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Social Representations and the Social Bases of Knowledge



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Thematic Perspectives and Epistemic Principles in Developmental Social Cognition and Social Representation

The Meaning of a Developmental Approach to the Investigation of Social Representations

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Introduction

More than a quarter of a century has passed since the publication of Moscovici's book on the social representation (S.R.) of psychoanalysis (1961) which represents a U-turn in the investigation of the social foundations of knowledge. S-R-inspired literature has developed so widely that it has become a "European paradigm" for the investigation of social world knowledge. It places its emphasis on a *constructive* and *interactionist* perspective, which regards the belief systems and theories that guide the social behaviour of individuals as being not merely cognitive but also the outcome of social processes; it is recognised as an alternative to the *social cognition* model predominant in the United States. The latter, in fact, adopts a fundamentally individualist perspective and attributes the genesis of social behaviour to individual cognitive processes or to an internal mechanism, as in the case of "prototypes" or "cognitive schemata"; these remain in a sense, pre-social, even when the object of investigation is peculiarly social (Forgas, 1981).

Recent attempts to identify significant, plausible interconnections between these two ways of attaining knowledge of the social world (de Paolis, 1986; Augoustinos & Innes, 1987) seem to neglect the *different heuristic horizon of the concept of society* which inspires American social cognition (attribution theory, human information processing) and the European social representation approach. The former is based on a concept of society as a sum of dyadic interpersonal relations (Ugazio, 1988) while the latter refers the genesis of S. R.

back again to the re-elaborative dynamic processes of knowledge activated in social exchange; these are contextualised within an "*organised society*" (Amerio, 1982) as a complex set of class, group and sub-group strata which have various ideological orientations and share different symbolic social meanings and cultural values. However all this only serves to illustrate the need to stimulate an integration between cognitive aspects oriented on the one hand towards the contents and on the other hand towards the processes which guide knowledge of the social world.

Over the last ten years there has been an opening at an interdisciplinary level towards heuristic horizons which have been traditionally held to belong to specific disciplinary areas. Social psychology has discovered "cognition" (Eiser, 1980; Hamilton, 1981; Hastorf & Isen, 1982), or rather rediscovered it, if the historical-epistemological studies of authors who have revised the cognitive roots of social psychology are taken into due account (Zajonc, 1980; Taylor, 1981; Forgas, 1983; Moscovici, 1986; Palmonari, 1987, 1989).

The emphasis placed on the social aspect in developmental psychology (McGurck, 1978; Doise & Palmonari, 1984, 1988; Goodnow, 1988) has echoed this discovery/rediscovery; it was already present, though with a greater socio-determinist outlook, in various theoretical and research approaches: for example, in socio-ethological studies (Bowlby, 1969; Schaffer, 1977; Hinde, 1978; Trevarthen, 1979), social learning studies (Bandura, 1977), social behaviourist work (Staats, 1975) and psycholinguistic studies of interaction processes in

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language construction (Bruner & Sherwood, 1981).

Recognition of the importance of the socially-connected meanings which individuals and groups give to social situations has led child psychologists to question the nature of children's social knowledge and the way it is constructed; this has also produced research trends which vary in terms of historical origin and theoretical background such as:

