence to show that the unfamiliar is disturbing, if not threatening. I agree with him there, but I do not think one needs to list all the known facts when stating a proposition. Some indications seemed adequate to me. To confine myself to his example: I do not think that children's fear of unfamiliar persons or objects can be separated from the 'idea' that they have of them. The magic power of strangeness and night, the fear of the dark undoubtedly originate just as much from an imaginary abandonment by a beloved and protective mother as from stories told to the child.

What disturbs him is not really the lack of evidence but the nature of the hypothesis. To wit, the affective motivational basis of social representations. Though these emotions are as numerous and varied as the representations themselves, they all have in common the feeling of strangeness, which has the same import for the life of the mind that guilt feelings have for moral life. Following Piaget's footsteps, Jahoda reformulates the hypothesis in purely cognitive terms in order to dispose of it. From the social point of view, a cognition is inseparable from its affective basis; that was my initial observation. Secondly, how do we differentiate the strange from the unknown, the obscure or the contradictory? The reason why hypnosis seems strange is not because its causes are unknown or because its effects fly in the face of common sense, but because of its unfamiliar, unusual, slightly magic aspects. Gustav Jahoda assumes that the non-familiar originates in intellectual uncertainties and can be defined objectively, without taking the feelings of those who experience it into account. He identifies it with the novel, the original, and that does not make much sense.

The presumption of strangeness or unfamiliarity expresses something quite different than a contradiction or dissonance between two cognitions. It refers to a failure of communication with the world in which a person or object is situated and an overflow

of meaningfulness which imbues the idea one has of him, her or it with ill-defined, hence disturbing emotions. There occurs a short-circuit in the current of exchanges, a shock to familiar meanings, which startles us out of a passive state, out of self-evident convictions. Irrespective of how detailed and down-to-earth our knowledge of certain sexual practices, homosexuality, f.i., may be, it always maintains its strangeness, because of its forbidden character. In the same way, certain types of knowledge, scientific knowledge among them, are always considered more or less esoteric. But let Heider have the privilege of describing the effects of the feeling of unfamiliarity: 'An unfamiliar situation is full of possibilities that may be sufficiently threatening to an insecure person to turn him against it. An unfamiliar situation is cognitively unstructured, that is, the sequence of steps necessary to reach an objective is not clearly known. On the basis of the consequences of cognitive unclarity, the unstable behavior and the conflicts of such groups as the following have been explained: adolescents (Lewin, 1939), minority groups, (Lewin, 1935 a), autocratic groups (Lippitt, 1940), young children in unfamiliar surroundings (Arsenian, 1943), and persons with disabilities (Barker *et al.*, 1953) ... The strange is experienced as not fitting the structure of the matrix of the life space, as not fitting one's expectations. The adaptation of change in expectation which is required by meeting the unfamiliar demands energy' (Heider, 1958, p. 194).

To cope with a 'strange' idea or perception, we begin by anchoring it to an existing social representation. The whole entity acquires an everyday meaning in the process. A nice illustration is offered by a study of the representation of radioactivity by Italian children after the Chernobyl accident (Nigro *et al.*, 1986). The unfamiliar phenomena that took place (explosion, evacuation of the population, food contamination) are first absorbed with the help of religious, science-fiction or medical images that the children already have. The familiar concepts and images contribute first their own descriptions and later their explanations. In the end, the unfamiliar is assimilated and the whole thing is unified in a representation of the new object in the process.

An important but often neglected feature of anchoring is the transfer of a network of concepts and images from one sphere to another, where it then serves as model. The extreme Right in France, f.i., recently formulated a representation of AIDS copied from that of tuberculosis and proposed comparable remedies. It even created a suitable terminology: the patients, under the designation of 'sidaïques' (from the French abbreviation for AIDS) were to be quarantined from the rest of the population in a 'sidatorium'. On a more spontaneous level, the same sort of process is at work in large American cities. Although it appears that the disease is propagated generally from male to female, the representations formed as a result of word of mouth rumours follow the traditional model and assume that contagion takes place from female to male (Fine, 1987). The rules applied to anchorage are indeed the ones noted by Bartlett: 'As has been pointed out before,' he writes, 'whenever material visually presented purports to be representative of some common object, but contains certain features which are unfamiliar in the community to which the material is introduced, these features invariably suffer transformation in the direction of the familiar' (Bartlett, 1932, p. 178).

