

# Mentality and representation

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## **Abstract**

*In this study, I try to bring a speculative analysis of the concepts of mentality and representation by referring to the nature of the mind. I started only from a few more well-known positions in the history of ideas to obtain a summary and a significant picture of the concepts under consideration. The aim is to show that, on the one hand, the use of the concepts of mentality and representation in current hermeneutics is, from our point of view, indispensable. On the other hand, the ultimate content of the mentality remains an unknown, because the mind, as part of the human being, is a mysterious phenomenon, due to its divine origin, impossible to know in its ultimate data.*

*Mentality results from an objective psychosocial process based on exchange and negotiation. It is about exchanging information between the individual and society and negotiating the consensus of the individual versus society, translated into norms – religious, economic, social, political, but also scientific, philosophical, and artistic.*

*The forces participating in the identity coagulation process of the mentality are multiple and interdependent, and the role or superior importance of one over the other is difficult to establish. In their convergence are born the representations of the real space, the interpretations and evaluations given by the individual to the world outside him, and the various reactions in the vast continuum of human-world communication.*

*The world primarily known by the person and the community shapes the soft relief of the mental space in forms that, once installed, tend to stiffen and self-reproduce. This is how the representations that dynamically nourish the mentality are born. Fortunately, however, the ultimate content of the mind remains an unknown, in scientific terms, a great mystery that is part of the divine nature of man.*

**Keywords:** *mentality, representation, mind, reality, mental space.*

## *Introduction. Mind and mentality*

Understanding the mentality of any people has always represented a great challenge for historians and philosophers if we look into the past. And if we return to the present, the analysis and description of individual and group mentalities, be they European or non-European, represents a test of maximum scientific ability to which small armies of sociologists, psycho-sociologists, and anthropologists,

ethnologists, and semioticians, political scientists, all engage in developing the photograph closest to the truth of the collective mental spaces. The objective is not at all easy to reach, and the answers, even if scientific, are content to be incomplete but legitimate hypotheses. The explanation lies in the nature – as volatile as it is real – of the mind:

*...the intellectual history of mankind is nothing but the game of the human mind with itself and it cannot be anything else. The interaction between the mind and the world produces symbols. But also, the application of the mind to itself and to its own possibilities produces symbols, and these are more durable than the others.* (Culianu, 2002, p. 29)

Mentality is a product of the mind; it lives, one might say, in the mental space (turning, therefore, into a fundamental attribute of it) and expresses itself mainly with the means offered by the nature of the mind.

What is the *mind*? The question, which is asked more and more often, arises as troubling every time and is associated with two others, even more uncomfortable: what is and where is the mental space? Cognitive sciences still do not manage to give clear and satisfactory answers to these fundamental questions. The etymology of the word is simple: *mind* comes from the Latin *mens, -tis*. *Mind* means, in the common perception, summarized by the dictionary, especially the faculty to think, to understand. It can also mean sound judgment, fair reasoning, wisdom, and thoughtfulness. Just the simple chaining of these explanations given to the mind shows its complex and controversial nature. The term mentality (from fr. *mentalité*) is part of the same paradigm and designates an attribute of the mind: the particular way of thinking of an individual or of a collective, ways of acting, of thinking of an individual; intellectual habits, beliefs, behaviors characteristic of a group.

Ioan Petru Culianu, historian of religions and anthropologist with a revolutionary vision in the research of mental space, warns:

*The location and properties of “mental space” are probably the most challenging enigmas that people have faced since ancient times; and, after two dark centuries of positivism trying to explain them away as fictitious, they came back stronger than ever with the advent of cybernetics and computers.* (Culianu, 2002, p. 36)

The mind is the place where reason, judgment, imagination, memory, and dreams develop. From childhood, we learn to distinguish between the physical space of real objects and events and the mental space, which we see inhabited mainly by our imagination. The physical, molecular, atomic, and, for some time, the quantum world represents for us the crucible of reality. In complementarity, we reserve the status of the laboratory of subjectivity to the mental space and give it

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an administrator: thinking. The separation between the two worlds is clear, as is the imperative need to distinguish them. The categories of knowledge, typical of Western European civilization, reflect this differentiation through oppositions such as exteriority versus interiority, objective versus subjective, real versus imaginary, history versus myth, verified facts versus hypotheses, and reality versus fiction. The coexistence of the two worlds is possible precisely because of this complementary differentiation, and those who fail to differentiate between the two worlds are considered dysfunctional and treated as such. The attitude towards any aspect of the physical world permanently enriches the world of ideas and subjectivity – the mental space.

