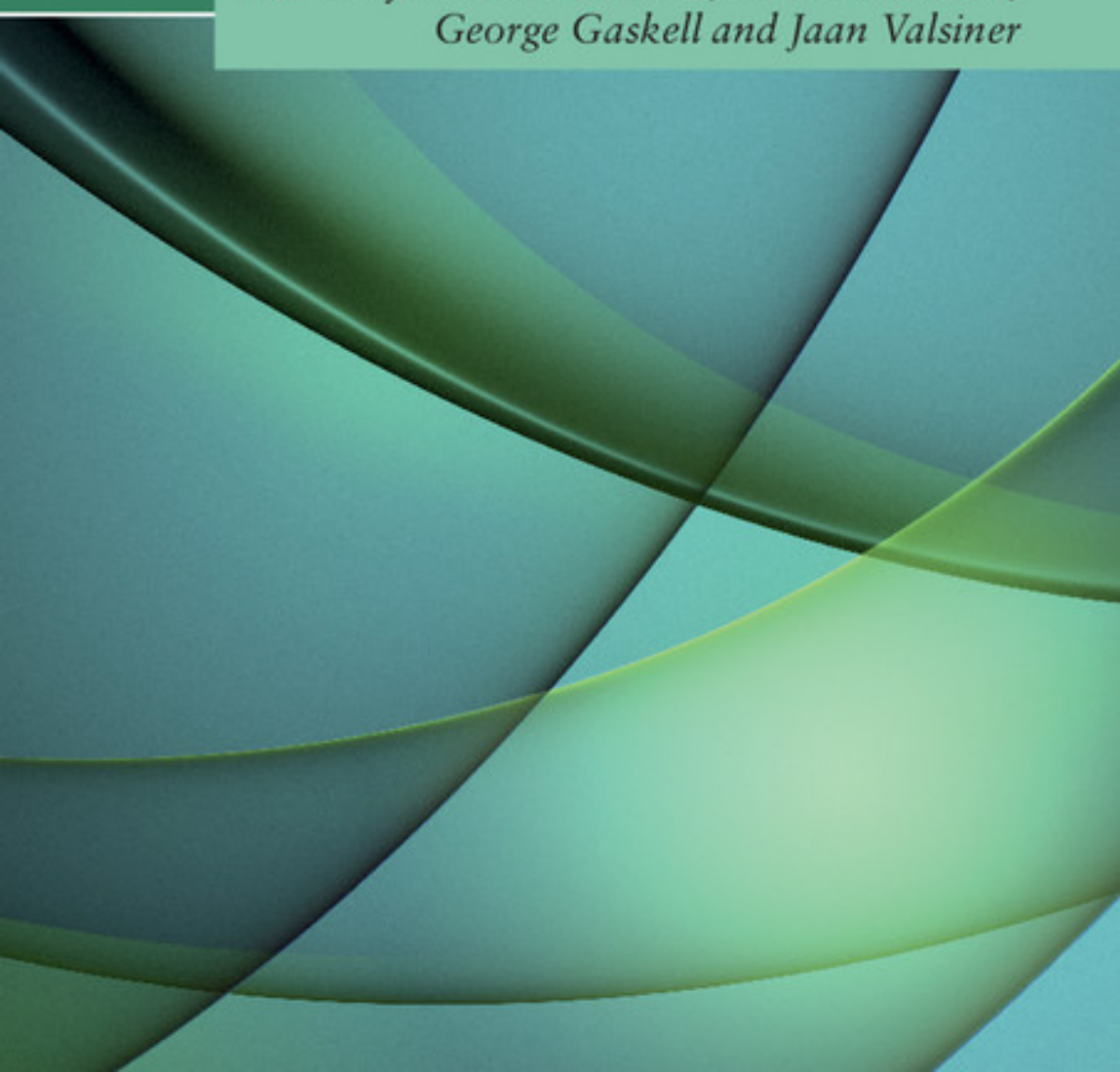
THE CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Edited by Gordon Sammut, Eleni Andreouli, George Gaskell and Jaan Valsiner



The Cambridge Handbook of Social Representations

A social representations approach offers an empirical utility for addressing myriad social concerns such as social order, ecological sustainability, national identity, racism, religious communities, the public understanding of science, health and social marketing. The core aspects of social representations theory have been debated over many years and some still remain widely misunderstood. This handbook provides an overview of these core aspects and brings together theoretical strands and developments in the theory, some of which have become pillars in the social sciences in their own right. Academics and students in the social sciences working with concepts and methods such as social identity, discursive psychology, positioning theory, semiotics, attitudes, risk perception and social values will find this an invaluable resource.

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Preface

This handbook aims to take stock and to look forward at key theoretical, methodological and applied desiderata of the theory of social representations. It is designed to appeal to psychologists and social theorists, as well as scholars and students working in cognate disciplines including cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, philosophy, communication studies and linguistics whose interests focus on the ordinary knowledge in the life-world.

In 1968 Gordon Allport wrote:

> the modern social psychologist is haunted by the question: How can the individual be both a cause and a consequence of society. How can his nature depend indisputably upon the prior existence of cultural designs and upon his role in a pre-determined social structure, while at the same time he is clearly a unique person, both selecting and rejecting influences from his cultural surroundings, and in turn creating new cultural forms for the guidance of future generations? (Allport, 1968, p. 8)

Towards the end of 'The historical background of modern social psychology', Allport sets out the challenge for social psychology: the burning issues of war and peace, education, population control and effective democracy, are all in need of assistance. But he suggests that such assistance is unlikely to come from 'small gem-like researches, however exquisite their perfection'. Will, he asks, the current preoccupation with methods and miniature models lead to theory and application? He goes on: 'integrative theories are not easy to come by: like all behavioural science social psychology rests ultimately upon broad meta-theories concerning the nature of man and the nature of society'. Allport contrasts the 'high level conceptualisations' of the likes of Machiavelli, Bentham and Compte with the contemporary non-theoretical orientation of the empiricists. He hoped that the tide might turn (Allport, 1968, p. 69).

The turning of the tide is evidenced in this handbook, which brings together forty authors whose research is inspired by the theory of social representations. This theory traces its origins back to Durkheim's notion of collective representations. Since its inception in Moscovici's (1961/1976) writings, it has adopted a societal level of explanation to account for the fact that human behaviour, however assessed from the outside, is sensible within a cultural context that validates and legitimates such behaviour. The theory of social representations has thus served to advance the sociocultural agenda by highlighting how human behaviour is sensible within the

context of its production. Consequently, it has provided sociocultural theorists with a framework for studying and understanding sense-making processes in different sociocultural contexts.

The theory of social representations has come to stand as the foremost psychological theory for the study of common sense. Over the past fifty years it has stimulated much research that has addressed these concerns and charted its implications on varied psychological behaviour such as communication (Moscovici, 1961/1976), social cohesion (Duveen, 2008), social cognition (Augoustinos, Walker and Donaghue, 2005), identity (Moloney and Walker, 2007), dialogicality (Marková, 2003), discourse (Wagner and Hayes, 2005), and others. And while much sociocultural research draws inspiration from the theory of social representations, publications in the field remain dispersed in innumerable journals and volumes that have researched these concerns and advanced our understanding of psychological phenomena in their context of production.

The theory of social representations takes a societal or sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural characteristics have featured in the psychology agenda since the beginnings of the discipline. Indeed, Wundt's (1916) concern with 'folk psychology' balanced the remit of study for the discipline by including concerns with mental events that originate in community life alongside concerns with physiology and the biological basis of human behaviour. Wundt thus included within psychology's remit concerns with language and cognate phenomena such as customs, religion, myth and magic (Farr, 1996). The quest for understanding human behaviour in its situational and cultural contingencies is, therefore, not new. However, in recent years the discipline has witnessed a concerted effort on the part of sociocultural psychologists who have sought to emphasize the fact that environmental, social and cultural conditions constitute an invariable condition for the very existence of psychological phenomena (Valsiner and Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2012).