In conclusion, a decoding operation calls for the transformation of 'strange' into 'familiar' symbols, without ever meeting complete success. At last one stops paying attention to them, because they have become self-evident or trivial. Concepts and images become objectified and turn into things that are self-contained. Words turn

into clichés, meanings that are contradictory can coexist without cancelling each other out and acquire an impersonal character. They now are everybody's and nobody's and repeated in daily exchanges. We reach the point where we no longer differentiate the objects about which we have concepts, and we no longer see them, just as we pay no attention to our relatives, because they are about all the time, not because they are indifferent to us. 'They have eyes and see not' is the phrase in the Old Testament. 'Implicit' or 'lay' theories are representations in that state. Tension with the unfamiliar has the merit of preventing mental habituation from taking over completely. It averts the complete repression of what is under our eyes, the familiar. The prejudices that enable us to judge remain in a state of arousal, perceptions are maintained in a state of alertness. This tension can be seen at work when psychology gives theoretical expression to informations on the individual or society which already were part of the representations shared by society. There they act upon and are objectified in relationships and behaviours without our realizing it. They are reinvigorated and brought to the surface in a new guise by the scientific theories, whose terminology and methods differ from the ones applied in our daily life (Semin, 1987).

I do not mean to imply that I have proved the hypothesis and even less that it should not be refined in the light of observations (Mugny and Carrugati, 1985; Jodelet, 1983), in order to deserve our full confidence. But it opens up a way of thinking about the genesis of social representations and about human communications in general.

(4)

Having reached this point, I feel like a hurdler who, having cleared a certain number of hurdles, is told that he might as well save his trouble, there is no point to the race itself. Having explained myself on the consensual and reified categories, on the underlying dynamics or representations, I am sent back to my schoolbench. Nobody any longer thinks of perception as a copy or reproduction of what we see, Jahoda informs me. The concepts themselves, furthermore, are fragments of social representations. I must be either ignorant or naive to see something distinctive in them, a junction point between percepts and concepts. To be sure, I have been familiar with these arguments for ages, and I keep up with all that is going on in these fields. Let us turn instead to the dose of the imaginary contained to a certain extent in all representations. In a study of social representations about mental illness, de Rosa (1987) showed and in fact discovered that the figurative component develops independently of the intellectual component. It seems to be rooted in an archaic state of social memory. The same is true of representations in a group. Kaës (1976) describes how they emerge from a certain number of very early images of the family and the parents' bodies. Only later are they incorporated in these concepts and associated with a vocabulary to express them. The two studies indicate that the figurative component is stabler and more directly social than the intellectual component. Images have the advantage of linking us to the past and of anticipating the shape of things to come, of the real in the making.

In the process of communication, a cognitive structure is generated which differs from the 'classical' structure, irrespective of the individuals' degree of education or the degree of formality in the field of knowledge. Ideas and information not intended to remain the exclusive property of a small minority must be transformed radically when they are propagated in society and become a subject of everyday conversation. When

men have other minds in their minds, they process information and ideas at a certain level to communicate them and form a shared reality. Anyone who disregards this need and limits himself to the 'conceptual' or 'scientific' level will never be able to reach more than a tiny minority. Our current research on the social representation of Marxism reveals this 'unwanted' consequence. For all these reasons, I have opted for a definition of representation that includes both abstract and iconic features. It enables us to understand an idea with the same vividness as a perception, and vice versa (Moscovici, 1985).

One consequence of all this at least becomes clear: representations have a social character because of a special isomorphism of the cognitive structure and of the functions to acting and communicating it fulfils in society. This is how the historian Duby describes the dissemination of Christian doctrines in the masses of the people: 'Where it was a matter of making conversions,' he writes 'and of educating in order to convert, it is obvious that the workshops of cultural creation, which were situated in the upper levels of the social edifice, among the avant-garde of the ecclesiastic dignitaries, but always at work to fill the needs of the people, voluntarily accepted vague tendencies, schemata, and mental images prevailing at lower levels of culture, to be able to domesticate them, incorporate them in the construction of their propaganda. By this propaganda, clothed in more familiar features, Christian doctrine had less difficulty in penetrating the masses' (Duby, 1988, p. 196).

In recombining cognitive elements, an image is particularly apt to 'make one see' and render familiar things that remain remote, strange. Things appear more ordinary and more interesting. Social representations are shaped and communicated to make the everyday world more exciting. Beyond this finding, there emerges a tendency in the psychosocial development of an idea or piece of information. While energy always moves from a hot to a cold state, it is a social law, on the contrary, that causes cognitions to move from a cold to a hot state.

