A new path for the discussion of Social Representations: Advancing the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint

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Abstract
This article discusses a new approach to subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint and the possible links that this new definition could have with the theory of Social Representation (SR). One of the facets of this cultural-historical approach to subjectivity that makes this dialogue with SR theory possible is that subjectivity in this definition does not constrain individual phenomena. Rather, subjectivity as it is defined in this paper is a new ontological definition of human phenomena, whether social or individual, that brings into light the symbolical-emotional character of human phenomena. The concepts that shape Social Representation Theory as subjective configurations are discussed, as well as the consequences of this definition for the development of psychological theory. Social representation, as is assumed within the present paper, might be considered an important building block for the further advancement of a definition of subjectivity that is not exhausted by individual subjectivity.

Social Representations Theory (SRT), like any theory, is not a monolithic construction; it represents a living organization of interrelated concepts and ideas in a process that takes different paths in its ongoing development. Concepts and ideas form meanings in their relation with the core of the theory and configure a theoretical model that is behind any isolated particular concept. In such a process, SRT is unfolded into different interpretations that,

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despite having the same label, are far from sharing the same theoretical principles. These theoretical differences are grounded in deep epistemological and methodological differences in a process through which new interpretations have emerged. Some of these interpretations have contributed more than others to the general development of SRT.

This paper discusses how a new approach to the topic of subjectivity based in cultural-historical theory may bring into light new theoretical devices that permit an understanding of social representations (SRs) as complex subjective configurations organized as symbolic/emotional systems that characterize social life as subjectively organized systems. Guided by this purpose, this paper aims to further advance three topics: the matter of the object, which has taken different definitions throughout the development of SRT, the relevance of the dialogue between SRT and the cultural-historical definition of subjectivity, and the theoretical implications of considering SR to be subjective configurations.

The concept of SR has had important antecedents in the history of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among which certain authors deserve to be mentioned, such as Durkheim, for his definition of collective representation, Piaget, for his comprehension of structure, and Levy-Bruhl, for his ideas related to the cultural character of social productions. However, the strong cognitive imaginary resulted from the North American Cognitive Revolution in the 1960s, which also significantly influenced psychology as a whole, and social psychology was not an exception.

In his works in the second half of the 1970s, Moscovici emphasized the symbolic character of SRs (1976). However, this emphasis has not been evident in the different theoretical definitions that historically have been legitimized as being part of the mainstream of SRT—for example, the trend founded and developed by Abric (2001)—or in the extending mass of empirical inquiries based on the theory all over the world. Moscovici has not been clear enough in his writings about what the symbolical character means, and he never was explicit about the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological consequences of defining SRs as symbolical productions instead of cognitive representations. The contradictions that, over time, have characterized the definitions of some of the main concepts of SRT, as well as the different definitions given by different authors in relation to those concepts, have been responsible for the confusion that prevails in relation to some of the main questions on which SRT is still focused today.

The different meanings that some of the concepts of SRT have been ascribed over time—for example, the concept of the object of social representation—have led to criticism of SRT. Critics of the realism of SRT have supported, to a great extent, the first definitions of the object of SRs, given by Moscovici and by other authors (Gergen, 1985; Ibañez, 1988), while criticism of the cognitive character of SRs has also been extensive in the literature (Potter & Edwards, 1999). Through the definition of SRs as subjective configurations, this article presents two important proposals: first, to overcome the dichotomy between society and the individual, which has characterized psychology to this day, and second, to define individual subjects as an intrinsic moment of social subjectivity, whose importance for SRT is that social representations turn into individuals' motives within the complex subjective dynamics of any given social subjectivity. Social representations always gain a subjective sense through the processes of communication that characterize the social networks within which social life takes place.

The concept of Social Representation and its different meanings within SRT

Despite the clear subjective connotation of Moscovici's concepts of anchoring and naturalization (2000a), which permitted the understanding of SRs as subjective grounds for social actions, the topic of subjectivity as such has only recently begun to be explicitly discussed within this theoretical perspective (Banchs, Agudo, & Astorga, 2007; González Rey, 2002b, 2005, 2007; Jodelet, 2003, 2007; Jovchelovitch, 1996; Moscovici, 2005). The absence of a discussion about subjectivity could be explained in part by the emphasis on the definition of social representation as social knowledge that emerges through the processes of social communication. This was implicitly the ontological reference of what social representations are. More recently, dialogical and discursive accounts have also been considered relevant for the definition of SRs (Markova, 2003; Moscovici & Markova, 1998). One of the problems that has made the solid progress of the theory difficult as well as the formation of a response to its biggest critics has been the absence of a critical discussion within the circle of its most relevant collaborators about the different moments in the definition of social representation as well as in the definition of the main concepts that historically have been articulated around SR's definitions. Moscovici, like any creative author, has been contradictory in different moments of his work. Such contradictions have emerged as an expression of his living thinking, which is something that, by all means, characterizes any scientific enterprise of such magnitude. At the same time, these contradictions relate to the different ways in which the author and his followers have defined SRs and the concepts related to them since they were introduced. Such different definitions have permitted the proliferation of different paths in the study of SRs, which differ from each other in terms of both the definition of the concept and the methodology used for its study.