#### *Mentality, between reality and unreality*

Mentality is the result of an objective psychosocial process based on exchange and negotiation. It is about the exchange of information between the individual and society and the negotiation of the consensus of the individual versus society, translated into norms – religious, economic, social, political, but also scientific, philosophical, and artistic. Norma defines thinking and rational knowledge in Western culture since ancient Greece, according to the principle of non-contradiction. Western man does not have to contradict himself in his rational acts. If he violates this norm, he becomes irrational. This is how the Western cultural model was constituted until the end of the 19th century, when scientific discoveries, the theory of relativity and Freudian psychoanalysis, but also the new post-Nietzschean philosophical visions introduce another norm: the principle of probability, which legitimizes the hypothesis in knowledge, a substitute for the indisputable truths of thought European before the 20th century.

The forces participating in the identity coagulation process of the mentality are multiple and interdependent, and the role or superior importance of one over the other is difficult to establish. In their convergence are born the representations of the real space, the interpretations and evaluations given by the individual to the world outside him, and the various reactions in the vast continuum of human-world communication. Any attitude, voluntary or involuntary, is a response to reality. Our simple presence in the world, living and traversing physical space irreversibly involves us in a relationship with the world. Reality is, above all, an inexhaustible territory of interrogations. In this forest of questions, each individual gives his own answers, and they compose his existential path step by step, in which any previous answer conditions and partially anticipates all the others to be given.

It is a matter of subjective determinism, in the unfolding of which the recognizable mentality of the individual is deposited layer by layer, the one that gives the measure of his irreducible identity. Every answer given to the questions with which real-life greets the individual means inventing a meaning or choosing a meaning among several possible ones. In this way, the forest of questions metamorphoses into a “*forest of symbols*”; the existing world is tamed and transformed into the known world.

The nature of the answers and implicitly the meanings with which the individual populates both the real space in which he evolves and his own mental space, therefore, depends on two fields of forces, external and internal, in a permanent negotiation or at other times in an open conflict. In the foreground are the actors of the real world: society and nature. The external reality is by no means a passive space in the development of the individual mentality. The forms of social reality and natural reality together condition the mentality, and between them, the forms of conditioning, limitation, or openness represent an important part of human history. The constraints and challenges coming from the space external to the individual are taken over by the field of internal forces, which are insufficiently defined and understood until today. If the protagonists of the real world are easy to identify because they submit to verification and description, the internal forces are often even hard to name; they have a relative, fluid consistency that resists any attempt to reveal their ultimate profile.

Thus, by internal forces, we mean consciousness and unconsciousness, genetic inheritance or temperament, desires and aspirations, predispositions, etc. Psychoanalysis seduces us with the accumulation of all internal forces under the apparently too capacious umbrella of the ego, divided into several areas, among which the unconscious and the subconscious dispute their somewhat repressive authority over the individual. Psychoanalysis promised to solve the whole problem of mental space and to tell us, finally, what the mind is. Obviously, the tools provided by psychoanalysis in the interpretation of the mental territory remain valuable and with punctual validity, but after a century of psychoanalysis, it is clear to everyone that the mental mechanisms, the protoplasm of the mental space and the dynamics of mentalities, expressed in the representation of any forms of reality, it exceeds the inclusive power of psychoanalysis and its language, far too poor for such a rich world as that of the mind.

Before psychoanalysis, modern philosophy polarizes the field of internal forces between consciousness and the irrational and brings into play a slippery phantom: the tutelary shadow of the self. This is how the third source of pressure is focused on the individual, along with nature and society: existence.

Philosophers, from Socrates to Kant, preferred, like the mystics, the opposition between *spirit* and *body* (or *soul* versus *body*) or between *spirit* and *matter*, translating the communication between the *mental* and the *physical* universe through a struggle of opposites, from which results and during which the human being is defined.