We are led on by a lively, repeated image from what we perceive to a judgment whose logic appears as the most accurate, the simplest expression of the way things are (Piaget and Inhelder, 1966; Johnson-Laird and Steedman, 1978). Our reactions to the sight of a crowd run amok are the same whether we have 'seen' it on television or in a stadium, and either way we will be sure of them. By this means we can skip several logical steps and make something familiar. Ideas we have conceived are transformed into perceived objects – think of collective hallucinations and illusions! – and become so vivid that their internal content assumes the character of an external reality. Mead was ahead of me in making this observation: 'We must recognize not only a corporeal individual, but a social and logical individual, each of whom would answer to the translation of the social and logical and psychological sciences into terms of psychical environment'. And he adds, recognizing that the only psychological term appropriate here is that of image, in spite of all its implications: 'There is no other expression that answers to such an organisation of a subjective state that it may become objective' (Mead, 1981, p. 57).

Through its instrumentality, ideas turn into things, thoughts into acts, and names are attached to persons. But while realizing the truth of this, we must admit that social representations have both an iconic and an intellectual aspect that is characteristic of them, and the variable extent to which each aspect manifests itself depends on circumstances, the degree of literacy, beliefs. At the present time we see a predominant tendency to convert ideas and events into figurative thought which depicts instead of

describing, shows instead of explaining, thus reinforcing the day-dreaming, wishful thinking and dream worlds that are relentlessly churned out in public media and conversation places.

Is a representation in fact a distinctive psychic phenomenon? The answer to this question is decidedly yes. We must first recognize that there are two universes, two categories, the consensual and the reified. These categories shape our thoughts and views which are then activated so as to familiarize us with the strange. All this intensifies to some extent the figurative character of representations and their specific nature, confirming Wittgenstein's comment: 'The act of thinking is quite comparable to drawing pictures' (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 172). Hence the importance of the stylistic qualities and the aesthetic value of social representations, as well as the fascination they arouse.

I am once more laying myself open to Jahoda's gibes about my allusions, metaphors and similar vices. But the point is that the phenomenon with which we are dealing falls within the range of several social sciences, and we are compelled to use a more personal phrasing. These vices are not intended as a way of embellishing the text or giving me greater pleasure in writing it. They are devices for allowing several forms of analysis and modes of discourse to converge and yet remain as close as possible to the matter at hand. The main point is to glimpse something we had not glimpsed before and to glimpse it in a new way. I am too well acquainted with the devices of a virtuous style of writing, having published in all the journals that require it, but I am not sure that we owe it any special advances or that it has contributed to making our research known outside a narrow circle. Virtue is not always rewarded, even if vice is sometimes punished by the moral majority.

V THE SCIENCE OF PRIVATE LIFE VERSUS THE SCIENCE OF PUBLIC LIFE

(1)

Has Gustav Jahoda really considered the ethical and intellectual implications of his conclusions? I appreciate his granting me the merit of having originated a label and done some research, unworthy of science, to be sure, but which nevertheless has aroused some interest. Whereupon he dispossesses me of these very things and advises me to let serious-minded people take over, hand the task to persons who can reconstruct systematically what I tinkered together and who will replace my 'soft' by a 'hard' approach. I find these metaphors borrowed from pornography distasteful. It might have been better to refer to 'non-linear' and 'linear' thinking, or a 'broad-minded' and a 'narrow-minded' view, and he would have made his point more clearly.

If I understand rightly, he proposed three remedies: 1) giving a rigorous definition of representations, 2) adopting more rigorous research methods, and 3) returning to the well-established framework of social cognition. At first sight, these are reasonable propositions, but they are very broad and carry us a long way. Our strategy has always been to combine the soft and hard approaches as fitted the case, making sure that concern for rigour did not overwhelm our heuristic concern. There are so many still-born babies in science that we had better reduce than increase mortality. As far as definitions go, they have a moot value. Concepts have not just one but many

definitions, as is true for such concepts as self, schema, attitude, etc. And if there are many, then there is none. So we are left with descriptions and intuitions, some of which meet with everyone's approval and others not. While I have been reticent about defining social representations, others have done so boldly (Doise, 1985; Flament, 1986; Jodelet, 1983; Codol, 1969 b) and successfully. The first remedy has thus been discovered already.

What can be said about the method? We are concerned with two types of theories which should not be confused. Some are conceptual frameworks which enable us to discover a new, fruitful aspect of the facts, interpret them and discuss them, which is not a negligible contribution. Other theories are a system of hypotheses that are derived from the facts and can be verified or falsified. Most theories in the behavioural sciences and social psychology are of the former type: field theory, information processing, attribution theory, social representations, of course. One cannot expect great precision from them nor subject them to an exhaustive factual test.

