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# *Introduction*

The making of an inspirational social theory with long-lasting influence for generations of scholars is driven by multiple interacting factors. Attempts at unravelling these require the involvement of surrounding disciplines, exploration of their histories, and understanding the role of the Spirit of the Time (*zeitgeist*) and its major challenges. These interacting factors indicate that not only the author's creative mind but also the ways in which his/her principal concepts are understood and interpreted determine the fortune of his/her theory. Some ideas get miscomprehended or ignored; some never see their climax; others are treated uncritically as unquestionable facts. The proper understanding of a social theory, therefore, requires not only the awareness of the contribution made by its creator but also a good grasp of the historical, cultural, and political environment in which the theory develops and is appreciated by others.

Some historical periods appear to flow relatively slowly, without obvious changes and, seemingly, with few new ideas or breakthrough inventions. Other periods appear to exude revolutionary advancements in which the abundance of new discoveries can overwhelm citizens who may be barely able to grasp their significance and implications. The philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel expressed his views on contrasts in the quality and kinds of human activities between, on the one hand, situations in which the lives of humans are threatened and, on the other, those circumstances in which humans live in relative peace. He commented that prolonged or 'perpetual' calm leads to stagnation, indifference to stabilised institutions, and to passivity. In contrast, wars or revolutions threaten the very existence of humanity, and the struggle for survival strengthens individuals and nations and their ethical health (Hegel, 1807/1977, 1821/2001, pp. 312–313). However, one might make a totally opposite observation in finding that revolutions, wars, and their aftermath provoke moral devastations and general decay. Hegel's comment is not a support of wars and crises in order to advance science. Rather, his observation suggests that the threat to



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life and the struggle for survival may galvanise and focus the human mind in a specific direction and lead to engaged actions. For example, the Covid pandemic has led to unparalleled scientific and professional activity as well as to the public's ethical engagement and to taking responsibility for the Self and Others.

Such unique events that focus the human mind in a specific direction have fundamental effects on the creation of social theories. Moreover, they suggest that the making of a social theory, too, is a unique event that must be explored on its own merits. Not only are the creators of great theories remarkable individuals but they conceive their projects in irreplaceable conditions and are surrounded by irreplaceable Others. Exploring such theories can reveal pointers towards new ideas, advanced concepts, and lead to practical implications that extend beyond a theory's boundaries. In other words, attention to a unique theory can serve as a case example to help one understand the myriad of elements that are involved in the creation and development of other social theories.

I have chosen to write about Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations and communication because of my own long dialogue with the theory. It formed part of my intellectual history and, through my struggles with it, it has been important in transforming my own thinking. Having originally rejected the theory as ill-defined, inconsistent, and yet provocative, I was quickly won over. In 1996, Serge Moscovici invited me to the European Laboratory of Social Psychology in the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. One morning, we were discussing social psychology in the Café Française in front of la Bastille and he spoke with great knowledge about the Prague School of Linguistics and the relevance of language and communication for the study of social representations. Moscovici was always puzzled as to how it was possible for social psychology to develop as a social science discipline without paying any attention to language or showing much interest in communication. In his book *Psychosociology of Language*, Moscovici (1972b) observed that linguists were not interested in social psychology and social psychologists were not interested in linguistics. Social psychologists have not been interested in language probably because they thought it was not their domain. There were exceptions, of course. Ragnar Rommetveit was a notable example at that time, and his ideas had a most profound influence on my thinking.

Following my stay in Paris, in 1997, I carried out dialogues with Serge Moscovici (Moscovici and Marková, 1998, 2000) and sought answers to questions that my colleagues and students also wanted to know. These included, for example, the studies of attitudes, communication, common

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sense, social representations, social influence, language, social change, as well as politics and Marxism. Marxism, specifically, influenced both Moscovici's and my own thinking, though in totally opposite ways. He started his career as a Marxist; I was an anti-Marxist from the very beginning. Later, Moscovici invited me to write a book with him on *The Making of Modern Social Psychology* (Moscovici and Marková, 2006). In the process of working with him on that book, I learned a great deal about his epistemological presuppositions and his thinking.