It would follow from all that I have said that the distinction between mental space and physical space, therefore the difference between what we now call the inner world and the outer world, is clear and definite, and that, just as we do not doubt their different nature, so then we would have no reason to doubt their different reality. However, the relations between the two worlds are by no means domesticated in definitive truths. We observe even today that mental space has rather the status of a fictional world or a world parallel to the real reality. The inner world would be synonymous with imagining, imagination, and illusion. That is why the inner world is often associated or even wrongly confused with the fictional worlds from mythology, literature, and, more recently, from the territory of virtual culture. The question arises: is the inner world real or not? Does *mental space* really exist? And if it exists, why is it called unreal? We meet even in contemporary scientific discourses such formulations as fictitious mental space. However, mental space is increasingly being dealt with by a fairly recent philosophy of mind, which is associated in research with cognitive psychology and sometimes with neurophysiology.

The right balance between the *unreality* and the *reality* of mental space has not yet been found in the cognitive sciences. But what we know for sure exists is precisely the mentality because it produces representation and attitude, and through these instruments, man intervenes in the external world, invents and re-invents the real spaces from which society and the known world are perpetually born. The flow of mentalities directs the process of objectifying subjective mental projections in the very real spaces that make up the diversity of cities and rural worlds, all material civilization and social structures, and the interference between man and nature. It is certainly time to get used to the idea that mental space is not an unreality but a different reality than the physical one. Moreover, the interdependence between the mind and the physical world is undeniable.

First, philosophy and then Einsteinian physics, the biological sciences, demonstrated that one cannot exist without the other. The emergence of virtual culture and cyberspace helps us go through a necessary mutation of mentality:

*...the world outside us and the one inside us are not really parallel, believes Ioan Petru Culianu, and that is not only because they interfere with each other in many*

*ways, but also because we can't even be sure where one ends and the other begins. does this mean that, in fact, they share the same space? (Culianu, 2002, p. 38)*

Culianu's questioning follows a whole tradition in Western philosophy, before and after Descartes, of problematizing the curious relationship between the subjective world and the objective world. If common sense naturally tends to question the reality of mental spaces, philosophers have often wondered, on the contrary, how much we can trust in the existence and truth of the physical world. Some philosophers have reached the radical conclusion that the world outside us is a pure mental construct of perception. Under such conditions, the so-called "*objective world*" would be the combined result of the conventions created and structured by our organs of perception. Schopenhauer briefly dictated: "*The world is my representation.*" He says that man

*...has the full certainty that he knows neither sun nor earth; he knows, in a word, that the world by which he is surrounded exists only as a representation in his relation to a perceiving being, which is man himself. (Schopenhauer, 1995, p. 15)*

But perhaps the best-known vision is that of Plato in the *Republic*, synthesized in the well-known analogy with the cave, which starts from the existence of two principles, of which "*...one reigns over the intelligible order and domain, the other over the visible.*" (Plato, p. 309) In *Part III* of the *Republic*, Socrates shows how the mental representation operates as a mediator between the intelligible and the visible, actually deciding the degree of reality of each and privileging the mental image over the object, in the sense that the image is primarily more important, therefore truer than the object itself:

*Then you also know that they [geometrists, arithmeticians] use visible figures and that they discuss about them, without reasoning on them, but, in fact, on those entities that the figures only resemble: in view of the square itself and of its diagonal he discusses and not in view of the figure he draws; and the same goes in the other cases. They use the figures they make up and draw – figures that have images in water and shadows – but they use these figures as images in their turn, seeking to see those realities themselves, which could not be otherwise seen only through reason.*

And then, he summarizes

*I said that the soul is forced to investigate in this division of the intelligible, with the help of "postulates." He does not go to the principle because he cannot rise beyond the postulate; he uses as images even the objects imitated by others inferior to them, using these images as entities that impose themselves on the opinion with clarity and weight, for the knowledge of the other superordinate realities. (Plato, 1986, p. 311)*

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The priority of the image before the object results, here, from the fact that the mental image is closer to the “*superordinate realities*” to the world of the Platonic Ideas, the only objective reality impossible to manipulate through the senses; the object, on the contrary, would be the least real, because it is only the fruit of the way in which our deluding senses convey to us the world outside us.