Our reservations about rigorous methods are motivated by the need to take the growth potential of the conceptual framework into account. Being comparatively new, our theory certainly still has a long way to go before being verifiable or falsifiable – on condition it remains fruitful. The only reasonable scientific attitude is therefore to respect these requirements rather than subject it to criteria that it will be able to meet only later, if at all. Here is what the physicist Bohm wrote about the slow germination of ideas: 'But a new idea which has broad implications may require a long period of gestation before falsifiable inferences can be drawn from it. For example, the atomic hypothesis, first suggested by Democritus twenty-five centuries ago, had no falsifiable inference for at least two thousand years. New theories are like growing plants that need to be nurtured and cultured for a time before they are exposed to the risks of the elements' (Bohm and Prat, 1987, p. 59).

Our idea still needs to be nurtured and cultured, there is nothing illogical about admitting it. Convinced as we are of all its implications, our primary concern is to enrich its contents and refine its theoretical framework. In short, to fill it out, to give it shape, if the purpose is to come up with an original domain of knowledge that helps us to understand what people do in real life and in significant situations. To reach this goal, we must undoubtedly rely more on the creativity of researchers than on tried and proven procedures. Jahoda is of a different opinion, since he blames the theory of social representations for having depended on a more or less qualitative, shall we say, cavalier approach. Because of which he proposes that the label be dropped and that I be left to my bird-watching and pseudo-explanations. To make way for minds that are more concerned with proofs and rigorous methods.

He should have looked at the question not in terms of persons but in terms of the nature of the phenomenon. My reservations about the methods he proposes are not due to a lack of know-how, an aversion to laboratory experiments or scaling, as can be seen from the fact that I willingly use them in other fields. They are motivated by the desire to avert any kind of premature exactness which, as Festinger reminds us, results in the stillbirth of capital ideas and leads to 'barren' research (Festinger, 1980, p. 252). The need to push investigations in the various possible directions to the limit is critical. We have therefore followed several 'hard' and 'soft' tracks, not to bend with the wind but to use the approach that was most appropriate for the content. We always used scaling to uncover the structure of questionnaire material, as was true of the similarity analysis by Flament (1962). We often apply hierarchic analysis (Moscovici, 1961) or

factorial analysis (Mugny and Carrugati, 1985). Several researchers (Di Giacomo, 1986; Le Bouedec, 1986) have recently come up with a statistically sound word association technique, which reveals the network of concepts and images constituting a representation, and evaluates quantitatively the link that holds them together.

All these methods nevertheless raise the problem of what the structures defined in this way actually mean. The anthropologist d'Andrade refers to the same sort of problem: 'A major drawback of this research is that multidimensional scaling does not yield results which fit a cognitive processing model. That is, one cannot, from scaling results, construct a computer program which even roughly simulates human thinking processes. But then, how *are* ordinary people able to fill out large matrices of the type used in this research? Perhaps attention to how people actually process cultural information can yield more effective and general models than multidimensional scaling' (D'Andrade, 1986 b, p. 45). The problem here is to make thought accessible to scientific measurements.

There is nothing difficult about using the experimental method, and in fact whenever a hypothesis lent itself to it, numerous experiments were performed. Self-esteem (Faucheux and Moscovici, 1968), creativity (Abric, 1971; Abric and Kahn, 1972), conflict resolution (Abric, 1976; Apfelbaum, 1967; Codol, 1968 and 1969; Flament, 1967), group and intergroup relations (Doise, 1972 and 1984; Hewstone *et al.*, 1982; Plon, 1968; Rossignol et Flament, 1977): each taught us a great deal and showed how much this approach can contribute to social psychology. Nevertheless, we felt the need to set broader goals, in line with Neisser's view: 'The actual development of cognitive psychology in the last few years has been disappointingly narrow, focusing inward on the analysis of specific experimental situations rather than outward toward the world beyond the laboratory' (Neisser, 1976, p. XI).

Since it is obvious that words are not the same as the things to which they refer and are nonetheless understood by a community of speakers, representations must be involved in this situation. Certain words have a way of concentrating images and meanings that galvanize conversation and thinking. Others, though rather empty themselves, act as a bridge between one universe and another and enable us to communicate about what we do not understand. Some are pure emblems (AIDS, charisma, computer, Oedipus complex), others are quasi-metaphors (black holes, the unconscious, genetic code). These two types constitute the web of a whole set of combinations underlying the language of a representation. We have made a serious effort all along to study this language by means of rigorous methods that would give us access to certain cognitive processes. Beginning with studies by Ackerman and Zygouris (1974) who used syntol and ending with studies along more logical lines by Grise *et al.* (1987) and Vergès (1987), a series of analyses of the spoken word have enriched our methodological stock. I am in no position to judge, but I know (Gardin, 1974) that this solution is not the last word in the problem of relating theories and facts. This problem will arise as long as the analysis of speech has no specific status of its own, since it remains vulnerable to philosophical controversies about the relations between language and thought.

