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Originally published in [Asian journal of social psychology](#), 2 (1). Pp. 95-125 © 1999 Blackwell Publishing.

**You may cite this version as:**

Wagner, Wolfgang; Farr, Robert; Jovchelovitch,, Sandra; Lorenzi-Cioldi, Fabio; Marková,, Ivana; Duveen, Gerard and Rose, Diana (1999). Theory and method of social representations [online]. London: LSE Research Online.

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Available in LSE Research Online: August 2007

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## Theory and method of social representations<sup>1</sup>

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This paper gives an overview of social representation theory, definitions of the key terms and of the social processes leading to a representation and to social identity. Six empirical studies are presented and details of their methods and findings are given to illustrate this social psychological approach. These studies are about the ontogenesis of gender, the public sphere in Brazil, madness on British television, images of androgyny in Switzerland, individualism and democracy in post-communist Europe and metaphorical thinking about conception. The methods are ethnography, interviews, focus-groups, content analysis of media, statistical analysis of word associations, questionnaires and experiments. Finally, social representation theory is compared to theories of attitudes, schemata and social cognition.

### Social representations

Social representation theory is a social psychological framework of concepts and ideas to study psychosocial phenomena in modern societies. It maintains that social psychological phenomena and processes can only be properly understood if they are seen as being embedded in historical, cultural and macro social conditions. By doing so it attempts to overcome the shortcomings of those currently widespread theories and approaches in social psychology which are based on methodological individualism and on an epistemology which functionally separates the subject from the object (Farr, 1996).

A social representation is understood as the collective elaboration "of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating" (Moscovici, 1963, p. 251). The elaborated object becomes social reality by virtue of the object's representation which the community holds. Hence, "subject and object are not regarded as functionally separate. An object is located in a context of activity since it is what it is because it is in part regarded by the person or the group as an extension of their behaviour" (Moscovici, 1973, p. xi). A social representation is further a "system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication. . . by providing a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their worlds and their individual and group history" (p. xiii).

A social representation is a collective phenomenon pertaining to a community which is co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and action. Within the frame of psychological description it may appear as if representations were residing in the minds of those co-acting individuals - what Harré (1984) calls their distributed form; but we maintain that this is a misleading image stemming from methodological individualism. Instead of imagining representations *within* minds it is better to imagine them *across* minds, resembling a canopy being woven by people's concerted talk and actions (cf. Sugiman, 1997). In summary, *a social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behaviour of actors which constitutes an object for a social group.*

Social representation researchers observe talk and action which is related to a social phenomenon or object. In contrast to social cognitive approaches it is presupposed that an object<sup>3</sup> is social not by virtue of some immanent characteristics, but by virtue of the way people relate to it. In talk people attribute features and meanings to an object which make this object a part of their group's social world. In the same vein, people's actions are often concerted and coordinated by bearing on shared conceptions of the world. The view which group members maintain about a social object is specific for the group and, hence, also the object itself takes on group specific social characteristics. Talk and overt action provide the frame of description within which the relationship between objects and subjects is defined. In social representation theory objects are socially constituted entities. In other words, for an object to figure in a group's world, i.e. to be an *object for a group*, it must be socially represented. As a consequence, social representation theory is a social constructivist as well as a discursively oriented approach (Wagner, 1996, 1998a).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was published in the Asian Journal of Social Psychology (1999) 2: 95-125. Tables of findings pertaining to research carried out by the other authors is not presented in this manuscript but is available in the final publication.

<sup>2</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge helpful comments made by Uichol Kim, Katsuya Yamori and two anonymous reviewers.

<sup>3</sup> The term "object" will be used in the following text to comprise phenomena as well.

## Socio-Genesis and Processes

### *Groups and social objects*

To define a group in the present context we need - contrary to most textbook definitions - a minimum of four persons. A social group is called any set of at least two persons which confronts at least one other group. Because a group is a subset of a universe of people, it can only be conceptualised within a context which is itself composed of social entities, i.e. at least one other group. Social groups are distinct in terms of their understanding of social phenomena which in turn constitute their social identity. The shared understanding of their world and of the objects composing it provides the ground for communication and other forms of co-action. At least some part of this shared understanding must be different from outsiders' understanding. Therefore groups mutually provide the background against which each group can be distinguished. Otherwise talking about social groups would not make much sense.

The phenomena composing the local world of a group are social objects. There is no doubt that things can be described within many frames. The best known frames in psychology are the scientific frames provided by physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences. The descriptions proffered by these sciences are valid descriptions by themselves, but inappropriate to capture the specific social characteristics of objects constituting local worlds. Social objects are constituted by representations, i.e. by discourse and concerted action of the members of the group without which there would not be an object which can be addressed by the people.

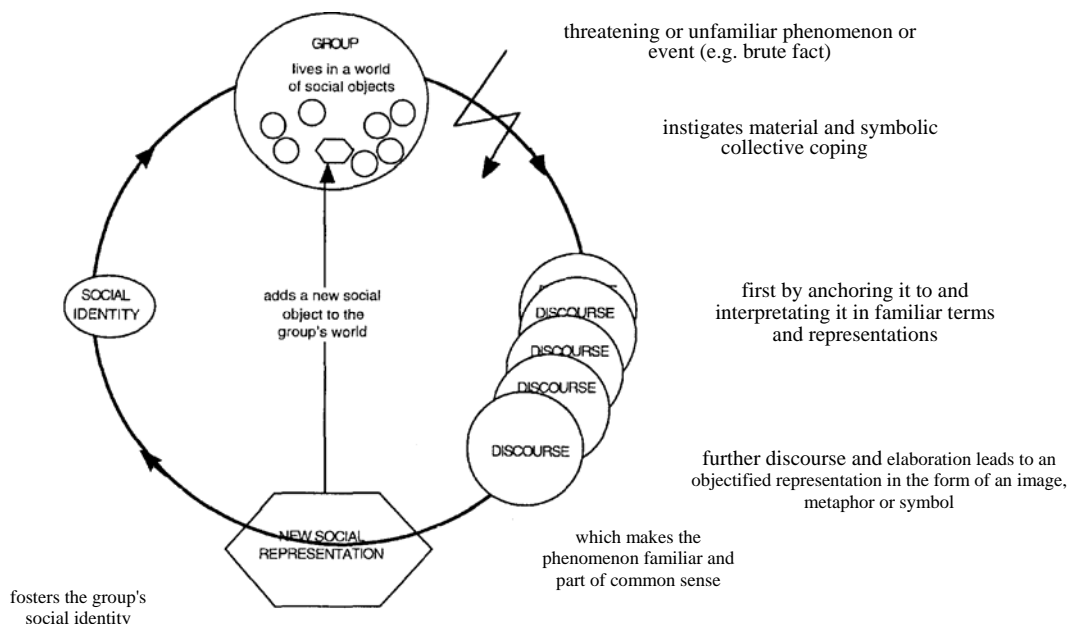
Groups never live in isolation. They are neither isolated from natural forces nor from other social groups. Both natural events and other groups exert an influence either by suddenly disrupting the familiar course of practice or by initiating slow but nevertheless inevitable changes in the group's natural and social environment. Examples of sudden and disruptive events are so-called natural catastrophes like a BSE epidemic which recently affected the cattle-stock of the British or the historical "catastrophe" of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain at the end of the 1980s (see section 7 for a related study). The latter are exemplified by the so-called Ozone-Hole which leads to increased UV radiation in wide parts of Australia and by Western TV programmes which steadily penetrate nonWestern cultures.

### *Discourse and symbolic coping*

Figure 1 presents a very simplified schema of the process and consequences of forming a social representation. It is read clockwise from the top and summarises the contents of this section.

Events and phenomena which disrupt the life-course of social groups are threatening and frequently unfamiliar. They require to be coped with materially as well as symbolically (Moscovici, 1976; Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta, 1996). While material coping is clearly a task for engineers, scientists and other professionals, "symbolic coping" is at the heart of social representation theory. In fact, social representation theory aims at describing and explaining exactly this process. A social representation emerges whenever a group's identity is threatened and when communicating the novel subverts social rules (Moscovici, 1976, p. 171).