The entire work of Serge Moscovici was a response to momentous political and social events that shook the world, including his personal experiences of those upheavals. Having survived the horrors of Nazism, including the pogroms on Jews where he barely escaped death (Moscovici, 1997a, 2019), immediately after the Second World War, Moscovici travelled from Romania to Germany to confirm with his own eyes that Nazism was demolished. Destroyed Germany made deep impressions on him as a very young person. He posed questions to himself, such as how was it possible that Nazi ideology could attract the rational thought of so many people? How was it possible that so many people joined Nazism, believed the Führer, supported atrocities against Jews, other minorities, and indeed against anybody who did not endorse Hitler's orders? As I understood his ideas, throughout his life, Moscovici kept asking the question about Otherness in two ways. First, who is the Other, that is, how does the individual create the sense of other people? And, second, who is the individual and what is society?

Concerning the first question, we may interpret Moscovici as saying that the Other is like me and yet different and strange. The Other is someone who may facilitate close intersubjective relations and aim to resolve conflicts but, equally, they may present danger and the possibility of brutal conflicts that destroy unwanted humans. Although Moscovici had experienced these issues personally and deeply in his youth, he made them part of his explicit writing only later in his life when he spoke directly about the problems of Otherness and of stigma. He explained at the beginning of his essay on two forms of thought in modernity (Moscovici, 1995) why he had not written about discrimination, racism, identity, and other related concepts. It was not because he did not know anything about them but because he knew too much about these phenomena: he had lived through them but was afraid to write about them.

The second question percolated explicitly throughout all of Moscovici's work. We find it in his studies of the dynamics of groups, social influence,

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ecology problems, and, above all, in his theory of social representations and communication.

During the last years of his life, in our discussions, he talked extensively about the beginnings of his theorising on social representations and communication after he had come to France, and about the political and intellectual resources of the theory. These discussions were intended for publication as a dialogue but, unfortunately, due to Moscovici's illness, this project remained unfinished. Parts of our discussions are incorporated in Chapters 1 and 2 of this book.

It was only in the years after Moscovici's death that I returned to the beginnings of his theory of social representations and communication and read, for the first time, the first edition of *Psychoanalysis* (1961), published only in French. The first edition was Moscovici's PhD thesis; it was difficult to find in libraries and bookshops and I acquired it in a second-hand shop in Paris with uncut pages. Only then did I realise the big difference between the first and second editions: the first was non-Durkheimian; in the second, Moscovici presented himself as a disciple of Durkheim. This discovery led me to redefine, for myself, the theory of social representations and communication and I researched on how to resolve the conflicts and inconsistencies concerning this theory that I had experienced much earlier.

The theory of social representations and communication brings to light novel ideas, to fight for and against, rather than ones to be accepted as whole truths or total errors. There are contradictions in these ideas but they should not be ignored or rejected as non-essential. Their value is in their being resources for thinking. Moscovici's creativity and capacity to connect issues and problems from diverse domains and disciplines was vast, and it opened up the theory's rich potential for development and for fulfilling its role as an anthropology of modern culture, to which Moscovici aspired.

## Content of the Book

There are different ways of writing a social theory, and there are different ways of writing about the theory of social representations and communication. There have been many full-scale treatments of the theory in handbooks, textbooks, books, chapters, articles, and newspaper reports. Each interpretation presents an effort to do justice to the theory's achievements and future potentialities, as well as to its problems and inconsistencies.

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As I show in this book, there are different ways in which the theory of social representations has been comprehended and clarified. I am presenting here one way in which this theory can be interpreted: I view it in a dialogical perspective. It is derived from my own knowledge and understanding of the philosophical epistemology of dialogicality and from my dialogues with Moscovici. Therefore, I make extensive references to dialogical scholars, for example, Vico, Hegel, Cassirer, Bakhtin, Tarkovsky, Morin, among others. Consequently, I emphasise the concepts of language, forms of thinking and knowledge, the triadic model Ego–Alter–Object, ethics, aesthetics, temporality, and dialogue in the theory of social representations and communication. No doubt, others would view the theory and its potentials differently.