In essence, human behaviour differs widely across behavioural conditions. The fact of individual differences in behavioural outcomes is well known and has received considerable scholarly attention. In response to a similar stimulus, an individual may respond in a certain way while another individual may respond in a totally different manner due to their personal inclinations. Human behaviour, however, differs even more widely than this. It differs due to social and cultural conditions that determine how a thing is perceived (Moscovici, 1984b), what construal of that thing is brought to bear in describing and understanding that behaviour (Ross and Nisbett, 1991), and what repertoire of behavioural outcomes is plausible and legitimate as a course of action for that individual in a given society (Wagner and Hayes, 2005). In this complex determination of behaviour, social and cultural conditions characterize psychological phenomena. Sociocultural psychology has drawn our attention to the fact that social and cultural conditions give rise to particular psychological phenomena that manifest within contexts which shape their emergence as well as ontogenetic progression. Understanding human behaviour in its manifold complexity, therefore, requires more than an appreciation of individual differences. It further requires sensitivity to those

extra-individual conditions that also determine behavioural outcomes. A consequence of this added focus is that assumptions of universality and standardization across cultural conditions are challenged. Sociocultural differences require a particular and specific focus on cultural elements that give rise to intercultural differences in the manifestation of psychological phenomena.

This handbook brings together various theoretical strands and developments that have emerged from the theory of social representations, some of which have become pillars in social psychology in their own right and have stimulated further inquiry in their turn. It also extends the social scientific agenda beyond that of the theory of social representations and into equally relevant concepts and domains of inquiry such as social identity, discursive psychology, positioning theory, semiotics and others.

The chapters provide an overview of the core aspects of the theory that have been debated over the years, some of which remain widely misunderstood, and provide an up-to-date account of developments such that further productive inquiry can be stimulated. Finally, the handbook will serve as an invaluable tool in the teaching of the theory of social representations. The theory has gained popularity over the years and routinely features in both undergraduate and postgraduate social psychology curricula in many countries. This handbook matches theoretical aspirations with real-world empirical concerns of interest to those of a sociocultural persuasion.

The handbook is divided into four parts. The first part, 'Foundations', deals with foundational issues and with the core concepts and debates within social representations theory. The second part, 'Conceptual developments', elaborates further notions and concepts that have become part of the social representations approach to sociocultural psychology. The third part, 'New directions', reviews some of the major social psychological theories that have furthered the theory of social representations and advanced the sociocultural agenda. The final part, 'Applications', presents empirical studies that have been undertaken in diverse fields and which demonstrate the breadth of application and the utility of a social representations approach.

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PART I

Foundations

The first part of this handbook addresses a number of foundational concerns that can be traced back to the origins of social representations theory in Moscovici's (1961/1976) study *La Psychanalyse, son image et son public*. Since its inception, social representations theory has contended with a number of conceptual and empirical issues that have drawn the interest and criticism of scholars in equal measure. The lack of conceptual clarity has enabled both a theoretical and an empirical eclecticism to arise over the years, and arguably this has enabled the theory to thrive and to address myriad social and psychological issues in its later developments. Fifty years later, this handbook revisits these foundational concerns in order to take stock of the contributions that have shaped the theory's development and to elucidate the characteristic contribution that social representations theory has made to social and cultural psychology in the understanding and explanation of social and psychological phenomena.

The five chapters of this opening part of the book disambiguate certain notions that have proven thorny over the years, such as the scope of action in social representations and the theory's relevance in the study and explanation of human behaviour. They also address the merits and concerns of theorizing and conceptualizing 'representations' and the 'social'. In doing so, they are intended to help the reader to understand what analytical and explanatory levels the theory is suited to address, and to identify the sort of phenomena that the theory has served to investigate. Finally, this part of the book aims to provide the reader with a blueprint for further developments and applications. It presents a wide-ranging discussion of empirical methods in order to provide social representations scholars and researchers with the required toolkit for an enquiry into social affairs and human conduct.

4 On (social) representations and the iconoclastic impetus

Martin W. Bauer

This chapter explores the notion of 'representation' from the point of view of societal psychology (see Himmelweit and Gaskell, 1990). It builds on previous discussions seeking to clarify the problematic carried forward by Farr (1987), Wagner (1996), Marková and Jovchelovitch (2008) and Howarth, Kalampalikis and Castro (2011). The argument develops in four steps expanding on two previous statements (Bauer and Gaskell, 2008 and 1999):

- The periodic sense of representations in crisis;
- Some particular 'representations' in the social sciences: scientific, statistical, political and mental, but not artistic;
- Recapitulating ideas for a theoretical paradigm of 'social representations';
- Rehearsing the implications for research into modern mentalities.

Why worry about representations: the iconoclastic impetus

In 2012 the *Economist*, a weekly magazine which is not known for any religious orientation beyond markets, commemorated a curious event.[1] In June 1913 Russian gunboats resolved a theological conflict on Mount Athos in Greece by brute force. An 'onomatoclastic' abbot had called in imperial help against his 'onomatodoxian' monks who repeated the 'Names of God' to unleash mystical powers. This conflict, which in the Orthodox world is known as the 'Imiaslavic controversy' (see Bulgakov, 1931/2012) centres on the issue of whether a word is more than just a *flatus voci* (Latin for a vocal fart). These events are historically contemporaneous with Ferdinand de Saussure's lectures in Geneva where he stressed the conventional link between the material signifier (the spoken, written or depicted 'horse') and the signified general idea (a four-legged riding animal) as the foundation of modern semiotics in a context of social psychology (Saussure, 1916/1960; Harris, 1987).

These events of 1913, recalled one hundred years later, point to old preoccupations about modalities of representations. The foundation narrative takes the following lines: Moses, who led the people of Israel out of Egyptian slavery, climbed up Mount Sinai, and when he came back there was upheaval. Aaron, who

1 War and theology – in the name of the Name, *Economist*, 22 December 2012, 46–48.

'represented' Moses as acting leader of the people in the meantime, had made concessions and the people regressed to venerating their old Golden Calf. An irate Moses reprimanded Aaron and the people of Israel and angrily destroyed the symbol of slavery. This was the exemplary act of biblical iconoclasm, presenting a violent act of liberation from false representations.

Why destroy the Golden Calf? Deference to idols is an act of infidelity, a transgression. The Bible tells of the Covenant of Freedom that was received on the mountain top and which stated clearly that God first and foremost is jealous and does not tolerate competition; deference should be to the one and only (hence monotheism); and secondly, to make this easier, God forbids the making of 'graven images of things in heaven or on earth' that could distract from the one and only (the iconoclastic impetus). This event leaves the Jewish tradition with a strong premonition of two lingering dangers of visualization and representations: infidelity and cognitive error (see Halbertal and Marglit, 1992), and a struggle with visual art (Julius, 2001). Islam inherited the iconoclastic ban of images of Allah, the prophet, and all human figures. Iconoclastic art is thus bent towards the ornamental and abstract to avoid infringement of the commandments.