Initially, symbolic coping involves a class of responses called "anchoring". For the group to come to a basic understanding of the unfamiliar phenomenon it is essential to name it and to attribute characteristics which allow the phenomenon to be communicated and talked about. Given its unfamiliarity, the group lacks a specific representation. Similar to the process of categorisation, hence, existing representations deemed applicable come to the fore and are used for naming and understanding. When AIDS first hit the marketplace of public opinion more or less two decades ago, for example, it was understood in terms of venereal diseases like syphilis and as God's punishment by the more religiously minded. It



**Figure 1.**  
Schematic depiction of the sociogenesis of social representations.

was only later that a specific representation called AIDS developed which allowed this illness to be distinguished from venereal diseases in everyday discourse (Markova & Wilkie, 1987).

A process similar to anchoring has been described by Bartlett (1932; cf. Moscovici & Markova, 1998). What he called "conventionalisation" is well illustrated by his often quoted experiment on the serial reproduction of the story "War of the Ghosts". For Western subjects this story has a rather unusual plot involving ghosts and black things coming out of the mouth. He noticed that this story, after having been serially reproduced by his subjects, contained many new elements which were more typical for Western culture at the expense of the original but foreign elements. Bartlett explained this finding as showing conventionalisation at work which makes people understand strange words or ideas in terms of more familiar schemata. Using serial reproduction as well, this process was shown to exist for individual (Bangerter & Lehmann, 1997; Kashima, 1997) as well as for group recall (Stephenson, Brandstätter & Wagner, 1983; Stephenson *et al.*, 1986).

The discourse accompanying collective symbolic coping is nowadays maintained by media and to a lesser extent by personal conversations. Although the dynamics of this discourse are still poorly understood (Rouquette, 1996), there are some hints in an early study by Moscovici (1976). When he investigated the public understanding of psychoanalysis in France in the 1950s, Moscovici identified three distinct forms of media discourse by the style the press reported and commented on this relatively new psychological theory. Each type was characteristic for a sector of the French press which corresponds to ideologically defined subgroups of French society. The first, diffusion, is characterised by a rather "neutral", more distanced and intellectual way of presenting psychoanalysis to a little structured liberal bourgeois readership. The second, propagation, is characterised by using reports about psychoanalysis in an instrumental way. Certain parts of it were integrated into the dominant catholic-conservative ideological framework of the readership, others were rejected. The third one, propaganda, rejected psychoanalysis altogether and fought a battle against this enemy of the left readership's ideology. The propaganda style of reporting was strongly aimed at maintaining a homogenous group identity. These styles of reporting in the press illustrate divergent ways of symbolic coping. Related results have been obtained in a study by Rose (see section 5) who investigated how madness is presented on British television.

### **Objectification**

Groups, be they cultural, political, religious or self-defined by life-style maintain a homogamic personal and media discourse. Homogamic communication means that people prefer to converse with others of similar opinions and to read newspapers which are likely to confirm one's own beliefs instead of confronting opposite opinions. It was shown for example that subjects who were enclosed in a room for an extended period of time talked significantly more with like-minded others and that the closest relationships developed between persons with similar opinions (Griffit & Veitch, 1974).

Social groups which are relatively closed in terms of communication are likely to develop their own interpretations of unfamiliar or threatening phenomena. This step of symbolic coping is called objectification. Objectification is a mechanism by which socially represented knowledge attains its specific form. It means to construct an icon, metaphor or trope which comes to stand for the new phenomenon or idea. It has an image structure that visibly reproduces a complex of ideas (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1997; Moscovici, 1984, p. 38). Sometimes called the "figurative nucleus" of a representation, an objectification captures the essence of the phenomenon, makes it intelligible for people and weaves it into the fabric of the group's common sense.

Jodelet (1991) observed images of "decay", "curdling" like butter, "fall", "souring" and "turning off" like milk, when her French lay subjects talked about mental illness. With these metaphors they likened "the phenomena of organic transformation [i.e. falling mentally ill] with processes of a more or less material nature" (p. 209ff.). Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner (1995; Wagner, 1998b) showed that popular thinking about conception in Austria is based on a sexual metaphor. People liken the activity and characteristics of sperms to male, and the activity and characteristics of ova to female sex-role stereotypical behaviour (see section 8).

These examples show that the choice of the image or trope is not arbitrary. Being farmers and village dwellers, Jodelet's respondents used the image of souring milk to characterise mental illness because it is closer to their everyday experience than it would be, for example, to the inhabitants of large cities. Close experience with these source domains allowed them to "explain" the threatening, unfamiliar, and "strange" phenomenon of madness. Hence, objectification depends upon the characteristics of the social unit where a social representation is elaborated. The specific social conditions of a certain group favour specific kinds of tropes to be used for objectification by which an unfamiliar phenomenon is represented and made intelligible. Such differences in social conditions between groups may be sociostructural, historical, cultural or subcultural, intergenerational or differences in school level. Differences in living conditions of groups delimit the space of experiences of their members, which in turn delimits the world of images, metaphors and tropes available for objectification. The resulting trope is not "correct" or "accurate" in the sense of scientific truth. It is just good to think. That is, whether an image is accepted or not by a group is neither a problem of truth nor an arbitrary choice, but determined by the group's experiential world and the negotiated consensus of the group members (Moscovici, 1988; Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner, 1995; Wagner, 1996).

Once collective symbolic coping results in a representation being maintained by a significant majority in a group, it serves its purpose as a means of understanding and communication in everyday life. Simultaneously a new social object is added to the group's life world. On the one hand this is achieved by discursive elaboration of a meaning system. On the other hand it is achieved by actors who behave as if the object had exactly those characteristics which it is thought to possess. Co-action is the cornerstone of the social construction of a group's world. Even so-called "imaginary" objects like "God",

"justice", "beauty" and the "public sphere" (see section 4) become physical and tangible in the form of the physical behaviour of physical actors (Wagner, 1998a).

It suggests itself that social identity is a direct consequence of representations being shared in a social group. On the one hand children, being born into a social group, are raised according to the social representations circulating in that group and they are allocated a specific social space. "A child is always a construction before it is a reality, but a construction of others, and through this construction its parents extend to it a social identity" (Duveen, 1998). On the other hand the engagement of people in local worlds shapes their social identity. An identity based on shared representations fosters affiliation and group coherence as the aforementioned experiment on homogamic communication (Griffit & Veitch, 1974) shows. It sets the conditions under which new representations can be accepted or rejected (cf. Augoustinos, 1991; Hayes, 1991; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1991) and therefore constrains the space and potential trajectories of social change (Duveen, 1998; see also section 3)<sup>4</sup>.

### **Research and Methods**

The following sections present six examples of empirical research in the field of social representations. Each section outlines a research topic and its relationship with social representation theory, a detailed description of the method used and a summary of the findings.

Being a social psychological approach to studying the regularities of social life, social representation theory cannot do without a historical perspective. The meanings of social objects which exist in a group today were also shaped by events in the past. In contrast to, say, the theory of attitudes, beliefs and values, which study phenomena only in terms of specific aspects, e.g. as evaluations or as cognitions, the approach of social representations allows us to capture macrosocial phenomena in their historical totality and dynamics. It enables researchers to examine the relatively stable cultural, and the dynamic social, political and economic characteristics of groups. This becomes most prominent in section 4 where the past must be taken into account when we wish to understand what "public sphere" means in contemporary Brazilian discourse. Likewise, section 7 looks at the impact of recent history on the people's commonsensical understanding of democracy, of the individual and of the community in several eastern European countries. The authors of these and of the other studies presented in sections 3 through 8 used the social representation approach because it enabled them to capture more aspects of the object of study than a purely developmental, cognitive or media analysis approach would have allowed. Although the following short sections cannot capture the full richness of the reported studies, they do give a taste of how the present approach allows to transcend the confines of more traditional social psychological research.