This book is composed of two parts. In Part I, I trace the development and diversification of the theory, its critiques, interpretations, and ideas as proposed by Moscovici and his followers. In Part II, I focus on issues that, in my view, were not clarified in Moscovici's original approach or are promising for further development. The choice and understandings of these issues are underlain by my dialogical perspective, and it is likely that Moscovici would disagree with some of my interpretations and developments of the theory.

Chapter 1 outlines the political resources of the theory of social representations and communication, while Chapter 2 is concerned with its intellectual resources. These two chapters are partly based on my dialogues with Moscovici and with his preoccupation with the beginnings of the theory after his arrival in Paris in 1948. He viewed these beginnings as arising from his experiences during the War, the post-War political and social situation, and from his scholarly inspirations in his early experience in Paris during his 'age of intellectual innocence'. Only with hindsight did I realise that Emile Durkheim played a minimal, if not zero, role in our discussions about these beginnings of the theory.

Chapter 3 depicts the first edition of *Psychoanalysis*. I claim that it was inspired by the philosophy of Hegel, Marx, and Cassirer, as well as by ideas from social anthropology and sociology with which Moscovici was familiar at that time. Moscovici was strongly influenced by Piaget, with whom he regularly held discussions when Piaget had the Chair in Paris in 1953–1954. Moscovici was also influenced by the Marxist developmental psychologist Henri Wallon and by the Communist scholar, another Romanian Jew, Lucien Goldmann, who lived in Paris at that time. As Moscovici (2003) later admitted, he did not know much of the work

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of Emile Durkheim, who figured very little in the first edition of *Psychoanalysis*.

Chapter 4 portrays the second edition of *Psychoanalysis* in 1976. By that time, Moscovici was a well-respected international scholar and presented himself as a follower of Durkheim. His aim was to modernise Durkheim. The second edition of *Psychoanalysis* became known outside France and the subject of appreciation and critique.

Chapter 5 discusses the diverse approaches to social representations that developed from Moscovici's original theory: structural, organising principles, socio-cultural-anthropological, sociogenetic, and communication.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the ways the theory was received when it diffused outside France. First, I discuss critiques and pseudo-dialogues between Moscovici and his opponents. Second, I outline numerous attempts to construct bridges between social representations and other theories that both his followers and adversaries advocated. While some of these attempts seriously question the underlying commonalities between diverse theories, others refer to seeming resemblances or superficial similarities; still others use the term 'representation' as a substitute for attitudes, opinions, or narratives. Part I concludes with the claims of Moscovici's followers and opponents that, while the theory of social representations and communication is provocative and provides an alternative vision of social psychology, it is unfinished and requires further development.

Part II includes five chapters which address some issues that, in my view, necessitate clarification and further explanation. I develop the dialogical perspective of these issues.

Chapter 7 poses a fundamental question about social representations and common-sense knowledge. Are these the same or different phenomena? The theory of social representations and communication involves different forms of socially shared knowledge but not everything is common-sense knowledge. Multiple forms of knowledge, for example, conscious, unconscious, routinised, and reflexive, are usually in tension in the process of formation and change of social representations.

Chapter 8 argues that 'meaning' and 'knowledge' are crucial semiotic concepts in the theory of social representations and communication. They present in various forms and relations and, very often, are not well distinguished and are used indiscriminately.

Chapter 9 is concerned with the triadic model the Ego–Alter–Object. Moscovici conceived it as fundamental for the construction of social knowledge and social reality. However, the model is presented only as an

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abstract schema, while its values, ethical concerns, engagement, and responsibility have not been problematised and conceptualised. It is vital that the potentialities of this model are discovered, recognised, and further developed.

Chapter 10 emphasises that social representations and communication explore dynamic and complex dialogical phenomena, thus implying their uniqueness and the necessity of exploring them as single cases. I view Edgar Morin's dialogical thinking as crucial for the future development of social representations and communication.

Chapter 11 returns to the question posed at the beginning of this book as to why the theory of social representations and communication is a good exemplar of a social theory and of historical, political, and cultural contexts. This chapter involves comments on simultaneous multiple interactions and dialogues between the creator of a theory and various 'Others'. These include socio-political and cultural-historical environments and their institutions, peers, other researchers, and lay observers, as well as the internal dialogues of the creator of a theory in encountering his/her uncertainties, hopes, or fears. I revisit here Moscovici's life-long questions of who is the individual and what is society? Do answers to these questions justify the followers of the theory of social representations referring to it as a revolutionary paradigm in the Kuhnian sense? Among various considerations, I particularly emphasise the choices that the creator of a social theory has between pursuing either scholarship and the search for knowledge or the strategies of political success and empire building.