Christianity inherited the iconoclastic impetus with ambivalence that manifests itself in historical waves of iconoclasm. In the Eastern Church this came to a peak in the controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries, when images of Christ were destroyed. The conflict between iconoclasts and iconophiles was resolved in favour of the latter, when in 843 CE the 'Triumph of Orthodoxy' council put icons back into religious practice. Eastern Christianity has since had a regulated practice of two-dimensional depictions of Christ, Maria, prophets, angels and apostles. In this context visual art became a mystical pursuit. In the West, the problem of representation came to a crunch in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, when the iconoclastic impetus resurged in the stripping of altars and the destruction of relics and religious art of all kinds (Duffy, 1992). Sacred spaces were not to represent anything except in the modality of words; *in extremis* even the sounds of music were considered distractive and potentially iconolatrous.[2]

In contrast, the historical defense of images counted on three lines of argument. First, modalities of representations such as pictures, movements or sounds were helpful for instructing the people as memory props and as illustrations of more abstract points. This didactic defence is traceable to Greco-Roman rhetoric, which states that to aid memory we should use vivid images: not many, but beautiful, grotesque or ridiculous ones (*imagines agentes*; see Yates, 1966). This was recognized by the fourth century and reinforced in the sixteenth century. The Catholic Counter-Reformation defended representations with baroque exaltation in all modalities such as carved, sculptured, pictured, sounded, and with colours

2 Clearly this is a heroic simplification of historical events. These issues gave rise to complex crisscrossings among different trends of the Reformation; and theological conflicts mixed with earthly concerns for the nationalization of the church's property (see MacCulloch, 2003; Wandel, 1994; Eire, 1986). The language used is the language of the victors: rejecters of images see themselves as correct and the others as 'iconodules'; while 'iconoclast' is the polemical term used by 'iconophiles' for the erring others.

and even smells and public processions. All the senses should be mobilized for the higher realm by the rhythms and textures of locations that reminded the community of the physical presence of Christ and the saints.

Second, the veneration of images was an aesthetic act of resistance to Islamic expansion in early medieval times. In the Mediterranean world, the military success of the new creed seemed to strongly indicate Allah's favour and defeat was easily blamed and internalized as punishment for the idolatrous practices of Christianity. The call for a return to 'purity' seemed only rational for some; for others it was a concession too many to the victors. Icons were thus in popular demand to mark identity and difference to Islam, and victorious Islam was rather tolerant of visual practices once firmly in power.

Finally, the controversy of the ninth century highlighted a third argument: the 'power-charged contemplation of icons' (MacCulloch, 2013, p. 107) offered an alternative route to salvation. Meditating and contemplating icons had the power to change lives; an aesthetic effect we still expect from exceptional works of art. Sloterdijk (2012) cites the poet Rilke to make this point: upon seeing Apollo in the Louvre, 'you have to change your life'. The iconoclastic authorities sought to monopolize the liturgy in the *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople, presided over by clerics, as the only spiritual highway. While the iconophiles, led by wandering monks, offered icons as the democratic pathway open everywhere. Icons could be kept in the house or carried on the road by everyone (for all this, see MacCulloch, 2013, p. 107 ff.).

Why start this chapter with a potted history of an undoubtedly complex problem: that of iconoclasm and the defence of religious images? It is important to remind ourselves of this heritage, which seems fully present in current concerns about 'representations'. A sense of crisis that has been building up is felt in both politics and the arts (see Behnke, 1992). The postmodern dismissal of all representations as ideological (Woolgar, 1989), defences that are to stem a return of behaviourism by the back door (Jovchelovitch, 1996), and various claims to revival of the iconic (Redner, 1994; Latour and Weibel, 2002) are underpinned by new-old arguments. We might profit from this history for our current understanding of sensitivities over 'social representations'.

The argument is that in researching 'social representations', social psychology is entangled in the legacy of monotheistic, in other words Judeo-Christian-Muslim, worries about symbolic activity – about the risks and dangers of 'imagination' and 'making images'. Social representations theory manages these anxieties by embracing this history rather than enacting it in the conduct of social research.

The monotheistic foundation story and its reception cultivate a sense of suspicion against 'representations'. Halbertal and Margalit (1992, p. 112 ff.) reconstruct this history as the chain of criticisms that moves from debunking folk idolatry (biblical) to the religious enlightenment of philosophical theology (medieval), to the secular critique of all religion (enlightenment), and finally to the modern critique of collective delusions and mass ideology (nineteenth and twentieth century). Endorsing representations is risky to freedom, salvation and effective action. In this legacy, representations distort, mislead and create a false focus of attention

and deference which in religious terms is blasphemy or fetishism, and in secular terms delusion or ideology. The policing of this risk is historically both a call for the powers that be, as in the case of Mount Athos in 1913, as well as for the revolt against such powers (as in the Russian Revolution of 1917; or see the Reverend Gilles Fraser and his recent comments on protests in Turkey and in London).[3] The critical notion of 'fetishism' also derives from this concern over misplaced deference. A fetish is an object that is attributed powers which it does not 'really' have. An amulet is just an ornamented stone, and nothing more. Fetishism is a pagan practice, which, according to Christian missionaries, needs to be denounced and left behind. This is a powerful frame of mind: the quest for Progress. Recent discussions of this history, however, argue that the attribution of powers to material objects is an anthropological constant rather than a historical residue that can be left behind (see Boehme, 2006; Ellen, 1988). Modern life, supposedly beyond the fetish, is cluttered with objects invested with powers. Enthusiasm for new technology and luxury goods is driven by a process of valuing objects far beyond their substance; 'buying a lifestyle' is empowering goods far beyond a piece of metal, cloth or leather.

The legacy of a *via media*: neither conflation nor separation of symbol and reality

The solution of the iconoclastic controversy in Christianity seems to hinge on avoiding certain solutions to the problem of the 'incarnation', in other words, the problem is how to think of Christ as God and human body, messenger and message, abstract and concrete, absent and present, signifier and signified.

The dogma of the Trinity, established in the fifth century, claimed the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or in a modern language, the three modalities of God, to resolve the paradox of the simultaneous godliness and humanity of Christ. In the Chalcedonian Creed of 451 CE we find the paradoxical formulation about unity in diversity: 'We teach . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'. In doing so the clerics contrasted and highlighted two heterodoxies[4] while steering clear of both. On the one hand, the Diaphysites (two natures/bodies) stressed the human nature of Christ, ordinary flesh and blood while being God only by casual association (e.g. Nestorians). This resonates with an arbitrary link between signifier (Christ) and signified (God), no divine kinship. On the other hand, Miaphysites (one nature/body) stressed the godly nature of Christ. This comes in two versions. One stream believed Christ equals God in identity and no difference; Christ's human nature was negligent, like a drop of vinegar in the sea. The Gnostic tradition claimed that Christ could not and therefore did not die a humanly painful death but a stooge died instead (i.e. Docetism); the Gnostics ridiculed the common belief in Christ's crucifixion and cultivated a

3 Reverend Gilles Fraser, Are you an iconodule or iconoclast?, *Guardian*, 15 June 2013, 53.

4 These pre-Chalcedon creeds survive as Oriental or Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodoxy, currently under existential pressure, but historically protected by Islam.

hermetic-esoteric knowledge of this falsehood that was propagated by a dark power (Gnostic dualism: Jonas, 1934/2001). This position also resonates in a fixed identity between signifier (Christ) and signified (God); an identity that is confused by appearances of duality among the multitudes, but is known by the few.

The dogma of the Trinity upholds a third way between these two positions by adding the concern for the mediating 'spirit' and by holding to 'similarity' and 'analogy', neither difference nor identity between signified and signifier. The triadic solution comprises the sign, the object and the abstract and mediating interpretans (according to Peirce; see Eco, 1985, p. 76 ff.). In the image, the object is described as such and such, as if it were such and such (Goodman, 1976, p. 28 ff.). Now, we also say the image frames the object. This compromise is unstable and oscillates the interpretation of the symbol between a leaning towards embodiment (the concrete action on the object) or towards transcendence (the abstract interpretans) without ever giving in totally. This might throw light on the cryptic prediction of Charles Taylor (2006, p. 609 ff.) on the various forms of resistance to the 'excarnation' of rationality; the historical trend leads away from the abstract-individual-calculus to the embodied-social actor; it appears salvation does not rest in Dr Strangelove and Strategic Bomber Command but in the bloody suffering *Die Hard* – Hollywood seems to pick up this trend.