There are, in fact, at least four widespread trends in the study of SRs, which in one way or another have been defended by some of the main authors devoted to the study of SRs, including Moscovici. However, some of these authors have referred to the concept for some time and, after a while, changed that definition without making a critical balance of the evolution of the concept. Thus, all the definitions that have historically characterized the evolution of the concept have continued to be used, without any specification, in the widespread empirical inquiries based on the term. This use is defended by writings that do not represent the more advanced positions of the authors taken as references of these inquiries. The concept of Social Representation is frequently used by psychologists in so-called "applied inquiries."

The first definition addresses the assumption of any given social object that pre-exists SR as such. Based on a representational epistemology, this position seeks to quantify the common attributes shared by a group of people that characterize one concrete object considered external to social representation itself. It tends, in this way, to reproduce an S-O mechanical distinction. This definition is very common in many works that use the concept of SRs as theoretical reference. Another extended use of SR emphasizes its shared character (Lahlou, 1996; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). This definition, taken together with the more recent approach that emphasizes SR as a discursive practice (Markova, 2003), represents a strong and radical turning point in the study of social representation,

which, despite its explicit differences from social constructionism (Markova, 2003; Moscovici & Markova, 2006) was, in my opinion, highly influenced by the social constructionism critique of SRT (Gergen, 1985; Ibañez, 1988; Potter & Edwards, 1999; among others). Finally, I would like to mention another recent trend that, like the abovementioned, is framed by the integration of a new theme in the study of social representations. This trend, in which this paper has inscribed itself, explicitly introduced the topic of subjectivity as relevant to SR studies (Banchs et al., 2007; González Rey, 2005; Jodelet, 2007), among others.

Throughout its development, SRT has changed not only the definition of SR but also the scope of the theories SRT actively deals with, in a process that has paved new avenues of intelligibility with regards to new domains for the development of the theory.

In my opinion, the more accurate and mature definition of social representation was given by Moscovici in one of his late reflections on this issue. He stated:

> we can ask ourselves what defines a social representation. If this meaning should be pregnant, it must be that it corresponds to a certain recurrent and comprehensive model of images, beliefs and symbolic behaviors. Envisaged in this way, *statically*, representations appear similar to theories which order around a theme (mental illnesses are contagious, people are what they eat, etc.) a series of propositions which enable things or persons to be classified, their characters described, their feelings and actions to be explained and so on. (2000b, p. 152)

In this statement, Moscovici stresses the symbolic-cognitive character of SR as a "comprehensive model of images, beliefs and symbolic behaviors" (2000b, p. 152). He compares SRs to theories, but in doing so, he only remarks on the intellectual function of the theories, leaving out the creative and imaginative processes that mainly characterize any good theory and that also must not be omitted in the SRT. These subjective processes, on which any theory is based, make it impossible to reduce the theory to a logical-cognitive system. The models to which the author referred are socially constructed models that, in Moscovici's words, are expressed as follows:

> Far from reflecting either behavior or social structures, a representation often produces conditions and even responds to them. This is so, not because it has a collective origin or because it refers to a collective object, but because, as such, being shared by all and strengthened by tradition, it constitutes a social reality sui generis. (1984, p. 27)

The emphasis on the definition of social representations in terms of images, beliefs, social knowledge, and symbolic behavior clearly advanced the tendencies Moscovici mentioned before in relation to the diverse definitions of the term. In that definition, Moscovici explicitly defended SRs as complex symbolical models through which things, persons, and events are ascribed meaning by persons, groups, and societies, becoming the basis on which human behavior is organized. This definition indicates that SRs are culturally "invented" artifacts that give meaning to human actions. This definition can be used to refuse the criticism of the concept for its realistic character. However, that criticism's fundaments are in other definitions given by Moscovici in his prior work.

The vagueness of the definition of social representation has been stated by different authors (Ibañez, 1988; Jahoda, 1988; among others) and was implicitly recognized by

one follower of the theory, Gerard Duveen (2000), who stated that "the insistence with which the charge of vagueness has been placed against the theory does deserve further consideration" (p. 15). Duveen's claim is evidence of what was affirmed before in this paper about the absence of criticism in relation to the prior moments of concepts and topics that have changed their meaning in the more recent works of Moscovici and of some of his closest collaborators.

