

**Juan A. Pérez, Nikos Kalampalakis, Saadi Lahlou,
Denise Jodelet, Themistoklis Apostolidis**
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In memoriam: Serge Moscovici (1925-2014)

For the REMOSCO, the members of the Steering Committee
of the *Réseau Mondial Serge Moscovici* (REMOSCO)
de la Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris
Juan A. Pérez, University of Valencia, Spain
Nikos Kalampalikis, University of Lyon, France
Saadi Lahlou, London School of Economics, United Kingdom
Denise Jodelet, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, France
Themistoklis Apostolidis, University of Aix-Marseille, France

"There are special times when, looking back on his life, a man discovers how what appears to others as a career was for him a long series of improvisations and surprises." These are the first words spoken by Serge Moscovici in Bern in 2003, when receiving the prestigious Balzan Prize for his work in social psychology. This award crowned a deep seminal mark left in social psychology as a discipline and especially as a science.

Born in 1925 in Braïla, on the banks of the Danube, in a family of grain merchants, he experienced the impact of anti-Semitic laws with his exclusion from school (1938) and the Bucharest pogrom (1941). Drifting via Hungary, Austria and Italy through the 1945 "displaced persons camps" system, he arrived in Paris in 1948. There he worked in the clothing industry, then in footwear, and met old and new friends, such as Paul Celan, Isac Chiva and Isidore Isou. The terrible events he survived during the war as an adolescent and marked all his life are described in his autobiography, "Chronicle of years lost" (Moscovici, 1997).

Institutional trajectory

After an epic arrival in Paris, he received in 1949 the recently created Bachelor degree in Psychology ("Licence") at the Sorbonne (grade: pass!). Attracted by the course on "the psychology of social life" of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Daniel Lagache, also concerned about the extension of his residence permit as a refugee, he wanted to enrol for a PhD thesis under his supervision, saying: "Lagache received me in the hallway and was surprised when I expressed the wish to do a thesis that he would supervise. Fortunately, he had time and listened to me developing the project for a half hour. Obviously, I avoided telling him that the study would focus on common sense material transformation of psychoanalysis." (Moscovici, 2003). Lagache, initially wary, suggested Moscovici meet Jean Stoetzel, a

social psychologist, founder of the IFOP (French Institute of Public Opinion) to learn survey methods.

In Paris, two familiar places and two discoveries were as important as they were unexpected. The booksellers of the banks of the River Seine yielding Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* and the French National Library yielding Robert Lenoble's *Essay on the notion of experience* helped Moscovici to find some much sought after concepts - collective representations, common sense, and communication - but he also found also an unlikely science that made their articulation so productive: social psychology (Moscovici, 2003). Lagache encouraged him and put him forward for a scholarship at the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research) which Moscovici is awarded in 1952. In 1953 he published his first article in the French Review of Psychoanalysis and also became a student at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes where he followed the seminars of Alexander Koyré, historian of philosophy and science.

In 1955, in collaboration with the sociologist Guy Barbichon, a specialist in social change, he worked for the Department of Work on industrial conversion programs, as a member of the Centre for Studies and Research on Psychotechnics (CERP) and in 1958, became editor of the Centre's journal, the CERP Bulletin. Alongside his study of psychoanalysis, he wrote his second thesis on a social and economic problem still acute nowadays, industrial restructuring (*Reconversion industrielle et changements sociaux. Un exemple : la chapellerie dans l'Aude*, 1961, Albin Michel). In 1961, in the grand Louis Liard amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, he defended his doctoral thesis, *La psychanalyse, son image et son public. Étude sur la représentation sociale de la psychanalyse*. (Jodelet, 2015).

That same year he graduated from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, under the direction of Alexander Koyré, with a thesis on the Galilean mechanics (*L'expérience du mouvement. Jean-Baptiste Baliani, disciple et critique de Galilée*, 1967). Based on manuscripts kept in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, this paper carries the seeds of his ideas on science, knowledge and nature. Baliani, a Genoese patrician, to whom we owe the first formulation of the principle of inertia, postulated in 1582, unlike Galileo, that the earth revolves around the moon the latter exerts a mechanical influence on the tides. Moscovici was inspired by their correspondence to theorize creative scientific uncertainty, i.e. the idea that mankind has created nature through science. This work opened the door to the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton (recommended by Koyré who was a member since 1955) as a Fellow in 1962-63. He gave his first lectures in English at Yale and Harvard and there met Thomas Kuhn.