The iconoclastic controversies needed to come to terms with representations, not least because of the unwavering popular demand for images. Because Christ was also human, he could be represented on wood blocks, but with certain care. The question was what were people doing when venerating the physical icons? Were people venerating God in the painted icon? – this would amount to an untenable miaphysite error, because there is an obvious difference between the woodwork and God. Were people venerating the painting as coloured woodwork only? – this was useless and at worst amounted to a diaphysite blasphemy (see Bulgakov, 1931/2012 for the theological intricacies of this). People were venerating God, but *through* the icons, and the motion 'through' needed guidance by the spirit.

The moral of the story is that the discussions over 'representation' in psychology and beyond remain within this tradition of quarrelling over the semiotic problem, *without confusion (identity) and without arbitrary separation (difference)* between signifier and signified, the act of representing and the represented object, and thus sustaining an aversion for settling on either extreme. In this tradition, social representations theory supports an ontological commitment to what is 'represented', it retains as much onomatopoeic-mimesis as it is semiotic-arbitrary. This debate extends into the secular social sciences: thus, what is a social representation?

Different meanings of 'representation'

The dictionary meaning of the term 'representation' is ambivalent and manifold. Some usages have found massive elaboration under attributes such as 'scientific', 'statistical', 'political' and 'mental'.

Scientific representation is discussed in relation to how models represent a target reality fittingly. For example, Frigg (2002) argues that for scientific models three features are required: (a) a formal system of symbols and relations, (b) an actor purpose, and (c) a physical-substantive embedding. Structural isomorphism between model and target reality is not sufficient to show how models represent, because there are models without a similarity to reality. Without substantive assumptions a model will have only abstract relations; a physics theory without physics, economics without an economy, a computer without a mind. However, how models represent real-world targets remains full of 'mystery': how does a non-verbal object, the physical design, for example a computer, represent another non-verbal target object, for example the brain/mind. The supposition seems to be that 'to represent' refers to different relations between symbol system and target, the specification of which is a wide open field of enquiry. Frigg (2010, p. 121 ff.) later argues that it might be useful to distinguish p-representations from t-representations, the latter implying the former. T-representation refers to the relation between the model and the real-world target, which is prototypically explored by one-to-one 'mapping'. P-representation is the narrative element of the model, the import of fictional characteristics which allows the observer to be surprised and carried beyond the formalism; it specifies the relation between the model and life-world.

Statistical representation is a well-trodden territory (e.g. Kish, 1965). Sampling theory deals with the logic of observing a part and making valid inferences about the whole. In terms of persuasion, we are dealing with a synecdoche, a rhetorical trope for which the felicitous conditions are very well specified: the quality of the sample determines whether or not the trope is persuasive. A population is represented, the sample is more or less representative, and representativeness is achieved by procedure; drawing randomized units that provide an unbiased sample and error controlled estimates of parameters of the whole. The language used for this is rich and includes population, sampling frame, stratification, cluster, weighting and random selection. Another set of well-defined terms specifies the 'representativeness' in terms of sources of errors such as coverage, sampling, non-response and measurement. A key insight of statistical sampling is that good design matters more than sample size. Doubling the sample size reduces error only by square-root of 2, which is a huge effort with little returns; hence 'big' is not better. Statistical sampling is a powerful tool of social research that runs the risk of over-application.

Political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives 'present' in the policy-making processes; it makes present what would otherwise be absent (Dovi, 2011). This involves a representing party, a represented constituency, opinions and perspectives that are represented, and a setting where this takes place. However, there are different fashions of how this 'presence' is achieved and each concept holds those who act as 'representatives' to different standards. One tension concerns the role and autonomy of representatives: to act as 'delegates' who embody the preferences as instructed or as 'trustees' who contribute to the deliberations to their best judgement. Political representation can vary on four dimensions (Pitkin, 1967). Formally it involves procedures of becoming

authorized and accountable; these may be democratic but need not be. Symbolically, those represented relate to the representative with degrees of acceptance. Descriptively, the representative is more or less similar in culture and attitude as his or her constituents. On substance, the interests of the constituency are more or less served. Political scientists observe how the significance of these four dimensions changes with political contexts, for example democratic formalism trumped other concerns during the Cold War when it provided a model for propaganda. Researchers are also concerned with the design of well-functioning deliberations, with how voices are raised or marginalized in the process, and whether 'representative democracy' might be a contradiction in terms: representatives assume a degree of independence from the represented which does not seem to be democratic (Dovi, 2011).

Mental representation brings us to psychology, cognitive science and the philosophy of mind. It is a key concept in constructing computer models of 'mind'; representations are mental models upon which 'cognition' operates. Mental objects have semantic properties, that is, they have propositional content 'x is y', a referent, and thus they are true or false (see Pitt, 2013). In addition, humans display attitudinal relations to these true or false mental objects. We say that chocolate must be represented in our minds if it is chocolate that we desire. Chocolate is the intentional content of the mental representation, and desiring or despising it is the propositional attitude we take to it. Mental representations are about things, they have intentionality, but they are also about objects that have no correspondence in reality, such as fairies and unicorns. Much attention is paid to misrepresentations of existing things, and to the unreality of representations to which we exhibit attitudes. These processes are modelled in computer programmes of brains (computer models of the mind), and in so doing we are led to believe that brains might think and desire something. We therefore lose sight of the rest of the body and other people supporting or challenging this event. Thus we easily commit the *mereological fallacy* of attributing a capacity exhibited by the whole to some of the parts, to a part which might be necessary but not sufficient for realizing the activity. It is an easy confusion of language to argue neurologically about psychological phenomena: for example the amygdala part of the brain might be involved in experiencing 'a dangerous animal', but it is more than odd to say that the 'brain represents the animal'; the predicate 'represent' is adequate only for the entire organism and not solely for the brain (Bennett and Hacker, 2003).

I have not dealt with representation in the arts (e.g. Goodman, 1976), which seems to me a dauntingly vast territory to explore here as well. However the point of this review is not completeness, nor is it a quest for the true meaning underlying all these different meanings of 'representations'. Rather it seems more useful to explore a *family resemblance* among different usages. This might reveal a set of features (F_R), and each usage makes use of a different subset of these features (fR_{mental} c F_R), any two uses covering a subset of features, but the common ground of all uses, conjunction [$fR_{science}$, $fR_{political}$ . . . . fR_{mental}] = 0], is an empty set. There is thus no prototypical usage of the term 'representation'; at most there is something close to a common concern: the iconoclastic impetus. In the sociology of

knowledge this is also known as a 'boundary object' (see Riesch, 2010): the same term is used by collaborators with partially overlapping meanings for purposes of tentative cooperation; the term links separated parties with a boundary. This is a liberating position within which to work on 'social representations'. Social psychology adds to the burgeoning concert of 'representation' players, to a concert where traditional iconoclastic worries and anxieties may be contained.

The paradigmatic formulation of social representations theory

The conceptual contribution of the theory of social representations to social psychology at large is to highlight and to guide the analysis of social groups as a serious pretend play involving the 'as if' of common sense, mentalities and vernacular knowledge. Representation means naming things, an act that makes use of common places rooted in social interaction. This defines an ample, powerful and critical ambition of real-world social-psychological research.

