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## The Psychology of the Social

The differences between individual and collective representations have occupied social scientists since Durkheim, whose classic article 'Individual and Collective Representations' was published a century ago. In the twentieth century, the social psychological theory of social representations has been one of the most important theories of the social, with the influence of social representations scholars such as Serge Moscovici (who contributes to this book) attested to by the work of social scientists worldwide. *The Psychology of the Social* brings together leading scholars from social representations and related approaches, including discourse analysis, to provide an integrated overview of contemporary psychology's understanding of the social. Each chapter comprises a study of a topical issue, such as social memory, social discourses about racism, intelligence, and education, or representations of the self in different cultures. These studies exemplify the theory of social representations and make connections between social representations and the central concerns of psychological research, including attribution, everyday knowledge, memory, the self, culture and ideology. They also emphasize the links to be made between social psychology and educational and developmental psychology. Taken together, the chapters offer an alternative programme for social psychology as the psychology of the social.

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## Foreword

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*Rob Farr*

This year marks the centenary of Durkheim's classic article on the difference between individual and collective representations (Durkheim, [1898] 1974). His primary objective in writing the article was to differentiate sociology (the study of collective representations) from psychology (the study of individual representations). His sharp distinction between the two disciplines created an opportunity for social psychology to develop within the context of either discipline. This generated an identity crisis for social psychologists which they have been unable to resolve in the course of the present century. At the close of the century there are sociological as well as psychological forms of social psychology with few points of contact between the two.

One solution to the problem posed by Durkheim is to declare that social psychology is the study of social representations. This was the strategy adopted by Moscovici ([1961] 1976) at the start of the modern era in social psychology when he published his pioneering study *La Psychanalyse: son image et son public*. This initial study was as much a contribution to the sociology of knowledge as it was an introduction to the concept of social representation. Moscovici's choice of Durkheim as an ancestor for this tradition of research indicates that Moscovici considers it a sociological rather than a psychological form of social psychology. Social representations are intermediate between collective and individual representations. While they may comprise a unique object of study for the social psychologist, their investigation inevitably involves one in being able to inter-relate sociology and psychology. If ancestors are able from beyond the grave to influence the affairs of their devotees then Durkheim will help ensure that social representations are not explained in terms of individual representations.

Although the term 'representation' does not appear in the title, the volume edited by Flick is germane to a consideration of Moscovici's response to the challenge posed by Durkheim. In his contribution Moscovici presents a very full account of the transition from collective to social representations. He describes in detail the influence of Lévy-Bruhl

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as well as of Durkheim on the developmental psychologies of Piaget and Vygotsky. The developmental perspective is important in accounting for the stability of cultures. It is also useful in identifying how collective representations are transmitted from one generation to the next. The contribution by Moscovici is conceptually challenging in regard to the relations between sociology and psychology and historically interesting in regard to the development of the theory of social representations. The developmental perspective is well represented elsewhere in the volume in the contributions of Doise, Mugny, and Pérez on the social construction of knowledge and of Carugati and Selleri on the differing discourses of parents and experts concerning intelligence and child development.

It is highly appropriate that the editor of the volume, Flick, is a social psychologist with a background training in sociology. The objects which are the focus of interest in the book which he has edited are explicitly social and cultural. This clearly differentiates it from a rival volume in social psychology covering many of the same topics (namely, Fraser and Gaskell, 1990). The appearance of the word 'belief' in the title of the rival volume privileges a psychological over a sociological form of social psychology. The appearance of the word 'knowledge' in the title of the present volume has the reverse effect, i.e. it privileges a sociological over a psychological form of social psychology. The theory of social representations, for example, is more central to the present volume than it was to its rival. The sociology of knowledge is a distinct field of study in its own right. As noted above, *La Psychanalyse* was a contribution to that particular field of study.

Belief has to be the belief of an individual, i.e. it is a psychological term. Knowledge can exist in a purely physical form, e.g. the volumes of an encyclopedia. Knowledge in this form is a cultural artifact rather than a social phenomenon in the strict sense. A representation is social, I would say, if it is, or has been, in two or more minds. The key question is: How does it get out of one mind in a form that can be picked up and interpreted by another? Centuries may elapse between these two events, e.g. the Renaissance corresponds to a rediscovery of the texts of the Ancient World, which had been preserved in the libraries of monasteries, mostly unread for centuries. The Renaissance, in its turn, led to the period between the Modern and the Ancient Worlds being re-presented, retrospectively, as The Middle Ages. I have chosen print as a medium for the expression of representations. Sommer, in his contribution to the volume, argues that television is a powerful new medium for the generation of social representations and he illustrates his argument by references to punk and to chaos theory. Text, inevitably, is language based. Television permits the transmission of images as well as text.

This is the first volume available in English which approaches the study of social representations through the medium of knowledge and language. There are six chapters devoted to the study of knowledge in its various forms and six to the study of language, with the former being more coherent, overall, than the latter. The forms of knowledge covered comprise von Cranach on social systems; Flick on everyday knowledge in social psychology; Hewstone and Augoustinos on social attributions; Doise, Mugny, and Pérez on social construction; Echebarría and Castro on social memory, and Oyserman and Markus on the self. The section on language and discourse is more heterogenous in its composition. Harré raises various epistemological questions concerning the nature of social representations while Potter and Wetherell, in their contribution, distinguish between discourse analysis and social representations. The topics covered in the two chapters on discourse analysis include media coverage of the Gulf War, racism (Potter and Wetherell); changing scientific conceptions of intelligence and cultural models about development (Carugati and Selleri). Augoustinos deals with ideology; Sommer (see above) with the mass media and Kruse with social representations of man in everyday language.

In origin, social representations was a French tradition of research (Farr, 1987a). It is, today, a multi-lingual enterprise with a substantial body of literature now available in Italian, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. The contributions in the last two languages come from South America as well as from Europe. There is now a growing literature in German on the topic. The present volume first appeared in German, and I believe I am correct in saying that it was the first text in that language to introduce the theory of social representations. There are links of a theoretical and historical nature between the collective representations of Durkheim and the objects of study in the ten volumes of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* (1900–20), i.e. language, religion, customs, myth, magic and cognate phenomena. Whilst Moscovici, in his theory of social representations, modernized Durkheim's conception of collective representations there was no comparable move, in Germany, to modernize Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*.

The present volume is a welcome addition to the literature available in English on the theory of social representations. There are novel contributions in the present work from German academics such as Flick himself, von Cranach, Sommer, and Kruse. The salience of the sociological dimension is also, I believe, important. It is also good to see the prominence which Flick gives, in his substantive contribution (as distinct from his editorial introduction), to the sociology of Schütz.