In 1962 he was appointed Senior Scientist at the CNRS (1962), and was elected Directeur d'études at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (1964). The same year, he became a member of the Transnational Committee on Social Psychology of Social Sciences Research Council, whose fascinating history has been written up recently (Moscovici & Markova, *The Making of Modern Social Psychology*, 2006). He was one of the original founders of the EASP, its first President in 1965 and associate editor of the European Journal of Social Psychology (1969-1974) alongside Leon Festinger, John Lanzetta, Ragnar Rommetveit and Stanley Schachter and soon after, Henri Tajfel, Harold Kelley, Morton Deutsch among others.

In Paris, he brought in the "Social Psychology Research Group", his first laboratory created in 1965 in the 6th Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, a pioneering group of researchers whose work was along his scientific lines of interest (among them: Claude Faucheux, Claudine Herzlich, Jean-Claude Abric, Denise Jodelet and Willem Doise). That is when he began an extensive experimental research program devoted mainly to social influence and social communication.

Following a parallel intellectual direction, connecting both history of science and social psychology, he is again a resident at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences (Stanford) between 1968-1969, and publishes another monumental work, the *Essay on human history of nature* in 1968. France is in turmoil on all levels - social, ideological, political and generational - and Moscovici reflects on the connection to nature in the first of a trilogy (*Society against nature*, 1972, *Domestic Man and Wild Man*, 1974) which marks Moscovici's "green period" – the least known part of his works by social psychologists. His anthropological ideas about nature, feminism, and political ecology trace a new horizon for generations of young students and activists: Nature is a relation; it is not the environment; no part of humanity, however primitive or advanced, is closer or further away from a state of nature; the analysis of the prohibition of incest as a social rule captures the relations of domination and control between groups. A theory of society is in the making.

This intellectual adventure led him to Robert Jaulin (theorist of ethnocide), head of the Teaching and Research Unit in Ethnology, Anthropology and Religion studies at the Paris VII University (Jussieu). Together and with the participation, among others, of Michel de Certeau, Jean Monod and Jean-Toussaint Dessanti, they run "off" seminars with "wild anti-colonial ethnology" which become hype among students, environmental activists and intellectuals. Moscovici got involved militates, writes: collective books come out " *Why mathematics?* (1974); " *Beyond crisis*" (1976) " *Why*

ecologists do politics" (1978). With one of the great mathematical geniuses of the last century, Alexander Grothendieck, who died two days before Moscovici, Jaulin and documentarist Yves Billon, they travelled through the south of France with a photographic exhibition called "Occitania, Amazonia, same fight" to denounce the ethnocide of small local and traditional peoples all over the world.

This hive of activity feeds his psychosocial production. He published a book of seminal English texts on social psychology (with Claude Faucheux, *Social Psychology, theories and experiments*, 1971), a second one on language (*The Psychosociology of Language*, 1972), an *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1972-1973) in two volumes, his theory of innovating minorities in English (*Social influence and social change*, 1976) and published a revised version, a hundred pages shorter, of his 1961 book (translated in English in 2008... *Psychoanalysis, Its Image and Its Public*). He received numerous international invitations as a visiting professor at the New School for Social Research (New York, 1970-72), the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau of the University of Geneva (1972-73), the University of Leuven (1976), the Franqui Chair at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve (1976), became a Fellow of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (1977) and of Churchill College, University of Cambridge (1980). For fifteen years (1980-1995), he was a Visiting Professor at the New School for Social Research (New York). This gradual increase in the international recognition of his work comes with the creation of many communities of researchers from different countries who learn, discuss, advance his seminal ideas, establish academic communal practices (e.g. biennial international conferences, Brazilian lectures, European doctoral training, Moscovici centres). In the 2000s, came full international recognition of his work, and in his own words, the work of the group around him (Moscovici, 2004).

The recognition of this work is very important in the world. Between 1980 and 2012, Moscovici is awarded sixteen honorary degrees, mostly in Europe but also in Latin America (Geneva, Glasgow, Sussex, Seville, Brussels, Bologna, London, Rome, Mexico, Pécs, Lisbon, Jönköping, Iasi, Brasilia, Buenos Aires and Evora). He won six international awards (1980, In Media Res Prize of the Burda Foundation; 1989, European Prize for Social Sciences and Sociology; 2000, Ecologia Award; 2003 Balzan Prize; 2007; W. James and W. Wundt prize; 2010, Premio Nonino Master of His Time) honouring all aspects of his thinking.