In my eyes, observation retains a privileged position in the study of the phenomena of thinking and communication. Through it the big break-throughs that allow us to understand the life of the mind were made, from Lévy-Bruhl to Piaget, from Freud to Vigotsky, from Lewin to Marc Bloch. And when I look back on the research we did along these lines (Moscovici, 1961; Herzlich, 1969; Palmonari, 1981; Jodelet, 1983; Emler and Dickenson, 1985), I find that it allowed us to grasp the phenomena in

question in depth. Observation has a preeminent role in the study of social representations. It frees us from premature qualification and experimentation, which chop up facts into tiny pieces and lead to meaningless findings. At times it may be a sort of bird-watching, to be sure, but it may result in great strides. Even if it does not yield equally significant insights, this approach may occupy a place in social psychology (von Cranach, 1980) comparable to the position secured by the ethological approach in biology, and for very much the same reasons. With reference to the latter, Medawar has written the following passage to which we should give some thought; 'In the "thirties", it did not seem to us that there *was* a way of studying behaviour "scientifically" except through some kind of experimental intervention – except by confronting the subject of our observation with a "situation" or with a nicely contrived stimulus and then recording what an animal did. The situation would then be varied in some way that seemed appropriate, whereupon the animal's behaviour would also vary. Even poking an animal would surely be better than just looking at it; *that* would lead to anecdotalism: that was what bird-watchers did. Yet it was also what the pioneers of ethology did. They studied natural behaviour and were thus able for the first time to discern natural behaviour structures or episodes – a style of analysis helped very greatly by the comparative approach, for the same or similar behavioural sequences in numbers of related species reinforced the idea that there was a certain natural connectedness between its various terms, as if they represented the playing out of a certain instinctual programme' (Medawar, 1965, p. 109).

For many years to come observation stimulated by theory and armed with subtle analytical methods will still give us the means of understanding the genesis and structure of social representations *in situ*. In any case, we are at this moment witnessing a blossoming of research and original methodological efforts (especially those carrying on Flament's work) which will bear fruit. It is easy to make pat judgments from a distance, but looking at things from close up, one would see that we probably constitute the most active group in this field, and each of us is aware of participating in a movement that is reaching out in several directions.

(2)

Would all requirements be met if we applied the criteria of definition and rigour? No, not even then. According to Jahoda, 'it would be more realistic to tie this up with the growing body of work on social cognition rather than claim the unverified existence of special domains'. As though social cognition was not an amalgam of special domains. We keep up with this research and assimilate some of its results. But what we are asked to do is to take over principles that are relevant on the individual scale and apply them without modification to phenomena on a group or societal scale. This has been done, to be sure, but the experience anthropology has had with this transposition alerts us to its limitations. After examining the hypotheses and postulates which 'allow only for the intervention of mechanisms of the *individual human mind*', Lévy-Bruhl listed all the arguments militating against their transposition to collective representations. His objection was that they are 'social facts, like the institutions that they reflect' and, on this account, 'have their own laws, laws that the analysis of individuals as individuals can never reveal' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1951, p. 14).

To eliminate this 'special domain', one would actually have to give up the social character of representations and a social psychology genuinely based on knowledge derived from them. It is widely recognized that most of the research does not involve

the social context or refer to group products (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). The body of work on social cognition studies cognition as a non-social process. This leads it to a one-sided link with cognitive psychology, to the point where researchers themselves become uneasy: 'When one notes the massive borrowing from cognitive psychology by investigators of social cognition, the question arises: is it valid for social cognition to import theories derived from the study of non-social phenomena? Do people know about one another as they know about sounds, geometric shapes, chairs or animals?' (Landman and Manis, 1983, p. 109). Borrowing is inevitable, undoubtedly. However, in view of the phenomena with which we are concerned and their context (Zajonc, 1980), it would be legitimate to draw more extensively on child psychology, anthropology and even psychoanalysis. This would be more heuristic borrowing, if one wished to understand how people create information and not only how they process it.