The following statement is an example of the vast differences in the definition of SRs in different moments of Moscovici's work:

> When we speak of social representations, we generally start from a different point of view. Firstly, there is no implication of a clear-cut division between the outside world and the inner world of the individual (or group); the 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 behavior. (Moscovici, 1973, p. xi)

Moscovici was not clear in the prior statement about the status of objects as part of the external world; his statement that "subject[s] and object[s] are not regarded as functionally separate" (1973, p. xi), nevertheless subtly maintains the dichotomy between the external and the internal. It is clear that these two levels, the external and internal, are not functionally separated, but it is important to be included in the discussion that for human practices, there is no external object that is separate from human constructions. Moscovici's claim that "an object is located in a context of activity" is ambiguous, even considering the rest of the author's explanation. The point here must be that the only objects to be referred to in human practices are those that are socially and subjectively constructed. The defense of this position is the only way to recognize the cultural character of human realities.

Moscovici's consideration of subjects and objects as functionally integrated represented an advancement of the crude realism that characterized psychology at that time, but that affirmation deserves a critical analysis in light of the more recent positions of Moscovici himself and of other authors, such as Jodelet, Duveen, and Markova, among others.

The concept of objects has been responsible for many object-based interpretations related to social representations, which have epistemologically been based on positivistic principles. Due to the way in which the concept of object has been used in many empirical studies across the world, social representations have appeared as a set of shared common attributes that can be inductively defined. As result of this approach, SRs of teachers, nurses, races, and so on have been described by turning SRs into entities defined by the common social attributes of one population to qualify things, persons, and social processes. This position resulted from the poor use of the theories that characterize the development, practices, and research of today's psychologists, who use theoretical concepts not as a device for hypotheses, conjectures, and theoretical constructions but as static normative criteria by which to assimilate the mass of empirically collected information. In such a process, the theoretical construction is subordinated to the demands of an "empirical-objective methodology."

In his last works, Moscovici consistently stayed away from the concept of objects as external to human construction: "social representation is not a quiet thing consisting of a

science and the transformation of that object" (Moscovici & Markova, 1998, p. 403). However, this fact does not justify that, until today, not a single critical analysis about the evolution of this category has been conducted, which has led to much confusion in the use of the theory.

If we agree with Moscovici that SR "constituted reality" (1984; Moscovici & Markova, 2000), we should also agree that SRs do not have "objects," because they represent models that generate the "objects" in the process of social practices.

The topic of the object represents, for different reasons, a common point between the theory of SR and the cultural-historical framework in psychology. The "object" represents a remnant of realism based on the "objective" or "logical-cognitive" character of theories, a position that has been held throughout the history of science to exclude the subjective character of human realities, including science. The more critical assumptions of Moscovici in regards to defining science as a logical-intellectual enterprise emerged only in his very last works (Moscovici & Markova, 2000, 2006). In psychology through the beginning of the 1980s, the dominant empirical model of science was not explicitly questioned by most psychological theories or by psychological institutions. The theory of social representation that emerged in the 1960s was not an exception in this respect, except for Jodelet (1989), whose first works advanced a qualitative approach to the study of SRs.

Since the 1980s, many other authors have been devoted to addressing the epistemological and methodological questions related to the study of social representations (Flick, 1995; González Rey, 2002a; Markova, 1996). However, despite Moscovici's growing interest in the epistemological and methodological processes in the study of SRs toward the end of his work, he was not completely committed to the epistemological and methodological demands that the theoretical advancement in the definition of social representations requires.

Cultural-historical psychology and the theory of social representations: Advancing the topic of subjectivity on a new theoretical basis

The theory of social representation, in its more recent advances, has been centered on the way in which "social realities" are defined by shared symbolical practices guided by symbolic models. These models are the social representations (Moscovici & Markova, 2000). For its part, cultural-historical theory,[1] in its origins and development in Soviet psychology, emphasized the socio- and cultural-historical genesis of human consciousness and took as its focus the individuals. Both approaches, however, converge in the relevance that they give to culture; the theory of social representations identified itself as being part of a social sociological psychology (Farr, 1998; Moscovici, 1986) that focused on communication, ideology, and social ongoing practices, whilst cultural-historical psychology, mainly in the work of Vygotsky, Rubinstein, Miasichev, and Ananiev, centered on a new representation of the complex psychological systems of human consciousness and personality.

Despite his advances in the comprehension of social representation as social and cultural produced realities, Moscovici maintained, until the end of his career, certain

constraints in assuming this position openly and clearly. In his writings in the 2000s, it is possible to perceive a more compromised position with the recognition of social representations as social constructions, a position that he defended since the 1980s but that he did not advance consistently since that time:

> When we are asked "What objects is our world made of?" we must in our turn ask "within what representation?" before answering. That is to say that shared representations, their language, penetrate so profoundly into all the interstices of what we call reality that we can say that they *constitute* it. (Moscovici, 2000b, p. 154)

If the objects depend on the representation within which they are "invented," they represent a subjective, imaginative creation rather than a cognitive formulation. However, in Moscovici's prior statement wherein he recognizes SRs as socially constructed, he did not mention the psychological processes that make possible human creation, whether individual or social, such as emotions, fantasy, and imagination. The point here is not that "language penetrates all the interstices of what we call reality" but that language is one of the resources of the complex subjective systems, social and individual, on which subjects create cultural realities during social practices in different instances of society.