We do not need to be enthusiastic followers of Platonic hypotheses to admit mental reality and to understand its nuclear role in the spatio-temporal movement of the individual and communities. Philosophers, however, make us more sensitive to the power of the mind over reality and force us to ask ourselves whether any type of reality is not a product whose birth the mind participates in and which it continuously influences, including administering it according to norms only partially accessible to knowledge current. Mentality itself, as a direct product of the mind, is a set of intricately layered norms in a kind of tectonic movement hardly visible, but where an earthquake or a volcano, that is, a destructive rupture or a revolutionary change, is in principle possible at any time.

Knowledge plays the most important role in the edification of the mentality within the individual because it trains and develops thinking and gives rise to individual consciousness. There is no mentality outside of knowledge. Any group mentality corresponds to a certain type of knowledge, because the mentality presupposes precisely the processing of a field of information, subject to selection, assimilation through social representations, and then analytical norming. And the type of knowledge also gives the content of the mentality, its irreducible pattern. For example, if the modern European mentality is authoritatively based on rational knowledge, including the rationalization and incorporation of the irrational, the archaic mentality, evident in primitive societies but also in traditional societies, is primarily based on irrational knowledge, manifested in mystical communication, in the culture of myth and of the dream, in rites and divinatory techniques.

Archaic African cultures are the fruit of totemic thinking, which comes from unconditional faith, without explaining the phenomena but investing them with the meanings dictated by mythical representations. And today, sub-Saharan Africans live in a world radically different from the European one, where the dead never leaves the living for good; they only turn into ancestors, uniting the visible world with the “world beyond” in an absolute coexistence natural, evident in the practices of everyday life. Such a mentality is inaccessible to the Europeans. Western European cultures receive their energy from rational thinking, formed in the cult of logic and explaining the causality of phenomena. If there is a myth central to the current European mentality, it would be precisely that of individual

reason capable of disposing of reality, even controlling and shaping it for its own benefit.

Rational knowledge takes multiple forms in European culture. Scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge, and practical knowledge, as predilection areas of the rational, do not exclude mystical or artistic knowledge but admit to them a relation of complementarity, sometimes active, sometimes suspiciously tolerant. Mentality, as a psychosocial phenomenon, results, at this level, especially from the exchanges of information that take place between scientific knowledge and knowledge specific to common sense, from the way in which they feed each other, oppose each other, or simply exclude each other. When we judge scientific knowledge, we notice that it belongs to the reified universe, which undertakes to systematically explain the world, impartially and independently of the human subject, because it rests on what is considered to be pure reality.

#### *Knowledge and common sense*

Common sense knowledge is profoundly different, because it belongs to the consensual universe, structured according to the reaction of the human subject to information, based on the principle of negotiation and mutual acceptance. And common-sense thinking is by no means as systematic as scientific thinking; it is based on collective memory and consensus, it actually builds group mentalities. Common sense is interested both in the material elements of immediate reality and in speculative inquiries, metaphysical questions like – *Is there a God? Who am I? Where do I come from where am I going? What is the origin of the universe*” are naturally associated in the mind of the anonymous citizen of today’s European societies with the direct questions: *“What kind of state do I live in? How does the law work? Who is doing me justice? Who do I vote with? Who represents me? How is the economy doing? What is the job market like...”*

The psychosociologist Serge Moscovici is one of those who plead for the rehabilitation of common sense, showing that the representations produced by common thinking are as rational as any others:

*...I tried to rehabilitate common knowledge; it is based on our daily experience, on common language and on daily practices. But in reality we were reacting to a fundamental idea ... namely that “le peuple ne pense pas”, that is, not all people are capable of thinking rationally, but only intellectuals. My childhood and adolescence were marked by the fascist regime, so one could say that, on the contrary, intellectuals are not capable of rational thought, since, in the middle of the 20th century, they were also the moral authors of such theories as irrational as racism and Nazism. (Moscovici, 2002, p. 167)*

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In *The Phenomenon of Social Representation* (1984) Moscovici studies the path from science to common sense. His hypothesis can be considered provocative, but it opens a new perspective on the mutations in current European mentalities. Moscovici says that, initially, science was based on common sense; progressively, however, it transformed common sense into somewhat less common territory.