- 1) the trend derived from the Piagetian model, which has shifted its focus of attention from the study of the logical-formal structures of thought to the understanding of situations and social phenomena (Furth, 1978, 1979, 1980; Damon, 1977; Waller, 1978; Berti & Bombi, 1981); for some authors the latter are particularly relevant for moral development (Kohlberg, 1976). Reviews by Shantz (1975), Barker & Newson (1980), Flavell & Ross (eds. 1981) and Butterworth and Light (eds. 1982) provide a complete picture of the varied Anglo-Saxon literature that follows this line; Ecksensberger and Silbereisen (eds. 1980) do the same for German studies.
- 2) the line of research dealing with the development of social competence in the child, such as the ability to perceive/comprehend others whether they be normal (Livesley and Bromley, 1973; Glick & Clarke-Stewart, 1978) or deviant (Coie & Pennington, 1976; Marsden & Kalter, 1977; Dollinger, Thelen & Walsh, 1980).
- 3) the line of research derived from the extension of cognitive models from general psychology, usually adopting an experimental laboratory approach. This trend is made up of:
 - a) research which looks to "human information processing theory" (Klahr, 1980; Siegler, 1983) and various cognitive models like prototypes, social schemata, scripts etc. (Solso, 1979; Nelson, 1981, 1986; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Abelson, 1981; Siegler, 1983; Mandler, 1983; Arcuri, De Negri Trentin, Job and Salmasso, 1988). The concept of "script", which is derived from the concept of "social schemata", is defined as the conceptual representation of stereotyped sequences of events which are applicable to frequent conventional situations whose level of generalisation is relatively limited. From this theoretical perspective no distinction is made between social and non social knowledge since the objective is to provide a unifying explanatory picture of comprehension, memory and reasoning. Comprehension and interpretation of an event (social and non-social) are regarded as being the result of the activation of an organised structure in the form of "schema" or "script" i.e. a structure which involves the temporal and causal connections between events, including elements relative to intentions, aims, rules etc. From the developmental point of view two types of problem are posed: 1) the modes of development of the scripts; 2) the role of cognitive processes and the gradual increase in social experience in the comprehension and representation of routine episodes through the scripts.
 - b) research derived from attribution theory examined from a developmental point of view (Kassin, 1981; Laljee, Watson & White, 1983). Although in much recent research the processes of attribution no longer only refer to inductive types of operation but also involve the influence of pre-existing factors in the conscious subject (anticipation, hypothesis, intuitive theories), it should be noted that the analysis of the way in which the "naive" subject explains, and explains to himself, social and non-social events through a category system is once more dealt with by resorting to inter-individual mechanisms as if the explanation of daily life events was taking place in a "social vacuum" (Tajfel, 1972; Semin, 1980; De Grada & Mannetti, 1988).
- 4) the line of research into the socio-genesis of intelligence (Doise & Mugny, 1981; Mugny & Carugati, 1985; Mugny, De Paolis & Carugati, 1988) and into the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Perret-Clermont, 1980); within this trend the social world is regarded more as a fundamental element which takes part in the construction of cognitive processes than as an object of knowledge.

The emergence in Europe of a valid social psychology of development (as set out in the

Table 1.