Vygotsky and Rubinstein, in their more creative moments, advanced the definition of a new type of psychological concept understood not as intra-psychic entities or energies but as systems in process within the continuous interweaving between consciousness and human action. With a different approach, Rubinstein advanced this proposal through his principle of the unity of consciousness and activity, according to which any human action embodies consciousness and any conscious creation expresses itself in a system of actions. Vygotsky, in his late work, introduced the concept of sense and advanced the concept of *perezhivanie* as psychological unities whose functioning takes place within the ongoing living experiences of people.

The aforementioned concepts developed by Vygotsky and Rubinstein were ignored for decades by the dominant official position of the former Soviet Union, represented by Leontiev's theory of activity, which dominated Soviet psychology from the end of the 1950s to the middle of the 1970s. This theory attempted to be an objective psychological approach and centered its proposal on the concrete activity of objects, defining objects by their external and objective character in relation to subjects. The consciousness in this approach is represented as an epiphenomenon of activity (González Rey, 2008, 2011; Mikjailov, 2002; Zinchenko, 2002, 2009).

The consideration of objectivity as a political value led to its identification as the main attribute of Marxist materialistic psychology. This historical fact was a great impediment for the development of the issues of subjectivity and culture in Soviet psychology (González Rey, 2014; Zinchenko, 2009).

Soviet psychology and SRT avoided any ontological proposal about the human mind. The concept of the human mind was completely marginalized from social sciences as a result of its identification as an individual structure on which human behaviors rest. Moscovici, like Vygotsky, ascribed great relevance to language and speech. However, Vygotsky found a way to introduce psychological concepts organized as units between affection and intellectual processes, like the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*. The

introduction of these concepts together with his emphasis on the subject of thinking in "Thinking and Speech" in fact created the theoretical premises for advancing a new approach to the topic of subjectivity.

The issue of emotion was central in the first and last agendas of Vygotsky (González Rey, 2014). On emotions, he wrote: "emotions come into a new blending of psychical functions; units of higher order emerge" (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 328). In his 1984 paper, Vygotsky attributed a generative function to emotions; they are in the genesis of new units of higher order and turn into a constitutive part of them. Moscovici also recognized the generative character of SRs, about which he pointed out: "Once created, however, they lead a life of their own, circulate, merge, attract and repel each other, and give birth to new representations, while old ones die out" (2000a, p. 27).

Moscovici defined SRs as active social systems that lead a life of their own, without mentioning individuals as subjects of this process. Moscovici never advanced the discussion of the intrinsic and constitutive character of emotions in social representations, which to some extent resulted (among other factors) from the absence of the concept of individual subjects in SRT. The advancement of this topic would imply integration of the category of subjects as intrinsic to the definition of social representation, as a result of a more complex comprehension of the relationship between society and the individual. Moscovici's critical position in regard to Marxism kept him, for a long time, far from the dialectic, which in my view is a good theoretical resource for conceptualizing a different relationship between the social world and individuals, which are facts that, instead of being opposed, are configured to each other in new type of unit, that is, those introduced by Vygotsky and Rubinstein through the concepts and principles addressed in this paper.

Jovchelovitch took an interesting step forward on this point in the following statement:

> As structured structures, social representations are bound to the context of their production and, as with any social phenomena, they cannot escape the limits imposed by society and history. And yet, as structuring structures, social representations are an expression of the agency of social subjects who engage, think, feel, talk, and eventually transform the contexts in which they find themselves. (1996, p. 128)

Jovchelovitch, together with Jodelet, was one of the few authors within this theoretical framework who explicitly referred to the subject; however, it is clear from the prior quotation that she only referred to social subjects. Who are the social subjects? Is it possible to separate social subjects from individual subjects? Social subjects have some shared feelings, but these feelings emerge and are organized in a very singular way in individuals who together follow general values and proposals. As indicated in the prior quotation, Jovchelovitch attempted to integrate social representations within the social living network within which they emerge, which is an important challenge for the development of SRT. From my point of view, this proposal is impossible to complete without developing new concepts that permit the advancement of the dialectical relationship between the social and the individual subjects.

One of the important questions that require attention for advancing the abovementioned relationship between the social and the individual is the issue of emotions. The

lack of attention given by SRT to the matter of emotions, a topic that was never organically integrated into the concept of SR, is also closely related to the absence of the idea of the individual subject within the theory. Individuals are as social within the social scenarios of their practices as any other social phenomena or processes. Jovchelovitch attempted to advance this issue when she affirmed in the prior quotation that social subjects "eventually transform the contexts in which they find themselves" (1996, p. 128). This claim makes clear how far the idea of individual subjects was from the authors who shared SR's theoretical framework.