The study of social representations has entailed an intensive discussion of research methods. Because the theory of social representations sets out to overcome the dichotomies between individual and social as well as between subjective and objective, there has been an effort to adopt a consistent methodological approach. Broadly speaking, methodological strategies should take into account the complexity of the phenomena under investigation and pay attention to the context and the diversity of voices. Farr (1993) advocates the use of multiple methods, while Jodelet (1991) maintains that methodological options should allow the identification of the conditions under which social representations emerge and function (cf. also Bauer & Gaskell, forthcoming, for a global view, as well as Breakwell & Canter, 1993).

In the following sections several methods are presented, ordered from the more qualitative to the more quantitative: ethnographic observation in a study on the ontogenesis of the representation of gender in England, analyses of interviews and media in a study about the representation of the public sphere in Brazil, content analysis of media in a study about public perceptions of madness in UK, the analysis of word associations in a research about beliefs about androgyny in Switzerland, the use of survey data in a research on democracy and individualism in Europe, and the use of experimental designs.

### **Ethnography: The ontogenesis of gender**

Children are born into a world which is already structured by the representations circulating in the communities into which they are born, and growing up to become actors and participants in these communities implies a developmental process through which these representations become as much a part of children's sociopsychological landscape as they are for their parents and elder siblings. Among the representations which structure children's lives, gender is central, both because it is one of the earliest social categorisations which children acquire and which they use to anchor much of their knowledge of the social world (cf. Duveen & Shields, 1985), and because it provides one of the first forms of social identity which children acquire. Indeed, as Rubin, Provenzano & Luria (1974) demonstrated, a gender identity is first extended to the child as a new-born infant (perhaps today we should add that this process can occur even before birth), and only subsequently is the meaning of this social act of categorisation internalised by the child.

Children, then, come into a world which is constituted of a complex web of cultural meanings, a web which both structures the ways in which others interact with them, and provides frames of meaning through which children come to structure their own understanding of this world and of their place within it. The perspective of social representations enables us to capture the complexity of this developmental process. A series of studies (reviewed in Lloyd & Duveen, 1989, 1990) traced the early development of gender identities in preschool children through observations of their play with other

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<sup>4</sup> See Breakwell (1993) for an alternative position about the relationship between social identity and representations.

children. The observations took place in a room furnished with toys which carried specific gender markings (established independently by asking samples of adults to select toys appropriate for a girl or a boy), so that toy choice could be taken as a relevant indicator of the extent to which children regulated their activity in terms of gender. By the age of 4, a clear asymmetry emerged: boys (whether playing with other boys or with girls) showed a clear preference for masculine marked toys, and avoided choosing feminine marked toys, while girls (again irrespective of the gender of their play partner) selected masculine and feminine marked toys equally frequently (this asymmetry does not imply that girls at this age lack a gender identity, only that toy choice is not the medium through which they seek to express it). In spite of this asymmetry, when these same children were given simple cognitive and linguistic tasks their responses indicated that they shared more or less the same knowledge of the gender marking of toys.

As they reach school age, then, to a certain extent children have already become independent actors in the field of gender, but the context which frames this activity is the domestic setting of home or preschool. At school they encounter representations of gender embedded in a new context, and one in which gender plays a much more focused structural role in the organisation of classroom life. At the beginning of investigating the further development of gender identities in the first year of schooling it was discovered that clear descriptions of the pattern of gender organisation in reception classrooms was virtually absent (when the first class children enter, which in England is during their fifth year; this study is reported in Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). While gender had been extensively studied as an influential parameter of life in secondary school, there were noticeably fewer studies in junior schools, and fewer still in infant schools, and in infant schools practically no studies in the reception class (although Corsaro (1985) is a notable exception). The first task then was to generate a description of gender as an organising dimension of life in the reception classroom, and for this purpose an ethnographic study of reception classes in two different schools was undertaken.

Ethnography has been characterised by Geertz (1973) in terms of the distinction between thin and thick descriptions<sup>5</sup>. Descriptions can be said to be thicker the more they move from observations of the regularities of social life toward an interpretative account of the intentionalities of the actors engaged in the situation. Traditionally, ethnography as a method was used to investigate the social organisation of communities, with the ethnographer's interpretive categories emerging through their reflexive analysis of the data collected during fieldwork. In the present case, since the researchers came to the classrooms with the aim of focusing on the role of gender in structuring classroom life, this approach was described as *motivated ethnography* (Duveen & Lloyd, 1993). It is perhaps a little surprising that ethnography has not been more widely used in the study of social representations. Indeed, in spite of Moscovici's explicit definition of social representations as "system(s) of values, ideas and practices" (1973, p.xiii), the theme of practice has been relatively neglected, although Lodelet's (1991) study is an exception (cf. Wagner, 1994, 1998a). For the present study, ethnography was the first choice of method, not only because it enables the researcher to focus on structural aspects of gender in the classroom, but also because at this age children's practice is a much richer source of their representations than their reflexive talk. One learns more about children's understanding of their worlds through observation than through direct questioning in interviews (and in this respect observations of children's pretend play is a very rich source; cf. Duveen, 1997; Furth, 1996; Lloyd & Duveen, 1992).

The ethnography of gender in the reception classroom served several purposes for the research as a whole. First, the structural description of gender as an organising dimension revealed precisely the ways in which children's activity was visibly regulated by gender. In particular, gender was important in children's peer associations, and in their use of the material culture and space of the classroom. On the basis of this ethnographic description, an observation schedule and a series of interview tasks was developed which allowed one to undertake a longitudinal study of the development of representations of gender through the first year of school. These methods allowed one to trace the ways in which the gender identities which children brought into school gradually adapted to the specific characteristics of the classroom as a context for social life (see Lloyd & Duveen, 1992).

Secondly, ethnographic records provide the basis for a description of the social representation of gender elaborated among these young children. This is based on an image of bipolar opposition which crystallises for the child a state of understanding in which the form of knowledge (its categorical structure) is fused with the content of knowledge (the separation between things masculine and things feminine). All things masculine tend to cohere together and to separate from things feminine. As is noted in the ethnography, separation along these lines can come to characterise the pattern of interaction in the classroom, and once established in this way the dynamic interplay of activity and understanding is capable of sustaining such moments over extended periods of time. Yet as well as representing difference the image of gender as a bipolar opposition also represents hierarchy, for the difference between the genders is also a relation of power. As much as the image is saturated with notions of hierarchy and power, so long as the difference between the bipolar opposites can be resolved, the hierarchy can be obscured. Sometimes the researchers also observed the ways in which this sense of hierarchy also produced moments of conflict and resistance among the children, especially among the girls (see Duveen, 1997; Lloyd & Duveen, 1992).

Thirdly, the ethnographic work also raised specific problems and issues related to the analysis of the development of gender identities. In particular, the researchers' daily exposure to life in the classroom highlighted the variability and heterogeneity among boys and among girls in the ways in which they expressed their gender identities. Generally in developmental psychology, a contrast is drawn between girls and boys as though each of these categories were homogenous,

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<sup>5</sup> A distinction which he himself borrowed from the philosopher Ryle (1971).

and which thus obscures any variability within each of these categories. Again, drawing on their ethnography, the researchers constructed an index of children's gender identity in terms of the proportion of their time that they were engaged in single gender groups. Although this is a very imprecise indicator, since it uses a single observational measure to describe a very complex phenomenon, including this index in the analysis of the observational data from the longitudinal study nevertheless revealed the extent to which variability among boys and among girls contributes significantly to the patterns of gender activity in the reception class. In particular, these variations contributed much to the organisation of the local gender cultures which distinguished one classroom from another.

Finally, the ethnographic method also served to highlight aspects of the development of social representations themselves. Childhood offers a particular arena for the study of social representations, since those very things which are most familiar and taken for granted in the adult world are themselves the focus of children's cognitive reconstructions. What has already become objectified and habitual for the adult is the object of active elaboration among children. This developmental process, however, is not a simple or linear process of acquisition. Just as Piaget's studies showed the difference in young children's thinking, so too in their representations of gender one can see the influence of children's own cognitive elaborations in the representational work which is at the centre of their reconstruction of social representations (cf. Duveen, 1997).