Main contributions

Regarding the study of social representations, one of us (Kalampalikis, 2013, pp. 8-9), in the introduction of Moscovici's last book in French (*The scandal of social thought*, 2013), highlights the contributions: the conversion of a form of scientific knowledge into a composite system of opinions and interpretation of reality; the dynamics of the formation of knowledge and social thought through the communication and action of historically and culturally situated groups. Moscovici's aim, comprehensive and ambitious, stated in 1961, is twofold. First, to give this young discipline, social psychology, a "material", its own epistemological horizon: studying representational states as forms of social knowledge. Consecutively, to root it in the social sciences with a "unity of concern" in the present, along with the streams of common ideas that have shaped them (Jodelet, 2011). To achieve this ambitious and radical plan, given the protean state of social psychology in Europe at that time and the relative neglect of Durkheim's contribution to the social sciences, one had to be innovative, inside and outside the disciplinary core of the theory. In psychology, Moscovici had to break with the prevailing North American behaviourist currents and individualist which evacuated the reflective and symbolic dimension of human conduct in society (Farr, 1996; Greenwood, 2004). In the social sciences, the breakthrough was to introduce the scientific legitimacy to studying of common sense in a "thinking society" against the criticism of the dominant epistemological and ideological models, in order to claim both the epistemological proximity and the specificity of the discipline (Jodelet, 2009).

In these early works, he developed two hypotheses that occupied much of the rest of his scientific career. He points the history of science to the study of the link between two essential areas of knowledge: science and common sense. For him, epistemology only glosses over the analysis of the relations between these two types of knowledge. On occasion he liked to quote Einstein and claim that without common sense science would fall into solipsism. He was therefore interested in a non-hierarchical interaction between scientific knowledge and social knowledge, that is to say the know-how and knowing of common sense, how they transform into each other, how the content of one is transferred to the other and vice versa. The seminal 1961 book highlighted two main socio-cognitive processes, objectification and anchoring, which function as connecting rods transforming the linear motion into circular motion and through which the abstraction of a scientific theory is reified in common sense and everyday practices. Among the many assumptions he addressed, Moscovici stresses that each group makes its own connecting rods, which serve to anchor the

nomothetic knowledge into something idiographic. These tools are communication systems, which always carry traces of the recipient and the sender. Thus, one of the most original parts of his work is the analysis of communication systems, including how the emitter, while building the message or selecting the information to be transmitted, takes into account the social relationship and therefore the influence it seeks to establish with the receiver. This analysis of communication systems has been mainly applied to media communication and inspired other works (Doise & Palmonari 1986). Among these systems, or communication genres, Moscovici distinguished diffusion (when communication is to pass across different social groups), propagation (communication within a given social group) and propaganda (communication stressing differences between groups or social categories).

This proposal is based on a critique of the classical model of communication (e.g. Lasswell) which led to the bulk of studies on attitude change at that time. In his first paper in English (*Attitudes and Opinions*, published in the *Annual Review of Psychology* in 1963) Moscovici criticizes this research tradition. This model excludes the two-way interaction that essential to both communication and influence. There cannot be messages, rhetoric, or language without context. A message cannot be understood as shaped in social vacuum. Emitter and receiver influence each other in the construction of the message. There is no communication without taking into account the receiving end.

These assumptions were developed in his work on language. In a chapter published in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (1967) and in the book *The Psychosociology of Language* (1972), Moscovici notes that there is no such field as the social psychology of language and therefore he tries to outline what should be included. He begins by questioning Saussure's hegemonic distinction between *language* - a stable system of relationships among lexical units - and *speech*, an observable set of uses of this system by the members of a community of speakers. For Moscovici communication is a process of linguistic production. Speech planning is the first point examined because here lexical and non-lexical elements combine. On the basis of the knowledge one has of the relations between emitters and receivers, their motivation, and their distance with respect to the object under consideration, it is possible to predict the message characteristics – grammatical features, redundancy, degrees of formalism - that relate to the given situation. Communication systems are linked to syntactic or lexical systems. The actual speakers, the actual creators of language patterns, are groups: class, nation, profession, cultural group, rural or urban culture. Differences between these groups by far exceed any individual differences

both quantitatively and qualitatively. He observed that the linguistic creativity is provoked and structured by collective exchanges. Even if language as communication is often said to hold society together for Moscovici it would be just as correct to assert the reverse: those cohesive forces, conflicts, negotiations, festivities, and rituals that characterize a given society are the factors that generate linguistic or meta-linguistic rules and cause their combination and diffusion.