Today, we can say that common sense means science made known to everyone. Thus, the contemporary European man acquires his political mentality and economic mentality, social behavior and philosophical-religious attitude, in accordance with the new world shaped by technology and science, precisely extracting from the area of scientific knowledge not demonstrations and theories, but general ideas, explanations, opinions and images that populate and restructure the collective mental space, defining a new field of common knowledge. Moscovici's vision goes in the same direction:

*If there is a knowledge system, the question arises: who is the subject of this knowledge, how can we imagine it in practice? For example, in recent social psychology he has been visualized as a science enthusiast, non-professional, as a novice, compared to an expert or a sophisticated scientist. When I started my research activity in the '50s, I anticipated an opposition between the professional researcher and the amateur philosopher, the former coming up with concrete questions about phenomena, and the latter asking questions of a general nature, about specific phenomena, and, instead of systematizing, it structures the elements of knowledge and the information collected in mental archives. Thus he extracts heterogeneous elements from the field of science, for example, and invests them in a meaningful whole that has a practical value for him. (Moscovici, 2002, pp. 181-182)*

### *The phenomenon of representation*

Cognitive psychology establishes that representation is the first level of organization of autonomous mental activity, independent of the presence and direct action of external objects. The source of representation is the information provided by sensations and perceptions, and its objective basis is memory itself, with its extremely complicated mental archives. If we abandon the too sterile language of psychology, we see the process of representation like this: a tree, the sun, a child, a circle, a man, gravity, thought are objective presences that populate the horizon of the world. The mind takes note of the existence of all these things and conceives an image capable of denoting the presence of the thing external to it and at the same time replacing it. From the mere sight of the work by the viewing subject, his own mind passes to the reflection of the work through resumption and repetition, for the benefit of the viewer, Transformed into a thinking subject. This

is how representation is born, an operation of reflexive transfer of work into images and ideas. There is, however, always an orientation in the representation process, which comes from the thinking subject's participation in the reflection of the thing.

No representation is absolutely innocent. It is also the reason why from the image of the representation to the idea provided by the representation there is a flexible interval, a kind of representational micro-space in which the meanings created or accepted by the thinking subject move, those that make the indissoluble link between the thing and its own representation in our minds. That is why the representation is not reduced to the image nor to the idea, it incorporates them into a dynamic sign, which even indicates the participation of each community and each individual in the invention and permanent re-invention of the world.

Representation is the beginning of any form of knowledge and any communication between man and the world. And the world itself is representation to the extent that to re-present means to duplicate everything in the world through a clear – a meaningful structure within reach of the thinking mind. The re-representation shows that each thinking subject would have his own mental copy of the world, if we ideally agree to substitute the sign for the presence of the thing and reduce the sign to the thing itself. All the dynamics of the representation of the world in the mind of the thinking subject is based on a mimetic economy, in which the work is split into a sign and an idea in order to be able to enter into mutual substitution operations. Only in this way does communication become possible, because the sign and the idea are manifested through language. I take the corporeality of language, its forms, its arbitrariness and logical rationality to tirelessly cover the distance between presentation and representation, between the reflective opacity of the sign and its transitive transparency, between the alienation of the thing in the sign and the identification of the thing with the sign. The plurality of languages makes it possible for the mimesis of representation to be competed by a non-mimetic economy, existing especially in artistic thinking, in the mythical and mystical imaginary.

The languages themselves and, through them, the communication phenomena are the first witnesses to the fact that the process of representation is not a dance between two, a mental game between the individual and the object – of whatever nature, physical, social, imaginary or real – subject to his attention. The dance of representation always has three partners, and the third is the otherness to which the individual self is constantly related, whether it is another individual or a group, a community or society as a whole. Therefore, the representation of the object is born in the interactive relationship between two subjects, the individual

subject and the social subject. The individual himself is never completely alone, just as he is never completely consumed by social otherness.