### **Focus groups, interviews and media analysis: the symbolic construction of public spaces in Brazil**

The debate about the public sphere in contemporary societies has captured the imagination of social scientists from a wide spectrum of disciplines. Taking the work of Habermas (1989) as a starting point, the debate has focused on both the form and realisation of public life today, and their consequences for the future of democratic societies. The discussion varies from country to country and, in Brazil, where the research reported in this section took place in the constitution of the public sphere is, and historically has been, an urgent and pressing issue. Corruption in political life, absence of trust in politics and politicians, violence, criminality and individualism in the streets were but a few of the realities traditionally associated with the public sphere in Brazil.

Representations about the public sphere are, to be sure, a key factor in the overall constitution of public spaces (Jovchelovitch, 1995a). Symbolic constructions, as much as historical, social and economic factors, shape the contours of social and personal reality; if it is true that we need to consider history and social structures, it is also true that both history and social structures are constructed by social psychological subjects, who know, act, invest with affection and render with meaning the realities in which they live. In the Brazilian case, an investigation about representations of public life is informative of how the Brazilian community makes sense of, and relates to, public issues. This social psychological edge can contribute to a much needed assessment of the possibilities and limitations of the public sphere, not only in Brazil but also in other countries where cultural and historical challenges have consistently undermined the quality of public life.

In contrast to most traditional research in social psychology, the theory of social representations offers the crucial elements needed to address these issues, first, because it theorises lay knowledge in relation to the cultural, historical and social frameworks of the context under consideration. In this sense, lay knowledge is more than knowledge in the heads of individuals. Quite the opposite, it is knowledge produced by a community of people, in conditions of social interaction and communication, and therefore expressive of identities, interests, history and culture. Secondly, because the theory is concerned with meaning and its interpretation. The symbolic dimension of social representations is central to understand how people express identity, develop patterns of behaviour and engage with significant others. And last, but not least, because social representations are themselves symbolic phenomena produced in, and constitutive of, the public arena (Jovchelovitch, 1994). The use of the theory in this project allowed for the establishment of conceptual links between social representations and the public sphere. Therefore, the introduction of cultural, social and historical considerations in the understanding of commonsense knowledge coupled with the importance conferred upon the symbolic and its public nature make the theory of social representations particularly germane to guide the present study.

### ***Method***

The present research design sought to capture, at different levels of social life, the relationship between specific social actors and the public sphere and how the logic of these relationships leads to representations about the public sphere. The public sphere was operationalised along two dimensions: the space of the streets (which corresponds to "natural", day-to-day settings of public life) and the arena of politics (which corresponds to the institutionalised public sphere). The mass media of communication are a key medium of the public sphere, and they were content analysed in relation to the above dimensions. Hence the empirical translation of the concept of the public sphere involved two dimensions - streets and politics - and one mediator - the press. From these dimensions, three others emerged. They concern the key social actors who, on a daily basis, re-enact the public sphere. The strategic social actors sampled were politicians, the ordinary "citizen in the street" and the media. The media are also considered social actors insofar as they are institutions which produce an effect in the web of social relations. These social actors do not belong, exclusively, to one space or the other. It is not the case that politicians belong only to the political arena while the citizen in the street belongs only to the space of the streets. Although they are predominantly associated with these spaces, they interact with one another and produce ongoing effects on each other. The media play a fundamental role in this interaction: they mediate between the two and

interact with each of them at the same time. Table 1 shows the overall constitution of the sample.

Content analysis of the press, focus groups with the different categories of lay informants and narrative interviews with parliamentarians comprised the range of techniques selected to generate the data. The press analysis involved a selection of all articles related to the streets and to politics during May 1992, and the focus groups were centred in a discussion about the situation in the streets and in political life. The narrative interviews with politicians were conducted around the impeachment of the former Brazilian president, F. Collor de Mello who, in December 1992, became the first Brazilian president to be expelled from office on charges of corruption and misuse of public money. The impeachment was considered to be perhaps the most important event epitomising the conditions of public life and Brazil and this exemplary, and unprecedented, character led to its inclusion in the research. In contrast to other forms of in-depth interviewing the narrative interview leaves the field completely open to the interviewee, by simply asking subjects to tell the story of the event being studied (Bauer, 1996). Narrative interviews draw on the conceptual value of story-telling as one of the most fundamental forms of human communication (Barthes, 1988), and have been considered as a particularly useful method in the study of social representations (Jovchelovitch, 1995b; Laszlo, 1997; Rose, 1996). Table 1 shows the object and methods of study.

**Table 1** The object, methods and sample of the study

Key actors of the public sphere	Sample	Method
The mass media	Five major Brazilian quality dailies and the two most influential weekly magazines: <i>Folha de Silo Paulo</i> ; <i>Estado de Silo Paulo</i> , <i>Jomal do Brasil</i> ; <i>Zero Rora</i> ; <i>Correio Brasiliense</i> . Magazines: <i>Vela</i> and <i>Isto E</i> for May 1992.	Content analysis
Citizen in the street	Professionals; manual workers, students; taxi drivers; policeman; street children	Focus groups
Politicians	Members of the Brazilian Parliament at federal level	Narrative analysis

The analysis of the data was both qualitative and quantitative. It involved two general steps: data systematisation and data interpretation. Data systematisation was achieved by constructing coding frames for each one of the datasets that emerged. In the coding frame for the content analysis of the press the articles were treated as stories, and the analytical framework was an attempt to identify what the story was about - the event, who were the main actors in the story, and which claims and justifications were present in the story. The discussion in each one of the focus groups was systematised through a coding frame which considered three levels of content: descriptions about life in the streets and in politics; claims and explanations made regarding such descriptions, and, finally, strategies of coping, relating and feeling developed in relation to the situations the groups were discussing. The coding frame for the narrative interviews followed principles of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) and identified themes in the stories, the qualifications and metaphors associated with the themes, the main actors in the stories, the reasons and explanations given to the stories as well as their consequences, and the aftermath of the stories. Once the full dataset was coded, qualitative and quantitative analyses were carried out. The qualitative interpretation was based on the logic of the argumentation in the groups and interviews, the relations between the different categories coded and on the previous literature related to the overall picture emerging from the data. The quantitative analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations and correspondence analysis. Correspondence analysis<sup>6</sup> proved particularly useful in regard to the corroboration of the qualitative interpretations as well as to the definition of the nuances and differences between the focus groups.

## Results

The analysis of the three empirical studies produced a strikingly similar representational field, marked by notions of fear, threat and individualism in the streets and corruption, self-interest and individualism in politics. These notions were brought together and explained by a central representation: the Brazilian character. It was this character, portrayed in the data as dubious, ambivalent, hybrid and of a "contaminated" nature, which justified the situation in the streets and in political life. The objectification of the streets and political life into the Brazilian character suggests that the blurred and ambivalent relationship between self and other in Brazil lies at the very heart of social representations of public life. Old metaphors of corrupt blood and a contaminated, ill, social body provide the anchors to contemporary representations of public life. These are deeply ingrained in Brazilian culture and self-interpretation, whose quest for a defined identity has been consistently undermined by the encounters of different peoples that shaped the cultural trajectory of the country (Ortiz, 1986; Quijano, 1993; Ribeiro, 1970).

These results suggest that the workings of social representations are inseparable from the historical and cultural features

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<sup>6</sup> The use of this statistical method will be discussed in more detail in section 6.



of the society in which they develop and from the processes whereby a community struggles to maintain an identity, a sense of belonging and a location in the world.