Vygotsky's concepts discussed above, *perezhivanie* and sense, are simultaneously given in the individuals and the social scenarios within which social practices take place; they pave a valuable path for thinking of the human mind as a process within a sociocultural, historical framework. *Perezhivanie* is always associated with processes, functions, and relationships that are emotionally relevant for the person. Any creative and motivated human performance appears to the subject as a *perezhivanie*.

The concept of sense was defined by Vygotsky as a word's sense, restricted to "the psychological aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word" (1987, p. 276). Despite the narrowness of this definition, sense and *perezhivanie* highlight the relevance of the unity between personality and social influences for defining the way social experiences turn into individual psychological processes and formations. Taking into account the sensitivity of Vygotsky to the emergence of intellectual-emotional units at the end of his work, the concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* represent a new type of psychological category through which it would be possible to advance a definition of consciousness as a living system of individual consciousness not as an intra-psychical system, but as a system organized by such a unity that can be simultaneously understood as psychological organization in processes that continuously organize and reorganize themselves in the course of individual and social performances. These incipient concepts of Vygotsky's, which he did not advance, inspired a productive path for advancing the issue of human subjectivity on a completely new basis.

Moscovici, also at the end of his work, seemed to be worried about ontological issues, which refer to the co-development between culture and the individual mind: "Continuity/discontinuity, to me, reflects ontological assumptions of dialectics/dialogism, as I mentioned earlier: the interdependence of culture and individual mind; their co-development; the interdependence between thought/thinking and language/speaking" (Moscovici & Markova, 1998, p. 399).

Despite his reference to the human mind, Moscovici seems to reduce the human mind to thought/thinking without mentioning emotions, fantasy, or imagination. The importance of categories like *perezhivanie* and senses is that they are permitted to consider emotions as constitutive of psychological functions and processes. Emotions do not exist in isolation; they are intrinsically associated with a new type of ontological definition of human psyche.

Social representations, together with Castoriadis' (1995) concept of social imaginary, were the first categories to highlight social facts as human productions. Meanwhile, SRT stressed the symbolic nature of these representations. Castoriadis highlighted the concept of social imaginary, which, unlike social representation, emphasizes imagination as a subjective and highly emotional process that is responsible for the integration between

individuals and social spaces. There is no subjectivity that is governed by logic, cognition, or thinking. Moscovici, in his conversation with Markova, referred to dialogicity and dialectics but ends up reducing the relationship between man and culture to that of thought and language, something that Vygotsky exceeds in his book "Thought and Language".

Not considering emotions or individual subjects led researchers to overlook the relevance of SRs as a motive for social action and behaviors. When Moscovici and Markova expressed their concern "with the power of beliefs, among other things, because during the war, I could see the terrifying power of nationalism and racism" (Moscovici & Markova, 2000, p. 252), they are referring to SR as propeller of human action. This explanation should include the question of the subject of the action and a definition of motive that is coherent with the foundational principles that inspired Moscovici's definition of SR; however, the topic of motivation has been excluded by SRT until now. As Verheggen and Baerveldt claimed regarding the study of SRs: "What we instead should understand is how feelings and actions become orchestrated and coordinated in such a way that people *appear to share* the same repertoire" (2007, p. 13).

Aligned with this concern, the matter of how SRs involve emotions is central to our proposal, which assumes emotions as inseparable of symbolic processes, which is a main characteristic of our proposal of subjectivity.

Subjectivity, as discussed in this paper, represents a theoretical alternative to integrate the continuous interweaving of symbolical processes and emotions that simultaneously characterize the course of the social and individual subject's actions in the social networks within which these actions take place. From this perspective, SRs would be simultaneously, and by differentiated ways, subjectively organized both in the persons and in the social spaces on which their practices run. Based on this definition, subject and subjectivity are not disregarded any longer within social and psychological sciences.

Subjectivity and social representations

The rejection of the metaphysical understanding of the human mind as having a universal essence or being grounded in universal origins has generated in these "post-modern times" aversion to the topics of subject and subjectivity, leading to frustrated attempts to banish them from social sciences and from psychology.

One of the first philosophers to recognize the importance of the subjective side of human phenomena was Dewey, which might seem paradoxical because American Pragmatism was a pioneering movement to shift the focus from the nature of phenomena to their functioning. Indeed, in psychology, it has been evident the way in which pragmatic authors, including Dewey, emphasized the idea of psychological functions as tools for action but ignored the complex subjective nature of these tools. However, like every philosopher, Dewey took different positions over the course of his writings, as is evident in his next assumption:

> human experience becomes human because of the existence of associations and memories which are filtered through the network of the imagination in a way that answers to emotional

> exigencies …. The things more emphasized by our imagination, when it is remodeling the experience, are those things that were never real. (1986, pp. 125–126)

Dewey focused on two of the main characteristics of subjectivity: its capacity to produce new realities—in other words, its generative character—and the place of imagination and the emotions in this process, which are responsible for the imaginary character of human experience. Emotions, imagination, and fantasy cannot be considered three additional psychical functions; they are a qualitative expression of a new type of psychological phenomena typical of human beings. This new definition of human psyche by its symbolic-emotional nature involves fantasy, imagination, and types of subjective productions as inseparable from the psychological operations that emerge in any human performance (González Rey, 2011, 2012). I coined these psychical systems as subjective configurations on which I will expand below.