SOCIAL OBJECTS STUDIED	
DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY	SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
<i>Social Cognition</i>	<i>Social Representation</i>
Inter-individual relations and inter-group comparisons	
moral judgement, rules and conventions, 'role taking'	
Kohlberg, 1963,1969,1971, 1976, et Al. 1983; Hoffman, 1976; Damon, 1977; Furth, 1980; Turiel, 1975, 1978; Feffer & Gourevitch, 1960; Flavell,1968;Higgins,1981; Panier-Bagat, 1982; Barbieri, Legrenzi & Starc, 1986	Emler,1987 *
interpersonal perception and comprehension	
Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Peevers & Secord, 1973; Feffer, 1974; Flavell, 1974; Brooks-Gunn & Lewis, 1975; Selman,1976,1980;Barenboim,1981; Rogers, 1984; French,1984; Dunn, 1988; Miller & Aloise, 1989; Gavin & Furman, 1989	Farr & Moscovici, 1984
interpersonal relations: (concepts of friendship, authority, obedience, cooperation, conflict, power)	
Bigelow, 1977; Damon, 1977; Mannarino,1980 Youniss, 1980; Selman, 1981; Berndt, 1981; Hartup, 1984; Bombi, Celegato & Cristante, 1985; Fabbri Montesano & Panier Bagat, 1988 a, b	Abrie, Fauchoux, Moscovici & Pion, 1967; Flament,1967,1971; Codol, 1969; Abrie, 1970, 1987; Codol & Flament, 1971; Di Giacomo,1985; Catellani & Quadrio,1988; Catellani, Quadrio & Saitta, 1989*
intelligence and its social definitions	
Wellman & Estes, 1986; Astington, Harris & Olson, 1988; Estes, Wellman & Woolley, in print	Mugny & Carugati, 1985 *; Poeschl, Doise, Mugny, 1985 *; Schurmans, Dasen, Vouilloz, 1989; Carugati, 1990a, 1990b
health, illness and death	
Campbell, 1975; Bibace & Walsh, 1981; Brewster, 1982; Eiser, Patterson & Eiser, 1983; Speece & Brent, 1985; Bush, 1987; Burbach & Peterson, 1986; Del Barrio, 1988	Herzlich,1969, 1984; D'Houtaud, 1976 ; 1978; Leventhal, Meyer & Nerenz, 1980; Herzlich & Pierret, 1984; Markova & Wilkie, 1987, et Al. 1989; Laplantine,1989; Mannetti & Pierro, 1989;Aebischer, 1991
mental illness, deviance and handicap	
Marsden, Kalter, et al 1977; Hoffman, Marsden, Kalter, 1977; Maurer, 1979; Dollinger, Thelen & Walsh, 1980 Coie & Pennington, 1976; Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 1977; Voeltz, 1980; Tallandini, 1982; Dobert & Nunner-Winkler,1985; Weiss, 1986; Younger, Schwartzman & Ledingham, 1986	Paicheler & Edrel, 1980; Jodelet, 1983, 1987, 1989b; de Rosa, 1985*, 1987a*,1987b,1988a, 1988b, 1988d, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c*,1991d*; Buendia,1985; Deconchy,1985; Ayestaran, 1985; Ayestaran & Paez, 1986; Ayestaran, de Rosa, Paez, 1987*; Schurmans, 1988; de Rosa & Iaculo, 1988*;Bellelli, 1987, 1991; Paez, 1987; Zani, 1987;Morvan, 1988; De Roten, 1989; D'Alessio, 1989*; Duruz, 1989; Becchi, E., Bondioli, A.Mazzoleni,M., 1990; de Rosa & Schurmans,1990a*,1990b*
sexuality, socio-sexual rules and gender	
Bernstein & Cowan, 1975; Goldman & Goldman, 1982; Hut, 1984; Jagstaidt -Janet, 1984; Amann-Gainotti & Sellardi,1989	Doise & Weinberger, 1972; Dechamps & Doise, 1975*; Giami et al., 1983 ; Aebischer, 1985; Lloyd & Smith, 1985*; Duveen & Lloyd, 1986*; Lloyd, 1986*; Lloyd, Duveen, Smith, 1988*; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1988
body	
Munari et. al. 1976; Crider, 1981 Amann-Gainotti, 1987, 1988	Jodelet, 1984a

Table 1 continued

<i>Social Cognition</i>	<i>Social Representation</i>
Social organisation and institutions	
economics: (concepts of work, wealth, property, distribution, social class etc.)	
Jahoda, 1979, 1981; Webley, 1983; Berù, & Bombi, 1981; Ajello, 1984, 1989	Vergès, 1984, 1987; De Polo & Sarchielli, 1983, 1987; Bellelli, Morelli, Petrillo, Serino, 1983*; Silem, 1981*; Ripon, 1983; Abric, 1984; Emler & Dickinson, 1985*; Duveen & Shields, 1985*; Mannetti & Tanucci, 1988*; Grize, Vergès, & Silem, 1988; Burgard, Cheyne & Jahoda, 1989*
politics: (concepts of government, law, penal system, country, foreigner etc.)	
Piaget & Weil, 1951; Danziger, 1958; Jahoda, 1964; Adelson & O'Neil, 1966; Adelson, Green & O'Neil, 1969; Greenstein, 1969, 1974, 1975; Tapp & Kohlberg, 1971; Connell, 1970, 1971; Furth, 1978; Ajello, 1984; Amann-Gainotti, 1984	Percheron, 1974*; Percheron, Bonnal, & Boy, Dehan, Grunberg, Subitkau, 1978*; Robert P. & Faugeron C., 1978; Vala, 1981; Louis-Guerin & Brillon, 1984; Pierre-Puységur & Corroyer, 1986*, 1987* Almodovar, 1988*; Pogliani & Quadrio, 1988 Quadrio & Venini, 1988; Nigro & Galli, 1988*; Quadrio, Catellani & Sala, 1988; Quadrio & Magrin, 1988
institutions and institutional roles, social services : (family and its transformations, childhood as social category, school, hospital, transport...)	
Bredzinsky, Singer & Braff, 1985; Furth 1976, 1980; Scabini, 1984; Goodnow 1988; Goodnow et al., 1985; Arcuri, De Negri Trentin & Salmasso, 1988; D'Alessio, 1988; D'Alessio & Venini, 1988;	Gilly, 1980, 1986; Mollo, 1974, 1986 Emiliani, 1982; Emiliani, Zani, Carugati, 1982; Emler, Ohana & Moscovici, 1987*; Chombart de Lawve, 1979, 1986; Audigier et al., 1986; Palmonari & Zani, 1989; Petrillo, 1990* Corsaro, 1990*; D'Alessio, 1990; Molinari & Emiliani, 1990
city, urban and rural environment	
Sfondrini, 1982; Gaetti & Venini, 1982; Axia, 1986	Ledrut, 1973; Milgran & Jodelet, 1976; Bonnes, 1980; Jodelet 1982; Milgran, 1984; Chombart de Lauwe, 1987*; de Rosa, Ardone, Bonnes, 1988; de Rosa, 1988c
technology: (electrical circuits, computers, radioactivity etc...)	
Turkle, 1984; Singery, Mason & Varisco, 1987	Tiberghien, Delacotte, 1976*; Bensaid, 1984a, 1984b; De Grada, Ercolani, Areni, Sensales, 1987*; Eiejabbarrieta, 1987; Galli, Nigro, 1987; Nigro, Galli, Poderico, 1988*; Desautels J., Avadon M., Larochele, M. 1988; Schiele & Boucher, 1989; Vergès, 1991