For reasons that I will leave to others to explain, social cognition focuses on bias, slip-ups in thinking, reasoning errors of ordinary human beings. This cognitive malfunctioning of the ordinary mind appears to be intrinsic, rather than instigated, provoked by extraneous emotions or needs. From this the conclusion is drawn that there is an abyss between logical and natural thinking, social thinking included. Social thinking would seem to consist of stereotypes and incongruities, in short to be irrational. In truth, there is something naive, pre-scientific in seeing these biases, errors, illusory correlations, etc. as the distinctive feature of ordinary and social thinking. This amounts to making the naive assumption that there exists a norm for thinking to which one must conform and which takes logical reasoning and probability as its standards. For many judgments, however, 'neither normative models nor direct verifications seem to be available. Here the investigators' own judgment as to what would constitute a valid inference is frequently used as a standard of veridicality; and deviations from this standard are considered erroneous' (Kruglansky and Ajzen, 1983, p. 3).

It might as well be admitted that one uses an arbitrary standard for defining what is held up as absurd or deviant. There surely were times when the mentality ill were believed to talk nonsense, children's errors on tests were interpreted as signs of lesser intelligence, and primitive religions were taken to be superstitions due to faulty associations. Just as many studies on social cognition consider lay thinking to be characterized by inference 'troubles'. This leaves them open to the sort of comment Wittgenstein expressed about the Golden Bough: 'The way in which Frazer states the magic and religious conceptions of men is not satisfactory: it makes these conceptions look like *errors*' (Wittgenstein, 1982, p. 13).

Now a scientific approach to these phenomena in pathological psychology, anthropology or child psychology actually became possible only when it was observed that this nonsense does have its own meaning and that errors reflect a different representation of reality. It was Piaget's discovery, to give just one example, that children subjected to a test gave wrong answers to the questions, but their ways of reasoning were also qualitatively different. A younger child is neither more stupid than an elder child, nor is he in any way retarded. His way of thinking is completely different. So is his representation of the world. By asking the right questions, one can observe that the child applies his reasoning power to every object. The results of this extension of Lévy-Bruhl's discovery are well-known.

In this light, the fundamental errors of attributing an event to a person rather than to a situation is in fact not an error. It is an integral part of a moral and legal view of

things that makes a person responsible for his or her actions. Generally speaking, all these slip-ups make sense if viewed in the light of representations shared by many people (Otway and Thamas, 1982). In the same way, incongruous or abnormal results may be attributable not to researchers' flawed thinking but to a paradigm of the scientific community. We do not wish to shock anyone, but it could well be that, contrary to what is claimed, by introducing the concept which concerns us into social cognition, one might give it a more scientific character and account for all these inference slips.

Many problems come up in the relations between different groups such as physicians and patients, parents and children, the media and the public. They are caused neither by a lack of information – on the contrary, information is plentiful – nor by a lack of logical skill. But they do reflect a lack of social representations or a flaw in the representations that are exchanged and communicated in daily life. By giving them the attention they deserve, one could build a bridge between mental functioning and social content, as d'Andrade demonstrated very straightforwardly (1986). Once they are viewed as symptoms of a certain representation of society or of relations with the external world (Flament, 1986; Moscovici, 1988), all these alleged slip-ups will cease to seem illogical. Certain false problems would no longer trouble us (Moscovici and Hewstone, 1984; Douglas, 1985; Doise and Palmonari, 1986) and rationality would be seen in a different light. This should be stressed without pretence at originality; what matters is being aware of the issues to be known and understood.

There is no question that social recognitions are representations in a general way. This is the case when they describe how individuals pick out what they need from the available information, facts and rules. They use only what is relevant, without having to examine and reject what is not. In what manner do they organize information so as to extract at once whatever the current situation demands? They always have the right word, object, and feeling. It is actually past experience that enables them to build forms, construct concepts and connect the diversity confronting them with schemata or frameworks already present in their minds (Higgins and Bargh, 1987). We are thus dealing with forms of thought shaped by contents that are already available in the brain, that is, stereotypes of the situation or the self. Every new object is reduced to an old object in this way, and the unprecedented case is subsumed under a general category. The unstable world is stabilized, and recovers its routine appearance for the individual. Schemata, scripts and prototypes may be specific and concrete – f.i. what is the prototype of a hamburger? How does one eat in a restaurant? – or they can be abstract – how is a correct equation put together? They all provide a stock of learned behaviour or ideas with which to face the needs of daily life. These categorization processes are of great interest, especially those involving prototypes (Semin, 1987), because they reformulate in terms of information theory processes that are very familiar to social psychology, first and foremost the process of categorization or stereotyping (Billig, 1986).