Imagination and fantasy are inseparable from any subjective human construction. Therefore, if SRs are a construction rather than a reflection, SRs must also be considered to be organized as an imaginative-emotional production. Once emotions begin to appear in their inseparable interweaving with symbolic processes, the intellectual operations and the social practices engendered within a performance that is subjectively configured turned subjective because fantasy, imagination, and the different type of intellectual models generated by this process represent a human creation rather than a normative intellectual realization. There are the creative subjects together with the new social subjective processes, groups, institutions, and social networks that are habitually organized around them, the facts from which frequently emerge new social subjects in different areas of social life. Creative subjects as individuals are inseparable from social and cultural development.

Moscovici noted: "Not recognizing the power of our capacity for representations to create objects and events is like believing that there is no connection between our 'reservoir' of images and our capacity for imagination" (1973, p. xi). Nevertheless, this part of Moscovici's thinking related to the generative and imaginary character of social representations has been frequently omitted within this theoretical realm and was never developed in depth by Moscovici himself.

The rescue of a definition of subject as a subversive singular position of a person or a group within a dominant social reality has nothing in common with the notion of the subject defended by certain trends of modern philosophy and psychology. The subject, intrinsically associated to our definition of subjectivity, is a creative, reflective, generative person or group whose actions are actively and simultaneously configured on the course of both individual and social performances. The subject is not understood here as the conscious individual addressed by its conscious proposals as a rational projection; rather, the subject is understood as individuals and social instances that are able to generate subjective alternatives as new paths in their ongoing social lives. Therefore, as subjects, persons and groups do not have any control over the results of their actions. These results emerge as new social and individual subjective configurations organized through a complex network of facts, which are beyond any subject's control.

To make further advancements in overcoming the gap between social representations and their different subjective configurations in individuals, other concepts that can stress

the subjective side of social representations are necessary. Looking at the social representations through our definition of subjectivity leads to the consideration that SRs do not flow over individuals as something external that influences them; they are subjectively configured and reconfigured during the subjects' ongoing actions in a process within which persons, actions, and social contexts are reciprocally configured one into the other, leading to different subjective configurations in each of those instances.

The subjective senses are symbolic-emotional units, within which symbols and emotions evoke each other, leading to a new type of unit that characterizes human subjectivity as a process and is characterized by a continuous flux of subjective senses throughout human experiences. These subjective senses that emerge during every human living experience allow for an understanding of subjectivity as neither a reflection nor as epiphenomena of external influences and facts but as human creation that might allow the persons and the different social instances within which they live to "invent," to generate new subjective alternatives that might be relevant for the definition of how realities that do not depend on human intentions are lived by persons and social instances.

Human subjectivity is constituted by culture but is also a constituent of culture. Culture itself is a subjective production. Human experience is characterized by constellations of subjective senses evoked during the ongoing subject's experience. These constellations of subjective senses organize themselves as part of different subjective configurations, which lead to new subjective senses during living experiences and, in turn, can be organized together, leading to the emergence of new subjective configurations during the subject's ongoing experiences. The way in which experiences lived by persons in different places and in different temporal moments emerge through diverse subjective senses as part of today's subjective configurations of human performance represent an imaginary and subjective production.

Subjective senses represent the subjectivity of processes that are configured and reconfigured during every human experience. Any human psychical operation functions as a motive when emerged as a moment of a subjective configuration. Thus, motivation in this theoretical account must be understood as intrinsic to subjective systems and not as one more psychological function.

Vygotsky, despite not advancing his concepts discussed above, was intuitively aware that any psychological function taken separately of the subject's living experience is not effective as motive of behavior. Vygotsky stated:

> Among the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology has been the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspects of consciousness. The inevitable consequence of the isolation of these functions has been the transformation of thinking into an autonomous stream. Thinking itself became the thinker of thoughts. Thinking was divorced from the full vitality of life, from the motives, interests and inclinations of the thinking individual. (1987, p. 50)

Vygotsky understood in that final moment of his work that psychological functions are functions of the subject, whose emergence implies "the full vitality of life." However, he nevertheless understood the full "vitality of life" though fragmented concepts such as motive, inclinations, and interests. Through this understanding,

Vygotsky also maintained the dichotomy between intellectual functions and affective/volitional functions because the point is to understand that when the thinking became a subjectively configured process, the "full vitality of the person" to which Vygotsky referred is the particular subjective configuration within which thinking emerges (González Rey, 2002b, 2005, 2008, 2012).