The Afterword suggests that the theory of social representations and communication has conceptual capacities to explore the multitude of uncertain and ambiguous complex phenomena that characterise contemporary society.

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PART I

# *The Development and Diversification of the Theory of Social Representations and Communication*

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CHAPTER 1

# *Socio-political Sources of the Theory of Social Representations*

## 1.1 The Second World War and Social Psychology

The Second World War had a dramatic impact on the development of natural sciences as well as of social sciences. Inventions in physics during the War, such as the creation and the use of the atomic bomb, showed that human genius and human evil were very closely interconnected. The War also showed close links between the natural and social sciences. Kurt Lewin (1981) argued that it was the realisation of the closeness between scientific advances and the possibilities of the destruction of the world that, after the War, led to an unparalleled expansion of human and social sciences. Moreover, rapid innovations in technology, in cybernetics, computation, and in the new means of communication, had a major effect on the development of social sciences. It was the War and the consequent advancements in physical sciences, Lewin observed, that totally changed perspectives on the importance of social sciences as viewed by the natural sciences as well as by the public. It became apparent that social phenomena, for example, communication, collective intentions, group relations, and social activities, are not about abstract theorising. Instead, they manifest themselves concretely in daily action: they mobilise the masses and, together with technological advancements, co-determine societal transformations and the directions in which humanity evolves.

Some social sciences, for example, anthropology, sociology, or economics, had been already well established before the War. Other disciplines, such as social psychology and cross-cultural psychology, became recognised as institutional disciplines during and after the War. It was during the War that social psychology proved its usefulness by providing social knowledge that was applied to wartime purposes and activities. For instance, social psychological research focused on building citizens' integrity and solidarity, encouraging resilience, and combatting demoralisation (Moscovici and Marková, 2006). Social psychologists contributed a great



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deal to the study of practical societal problems. Atrocities, which the War had brought to the surface, had major impacts on the development of social psychology as a new discipline. For example, after the National Defense Advisory Commission in the USA had set up the nutrition defense program for civilians, Kurt Lewin (1943) got involved in the investigation of the eating habits of diverse groups of people. He used methods of cultural anthropology and psychology to study how to change the eating habits of civilians during the period of food shortages. Social psychologists also contributed to the study of military problems, such as those of the American soldier (Stouffer et al., 1949), and to explorations of domestic and international attitudes towards the War. They developed new concepts and research tools (Cartwright, 1948) as well as examined group relations and group dynamics (Lewin, 1939/1952).

## 1.2 Migration and Cultural Experience

The generation of social scientists who lived through the rise of Nazism, the horrors of the Second World War, and the subsequent rise of Communism and antisemitism in Europe were deeply aware of the interdependence between socio-political circumstances and psychosocial processes transforming the human mind (Marková and Jahoda, 2018, 2019). Many European social scientists left their threatened countries and migrated elsewhere, particularly to the USA, where they had a tremendous influence on the post-War development of social psychology. Dorwin Cartwright drew attention to the significance of migration to the USA in pointing out that it would be difficult to 'imagine what the field would be like today if such people as Lewin, Heider, Koehler, Wertheimer, Katona, Lazarsfeld and the Brunswiks had not come to the United States as they did' (Cartwright, 1979, p. 85). Equally, the development of social psychology in Europe was profoundly influenced by migrating individuals such as Marie Jahoda, Henri Tajfel, Serge Moscovici, Gustav Jahoda, Hilde Himmelweit, and Rudolf Schaffer, among others (Moscovici and Marková, 2006; Marková and Jahoda, 2019). The engagement of social psychologists with political and practical problems of their time was a primary role they took on after the War. As migrants, they not only encountered political alternatives in their newly adopted countries but also experienced cultural differences changing their life perspectives.

Marie Jahoda, imprisoned in Austria before the War for her political involvement with the Democratic Party, and released only on the

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