Everyday mentality is controversial and often identified derogatively as just 'common sense' or 'popular delusions'. These derogative terms inherit the age-old tensions between episteme and doxa, knowledge and opinion or belief, science and non-science, between dignified and less dignified knowledge. The theory of social representations enters this debate decidedly on one side; it sides with doxa, belief and common sense. The theory of social representations defends the dignity of these notions against the onslaught from enlightenment notions of popular prejudice, nineteenth-century middle-class angst over crowds and mass delusions, Marxist analysis of ideology and 'false consciousness', and existentialist debunking of 'bad faith'.

Social representations theory inherits relaxedness about the pretend play of 'as if' and 'as such'. The 'as if' and the 'as such' of representations are not so disturbing to the analyst that he or she would be immediately drawn to cry foul and to debunk the fictional element of these representations. The theory of social representations steers us towards care and circumspection in that respect. The iconoclastic impetus is suspended, tamed or sublimated.[5]

The iconoclastic impetus is tamed because social representations theory rejects the dilemma of mimetic identity or convention, of iconicity or arbitrary association between signifier and signified. The theory of social representations stands in a tradition of a triadic solution to sharp dilemmas, of avoiding the fallacy of the excluded third (Boyes, 2000). It rejects the Either/Or in favour of the Neither/Nor. On the semiotic issue the theory of social representations retains an ontological investment despite the doubling up of reality in representations and without recollapsing it in either identity (fundamentalist) or an arbitrary regress of symbols onto

5 The historical acceptance of this inheritance of taming the iconoclastic impetus is here more alluded to than really analyzed. This historical work still needs to be done.

symbols (constructivism). The 'as if' reality of social representations are not tested on fact; instead, they are tested on practical social functions (Wagner and Hayes, 2005).

Harré (1984) positioned this effort within a wider tradition of 'socialising the mind', in elective affinities with an understanding of Wittgenstein's language games: as there is no private language, but only established rules of using words to buy into, there is also no private representation of the world. Social representations are shared by members of the group in analogy to language: it is a commons, a distributed resource without any one individual being in command of it all. In the 1970s social psychologists from both sides of the Atlantic tried to stem a 'crisis of the discipline' by redefining a more valid social psychology – Hegelian, reflective, real-world, multi-method; this in contrast to the then dominant approach – individualistic, Cartesian, busy-productive, experimental of mainly undergraduate student behaviour (Moscovici and Maková, 2006). Forty years on, it seems that the latter style of work still wins the day, though recently engaging in some soul searching over lack of replicated evidence, and the socially biased evidence base; the credit-seeking sophomore student continues to populate most busy-body studies (Arnett, 2008).

The theory of social representations continues to make an enormous difference to the analysis of social innovations and new technologies. Formulated in the 1960s against the then dominating and still ongoing notion of 'diffusion of innovation' (Rogers, 1962), social representations theory considers the adoption of innovation as a creative process of transformation and appropriation. The serial reproduction of ideas or designs is no encoding-decoding, identity preserving communication process on the high fidelity (hifi) model. Where the diffusion model only considers adoption rates and quality decay, the theory of social representations highlights the transformation of ideas and redesigns in social circulation. The theory of social representations therefore continues to make a critical difference over hifi models of communication in science communication and innovation studies. One could even consider social representations theory as a theory of resistance against technocratic dreams (Bauer, 2013 and 2015).

The theory of social representations is a logical function with several arguments

'Representing' is an activity, a constituting and constructing of a relation either by mental act or by investing in ink blots on paper or in matter such as building a skyscraper: we are building a relation: *'x represents y'*. And designing, thinking and symbol use are brought about by moving human bodies; hence *'x represents y for actor'*.

The target object 'y' is said to exist or not to exist independent of human actors. But even if the object is found, it is still 'made' in a certain fashion by the means used to represent it. We tend to find stars as 'sets of molecules' or 'angels in the sky'. The means 'x' (molecules or angels) of representation vary in two ways: first

they employ concepts, words, sentences, thoughts, pictures and images, or sound and music. Different modalities have a different logic of constituting the relation *'x represents y for actor by modes m . . . '*, something that is well explored with language, spoken or written, but less clear for images and pictures or for sound and music (Hondrich, 1995). Second, representations also vary on modalities along a set of genres, *'x represents y for actor by mode and in modality'*, for example Churchill is represented as the victorious knight on a horse (knight genre in sculpture mode). In all cases, fact and fiction are curiously mixed up in the act of representing (a noema, intentionality, actuality or aboutness) and in a certain moment in time (kairos). One feels an acute sense of category mistake if somebody declares that 'they do not read fiction because it is not true'; our sense is that fiction entails fact; our sense of fact seems poor without fiction. One might further worry about the possibility of two or more representations equally fitting the target reality; fitting but logically inconsistent world-makings (see Kung, 1993, contrasting the notions of 'world-making' and of 'constitution'). Or we might consider the case that the representation anticipates what will become efficient reality, guiding the actions that bring it about. Utopian social engineering seems to follow this path (Bloch, 1953/1986).

However, we might not worry about 'reality fitting'. We might worry less about semantic truth value and more about the pragmatic value of representations. Suspending the fact–fiction distinction and the truth value problem for the moment, we might ask: what do representations do for the actors and how do they do it? That is the task of societal psychology: to elucidate the content structure and the social functions of current common sense, in other words, to empirically and comparatively clarify the mentalities of everyday life. Jodelet (1989b) has aptly identified the study of social representations as the anthropology of the present rather than of faraway places.

The paradigmatic definition of 'social representations' as developed in previous writings (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999 and 2008) highlights five elements, which I will briefly rehearse:

- Subject–Object–Project communication systems
- Modes of representation (multi-methods)
- Modalities of representations (multi-level)
- The time scape – temporal extensions
- Some methodological implications

The purpose of this paradigm was not normative, but an attempt to define the specific contributions of the theory of social representations for the purposes of social psychological research. The paradigmatic description of social representations theory recognizes social representations (SR) as a logical function with several arguments:

$$\mathrm{SR} = \mathrm{f}\left(\mathrm{object}_{12},\ \mathrm{subject}_1\ -\ \mathrm{subject}_2,\ \mathrm{project}_{12},\ \mathrm{genre}_{\mathrm{x}}, \mathrm{time}_{12}\right).$$

$$\mathrm{SR}\ =\ \mathrm{f}\left[\mathrm{x\ relates\ to\ Y,\ by\ actors,\ mode\ and\ modality,\ kairos}\right].$$

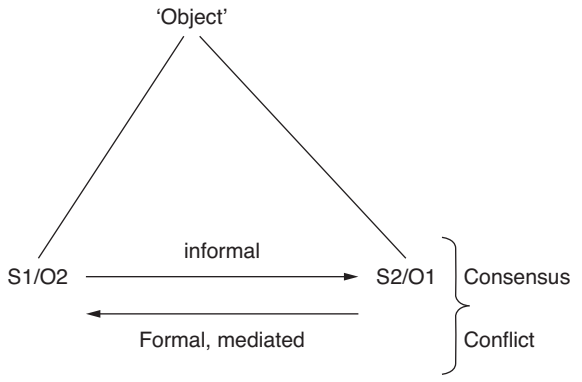

Figure 4.1 *The basic unit of analysis and attribution of representations.*

Talking of an argument with several functions suggests that talking of social representations means that, in studying social representations of X, we should clarify the subjects involved, in other words, the social group that is constituted by the joint intentionality of a project$_{12}$; the object$_{12}$ Y that emerges as the 'as if' in that interaction,[6] and the genres of communication and the sense of timing, the kairos, that defines the form of social integration (Duveen, 2008).