He never understood why some social psychologists sought in the individual and his or her brain what in fact lays in social interaction. It is through this interaction that social knowledge is created, extended and spread, because ultimately there is no transmission without transformation. This communication process, specific to the human species, in which information is not processed, but rather interpreted or re-interpreted, was for Moscovici a principle that no psychosocial theory should ignore. On several occasions he was very critical of the cyber metaphor of people as information processing machines, which often consisted in reducing social knowledge to "social cognition", as he remarked quite often – a position in social psychology took the social for granted but did not make it explicit.

His first contact with American social psychology, at least the only one to be institutionalized at the time, was mediated by the group of psychologists of Lewinian tradition. Similar to this tradition, he locates change and innovation within the interaction between individuals and social groups. He argued that mechanisms of change are in active exchange, in the expression of differences, and especially in conflict (following Simmel). Thus, with Claude Faucheux they explored the hypothesis on how the structure of communication within a group (centralized vs. free) resulted in an effect on the performance of groups (groups with a centralized structure better solved logical, highly structured, tasks; while groups with a free communication performed better in creative tasks).

Europe organized by Lanzetta, where he came to know Festinger, Schachter, Deutsch, Pepitone, among other figures in American social psychology. He built a strong collaboration and forged a profound friendship with Festinger, who no doubt inspired in him several principles for the discipline of social psychology, for example the importance of the experimental method. Despite this importance, this never prevented Moscovici to practice the widest diversity of methods and advocate "methodological polytheism". In a way we can say that he always had something of a Wundtian side, even though folk knowledge and social representations are phenomena that are difficult to grasp with an experimental approach. Besides, he considered experiments as inventive experimentation, where we realise that something

new can be discovered. Hence he never took too seriously the mantra of experimentation as a verification device to test the predictions of a theory. On quite a few occasions he could be heard saying more or less jokingly, "if the experiment goes against the theory, too bad for the experiment" He listened to and read the experiences in great detail, paying particular attention to understand if the experience had simply changed a parameter or if it really addressed a variable. He was very critical of the trend to repeat experiments and varying only one more parameter, leaving aside the core of the problem or the actual phenomenon studied.

His introduction into social psychology through figures like Festinger led him to follow Festinger's advice to Moscovici in the numerous meetings of the Transnational Committee namely that Europe should not limit itself to simply replicating studies by American social psychologists just to see if there were cultural differences. In this respect, he cited as exemplary an article of his close friend and colleague Claude Faucheux (Cross-cultural research in experimental social psychology, *EJSP*, 1976). He remained, until the end, a leading advocate of the importance of the study of *our* culture in specific historical and political contexts (Moscovici, 2012).

His dedication to social psychology coincided with the so-called 'crisis' of the discipline. Although this crisis was primarily about methodological issues, the question for him was more epistemological. This was to define the "matter" of this science. For him, this "matter" was common sense, in the same way that language is the matter for linguists, myths for anthropologists, dreams for psychoanalysts, cell life for biologists or market for economists. In addition, he theorized the perspective of this discipline, the *psychosocial perspective*, offering a triple reading of phenomena and relationships in order to replace the dual relationship between subject and object, an interaction, that is a three-term relation (individual subject (ego) - social subject (alter) - object).

A constant interest in his works, and not just his social psychology research, is the study of innovation. As was usual with him, he first observed a general phenomenon, and then he tried to conceptualize and analyse it. He noticed all societies change, but at different speeds. He then wondered whether this was due to differences in innovation processes in the construction of social knowledge. On this issue he proposed two theories that are better known by "mainstream" social psychologists. One is the theory of the collective polarization and the other the theory of minority influence.

In 1969 he first published his theory of collective polarization, later followed by numerous articles, some co-authored with Marisa Zavalloni. So far a number of social psychologists reduced group decision making to some aggregation of individual decisions, where the group situation merely diluted individual responsibility. But Moscovici started from a much broader issue, namely, how attention in a society gets polarized on one topic or another, then how feelings will polarize on this topic. It goes without saying that opinion leaders or the mass media are key in determining the thematic agenda for a society. But the original question that interested Moscovici was how the symmetry of interactions within a group can be broken at some point, and what happens next. In something of Lewinian and Festingerian tradition, he saw that there is on one hand the normalizing group that produces a pressure to reference and compliance, and on the other hand a pressure to inference, the group that produces dissidence and differences of content that will eventually break the symmetry, and where social interaction results in change and innovation. He showed that in a group discussion new perspectives can emerge that were not originally present in any of the participants. He tried to generalize the polarization phenomena observed in experiments, and co-authored publications building on the notion of symmetry breaking with physicist Serge Galam.