## Media analysis: Madness on British TV

The problem addressed in this section concerns media representations of madness. The empirical focus is on British TV and how it portrays and represents madness, mental illness and people with mental health problems. There are only a handful of existing studies on how television represents issues around mental ill-health, although the two elements of the problem - madness and media - have generated a huge literature (e.g. Philo, 1996; Rose, in press; Signorelli, 1989; Wahl, 1992). These studies uniformly conclude that mentally ill people are stigmatised in the Western media, especially through their association with violence.

There is a clear sociopolitical dimension to this stigmatisation. In Europe and North America, it is three decades since the start of the project to close down institutional asylums and have mentally ill people live in the community. Clearly, such policy moves affect the media, and it is likely that there will be an effect of the media on the development of policy. It is clear that people with serious mental health problems express a strong preference for community living over institutional living (Rose, Ford, Lindley, Gawith & the KCW Users' Group, 1998). Looking at media representations is one way of finding out if the "community" accepts such government policy or is hostile to it.

In the present research social representation theory was chosen as the social psychological theory best equipped to provide concepts for analysing the media. The mass media are social in their production (Allen, 1992), social in their texts (Fiske, 1987) and social in their consumption (Livingstone, 1991). Concomitantly, the theory of social representations operates at a much more social, collective level than most social psychological theory (Farr, 1996; Moscovici, 1984).

There is also a much more specific reason for using social representation theory to analyse representations of madness on television. Many media are partially visual, yet have been analysed by some as if they were only made up of words (e.g. Wearing, 1989; cf. De Rosa, 1987). Social representation theory permits us to look at the visual side of television through the concept of objectification. That representations contain the dimension of the concrete and visible proves very helpful in the attempt to understand the structure and operation of representations of madness on television in a Western country at the close of the twentieth century.

### *From theory to method*

The method used here has its roots in early content analysis (Berelson, 1952) whilst taking its theoretical basis from social representation theory. The chosen method allows one to properly quantify meaning in the present context. Additionally, taking up criticisms by deconstructionists, the method also acknowledges that what is *absent* from a text is as important as what is present. For the present purposes, if, for instance, positively valued meanings are completely absent from the television text on madness, this would be highly significant. This also tells us that we should include in a coding frame meanings that we do not expect as well as those that we do. The formal instrument used in the analysis was a coding frame [Table].

As can be seen, the coding frame has a hierarchical structure. At the most detailed level of the instrument are a large number of semantic categories which can be allocated to analytic units. The reason for the large number of categories is to capture the idea that madness has multiple meanings. At the same time the coding frame has the capacity to reject the hypothesis of multiple meanings. Common sense might say that "mental illness" is represented in close proximity to the category of "illness". From the present point of view, it would then be expected that nearly all the coding allocations fall into this category and it would have been shown that the social object "madness" is conceptualised in terms of the medical discourse "illness". This is not, however, what was discovered.

A further point to note about the detailed categories is that positive evaluations are included. We do not want to pre-empt the idea that all representations of madness on television are negative. Conversely, if these categories are empty, this would be highly significant.

Representations are not pure content, nor are they only semantic. Stories in the media have a structure, just as Propp (1969) proposed with the analysis of folk-tales. The structuralist position that structure carries significance is put to use in having a first level to the coding frame which allocates a narrative element each time a coding is made. For example, an analytic unit might be coded "narrative description" as well as "danger".

### *Selection, translation and transcription*

The coding frame is applied to a body of data which is subjected to procedures that turn moving pictures and spoken discourse into a form amenable to content analysis. First, there are the steps to do with *selection*. At the beginning a broad sweep of prime-time popular TV programmes was selected. This included news and current affairs, documentaries, soap operas, drama serials and situation comedies. Over a two-month period in 1992, 157 hours of data were collected by videotape. It must be made clear that these are procedures of selection and are not concept tree.

For selecting extracts depicting madness, a definition by Wahl (1992) was used: "I would favour, for example, the presence, *within the media presentation*, of a specific psychiatric label (including slang designations such as 'crazy', 'madman' etc., as well as formal diagnoses such as schizophrenia or depression) or indication of receipt of psychiatric

treatment as the appropriate criteria" (Wahl, 1992, p. 350).

A further problem with selecting the dataset concerns metaphors. Mental illness terminology is routinely used as tease and insult - "you're a raving nutter"; "who is this loony schizo"; "she's mad about the boy". These uses of mental illness terminology are important for the overall representation of madness on television. They were noted in the analysis to be described here.

Metaphorical use of mental illness terminology can be more tightly or more loosely connected with other representations of madness. There remains the question of what metaphorical uses to include. However, if language is a system, then signs belonging to one context appearing in a completely different one will still carry some of the weight of the initial meaning. At first sight, the popular phrase "she's mad about the boy" seems to have little to do with psychiatric disorder. But the term "mad", generic for centuries, is still tinged with notions of extreme and excess, and even emotional danger, when located in its new context.

Finally, both visual and verbal elements of the text were transcribed so that the transcript looked like the script for a play, in two columns, one describing the visuals and one the spoken text. [Table].

The unit of analysis was the camera shot. When the camera switched to a new shot, a new unit of analysis begins (Rose, 1996; Rose, in press). The visual transcription consisted in a brief description of the action, a note of who was in the shot, and a note of the camera angle. The codes are shown in [Table]. The verbal transcription was a "verbatim" record of the spoken word. Pauses, hesitations or supra-linguistic features like changes in intonation were judged not to be of a significance that would justify the work needed to transcribe them.

### ***Coding***

Once transcribed, a coding is ascribed to each unit of analysis. For the visual dimension first, the camera angle of each shot in the dataset is coded. Secondly, a note is made of whether the shot is a single shot, a two-shot (two people in frame) or a group shot. Finally, a count is made of the number of shots that use shadowy lighting and the number of times music is used and its nature.

The verbal material was not, of course, coded independently of the visual. The spoken discourse is critical in making a decision about the codes to be allocated to each unit. Visual and verbal were taken together to provide a coding allocation to each unit of the appropriate narrative element, a subdivision of the narrative element and a detailed content category. For example: (A1a) scene setting, disruptive, danger; (B2f) narrative description, reconstruction, sickness; (C2) explanation, medical; (D2c) resolution, absent, neglect.

The totals of the different codes in over 2,000 units of analysis were then calculated. Besides quantification, the analysis also took care of structural features of stories to properly assess the semantics of madness on television.

### ***Results***

[Table], shows the outcome of the analysis of representations of madness for the first two narrative elements (scene setting and narrative description) for the news. It should be read like a map. It shows the points of emphasis and stress and the points of lack and absence in the news data. It would not be sensible to say there was "twice as much danger as sickness" although a metric reading of the figures would come to that conclusion. It makes more sense to say that danger dominated themes of sickness and that the lack of themes of success and coping say something significant about how mental health problems are represented on the news. What is absent is just as important as what is present, as semioticians have shown.

It was possible, with the visual material, to employ a method of contrasts. Since both mentally ill and non-mentally ill people appear in the programming, their visual depiction can be compared. [Table] shows such a comparison. It shows that the mentally ill character (Mrs Bishop) was much more likely to be filmed alone and in close-up than either the other main character in the story (Mr Sugden) or other characters in general. This finding was repeated for other genres, the news and drama. It carries the meaning of an isolated, emotionally scrutinised person. Others are filmed as couples or in groups, social shots that usually require a medium wide angle.

A further important result was that structure carries meaning. In the present audio-visual material, structure has been conceptualised in terms of narrative form (Propp, 1969). Narrative structure on television is often open, for instance, in soap operas, to keep up the suspense. But the analysis of narrative structure in the representation of people designated mad showed that lack of narrative closure was the norm. This of course adds weight to the idea that representations of madness on television are chaotic and resist fixity. Here we see representations as often structureless. [Table] shows the results of the analysis of narrative structure in drama programmes. The majority of sequences have either no ending at all or no restoration of social harmony.

The representations of madness and of persons designated psychiatrically ill in the media carry multiple meanings and refer to an unstable concept. The visual representations marked the mad person as different and the semantics of the field are fluid and uncertain. This structure (or lack of it) of meaning poses a semiotic threat. It could be said that the mad person inhabits a realm of otherness in popular imagination.