Social representations theory guides the analysis of communication systems

Social representations theory adopts the basic unit of analysis, self-other-in-relation-to-common object, which has been postulated for social psychology with mixed success in the past. The analytic unit and the target of entity attribution is thus the dialogue between subjects, a unit of communication. The mentality manifests itself in this conviviality, though this conviviality is not free of conflict. Figure 4.1 depicts this idea schematically in the Subject S_1 who is 'other O_2' to subject S_2, who in turn is 'other O_1'. The object arises from this interaction as a pretend play 'as if' with both factual as well as fictional elements. The interaction can be informal face-to-face or mediated by formal communication involving attention to media genres of mass circulation at a distance. The diversity of perspectives of subjects gives a dynamic tension to this basic triangle (Marková, 2003; Farr, 1997; Moscovici, 1984).

Social representations therefore need to be observed both in people's minds, as semi-privately introspected and verbally or behaviourally expressed, and as circulating sign vehicles in society and between people (see Farr, 1981). Our symbolic

6 On the important difference between 'actuality' and 'reality', I refer to the classic book by Berger and Luckmann (1966). The authors struggled with the English translation of the German distinction between 'Wirklichkeit' and 'Realitaet'. According to Luckmann, the title of this book should have been the 'social construction of actuality' (English translation of 'Wirklichkeit') and not 'the social construction of reality' as this created much misunderstanding about their argument (personal communication, 2006).

environment constrains and scaffolds common sense and practical activity; we are dragging along in a continuous stream of mass media, physical artefacts and designed symbols.

Social representations exhibit structural features and serve many functions

The theory of social representations cultivates two structural intuitions: the features of core–periphery, and the distinction between reified and consensual elements. Reification is often synonym to 'natural' and 'essential' and therefore deemed to be given, fixed and unchangeable. The consensual is deemed open to change. We can expect that social representations in real life have this duality of structures; some notions are peripheral and negotiable, that is, the consensual, while others are more central and are not negotiable, that is, the more reified and essential in the 'nature of things'. But we might also observe peripheral elements that are naturalized as ecology, and central elements that are negotiable in social representation. These distinctions are flexible and fungible.

The structural build-up of mentality serves pragmatic functions to guide – what to do next – and to justify action – why to do it. Social representations serve attitudinal, attributional, identity presentation and collective memory functions in social integration, or in the language more common in the literature, social representations constrain, select and enable particular attitudes, attributions, identity and collective memory; they frame particular actions.[7]

Our research on the public perception of new technology, in particular biotechnology, in a comparative manner, has given rise to the formulation of this paradigm and its developments from the Toblerone model to the wind rose model and the waterwheel model.

These subsequent developments involve both the suggestive use of metaphor and the drawing of schematic images to stress different points.

The Toblerone model in Figure 4.2 is basically an elongated triangle. This elaborates the basic triad of communication (subject–subject–object) into a temporal extension as projected by shared intentionality. New technologies come with a vision of the future which changes in time. The figure shows a slice in the Toblerone as the mentality, project or common sense at a particular time (Kairos) that is derivative of the past project_{t-1} and in transition to the future project_{t+1}. These notions are reminiscent of Lewin's depictions of the psychological field-at-a-given-time with its extensions into the past and into the future with variable complexity (Lewin, 1952). The Toblerone model absorbs two further notions beyond that of the basic triangle: those of project_{12} and time_{12} in addition to the subject_{12}-object_{12}.

7 It appears that the social movement literature has developed an entirely parallel language game that explores the pragmatic function of symbolic activity and social imagination under the heading of 'framing collective action' (see Benford and Snow, 2000). It seems a future task for SRT researchers to engage that literature in some detail (for an attempt, see Bauer, 2015).

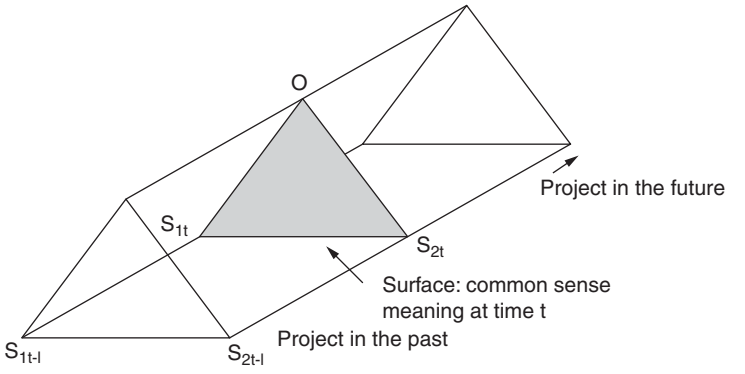

Figure 4.2 *The Toblerone model of social representations (after Bauer and Gaskell, 1999).*

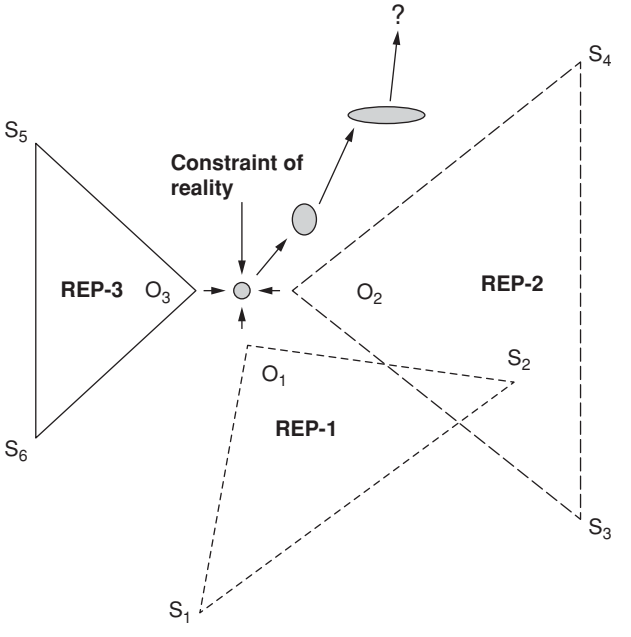

Figure 4.3 *The irregular wind rose model of social representations (Bauer and Gaskell, 2008).*

However, in empirical research the particular features, structural and functional, of social representations only come to light in comparative research, and thus we need to extend the model to a set of triangles that are held together by a 'linking pin' at the centre, that is, the common reference of discourse to which all refer (though in their specific 'as if' pretend play). Hence we come to the wind rose model of several triangles linked by a central pin as shown in Figure 4.3. This extension incorporates the basic reality of us/them intergroup behaviour that defines the

functions of social representations. A particular representation of 'food' as 'organic, not genetically engineered and sustainable' is traded against other representations of food as 'industrial, genetically modified and unsustainable'. The fact that these different representations of food have unequal power to determine the history of food production is reflected in the relative size of the triangles linked together in common reference. The reality of food stuffs we eat is the outcome of the intergroup behaviour of actors who sustain and propagate different notions of what we all should eat. The wind rose model absorbs the fact that some discourses share elements, hence the overlapping triangles. Also, a particular subject might juggle several representations in 'polyphasia', as if they spoke several languages without confusion; however, the representations might not be of equal weight when tested under stress. The theory of social representations develops the notion of 'cognitive polyphasia' in contrast to cognitive dissonance on how people handle contradictory mind frames (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Thus the wind rose image is a model of intergroup contexts. Social representations do not stand in isolation, but in the middle of social polemics and competitions, they evolve in demarcating identities, and through resistance to the machination of dominant stances. Hence, one of the key functions of social representations is the preservation of autonomy by enabling resistance against undue influences.