positions taken by authors such as Doise, Mugny, Palmonari, Carugati, Emler, Duveen amongst others) has highlighted the risk of how in some cases these interdisciplinary changes have merely "borrowed" objects of study rather than brought about real integration of explanatory models.

Objectives

This paper draws upon a more general theoretical model as a result of empirical research carried out over the last ten years (de Rosa, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b, 1988d, 1991a, 1991c) and the recent critical debate on social representation (Farr 1977, 1984, 1987; Bau-

bion-Broy, Lapeyr & Malrie, 1977; Ramognino, 1984; Harré, 1984; Le Bouedec, 1979, 1986; Litton & Potter, 1985; Potter & Litton, 1985, 1987; Semin, 1985, 1989; Hewstone, 1985; Doise, 1985a, 1988, 1990; Doise & Palmonari, 1986; Betocchi Villone, 1986; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; McKinlay & Potter, 1987; Parker, 1987; Jahoda, 1988; Moscovici, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Jodelet, 1984b, 1989a, 1991; Breakwell & Canter, eds. 1989; Beauvois 1988, 1990; Trognon & Larrue 1988; Palmonari, 1980, 1989; Wagner, 1989; de Rosa, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1990d, 1990e, 1991b; Fraser & Gaskell, 1990; Aebischer, Lipiansky & Deconchy 1991).

This article will attempt to set out some notes; its twin objective is:

- a) to make a critical comparison between developmental social cognition and social representation;
- b) to underline the importance of a developmental approach to the study of social representation.

A. Towards a critical comparison between developmental social cognition and social representation: thematic perspectives and epistemic principles

The table set out above shows the thematic perspectives which developmental and social psychology have followed when identifying common "social" objects of investigation. The table uses a purely thematic criterion for matching and attempts to analyse a large quantity of what might be termed "social cognition" research; this research is oriented from the developmental (including all the above noted trends) and the social representation perspective.

It is clear that the table is necessarily selective and therefore partial and incomplete; it does not claim to provide an exhaustive panorama of the literature on the subject or a critical review of it. The only aim of the table is to underline certain thematic links which can be found in the vast amount of research which uses the two perspectives in question.

The social cognition/social representation subdivision which is attributed to developmental psychology/social psychology is more of a response to the criterion of graphically illustrating the perspectives than to that of definitive bipolarisation: in fact, as is well known, there are both social cognition-inspired research trends in social psychology and social representation-inspired trends in developmental psychology.

The contents of the "social representation" section includes studies carried out on both adults and children: those carried out on children and/or adolescents have been marked with an asterisk.

As table 1 shows there is no doubt that many broad connections can be identified at the "content" level between studies which, though using different perspectives, investigate the same areas of social world knowledge construction and organisation.

Comparative analysis of methodology and

results are essential for further investigation and would be interesting to carry out, but it would not be possible to carry out such a large scale review here. The aim of this article is not a thematic analysis but a comparison between the models and theoretical perspectives of social cognition and social representation.