Immediately he understood that when a group comes to polarize its attention on a given topic, and initiate a debate then a lively discussion, opinions, and feelings will polarize towards the pole to which they initially tended. In his book with Willem Doise (*Conflict and consensus: a general theory of collective decisions*, 1994), they show how to go against the "groupthink" phenomenon (Janis, 1972), how to transform a standard setting and conformist group into an innovative, creative and effective group. Organizations will derive great benefit from this work.

In parallel to these works, he continues his research on social influence and social change. In *Social influence and social change*, he examines in depth all the theories proposed in social psychology to account for social influence. He then comes to two major conclusions. On the one hand, theories confuse social influence and power: they reduce influence to the possession of some kind of power or authority (normative, informational, referent) which commands increased compliance and uniformity. On the other hand, none of these theories is able to account for social innovation. His experience in the ecologist movement has taught him that social minorities are forceful social actors and that they can be innovative. Hence he raises two key questions: can a social minority, with no power, produce influence? If so, how? His early experiences in this field aim to discover the existence of minority influence. This may appear a bit simple, but remember that for Moscovici experimentation should lead to discovery of phenomena, beyond the mere testing of assumptions.

Eventually this led to his genetic or interactionist model of social influence. In the origin of innovation, he put the minority's behavioural style, mainly consistency or mere repetition of an alternative without contradiction. This would be the only way a social minority can generate social conflict and force the majority to think about what the minority wants to say and at a certain level to rethink its own previous positions. He also sees that the nature of the influence exercised by a majority is different from that exercised by a minority, which led him to write the conversion theory, published in the 1980's, with others in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Throughout his life, he considered active social minorities were the means for a community, a society, to step out of its own normative patterns.

We limited this short tribute to the major contribution that Moscovici leaves us for social psychology, and this is far too limited. Here we cannot sketch the complete picture of his long, active, creative and original intellectual and scientific career, fully anchored across the social sciences. Among his essential contributions we should also include his reading anew and reinterpretations of the classics of the crowd psychology, for example, Le Bon, Tarde, Freud (*The age of the crowd: a historical treatise on mass psychology*, 1985). He also returned to the source of the founders of the social sciences as Weber, Durkheim, Simmel (*The invention of society: psychological explanations for social phenomena*, 1993), and more specifically of collective psychology, in defence of the inseparability of the social and the psychological.

His two institutional "inventions", the Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale de l'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (LPS) and the Laboratoire Européen de Psychologie Sociale (LEPS) have hosted and influenced generations of researchers worldwide. The first, the LPS, brought together and trained for four decades researchers to a specific social psychology, deliberately societal in orientation, now clearly identified and recognized across a broad international community. Over 90 theses were defended there from 1966 to 2007 (of which 59 under his supervision). Most of these highly-trained researchers now operate in prestigious academic institutions in France and Europe but also in many other countries.

The second, the European Laboratory of Social Psychology (LEPS), was created by Moscovici in 1976 the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH) in Paris. It was designed to strengthen the various European research currents that had an original approach but were disparate, thus complementing the work of the European Association. Several research groups led to the emergence of innovative and interdisciplinary themes,

strengthened the collaboration between researchers and resulted in many collective publications. It was organized from the beginning as a network long before this model of collaborative work become fashionable, and was a rare example of institutional innovation (Kalampalikis, 2003).

After thirty years of activity of the LEPS, Serge Moscovici supported its transformation by encouraging the creation of a new network, also located at Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris FMSH in 2014, to extend and continue with new means the approach he advocated, connecting the now very broad international community of researchers who rely on its work. This new network, now named the "Serge Moscovici Global Network" (REMOSCO) brings together the diverse and inventive communities which revolve around this Moscovician societal approach of social psychology, supported with digital technology, for example by organizing the International Conferences on Social Representations, which bring together biennially some 600 researchers and are now in their 13th edition.

Human history is inseparable from the history of ideas. Moscovici started his study of the history of ideas, with Koyré and Lagache. He added his own theories of how ideas emerge, transform, and spread through social interaction. In the end, Serge Moscovici's own trajectory through the history of the twentieth century, this "long series of improvisations and surprises" accorded to him, deeply affected the social sciences as a whole and not only the science of ideas. His death now makes us realize the full dimension of his polymorphic work and, in particular, in a science which he wanted to be, as he was himself, open, curious, inventive, sensitive and in line with societal issues of the time. A Social Psychology that "explores how and why we seek to understand the world *hic et nunc*, and act on it; that is, *an anthropology of our culture*" (Moscovici, 2012).

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