But there is still another level of threat. The most common representation in the data was of psychiatry as associated with danger, the mad person as violent, often murderously so. In the news, 70% of the mentally ill people portrayed were associated with violence. This stands in stark contrast to the estimated 92% of people with serious mental health problems who will never be violent and that age, gender and drug and alcohol use are better predictors of violence than mental illness

(Swanson, Holzer, Ganju & Jono, 1990).

The visual representations and narrative structure are revealed as marking the mad person as different, in scrutinising visual shots and in a narrative which lacks the structure inferred as universal by narrative analysts. There is evidence that these portrayals affect the perceptions of the general public making the otherness of the mental patient doubly relevant. Therefore this is a type of arena where the theory of social representations can affect public policy.

## The analysis of word associations: Androgyny in everyday thinking

Social psychology has witnessed numerous conceptions of androgyny. Lorenzi-Cioldi (1996) has organised these conceptions into three consecutive types, according to their emphasis on the content or on the structure of the androgynous personality. The inaugural type of androgyny is that of a person who achieves the co-presence and psychological balance of masculine and feminine sex-typed characteristics or stereotypes (Bern, 1974). *Masculine or feminine*, the androgyne alternates the gender characteristics in behaviours depending on their situational appropriateness. Gender characteristics and stereotypes remain clearly separated and recognisable. According to the subsequent type of androgyny, which Lorenzi-Cioldi named fusion, the androgyne is *both masculine and feminine* in single circumstances (e.g. Heilbrun, 1986). Androgyny proceeds from the mixture of the feminine and masculine domains that blends their specificities and boundaries, and makes them indistinguishable. Current conceptions of androgyny, which can be referred to as transcendence, radicalise the previous ones by highlighting cognitive processes that lead individuals to deflate or even abandon gender-based perceptions and behaviours (e.g. Bem, 1993). *Neither masculine nor feminine*, the androgynous person is then portrayed by his or her indifference with respect to the gender polarity and his or her enactment of more piecemeal and person-based differentiations. Lorenzi-Cioldi (1994) suggested that these three types of androgyny have emerged not only among social psychologists, but also in the individuals' lay representations.

Social representations are tools for social communication and are therefore more concrete than scientific concepts and convey more figurative elements. Each one of the conceptions of androgyny outlined above is turned into a specific image of a human being. That is, social representations are objectified by reference to specific persons or by superimposing analogies and metaphors on to the concepts (cf. section 2). This section reports an illustration of the way lay representations of androgyny mirror, to some extent, those produced by science.

The field of androgyny provides a timeliness case for studying social representations because it challenges the traditional system of classification of beings and behaviours in terms of the gender dichotomy. Androgyny is something strange, complex and abstract, which must be objectified, and thus turned into something more concrete. It is often perceived either in "downgraded" ways, as sexual anomaly and monstrosity, as ambivalence and homosexuality, or in flattering ways, as harmony and wholeness, as increased behavioural potentialities. Hence, androgyny becomes a social representation by adding worth or worthlessness, and flesh, to scientific models of how people act in their social world.

### Method

As part of a wider programme of research (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1994), spontaneous answers to the question *What does the word androgyny call to your mind?* were gathered among 48 male and female students. Multiple-choice questions then invited the participants to specify the target people activated in responding to the open question. Questions were worded as: *Did you think of* (a man, a woman, a person in general, other); *Did you think of someone in particular* (an acquaintance, a famous person, other)?

Before running the statistical analysis, the responses were slightly simplified. For example, all words were used in the singular and names of famous people from the media (e.g. Michael Jackson) were summarised as *famous man* or *famous woman*. The most important simplification related to the three terms "or", "and" and "neither/nor...". These terms exemplify in turn the three major types of androgyny outlined above: androgyny as co-presence (enactment of masculinity or femininity), as fusion (enactment of masculinity and femininity), and as transcendence (enactment of neither masculinity nor femininity). However, such terms were kept only when they explicitly referred to the three types of androgyny (e.g. "man and woman", "virility and gentleness"). The simplified responses comprised a total of about 700 words, 40% of which were distinct. Finally, a matrix crosstabulating individual respondents by the 77 words mentioned by at least two participants was analysed.

The respondents-by- 77 wordsmatrix was subjected to a lexical correspondence analysis (see Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993, pp. 147-153; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1997, pp. 219-239)<sup>7</sup>. Dimensions derived from this analysis cluster words according to their co-occurrence. Specifically, two words stand all the closer in space as they are associated in the answers of several participants, and are placed further away from other words with which they are less associated. Each word comes with an index which indicates the weight of this word in the construction of the dimensions. Only words with a substantial value on this index are considered for interpreting a dimension. For interpreting the word clusters, two-

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<sup>7</sup> The method of lexical correspondence analysis is a direct derivative from correspondence analysis (Greenacre, 1984; Van de Geer, 1993) which is itself a derivation from a method called "quantification on response patterns" (Hayashi, 1950). There are also studies which use not only correspondence analysis of word associations but automatic factoring and clustering of large corpuses of verbal data like interviews and textual media data (e.g. Lahlou, 1996).

dimensional solutions are frequently used in correspondence analysis. Proximal words are considered a key to the contents of social representations of androgyny. Additionally, social and other attributes of respondents can be projected into the word-correspondence space. The positions of these attributes relative to the word clusters provide information about which class of respondents produced which word clusters about androgyny. The location of the first letter of each word specifies the exact location in the two-dimensional solution.

## Results

The results of correspondence analysis (Figure) show the opposition of a symbolic and abstract androgyny to the left, and a more concrete and personified one to the right. The first pole includes *neither masculine nor feminine*, *neither man nor woman*, and the word *nonidentity*, which characterise androgyny in a transcendent way. The passive variables attest to this alternative androgyny perceived as a sublimated wholeness: androgyny appears here as the exclusive reference to generic "persons". Nominalised words appear at the opposite pole of this dimension. Here, androgyny is resolutely concrete with an ample illustration of characters, most often from the mass media. It is also subject to value judgements. This pole includes a number of words which are scattered along the second dimension.

On one pole of the second dimension, there are words like *harmonious opposite*, *entirety*, *archetype*, *totality*. Associated with *ideal*, these words disclose a positively valued androgyny. On the other pole we find words like *notorious women*, *womanish man* and *mannish woman*, *homosexual*, *ambiguous* or *confusion*, together with the qualifiers *disturbing* and *mysterious*. This contrast seems to fit well with a distinction between the interiority and the appearance of the androgyne. It is also a separation of its most abstract, positively valued, and most concrete, often negative, components. On the concrete side, androgyny is bound to everyday life, to the discourse of the media, and reminds one more of a paradoxical and even deviant unity. This paradoxical component of androgyny stems more from the exteriority, the noticeable, than from a kind of depth psychology. It is worth noting that the prepositions "and" (linked to sex fusion) as well as "or" (alternation) tend to be positioned coherently on this second dimension, toward interiority and toward appearance, respectively. The fusion of sexes, exemplified by the *Yin-Yang*, refers to a coalescence projected into a totality that is desirable although confined to the interiority. On the other side, the "or" reduces androgyny to its visible components, at the same time aesthetic, troublesome and ambiguous. On the concrete side, androgyny is more the conflicting combination of the masculine and the feminine than the dissolution of their boundaries.

Interesting facts emerge from the positioning of the passive variables (target people). References to a "man" likened to a generic "person" appear on the pole of interiority. Conversely, the "famous person", as well as the exclusive reference to the "woman" and the simultaneous designation of both sexes, appear toward concrete androgyny. Thus the referent's prototype for the most abstract definition of androgyny is "man" taken in isolation or linked to a "person" in general. When androgyny is in a way carved into the bodies and attitudes of famous people, the referents focus on the "woman", or else on both sexes simultaneously.