The first observation to be made is this: as well as the parallelism between objects of study in both the social representation and social schemata approach, prototypes and scripts, the informative elements which organise content through the subjects' active selection processes, are regarded as being hierarchically organised around a central nucleus, though with a different emphasis on social meanings for the former and on logical-formal ones for the latter;

Moreover if the same importance is attached to the study of "content" as is attached to it in the social representation model (Moscovici 1986), researchers will surely be able to benefit from knowledge of investigations which have the same object of study, despite the fact that these investigations have their own theoretical-methodological instruments that are of different epistemological orientation and are used within disciplinary areas like social and developmental psychology which are close but not identical in their historical-heuristic perspectives.

It should be noted however that in social representation the content of representation is a vitally important element in the dynamics of representation (*social representation is always a representation of something (the object) by someone (the subject), whose respective characteristics always affect the representation*).

"It is not the nature of the object which differentiates the social from the non-social but the relationship that is established with it. There are sacred cats and sacred houses while there are human beings regarded as less than objects, for example by their doctors. By blurring the distinction between social elements and interpersonal elements, doubt is cast on a great deal of the work done in the area of social cognition" (Moscovici, 1986: 36 - my translation).

Social representation research tends to stress socially significant variables through which the objects of social knowledge are

structured and give form to representations which are shared by individuals and groups.

In a specific reference to research on moral judgement, Emler recently criticised Lickona's claim that:

"Content tells us *what* a person believes, which is obviously dependent on culturally variable experiences, whereas structure tells us how a person *thinks about* the content of his belief; this reasoning, so the theory goes, is universal." (Lickona, 1976).

Emler's criticism is explicit:

"Constructivists use the content-form distinction more generally as a way of handling cultural influences on thought; culture may affect the content but not the form of social knowledge" (Emler 1987: 378).

Apart from similarity in content and their differing relevance for knowledge of the social world, the literature also shows, albeit in an unsystematic way, other elements of convergence and divergence between the American social cognition model and the European social representation one.

Attempts to identify epistemologically significant *transversality* between the two models have been identified:

- a) in wide-ranging theoretical analyses which compare large trends – all under the social cognition heading, with the aim of tracing the structural principles which characterise their similarities and differences (Forgas, 1981; Palmonari, 1987, 1989; Ugazio, 1988; Jodelet, 1989a);
- b) in more detailed analyses which focus on individual concepts (like schema, script, prototype, representational field etc.: Augustinus & Innes, 1987, 1990; Semin, 1989) or theoretical models (like attribution theory: Hewstone, 1989) or thematic fields (e.g. moral development, Emler, 1987).

In this paper it is not possible to trace the paths these various discussions take. It is sufficient to underline that, although authors have different ideas as to possible integration of the above theoretical approaches, they are all in agreement in recognising a common "*constructivist*" approach to the social knowledge mod-

els of American and European social cognition.

In fact these authors recognise that both trends emphasise the "*active structuring of knowledge by the subject*", both as "naive scientist" and "vehicle of common sense and pre-existing knowledge". However they also stress *the different acceptance of the concept of "social"* present in the two approaches – the one regarding it purely as a criterion of inter-individual and collective knowledge sharing, and the other as an element which generates that knowledge.

The concept of "social" has often had various ambiguous or generic interpretations made of it in the literature when placed alongside the term "representation" or the even vaguer term "cognition". Moscovici has recently clarified this point:

"By recognising that representations are at the same time both generated and acquired, the prestabilised static nature which representations used to have in the classic interpretation can be avoided. *It is no longer the substrata but the interaction which counts.*

There follows the correct observation that:

"what enables us to call representations "social" is not so much their individual or group supports as the fact that they are elaborated *during processes of exchange and interaction*" (Codol, 1982: 2)". (Moscovici, 1989: 82 – my translation).

Thus it is not the criterion of the common object or of sharing which legitimises the social nature of representations but the logic of the social exchanges which produce them.