Subjective individual configurations emerge as result of both (a) the networks of subjective senses that arise as fold-out nets of social practices over the course of which the individual options and alternatives unpredictably unfold during the ongoing action and (b) the subjective social configurations of the social context within which the action takes place. The individual actions always have unpredictable social connotations; for this reason, they *are* also social productions.

Subjectivity is not exclusive to individuals; it characterizes social and individual phenomena. Hence, the concept of social subjectivity is discussed as inseparable from and continuously interwoven with individual subjectivity. Any human experience characterizes itself by processes that simultaneously take place at both levels and are configured through different subjective senses. Social subjectivity is the network of social subjective configurations within which the different social practices, activities, and institutional rules get subjective senses for those involved in the processes within social institutions and informal social organizations. The social relationships are, in turn, simultaneously organized within these subjective social configurations through different and often contradictory subjective senses. Thus, for example, a social subjective definition such as gender will be subjectively configured differently within the same person when he/she is placed in a position of teacher or parent.

Any social subjective production expresses, through a diverse repertoire of different subjective senses, the multiplicity of social and individual configurations that characterize any space or moment of social life. Social subjectivity thus characterizes the multiple and simultaneous social spaces within which society functions. Social subjectivity represents the complex subjective network of subjective social configurations within which every social functioning takes place. This process takes place without the consciousness of those who share these social spaces. Social subjectivity emerges as part of individual subjectivities in such a camouflaged way that it is impossible to infer it directly from observed individual behaviors or language.

Social subjectivity is not external to individuals; different from other concepts like "relations of productions," which are anchored on the sharing of concrete social conditions, social subjectivity is an imaginary production that characterizes the way in which social experiences get subjective senses within the invisible subjective networks that arise as an interwoven movement of actions, feelings, and symbolical and imaginary processes that form different social subjective social configurations that permanently emerge in the different instances and scenarios of the social world. These complex networks simultaneously emerge at both the individual and social level through each of their different subjective configurations; they are precisely the new configurations that arise from ongoing experience as a result of contradictions, tensions, and overlapping moments between the social and individual world, which become motives for whatever happens within a social scenario.

Motives are not a priori to action; they are the subjective configurations of action. Subjective configurations integrate into a singular account the interwoven movement of subjective senses that are continuously and simultaneously produced as the result of experiences that involve persons, groups, and institutions in different scenarios of social life.

Social practices are living systems that unfold into many paths of social life, unconsciously producing splits for those who share these practices; thus, it is impossible to attribute to the subjects of social practices, be they individuals or social groups, the power to access their proposals as a result of their conscious intentions. The course of every social movement is defined by a blend of factors that are always beyond individual intentionality. However, even when the complexity of social life—configured in different ways as subjective social configurations at home, in school, in the neighborhoods, and so on—is beyond individual consciousness, these diverse facts and subjective social configurations emerge through different subjective senses in individual subjective configurations. SRs are always beyond individual consciousness; however, we must explain how SRs become motives not only for social subjects but for individual subjects.

For Jodelet (1989), the genesis of social representations is essential for her study. The study of SRs in their contexts is important for the comprehension of complex social dynamics that are beyond SRs and yet are indirectly expressed in them. On this topic, Jodelet stated: "Despite the high level of generality and the demonstration of the influence of certain structural elements on the orientation of the action, the structural study of representations has a weak point in the fact that it leaves the topic of the genesis of representations in the dark" (1989, p. 49).

In many cases, the symbolical and the cognitive realms appear to be synonymous in studies of SRs. As Flick stressed in a reference to Abric's group: "This type of research has increasingly begun to address the traditional questions and methods of cognitive psychology" (1995, p. 74).

The inclusion of the subjective side of social representations by their definition as subjective configurations may help overcome some of the following problems that arise in the study of SRs, which are very closely interrelated to each other:

1. The need to integrate individual and social facts into the study of SRs not as two different systems, one external to the other, but rather as a complex system within which the individual and the social realms reciprocally constitute one another as subjective configurations. This complex system is characterized by the simultaneous emergence of social and individual subjective configurations, which, through their interwoven relations, reciprocally configure and reconfigure one configuration into multiple others on both levels. SRs are subjectively configured at the same time in individuals, groups, and institutions.

2. The need to integrate the affective and symbolic processes into one unit as the ontological definition of social representations. Symbolic processes in themselves, without emotions, cannot become human motivation. The discussion of SRT should include its function as a motive because, in fact, SRs do not belong exclusively to the symbolic domain as intellectual operations; they emerge as relevant drivers of human actions. The interweaving of subjective senses within

the ongoing subjective configuration of the action is the process within which SRs gain motivational relevance. The discussion of SRs as motives implies the advancement of such a definition of motive not as an intra-psychical entity but as a subjective configuration that can integrate the actions, the context, and the individual subjectivities of those involved in the action. The concept of subjective configuration fulfills this requirement.

3. The need to transcend the association between social representations and objects. The simple descriptions of shared attributes in regard to a social object should not be considered a social representation.