This correspondence analysis brings to light very diverse structural principles of the social representation of androgyny. On the whole, it shows that androgyny cannot do easily without a concrete figure of the androgyne featuring an ambiguous and troublesome being, womanish man or mannish woman, or even homosexual. Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that androgyny *can* be dissociated from such figures to become more abstract. These results also stress that men and women (target people) foster different relationships with each one of these representations of androgyny. The generic person and man, on the one hand, and woman, on the other hand, do not share in the same way in these androgyny figures, particularly according to the lines of being and appearance. These results testify that androgyny expresses itself in the opposition of the concrete and the abstract, of the image and the model, of the individual in the flesh and the symbol: this notion is definitely plural. However, the examination of the reference frames reveals that the androgynous solution to the problem of sex differences, that of a personal identity devised as the mid-term between the genders, still maintains different relationships toward men and women. This is counter to the hope that presided over its emergence. Man remains closer to a generic image - and potentially androgynous - of the "person" in general.

## Questionnaires: The individual, the community and democracy in post-communist Europe

For 40 years, until 1989, European countries were separated by different ideologies and by rival political systems: the nations of the previous Soviet bloc and Western democracies. Many of the values which were part of a common European heritage since the Renaissance and Humanism, such as freedom, agency, individual rights and individual responsibility, were rejected by the communist regimes. At the same time, extreme forms of individualism developed in certain Western European nations during the same period.

The background to this project was the ending of the cold war following the collapse of communism in Europe in 1989. The main interest of this project was not in political, economic and historical phenomena as such, but in how these different phenomena were represented in the minds of ordinary people and how they were expressed in their language and communication. In view of these historical events the following questions were asked: Do people in the post-communist countries of Central Europe, after 40 years of totalitarian collectivism, still adhere to the values of the common European heritage? What is the meaning of "the individual" today, in Western democracies and in Central European post-communist

nations? Which issues are important for the well-being of the individual and how do they relate to the political and economic circumstances of those individuals? What is the meaning of "democracy" in the nations with a traditional democratic system and in those who were subjected to totalitarian collectivism and who lived in "people's democracies"? In the latter, "Soviet democracy" or "proletarian democracy" was clearly distinguished from "bourgeois democracy". "Soviet democracy" was defined by Lenin in terms of "the systematic use of violence" and of the "force against persons", by Stalin as "democracy for the working class" and by Vyshinski as "dictatorship of the proletariat". It was conceivable that for people in post-communist countries "democracy" could be affiliated with the negative images of violence and force against particular persons and minorities.

Propaganda tries to transform ideology into culture, to make it a part of common sense (Moscovici, 1976; Moscovici & Markova, 1998; cf. also section 2). The processes that were studied with respect to the individual, the community and democracy were: similar to those explored by Moscovici with respect to psychoanalysis in France in the late 1950s, when the Catholic Church and Marxists, using propaganda, tried to make their ideologies part of culture and build it into common sense. Moreover, when living in a particular social, cultural and political system, people unreflectively adopt ideas and ways of thinking which are implicitly imposed upon them by that system. Even if they disagree and oppose that system at a conscious level, the system creates and defines their social reality and pervades daily language. Representations are expressed through language and, at the same time, language itself is an object of social representations. It was the interdependence between language and social representations that has been explored.

The study used multiple methods (word association tasks, rating scales, questionnaires, interviews and discussion groups) to capture different levels of awareness of the respondents (Markova, 1996; Moodie, Markova & Plichtova, 1995). Thus it was assumed that in studying word associations, the respondents give spontaneous and relatively unreflected responses. In contrast, in rating scales they have to consider a level at which the term in question should be evaluated, and thus rating scales provide more reflected responses; in interviews the respondents also justify their answer while in discussion groups they are confronted with other people's point of view and they therefore argue and reflect more deeply upon their own perspectives. The respondents were from the following six European nations: three post-communist nations (Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary) and three western European nations (Scotland, England and France). Altogether, approximately 2,600 respondents in each nation, comprising two generations, those aged between 18-23 years and those between 40-45 years, took part in the study. The older generation was born around the time of the communist takeover in central and eastern Europe (1948 in Czechoslovakia). The younger generation was born around the period of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and grew up during the period of so-called "normalisation". Half of the participants were men and half were women, half were educated to university entrance level and half had qualifications below that level.

Here we focus on the results based on quantitative data. The data from word associations and rating scales were collected twice; first, in 1994, with focus on the individual and social/collective issues (Markova *et al.*, 1998; Moodie, Markova, Farr & Plichtova, 1997); second, in 1996, with focus on democracy and the individual.

In the word association task respondents were presented, in 1994, with 38 and in 1996 with 30 political, ideological and economic terms. These particular terms referred to important political and economic phenomena in central and western Europe. Rating scales contained the same term as the word associations tasks and respondents were asked to rate each of the terms on five-point scales to find out how these terms were important for the individual or for the local community or for democracy.

Word associations were studied using the semantic space analysis and content analysis. The former was carried out to represent the structure of associations, using, first, the program PROXIMITIES to compute the similarity matrices for the distribution of the frequency of associations to each stimulus word; secondly, matrices were subjected to multidimensional scaling using ALSCAL, resulting in a two-dimensional graphic representations. Terms with similar distributions of associations appeared close together while unrelated terms appeared more distantly on the plot. The plot represented a descriptive map of terms and their clusters. It was found that the structures of the representations of "the individual", "the community" and "democracy" were formed, in all cases, by the core terms (freedom, justice, human rights, self-determination) which were relatively stable across all six nations. In contrast, the flexible periphery terms appeared to depend on economic, ideological and political circumstances of the nations involved.

Content analysis of the associations to "the individual", "the community" and "democracy" corroborated the existence of a stable core with "freedom" being the most frequent association for all three terms. However, while for the Western nations "community" was represented as a positive and meaningful concept although often as something belonging to the past, in the post-communist nations, community was destroyed during the years of communist domination and was represented as a negative or meaningless concept.

Data from rating scales were subjected to three kinds of analyses. First, to a descriptive analysis based on mean scores; these data showed that the four most highly evaluated terms both in central and western Europe were "freedom", "peace", "justice" and "human rights". Secondly, to a factor analysis of the whole sample of six nations to identify groups of terms which were interrelated. It was found that the factor "the individual in a democratic society" (human rights, freedom, democracy, justice, peace) and the factor "the individual in a market economy" ("privatisation, private enterprise and market economy") accounted for most variance. Finally, to a series of stepwise discriminant function analyses (cf. Doise, Clemence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993) in order to identify the following: (1) which factors, or combination of factors, discriminated between the total sample of central Europeans from the total sample of western Europeans; (2) which factors discriminated between the three nations within central Europe and also the three nations within western Europe. It was found that all the factors, except for "the individual in a democratic society" discriminated between central and western European

nations. Respondents from western Europe rated more positively the well-being of the individual on "wealth", "collective values" and "community"; respondents from central Europe rated more positively the factors relating to "the individual in market economy", "the state" and "the self".

In general, this study has shown several things. First, the content of lay people's representations of the individual, the community and democracy suggests that some of them reflect traditions and cultural values of a common European heritage that have not been destroyed under Soviet rule, despite indoctrination at school and imposed totalitarian collectivism (Markova, 1997). It is also significant that democracy is included among these values and is related in the first place to freedom and to human rights rather than to, say, the market economy. Secondly, these findings add further weight to those of other researchers, showing that social representations are structured and contain some relatively stable and relatively flexible components at different hierarchical levels (Abric, 1993; Wagner, Valencia & Elejabarrieta, 1996). However, these structures are not static but are processes that are reconstructed in the socio-economic conditions in which they take place (Flament, 1994). Thirdly, we have shown that by using the theory of social representations, social psychology can contribute significantly to the study of macrosocial phenomena that have been, until now, studied mainly by sociology, economics and politics.

## Experiments on social representations

Experimentation poses a specific problem for research on social representations. Since representations are representations of the social world of the subject and because experimental situations, especially in laboratories, carry significant meanings themselves, the researcher necessarily becomes part of the subject's interpretation of the experimental situation. This problem is not unique to social representation research, but it is within the frame of this theory where its potential consequences become acutely important (Farr, 1976, 1984).