Ugazio (1988) rightly identifies integration between constructivism and interactionism as the epistemic element which characterises the European approach to social representations compared to the American approach which,

"by adopting a strictly individual type of constructivism which regards cognitive structures as invariant, ends up with a definition of social psychology as a simple extension of general cognitivist psychology for the study of social stimuli" (Ugazio, 1988: 44)

Similar criticisms have been made by Semin about the making of a distinction between the concepts of prototype and social represen-

tation, although they are recognised as being similar in their reality categorising function:

"while the social representation approach emphasises the indispensable aspect of the social element, above all in its treatment of categorisation processes as irreducible to the individual subjective dimension, the prototype approach is based on precisely the opposite. Despite its claim to be working on social categories its objective is to examine the organisation and representation of categories in the mind of the individual ... the essential difference

between the two approaches derives from the fact that in the case of the prototype approach the problem is with "internal" mechanisms while in the case of social representations the emphasis is on factors which affect the way in which we order our environment" (Semin, 1989: 245-247 my translation).

Hewstone discusses the possible integration of attribution theory and the social representation model; he recognises that the social representation approach is different from the social cognition one in that it stresses the bases,

Table 2.

SOCIAL COGNITION	SOCIAL REPRESENTATION
constructivist perspective	integration between constructivist and interactionist perspective
individualist perspective (social behaviour explained through individual processes)	interactionist conception based on the dynamics of interpersonal and social exchanges
metaphor of the subject as 'naive scientist' and 'economiser' of cognitive resources	metaphor of the subject as 'actor' of daily life
simplified and non-historical conception of society as collection of individuals linked only by interpersonal relations	conception of 'organised society' (society not as a collection of social atoms, but articulated and stratified in classes, groups, sub-groups)
social world treated in the same way as the natural world, as an object of cognitive operations and categorisation (superiority of the unvarying form over varying contents)	social world treated on the basis of the complexity of its contents and its normative, ideological and value implications (integration between form and content)
social concepts as acquisition within a universal sequence of stages, not socially determined. Social influence is only recognised as facilitating logical operations within problem-solving strategies available in own cultural context (e.g. Piaget's cross-cultural studies)	social concepts as socially transmitted sets of information, re-elaborated through interaction between individuals and groups and reconstructed by the social actors on the basis of social experience. Importance given to the symbolic order of own culture.
focus on the 'how' and 'why' of knowledge	focus on 'what kind' of representation and 'of what'
cognition as formal and logical structures	representations as set of rational/non-rational, logical / emotional, normative and evaluative components, with action-guiding value.

contents and social origins of knowledge; it is from these that attributions are forged (Hewstone, 1989: 261).

Thus social representations contribute to clarification of the genesis of attribution processes and the widely shared nature of explanatory causal processes. This view sees social representations not only as the product of cultural determinants, but also the origin of cognitive processes and their inter-individual consensus, the socio-normative background within which the meanings of the explanatory mechanisms used by people to interpret reality are codified.

The distinctive positions of the two approaches to social knowledge construction in the child can thus be summed up as shown in Table 2.

B. Towards a developmental approach to the study of Social Representations

An examination of the functions attributed to social representations (*familiarisation of material and social reality* and *intergroup communication*) will clearly reveal the meaning of proposal oriented in the direction of a developmental and genetic approach.

Anyone with experience of a relationship with a child is aware of their increasing demands for explanations about the world (whether it be social or material) at every unknown word, new figurative element, ambiguous perception or image of unfamiliar situations; they are attempting to find a meaning or a meaningful connection between their infinitely small already-known universe and the infinitely large unknown universe opening up in front of them. How they construct their representational maps day by day, moment by moment, interaction by interaction and experience by experience is a fascinating question for any researcher into social representation, whether they be social psychologist, developmental psychologist or anthropologist.

The part played by "the construction of language-mediated social meanings" (Gumperz, 1982; Rommetveit, 1984; Semin, 1987; Trognon & Larrue) in this process has still to be investigated by means of an integration which would combine the approach of the developmental/interactionist/psycholinguistic school

with the approach of social psychologists interested in the genesis of social representations and in social representations as generators of socially shared cognitive mechanisms.