Finally, by repeating the move from triangle to elongated triangle, we reach something that looks ideally like a waterwheel; several elongated triangles rotate around a central hinge, as does the waterwheel that propels the steam boat on the river. The 'waterwheel' model depicts an evolving reality in the central pin that is put under tension by the rotating segments. The model is converging with that of evolving ontologies, otherwise called 'sausage ontologies' (see Kung, 1993), each constituting a more or less demarcated action space with its projections and time dimension. The waterwheel is a rather too regular model for this, as we must expect the segments to be irregular, contorted and converging with and diverging from each other. Mentalities and mind frames tend to fuse in social interaction (meta-frames), and they also tend to differentiate over time (frame splitting). This becomes impossible to visualize on paper; it requires rather animated computer graphics. A model for comparative social representations research is emerging which incorporates multiple elongated, triangular units of communication, different 'as if' objects projected into an open future, competing with other representations and actors, and in doing so defining a co-evolving reality as the linking pin and common reference.

The key point of the theory of social representations is preserved through all these models, the iconoclastic impetus is muted: social representations theory remains agnostic with regard to the ultimate dignity of any of these 'as if' pretend plays. The key point is functional analysis of representations for action; the iconoclastic suspicion is suspended, though not abolished. Iconoclasm remains a possibility, but it is not the main theoretical preoccupation. The theory of social representations left behind notions of teleological development from mythos to logos, from mythical, to dogmatic and to scientific knowledge, stages of societal development, or notions

of social maturity. It can recognize, however, that such notions of historical telos are part of the claim-making among social actors and their representations of reality.

Research and practical implications of this paradigm

All this has methodological implications, as has been suggested in a previous formulation (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999). I will briefly rehearse and update: content and process, mode and modalities of representations, natural social milieus, within milieu cultivation, longitudinal designs, historical crossings, and the disinterested research attitude.

The added value of these implications is illustrated in the conduct of a large international project 'Biotechnology and the Public' (Bauer and Gaskell, 2002). At the time, the theory of social representations served us as a strategic dispositive to guide data collection and stimulate conceptual discussions, and at the same time to fend off any inclination of social researchers to reify common sense in the latest questionnaire-based survey data: public opinion is more than what the latest survey depicts. As the Toblerone model kept reminding us: 'we ain't there yet'.

Methodological implications for the research design

The preceding discussion leads to several implications for the design of social representations studies in order for it to live up to the ambitions of the concept. A set of criteria is proposed to provide a guideline for our own empirical research and that of our colleagues. This will also allow us to identify social representations studies by 'family resemblances', both by common inspiration and origin or by elected affinities. There are many studies of real-life phenomena which do not use the term 'social representation', but are entirely within its remit and ambition (while on the other hand there might be others which use the term, but hardly serve the label). An ordering of the key questions will define the approach by comparison with other research programmes of social psychology and the social sciences and allow both to identify the elected affinities as well as the false positives. And if Devereux was correct, then the clarification of methods is a way to manage anxieties of the researcher, in our case the worries that might persist in dealing with 'representations' (Giami, 2001).

Modes of representations: multi-level analysis

Social groupings are more or less institutionalized, are organized and have taken historical shape. The elaboration of different levels of representation in habitual behaviour, individual *cognition, informal and formal communication* corresponds to the degree of institutionalization. New groups show less formality than older

ones; but informality and simple habits do not disappear with formality. This multi-levelled reality requires a multi-method approach to compare the various levels simultaneously: questionnaires and interviews might reconstruct and monitor individual cognition; transcripts of group interviews the informal group dialogues; and document and mass-media analysis cover formal communication. Established canons of discourse and content analysis can characterize the contents of representations comparatively across different levels.

The primary requirement is multi-method design, combining spontaneous interview data with written and documented data. Triangulation of different levels is central; however, not to validate claims (similarly Flick, 1992), but to determine core and peripheral elements through the comparison of levels and data, and to determine the functions of representations in different contexts. Differences between data and levels of analysis will refer us back to the research process: thus reflexivity becomes an integral part of the conduct of research.

Modalities of representations: multi-method analysis

A feature of social representations is that we have to expect them to be invested in all possible modalities: in *speech and conversation, scripture and texts, images, sounds, and movement, even smell and taste*. This is clearly a call for diversification, as most research in social psychology is focussed on the spoken or written word, as in conversational interviews or questionnaires. Computerized experiments might also use movements such as keystrokes and decision speed as key indicators of mentality, but such micro-activities are notoriously uninformative and a disappointing data source with which to explore the contents of mentality (see Baumeister, Vobs and Funder, 2008). Movement without knowledge of the invested intentionality is vague and ambiguous in meaning. The social researcher clearly needs to be open and able to deal with many of these modalities of 'representations', in combination of mixed-method. One of the difficulties lies in the implicit hierarchy of data dignity mapped on to these modalities. The iconoclastic tradition has also left a preference for the word over the visual, and even a preference for action/movement over the word and image (i.e. revealed preferences), when it comes to constructing data streams that give access to mentalities. Many researchers suspect that images hide more than they reveal, while words seem to be open and transparent. A close inspection reveals this as a curious prejudice. The most reliable source of data seems to be the observable behaviour that can be registered in the legacy of 'behavioural science'. However, the theory of social representations makes us query these assumptions, as much as we recognize that implicit data hierarchies are part of the historical struggle over worrisome 'representations'.

Segmentation of 'natural' groups

The problem of social segmentation for comparative research brings us to the differentiation of groups as carriers of representations. Social representations theory

is primarily interested in natural groups that exhibit self-reference, and less in statistical aggregates, however defined.

Let us consider the classical study *La psychanalyse, son image et son public* (Moscovici, 1961/1976): what suggested at the time the differentiation of an urban-liberal, a milieu-Catholic, and a party-communist segmentation of the French public? The question can only be answered by historical witnesses. We start with speculations: the segmentation refers to milieus of 'Weltanschauung'. The world is and feels a different place for secular liberals, Catholics and communists shortly after World War II. As a consequence, the three milieus take very different positions towards 'psychoanalysis' and its model of the human psyche. This difference is grounded in different ways of seeing and experiencing the world, how it works, and the role of human action. But the three representations of psychoanalytic knowledge can be typified and contrasted. The result makes the segmentation plausible *ex-post facto*.

Segmentation, however, is a problem at the design stage of research. We need heuristics to determine relevant groups for particular topics, in order not to follow blindly the default of much social research to segment according to income, age and sex. The multiculturalism of formerly homogeneous modern societies may be diagnostic. To what extent are old distinctions of social class, language, religion or urban–rural still relevant life-worlds? For international comparisons we may continue to consider 'political nation-states' as self-referential units. A heuristic might also be whether a group commands a mass medium edited by-and-for-itself. These are not necessarily costly TV or radio stations, but events such as newsletters, pamphlets, musical subcultures or social media networks may be relevant formal media.

Furthermore we should clarify how far functional differentiation of operations in law, business, art, religion and science (Luhmann, 1984) segment into social groupings of the 'natural' type. Is this a conceptual or an empirical problem? According to system theory, functional differentiation historically replaces social hierarchy in a globalizing context. Is this replacement complete or partial?

We need a diagnostic eye to gauge whether current statistical or functional aggregates carry the potential for self-reference. Observed groups can become self-referential groups-in-and-for-themselves. Social representations theory needs sociological imagination to observe the historical trends.

Sender–reception studies within each collective

Our analysis of social groups as communication units leads to a further implication. The study of psychoanalysis in France has shown that representations are embedded in a production–reception system of ideas; and these communication systems need to be introduced as variable into the research design. The notions of diffusion, propagation and propaganda are types of production–reception based on particular speaker–audience relations. The list might not be exhaustive and might include other systems such as rumours or advertising.

We need to consider groups as communication systems with informal and formal communication arrangements involving a mix of mass media of circulation and contact, with processes of worldview cultivation, agenda setting, framing or spiral of silence (see McQuail and Windahl, 1993). Mass-media systems express different sender–receiver relationships which can be typified and compared. What is the audience's view of the producers: trust, mistrust, ridicule, familiarity? And what are the producers' views of the audience: condescendence; elitism; patronizing? The focus of such an analysis is, unlike in audience research, not the divergence of receptions of a single media event (e.g. of soap operas) but the typification of production–reception relations in different groups: the medium from-and-for the group is the embodied representation. Diffusion, propagation and propaganda are a special case, some may still be relevant, others may be discovered. This is an empirical problem and offers scope for innovation in the theory of social representations.