In the first stages of a research qualitative methods like the ones covered in sections 3 to 5 are the method of choice. In later stages questionnaires and experiments can play a role in uncovering elements, processes and structures of social representations which are less accessible. Particularly for experimentation, it is necessary to have a detailed knowledge of the semantics and symbolism which can only be discovered by exploratory approaches.

Due to their consensuality and to their being part and parcel of social reality social representations are not destined to play the part of dependent variables in experimental designs. It is virtually inconceivable how to produce something which comes close to a representation by the short-term manipulations which experiments typically consist of. The place where representations have entered experimental designs is as independent variables. Used as independent variables, social representations can be strictly tested for specific contents and characteristics. The results of such experiments are, however, never universal but limited to the specific population and group to which the subjects pertain.

A by now classical experiment is Faucheux and Moscovici's (1968) research on the effects of different representations in an experimental game. They told their subjects that they were playing against an impersonal opponent who would react to their own moves either by chance or as nature would. According to their representations of chance and nature, subjects in the chance-condition perceived the moves of the opponent as malevolent and capricious, while those in the nature-condition saw them as more benign, neutral and systematic. The subjects' exploitative behaviour and self-esteem differed systematically.

Using an experimental questionnaire design, Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner (1995) tested which metaphors Austrian people use to understand the natural process of conception and the interaction of sperm and ova. It was hypothesised that the popularised scientific insight into the role of sperm and ova in fecundisation will be understood in terms of sex-role metaphors such that the behaviour of sperm is likened to male and the behaviour of ova to female sex-role stereotypical activity. The rationale is that on the one hand the interaction of these two biological cells has most likely never been directly observed by normal people. Hence, this void of cognitive evidence affords to be filled by imagination. On the other hand, the sperm and ova each stem from one of the two sexes and therefore may carry some of the sex's characteristics. Such ideas can be attributed to the role which sympathetic magic plays in everyday thinking (Rozin & Nemeroff, 1990). Magical thinking often applies the metonymic principle according to which the part, e.g. sperm and ovum, can stand for the whole, e.g. man and woman respectively. It was further expected that metaphor use in understanding sperm-ovum interaction will depend on the subjects' sex-role ideology. Sex-role conservative subjects should more strongly attribute sex-role stereotypical characteristics on to the gametes than sex-role liberal subjects who subscribe to a more egalitarian world view.

The experimental design involved, first, adjective polarity scales using sex-role critical as well as sex-role neutral adjectives. Secondly, in a 2 x 2 experimental design metaphorical comparisons were crossed along two dimensions. The first dimension likened sperm-ovum interaction either to a social or a non-social domain. A man meeting a woman, for example, would be a social event while a mouse meeting a cat would be a non-social event. The second dimension varied the principal actor in each metaphorical comparison. On one occasion the metaphorical substituted for the sperm and on the other the substitute of the ovum was the principal actor [Table].

All hypotheses were confirmed. First, the sperm was attributed significantly with more male-stereotypical characteristics (hard, active, fast, dominant) than the ovum (soft, passive, slow, submissive). Secondly, subjects preferred significantly more social than non-social metaphorical comparisons and also those comparisons where the sperm was the principal actor than where the ovum was the principal actor. Both effects were significantly stronger for sex-role conservative than for sex-

role liberal subjects (see also Wagner, 1998b).

The authors conclude that by comparing gametes and ova in the female womb metaphorically to men and women in social and sexual life, the process of fertilisation becomes as intelligible, "real" and "tangible" as sexual interaction and intercourse in real life. The previously abstract entities of sperm and ovum known from popular science become converted into concrete entities with specific attributes; the cells, invisible to the unaided eye, become part of our everyday world. But this objectified conception of sperm and ovum cells is not a neutral conception. With the process of selecting and using a specific metaphor the source domain of the metaphor is converted into the symbol of the formerly unknown cellular entities. The new objects which are thereby created, the "socialised" sperm and ova, also possess new attributes unknown to biologists. The evaluatively neutral description of fertilisation in the scientific universe gives no grounds for thinking of sperm as active, hard and dominant and of ova as passive, soft and submissive. These moral and evaluative attributes make sense only in the consensual universe of everyday thinking and communication. Metaphors and attributes in everyday understanding are not applied because they reflect some truth about a phenomenon, but because they are good to think (Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner, 1995, p. 684).

## Conclusions

Social representation theory was introduced to the French-speaking social psychological community in 1961 through Moscovici's book-length study on how psychoanalysis became part of everyday understanding and discourse in France in the 1950s. Moscovici (1963) first presented the concept of social representation to the English-speaking community in an Annual Review paper on attitudes and opinions. While emerging from a French tradition of research on the popularisation of science, social representation theory was from the beginning a more general approach.

Paradoxically, a somewhat related approach can be found right at the cradle of experimental psychology (Farr, 1984). It was Wundt who developed on the one hand psychological experimentation at the individual level and on the other hand a psychology of peoples and cultures at the collective level which he called *Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1900-1920). In the ten volumes comprising his *Völkerpsychologie* he investigated language, magic, myth and religion and their psychological relevance for the structure of the mind. Durkheim, who once visited Wundt's laboratory, built on these achievements and elaborated his sociology of collective representations.

Instead of focusing on widely distributed and culturally entrenched representations which were the subject matter of Durkheim's sociology, Moscovici adapted this approach to fit modern societies. The dominant characteristics of present-day societies are less religion and traditional cultural practices but dynamic and often disputed mental fashions and scientific "myths" (Alexander, 1995; Moscovici, 1992). In a sense social representation theory is social psychological anthropology applied to modern societies.

Issues of culture, modernity and local psychologies have been addressed by many authors. There is, for example, remarkable progress in research about indigenous psychologies in Chinese (Yang, 1998), Indian (Sinha, 1998), and Korean (Choi, Kim & Kim, 1997) settings to name but a few (cf. also Verma, 1997). Social representation theory positions itself right next to this endeavour as a social psychology concerned with the contents of common sense and local knowledge (cf. Jodelet, 1993; Wagner, 1997).

The understanding of social representation resonates the initial meaning of "social attitude" as it was developed by Thomas & Znaniecky in a study about the Polish peasant in America (1918-1920; cf. Jaspars & Fraser, 1984). Their topic was cultural assimilation and social difference. Given this research interest, the convergence of the early concept of attitude and of social representations today does not appear as a coincidence. Pressing social and cultural problems require a theoretical framework which allows collective processes to be tackled in psychology. This analytical power of "social attitudes" was later lost in the course of the individualisation of "social" psychology (Farr, 1996). In their present definition as individual evaluations of objects, attitudes are only marginally related to representational processes. Attitudes appear to capture peripheral and evaluative aspects of social representations which are not part of their central and constitutive elements (Moliner & Tafani, 1997).

Social representation theory's relation to social cognition is rather more complicated (cf. Duveen & DeRosa, 1992). At first sight representations seem to be social schemata. Schemata as well as representations involve cognitive structures which orient an individual in his or her world. However, schema theory is mute about the social origins of schemata whereas social representation theory is quite explicit about sociogenesis. Furthermore, schemata are conceived as *representations of reality*, similar to a picturing process in people's minds, whereas social representations are conceived as *negotiated constructs of social groups*. Therefore the latter are out there in the talk and action constituting the social world of the community. This difference is crucial in the sense that these terms are based on divergent epistemological frameworks.

What is true for schema theory is even more true for social cognition in general and its cross-cultural variants. Its juxtaposing the subject and the object, its reliance on a correspondence theory of truth which supposedly allows to determine a cognition's validity by comparing it with its object (cf. Wagner, 1996), its claim to universality of its findings, and its failure to truly take the social and cultural foundations of cognition into account set social cognition theory squarely at odds with social representation theory. There have been attempts to integrate both approaches on a conceptual level (cf. Augoustinos & Walker, 1995), the success of which must still be proven.

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