If we take up Doise's recent expectation (1988) ("A particularly interesting way of studying the nature of "social world images" must be the study of their genesis in children ... " – my translation), which has often been repeated by Moscovici (1984, 1986, 1990), the importance of a developmental approach to the study of social representations can be summarised as follows:

- a) the importance of carrying out research on populations (like classes in various institutional environments or the sibling subsystem in the nuclear family etc.); these provide an ideal opportunity for studying the degree of sharing of representational systems because of their nature as *groups with a history* (see inter alia: Cook-Gumperz, Corsaro & Streck eds., 1986; Corsaro, 1990).
- b) the importance of studying the *processes of social consensus construction* i.e. the communicative-interactive means by which a piece of social representation data is transmitted and re-elaborated in relation to the various primary and secondary child socialisation contexts; the reasons for this are the following:
 - on the one hand the importance of *symbolic mediations* which intervene in *asymmetric exchanges* between the cognitive and representational world of adults and of children and between the universes of children of different ages (see inter alia: Emiliani, 1982; Chombart de Lauwe, 1986; Molinari & Emiliani, 1990; Semin & Papadopoulou, 1990).
 - on the other hand the *negotiation of polysemous models of consensual or alternative definition of reality* during adult/child and child/child interaction of social categories which are different in terms of age, sex, socio-economic cultural level) (see e.g.: Emler & Dickinson, 1985; Emler, Ohana & Dickinson, 1990).

In this sense, a developmental approach to the study of social representations provides a good opportunity for examining the *dynamics between S-R development and social*

influence theory in a bi-directional perspective of social exchanges, given that:

"children make up a socio-genetic category which is dominated but emotionally tied at an inter-individual level to members of the correspondingly dominant category – the adults (Chombart de Lauwe, 1986: 101 – my translation)

The micro-ethnographic study (Corsaro, 1990) on children's secondary adjustment to adult social rules in American and Italian nursery schools is an interesting illustrative investigation on the development of social representations as a collective process involving children's interaction with peers and adults.

"First, the analysis of children's secondary adjustments provides evidence that the children share a basic understanding of adult social rules. Secondly, secondary adjustments provide a forum in which children are able to elaborate their own set of social representations. In the process of acquiring a sense of adult social structure, children simultaneously come to produce their own unique peer culture. ... Knowledge of the content of a rule is never sufficient for its application; rules must be applied and interpreted in social context. In this sense children's social representation of adult rules does not involve simply thinking (or cognition) about social life; rather it involves children's psychological activities in their social lives. Children's social representation of adult rules and culture is initially, in line with Vygotsky (1978), always a collective process. Social representations become psychologically active for individual children as a result of their reconstruction of prior shared cultural experiences with adults and peers. To understand fully children's ontogenesis of social representations it is necessary for researchers to be willing to enter children's worlds and peer cultures" (Corsaro, 1990: 14, 25).

c) the importance of studying at a young age the processes of *anchoring* and *objectifying* through which children begin to construct their symbolic order of reality by organising new information into a mosaic of elementary representational maps whose *Gestalten* acquire values which are increasingly more significant at a social level over time (e.g.: the investigations on S. R. of mental illness

from childhood to adulthood: de Rosa, 1987b, 1990a; or on S. R. of radioactivity, in statu nascenti, immediately after Chernobyl accident: Nigro, Galli & Poderico, 1988).

Unlike traditional social cognition-inspired research, SR research emphasises not so much cognitive aspects as symbolic aspects or those dealing with integration between conscious and unconscious rational and non-rational aspects. Moscovici has written about this that:

"... the concept of social cognition implies a conscious logical process. This is not true for social representations. These are based on conventions and symbols and include conscious, unconscious, rational and irrational aspects. The result of this is that the term "cognitive" is not precise when it is applied to social phenomena. It would be more appropriate to use the word "symbolic", which is not the same thing. It is thus wrong to say that social representations are cognitive representations. Psychosociologists tend to confuse cognitive and symbolic. If, as is claimed, the cognitive revolution is behind them, the symbolic revolution has still to arrive and this also involves general psychologists. Without this revolution, social representations can only provide a small contribution" (Moscovici 1986: 73 – my translation);

d) the importance of studying by longitudinal and cross-cultural research the *consistency over time* (stability versus variability) and *across cultures* (urban/rural, western and non-western etc.) of concepts relative to determinate social objects from childhood to adulthood. This is particularly important from a transcultural point of view, so that the "comparative by definition" nature of social representations (Moscovici, 1986: 76) can be taken into due account (e.g.: de Rosa, 1984, 1987; Ayesteran, de Rosa, Paez, 1987; Emler, Ohana & Moscovici, 1987; de Rosa & Schurmans, 1990a, 1990b);

e) the importance of studying social knowledge construction processes in relation to variables such as (individual and social) experiential *proximity to/distance from* the objects being studied. This point is well supported by considerations suggested by Markova & Wilkie, 1987; et al. 1989 as regard the powerful source of influence of social representations of people with