In researching social representations we are not only interested in the autonomy of audiences vis-à-vis certain media messages, the resistant decoding, but in the active mobilization of messages and images for the projects of groups, the resistant encoding. This process generates the representation of particular groups which is the focus of social representations studies. Insights into ownership and influence in the mass-media markets are relevant for such studies.

Content and process

'Content matters' is a slogan of the social representations programme. The discussion of social representations has in the past and will in the future invest time and effort to describe content. The methodical developments focus on the differentiation between core and periphery, the analysis of anchors in naming, classification and free associations, and the inventory of images, pictures and metaphors which objectify the abstract issues involved. Processes of communication influence these contents. Diffusion, propagation and propaganda are not content-neutral. The presumption is that the 'stickiness' of contents of representations are as important as their generation, and essential to understand their impact on action.

Here the theory of social representations contrasts with the narrow attitude paradigm of social psychology. Mini-theories on attitude formation, resistance and change are formalized in general terms, thereby abstracting from different attitude objects and contexts. The problematic starting point is the assumption that any attitude's context is formally equivalent. However, the relationship between attitude and behaviour is not the same whether it relates to drug consumption or the purchase of hair sprays.

Time structures and longitudinal-sequential data

Social representations are structures with a medium-range life cycle; they have some stability over time with a rate of change somewhere between the elusiveness of conscious cognitions and the *longue durée* of collective mentalities. Only

a long-term research design is therefore adequate to observe changes in social representation.

Furthermore, a functional analysis of representations, in line with the above distinction of structure and functions, requires us to describe representations and their consequences over a longer time period. Interviews and documentary analysis need to be repeated and extended over time. Data collection should span several time points to assess the internal and external consequences of contents.

Using the Toblerone or the waterwheel model, a social representations research design would include several elongated triads, for example by studying the elaboration of genetics in several social contexts over twenty-five years. This would suggest that studies of the 'social representation of X' tend to take on the scale of a research programme rather than single study. However, this ambition should only provide a horizon, and not discourage any smaller scale studies.

Cross-overs of cultural trajectories

Another implication is mainly diagnostic of the relevance of social representations for a particular research context. Which situations are likely to be productive for the study of social representations? A common view in the community is that these are situations of novelty and sociocultural challenges as they are likely to occur in fault lines of cultures with different historical trajectories. In other words, the theory of social representations is indicated at points in time and space where different social groups cross paths.

Social representations are in evidence when one group resists the machinations of another in an intergroup us/them context; or in contexts where groups cope collectively with a natural threat or catastrophe of some sort. Different groups have different historical trajectories; as they cross paths, sensitivities are high. 'Crossing paths' means something becomes a common focus of attention for the different groups. Social representations are best studied when 'new' concerns arise for different groups. The origin of the concern could be one of the groups involved. Group A putting an object, idea or problem into the world, and the differential reactions and elaborations of this issue by groups B to K is precisely the stuff of social representations.

These meetings of cultures constitute an uneasy situation: in the extreme of violence, the migration of large groups of refugees, the less problematic but no less significant encounters of different visions of the future on 'nuclear power' or 'genetic inheritance'. In these situations, traditions bring existing symbolic resources to bear to resist, assimilate and accommodate each other, while changing themselves and the challenge in the process.

The 'melancholic' attitude

The theory of social representations requires stepping back from intervention into social affairs; it requires an attitude towards the object of study which could be characterized as 'live and let live': disengaged observation of mentalities with the

iconoclastic impetus tamed and sublimated. This attitude preconditions a particular sensitivity and the holding of judgement, which would otherwise be flushed out by the fervour of the researcher's own mission.

An example of how the mission can cloud the analysis is the linear hifi model of communication and diffusion (Rogers, 1962). The difference between source intention and reception is attributed to audience resistance, channel problems or sender incompetence. Resistance is supposed to be controlled efficiently by competent management of messages and channels; it has nothing to contribute to the process. Here the researcher is on a mission, and not concerned with studying representations of the audiences in their own terms, but only with a view to increasing the efficiency of the sender in changing the audience in set direction. The theory of social representations took issue with this manipulative take on communication from the start.

This attitude of social representations theory has some affinity with the melancholia as *mal du siècle* as analyzed by Lepenies (1969/1972): the melancholic, and those who think they are, relegate themselves to a disengaged position of sensitive observation and reflection on the situation with a (self-)imposed action block. Abstaining from engagement is instrumental for a particular sensitivity towards the world.

Melancholia is conditioned (a) by over-stimulation in situations of chaos and civil war, which motivates a search for ideas radically different from the status quo; utopia compensates for the present desperation with a future in remote space and time; this vision includes the eradication of melancholia as a problematic state. Or (b) melancholia is conditioned by chronic under-stimulation which is historically characteristic of persons who are capable but excluded from power. Both situations are characterized by imposed inaction that leads to a particular colour of sensitive experience of the world. Historical examples are those of the French aristocrats of the Salon conversations who are excluded from the court life at Versailles and instead of engaging warfare write up moralistic observations; or the German romantic bourgeois with no prospect for political power, instead exploring 'Innerlichkeit und Natur'; or the Marxists disillusioned by Stalinism after the Russian Revolution and instead engaging in 'Kulturkritik' far removed from the direct action of the day.

This is not to suggest that social representations theory is a melancholic pursuit without 'relevance'. On the contrary, there may be many studies which can inform the social engineer intending to ameliorate a social problem. Disinterested analysis of notions of mental illness, of the environment, of health and illness, of popular science are indispensable entry points for re-constructive intervention without being intended as interventions themselves. One might even argue that the theory of social representations would be a better ground for social engineering than many traditional experimental studies of attitude and attitude change strategies explicitly designed to create change.

In social representations research the researcher is methodically disengaged from social engineering; but paradoxically, the revolutionary among his or her audience

may be better served by the results obtained from this disengaged attitude. Though impact is not the purpose of the theory of social representations, it might well be one of its unintended consequences.

Conclusion

We have asked ourselves where the curious suspicion about representations comes from, and have traced it in the iconoclastic impetus of monotheistic religious traditions. In that very tradition, representations are defended as didactic memory props, as tactics of popular resistance, and as non-elitist practices of life.

The theory of social representations is part of a family of disciplines in the social sciences that elaborate on the term 'representations'. While all usages might share the motive of iconoclastic suspicion, social representations theory in particular seems to sustain a third way of neither/nor between total identity and utter difference of symbol and referent; it remains suspended in an uneasy compromise 'without confusion and without separation' of symbol and reality and thus retains an ontological commitment to what is represented.

The paradigm of the theory of social representations is best defined as a logical function of several arguments: X is represented as Y by a purposeful actor using modes and modalities at a certain time. In the context of comparative research, this leads to the Toblerone and waterwheel model, where actual mentalities are compared over time, and different actualities define an intergroup context. The methodological implications of the theory of social representations include considerations of mode and modalities of representations, natural social milieus, within milieu symbolic cultivation, content and process, longitudinal research designs, diagnostic moments of historical crossings, and the disinterested attitude where the iconoclastic impetus is suspended and sublimated. Considering the entanglement of secular social representations in the iconoclastic suspicion, how might mentalities and common sense be understood by researchers who work in cultural contexts of Asia or Africa without such iconoclastic suspicions? Has the iconoclastic suspicion gone global or are there functional equivalences in different traditions? These might be questions to address in the future.

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