The previous reason implies another way to understand the social world: not as a priori "building blocks," which characterize societies once and forever, but as complex subjective configurations within which the concreteness of social life is present through collateral effects in terms of subjective senses for groups, institutions, and persons. These subjective senses connect subjective configurations to each other, making up tissues of social subjectivity that emerge simultaneously in individual actions and in social events. This recursive system of SRs as subjective configurations demands new epistemological alternatives for the study of social representations.

The above challenges require an updated discussion on theoretical questions that are able to bring into light new avenues for the development of SRT and to overcome the sterile and depersonalized data procedures in the study of social representations, which have replaced theoretical constructions with instrumental procedures. Cognitive, behavioral, and discursive definitions do not separately exhaust the concept of SR. For these reasons, it is important to further advance the ontological definition about what to understand as a social representation.[2]

If social representations are not just a moment in a discursive flux or a cognitive representation, what differentiates them from other discursive or cognitive productions? In my opinion, one possible and viable answer to this question is its definition as a subjective configuration. Social representations are not only meanings, or only knowledge, or only practices, or the sum of all of these processes together. Social representations always carry emotions as an inseparable and definitive aspect of their definition. Fantasy and imagination are inseparable from their subjective configuration, and to a great extent, SRs resulted from an imaginative construction. Such a definition opens the dialogue of SRT to theories oriented to rescuing the cultural-historical genesis of subjectivity and preserving the individual subject in his creative and generative individual capacity (Bozhovich, 1968; Castoriadis, 1995; Elliott & Frosh, 1995; Frosh, 2010; González Rey, 2002b). These authors, among others, have developed an innovative way to consider subjectivity in its complex social genesis in such a way that integrates the richness of generative and imaginative individual subjects within cultural and institutional subjective functioning.

Final remarks

SRT has historically been grounded in terms associated with social knowledge, communication, and action rather than with the motivations of social and individual agents.

Terms such as comprehensive models of images, beliefs, knowledge, and symbolic behaviors have been frequently used as the ontological anchorage of SRs. This paper emphasized the relevance of extending the comprehension of SRs as social and individual motivation in such a way that motivation is understood as the subjective configuration of social and individual actions and not as an intra-psychical entity.

Once we understand SRs as subjective configurations, we should accept the mobility of the subjective senses as one of their characteristics. Despite the fact that SRs ascribe subjective consistency to a diverse mosaic of subjective individual constellations of actions, permitting their integration into a "rational" social reality objectified and naturalized as a social "truth," this congruency is also in movement, in a process in which there may arise contradictions on the ongoing social experiences on which ruptures and alternatives may emerge and may become important subjective forces for social transformation.

The concepts of subjective senses and subjective configurations permit further advancement of an unfinished legacy of the cultural-historical theory as it emerged in Soviet psychology in regards to the topic of subjectivity on new theoretical and philosophical bases. On these bases, it is possible to advance the topic of subjectivity as emotional symbolical configurations and processes organized in such a way that both emotions and symbolic processes imply one another in a process that generates a new qualitative order. Subjective senses are informed by all the symbolic socio-cultural domains of social life as well as by personal histories and current life contexts, thus making it possible to generate intelligibility on such diverse matters as genre, race, family, values, and so on through the study of any subjective configuration, regardless of how far that subjective configuration apparently is from such issues.

Social representations as subjective configurations should be understood as a complex blend of subjective senses on which social actions are grounded. SRs take many different paths within those socially shared activities. It is impossible to define social representations by their objects, fragmenting them into different isolated entities, as has been done in many studies on this subject.

The subject represents the living moment of subjective individual configurations in the action, becoming the link between social and individual subjectivities. Social and individual configurations conform, through this subject, into a unique subjective configuration that is simultaneously social and individual: *the subjective configuration of the action*. As Tucker noted based on Castoriadis: "While imaginary significations must find points of support in the individual's unconscious, social conditions shape the unconscious of multitude of people, for otherwise collective beliefs could not arise" (2005, p. 51).

Funding

Notes

1. That label was not created by Soviet psychology or any of its main representatives as an identification of the type of psychology that they did. More recently, Vygotsky's writings between 1928–1931 have begun to be identified as cultural-historical theory. Furthermore,

some Russian psychologists (Mikjailov, 2002; Yasnitsky, 2012) have criticized this identification of cultural-historical theory in that moment of Vygotsky's work. In this article, I refer to the main Soviet psychologists as representatives of a cultural-historical psychology, with the exception of Leontiev, whose proposal of activity theory intentionally stayed away from the cultural-historical definition.

2. I consider as ontological the specific theoretical representation through which one system of facts becomes a signified system susceptible to certain methodological procedures. A process in which an empirical field is created, whereas one theory is founded. There is not, in my use of the term ontology, any objective pretension of defining reality as it is. Knowledge represents a process through which intelligibility on an imaginary representation through empirical "pieces" is produced.

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