These theories are in any case inadequate when it comes to understanding social representations in the making, adjusting themselves to the sinuousities of a given culture. How can we speak of constructing or creating reality on the basis of processes with exactly the opposite meaning? And to what extent can we rely on processes that dissociate thinking from communication, when all representations are both a resultant and a dissemination focus of what has been created? Reread the passage about the split brain quoted earlier, and you will see how inextricably dissemination and knowledge are bound together. When a representation emerges, it is startling to see

how it grows out of a seeming repetition of clichés, an exchange of tautological terms as they occur in conversations, and a visualisation of fuzzy images relating to strange objects. And yet it combines all these heterogeneous elements into one whole and endows the new thing with a novel and even cohesive appearance. The key to its method of production lies in the anchoring and objectivation processes.

A final point. Social cognition pays almost no attention to the population factor and even less to the cultural factor (Pepitone, 1986). For our part, we have taken them into account and they are of great importance. The theory of social representations maintains enough flexibility to adjust to differences in groups, cultural matrices and information that circulate in a given society. In this research phase, when the collecting of experiences and materials is paramount, observation, no matter how systematic it is, is subservient to the characteristics of the population under observation and its special problems. If it were otherwise, what would be the point of the term 'social' that we toss about so liberally?

This having been said, it is true that social psychology, in this domain, concerns itself with private behaviour and private relationships. In this rich and yet narrow setting, moreover, everyone is expected to behave like a serious person, look at things clearly and choose with appropriate logic. No one dreams, no one believes in god, no one is gnawed by a devouring passion. The world in which people move about is in keeping with the world of science and technology, a vast campus where problems are solved and everyone aspires to succeed. Yet anything that has the slightest connection with social representations must take into account the fact that men have a zone of darkness shrouding most of their thoughts and relationships. Very ancient beliefs lurk in the shadows and their memory is the repository of a content that is only partially admitted. Such is the power of attraction of this borderline zone of lucid knowledge that psychologists who make no effort to deal with this zone of darkness will blithely walk past a representation and fail to see what is fascinating about it. As Bartlett observed: 'The familiar is readily accepted; the unfamiliar may hold us' (Bartlett, 1932, p. 19). Is it not this aspect of religious, political visions, newspaper stories that characteristically attracts us to them? Our public life is teeming with outbursts of illusions, syncretic ideologies and arborescent beliefs. It can best be understood through social representations, as most studies have confirmed so far.

With this purpose in mind, I should like to carry my initial remarks one step further. A theory of representation does not deal only with men and women in flesh and blood. It should also allow us to understand their jointly created works, and beyond that, literature, novels, movies, art, and even science and the institutions that give them objective shape. Is there not a vast storehouse of material concerning our ability to acquire knowledge and to communicate to be found in these various cultural domains? Why should social psychology be excluded from them and withdraw from conversation taking place between the various scientific disciplines on these topics? In brief, I am not asserting that we should turn our backs to this large corpus of social cognition – unless, like others, it disappears from one day to the next (Moscovici, 1984) without warning. I am simply saying that we should examine certain approaches more attentively and grasp certain opportunities that the study of social representations offers. It will take time to agree on a single method with respect to one of the oldest, if not the very first object of study and worship, to wit, the social mind.

In any case, Jahoda's objections could apply to any other concept, from attribution to schema, even better than to ours. The fact that they currently enjoy a certain

popularity in one part of social psychology, and that hundreds of experiments about them have been published in the most prestigious journals is basically irrelevant. Fundamental issues, like that of the individualistic fallacy (Farr, 1978) are swept under the rug, and the limitations of these concepts are not given serious consideration. My close contact with and knowledge of social psychology make me less inclined than Jahoda to go along with its priorities. My verdict on its strengths and weaknesses differs completely from his. This is inevitable, both because I do not believe in tough tests on thin theories, on methodical grounds, and because I consider the social nature of thinking and existence in general self-evident. This happens not to be true of our American colleagues who live in a culture that offers no alternative to individual representations, no language for expressing needs and concerns that transcend those of individuals and express those of groups. For lack of familiarity with such concepts and such a language, they naturally wonder why and how something, for instance a representation, is social. I am often startled to hear this kind of question, to be asked to justify what, in my eyes, goes without saying. Whereupon people shrug their shoulders, because the answer I give them relies on experiences that the questioner lacks or that seem abstract to him. There seems to be emptiness for them where there is fullness for me, and vice versa. This gap between us explains why it is difficult to explain the value and scope of the theory with which these remarks are concerned.