- HIV/AIDS and haemophilia in parents and close friends;
- f) the importance of investigating "ab origine" the social genesis of ties between *representational systems and behavioural strategies* (von Cranach, 1982, 1989; Amerio, 1991) regarding socially relevant aspects such as the processes of inter-group stereotyping and category discrimination etc.
- g) the importance of using *open methodologies* which integrate studies based on semi-directed interviews, unstructured material or conversational analysis with studies using observational techniques for the analysis of the interrelations between verbal and non-verbal, thought strategies and plans of action (see: de Rosa, 1990a; Bellelli, 1990; Mannetti, 1990).

Conclusions

The notes contained in this article, which has the twin aim of providing a critical comparison between developmental social cognition and social representation and of underlining the importance of a developmental approach to the study of social representations, does not claim to be exhaustive or original. In fact there are several contributions which have anticipated aspects of the above objectives.

As regards the critical comparison between cognitivist approaches – albeit in socio-psychological terms rather than developmental ones – it was the specific subject of a paper delivered by Moscovici to students at the Université d'Eté in Aix-en-Provence (1981) and published in English (1982) and French (1986); in it the representational model was conceived as the third phase in the cognitive revolution (or reform?) in social psychology, following on from the attitude era and the social cognition era.

However, although a few firm contacts have been made in this comparison (Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1989; Palmonari, 1987, 1989; Emler, 1987; Ugazio, 1988; Jodelet, 1989a; Semin, 1989; Hewstone, 1989), it has not prevented ambiguity and blurring of the confines between the two fields.

Editorial work has produced a kind of epistemic confusion: for example, in social representation "readings" or "bibliographies",

contributions can be found which are directly inspired by different cognitive psychology models (prototypes, schemata etc.) and where no attention has been paid at a theoretical level to their connection with social representation.

This article has attempted to mark out the thematic horizons and epistemic principles which make up the ground for meeting and differentiation between social cognition in its various expressions and social representation.

As regards the objective of defining the meaning of a developmental approach to the study of social representation, empirical work has been appearing for some years and a few readings specifically oriented in this direction have started to appear recently (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990).

Studies which combine a developmental perspective with an intercultural one (in terms we have already suggested: de Rosa, 1984) aimed at studying the variations in the social representations of specific objects over time and across cultures (such as in the investigations of Ayesteran, de Rosa, Paez, 1987; Emler, Ohana & Moscovici, 1987; de Rosa, Schurmans, 1990a, 1990b) are being usually completely disregarded (see: 'Bibliographie générale sur les représentations sociales' edited by Denise Jodelet & Jocelyne Ohana (Jodelet, 1989a) and bibliography edited by Wolfgang Wagner in periodical newsletter distributed to the participants of 'Social Representations' Communication Network).

We hope that in future an increasing number of studies oriented towards integration of contributions from social psychology, developmental psychology and anthropology, can contribute to the development of the *tridimensional nature* of social representation, defined by Denise Jodelet (1989) as *vitality, transversality and complexity*.

We conclude with Doise's note:

"Only by explicitly studying the articulation between system and meta-system, between cognitive and social, and providing them with a more elaborate theoretical platform will studies of the development of social cognition be turned into authentic studies of social cognition" (Doise, 1988: 103 – my translation)

Note

A preliminary version of this paper has been presented – with M. Amann-Gainotti – in the *Sammelband der Zusammenfassungen der Referate, 1. Kongress der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Psychologie – Soziale Vorstellungen und die sozialen Grundlagen des Wissens* (Bern, 31 August–2 September 1989).

The French version of this article was published in *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 1990, 5: 69–109.

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N.B. = The following bibliography is too large for an article, but it lists the vast amount of literature whose thematic paths and explanatory principles this article has attempted to set out.

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