Numerous doubts persist with respect to it, to be sure. That cannot be avoided. These doubts do not shake the confidence some of us have placed in the line of research we have carried on for many years. And even less so now when swiftly and unobtrusively it is stimulating research wherever the need is for a heuristic framework rather than a dogma. There seems to be an opening there for all those who seek a new way of doing social psychology, a way that is closer to the other sciences of man and on the scale of the social phenomena in the midst of which they live. Like them, I am convinced that social representations point in the long run towards the solution of scientific problems and of societal problems that are no less real.

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RÉSUMÉ

La théorie des représentations sociales occupe une place à part en psychologie sociale, à la fois par les problèmés qu'elle soulève et l'échelle des phénomènes dont elle s'occupe. Ceci provoque maintes critiques et malentendus. Il se peut qu'une telle théorie ne corresponde pas au modèle de la psychologie sociale tel qu'il est défini à présent. Cependant on tente de montrer qu'elle répond à des questions sociales et scientifiques importantes, en quoi elle diffère de la conception classique des représentations collectives et adopte dès le début une optique constructiviste qui s'est depuis répandue en psychologie sociale. Plusieurs courants de recherche ont confirmé sa vision des rapports entre phénomènes sociaux et phénomènes cognitifs, communication et pensée. D'autre remarques visent à dégager la nature des représentations sociales, leur capacité à créer des informations, leur fonction qui est de nous familiariser avec l'étrange selon les catégories de notre culture. En allant plus loin, on insiste sur la diversité des approches méthodologiques. Si la méthode expérimentale est utile pour comprendre comment les gens devraient penser, il faut aborder les processus mentaux et sociaux supérieurs à l'aide de méthodes différentes, y compris l'analyse linguistique et l'observation de la façon dont les gens pensent. Certes, les représentations sociales ont un rapport avec le domaine plus récent de la cognition sociale. Mais dans la mesure où elles dépendent du contenu et du contexte, donc de la subjectivité et de la sociabilité, elles abordent les problèmes autrement que la cognition. En se référant à la psychologie de l'enfant et à l'anthropologie, on peut soutenir que c'est aussi une manière plus scientifique. Il y a cependant beaucoup à apprendre des critiques, car la voie est encore longue avant d'aboutir à une théorie satisfaisante de la pensée sociale et de la communication.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Theorie der sozialen Vorstellungen nimmt einen eigenen Platz in der sozialen Psychologie ein, durch de Probleme die sie aufwirft ebenso wie durch das Massstab der Phänomene mit denen sie sich befasst. Eine solche Theorie ist vielleicht nicht dem Modell der sozialen

Psychologie, wie es heute üblich ist, angepasst. Trotzdem versucht man zu zeigen dass sie bedeutende sozialen and wissenschaftlichen Fragen beantwortet, worin die Unterschiede mit der klassischen Konzeption der kollektiven Vorstellungen bestehen, und dass sie von Anfang aus einen konstruktivistischen Gesichtspunkt aufnimmt der sich seitdem in der sozialen Psychologie durchgesetzt hat. Mehrere Untersuchungsrichtungen haben ihre Ansicht der Beziehungen zwischen sozialen und kognitiven Phänomenen, Kommunikation und Denken bestätigt. Weitere Bemerkungen, zielen darauf, die Natur der sozialen Vorstellungen aufzuzeigen, ihre Kapazität, Information zu schaffen und ihre Funktion, das Unheimliche für uns heimlich zu machen, in Beziehung zu den Kategorien unserer Kultur. Indem man weiter geht nimmt man Bezug auf die Verschiedenheit der methodologischen Annäherungen. Obwohl die experimentelle Methode wertvoll ist um zu verstehen wie die Leute denken sollten, müssen höhere geistliche und soziale Prozesse mit Hilfe von anderen Methoden angegriffen werden, darunter sprachliche Analyse und Beobachtung der Weise in der Leute denken. Gewiss haben soziale Vorstellungen eine Beziehung zu dem gegenwärtigen Feld der sozialen Kognition. Aber in dem Masse in dem die ersteren von Inhalt and Kontext, also von Subjektivität und Soziabilität abhängen, fassen sie die Probleme anders als die letztere auf. Mit Bezung auf Kindespsychologie und Anthropologie kann man behaupten dass diese Annäherrungsweise mehr wissenschaftlichen Charakter hat. Jeodch gibt es viel zu lernen von den Kritiken, denn es ist noch ein langer Weg bevor man an eine befriedigende Theorie des sozialen Denkens und der Kommunikation anlangt.