These aspects are commented on in psychology and social psychology studies, from Freud to Serge Moscovici. Freud still said:

*The opposition between individual psychology and social psychology or crowd psychology, which may seem important at first sight, loses much of its sharpness if it is examined in depth. Of course, individual psychology has as its object the isolated man and seeks to find out in what ways he tries to obtain the satisfaction of his impulses, but, in doing so, it is only rarely – in certain exceptional conditions – capable of abstracting from the individual taken in isolation. The other regularly intervenes as a model, support and adversary, and by this fact, individual psychology is also, globally and simultaneously, a social psychology, in this extended but perfectly justified sense. (Freud, 1982, p. 123)*

Just as there is objectively a society, outside of us, so each of us carries in mind a society from within, in which the voices of the family are associated and contradicted, with the voices of friends and colleagues, the voices of enemies, with the personalities of the day and of the to those identified as leaders, etc. And between the society inside and the society outside there is an open conflict, never exhausted, from the birth to the death of the individual, translated through victories and defeats on one side and the other, through negotiation and truce, through collaboration and incompatibility, through adaptation to social reality and the loneliness of the individual in the world.

The awareness of the fact that the representation is born on the same route in the circuit as the mentality (*mind - man - world*) indicates the representation as the fairest unit of measurement of mentalities. But it is not, in principle, all mental representations, but in particular social representations, because through them the multiple ways of organizing thought (in concepts, truths, beliefs, ideals, rules or prohibitions) and the plurality of ways of organization are manifested of the imaginary in symbols and sets of symbols. Social representations are more than a screen, an interface between the individual, society and the world; they are our natural way of thinking about the world, processing realities and exploring virtualities. Finally, social representations express our humanity and the specific way we place ourselves in the world.

But what are social representations, anyway? The concept and the expression itself were launched by Emile Durkheim in 1898. For him, social representations are a very general class of psychic and social phenomena, inherited and stable, produced by collective conceptualization, specific to the family, group, tribe, and encompassing myth, ideology, science. In Durkheim's view, social representations

are equivalent to the mental or cognitive part of the self-structuring of the rituals, beliefs and fundamental values of a society into sources of immutable authority:

*A man who would not think through concepts would not be a man; since, once reduced to simple individual perceptions, he would not have a social being, but would be undifferentiated and animal. [...] To think conceptually does not mean only to isolate and group a set of characters common to a certain number of objects; it means to subsume what is variable to what is permanent, the individual to the social. (Durkheim, 1967, pp. 626-627)*

In the 1960s-1970s, Serge Moscovici revived the concept and renamed it, focusing the social representation on the idea of evolution and mental change, induced by new knowledge. Moscovici's goal is to describe the movements and understanding at the level of public opinion, to observe the originality of social thought processes. Serge Moscovici thus founded a general theory of the elaboration and diffusion of knowledge in society, in organizations and in situations of confrontation, of divergence between groups. In this way, the study of social representations favors in research the positive relationships between people and their sociocognitive adaptation to an increasingly evolving world. The orientation given to the concept by Moscovici makes social representation a transdisciplinary notion, a dynamic ensemble hierarchically composed of knowledge and meanings, from which personal opinion, social attitude, collective imagination, the behaviors of groups and individuals in an evolutionary seen social environment are born:

*The representations social are... dynamic ensembles, their status is that of producing behaviors and relationships with the environment, of action that changes both of them and not of reproducing these behaviors or relationships, of reacting to a stimulus exterior given. (Moscovici, 1994, p. 38)*

From the perspective opened by Moscovici, social representations become tools of maximum efficiency in the study of mentalities. understood as systems with their own logic and language, with a structure of implications bringing together values and concepts, social representations have their own autonomous discourse about the specifics of any community's journey through the world:

*Consistently they exceed what is immediately given in science or philosophically, the given classification of facts and events. A corpus of themes and principles can be seen here presenting a certain unity and applying to certain areas of existence and activity: medicine, psychology, physics, politics, etc. What, in these areas, is received from the outside and included in them, is subject to a transformation activity, of evolution, in order to obtain a knowledge that most of us use in our daily life. (Moscovici, 1994, p. 38)*

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During the use of social representations, the public and private spaces are populated with beings, with anonymous heroes and figures, social behavior is fueled with meanings, concepts come to life, become concrete, so that the texture of the reality of each of us is enriched by continuously shaping the dynamics of mentalities. That is why, since the 70s of the last century, there has been talk of the need for a pedagogy of social representations, because they delimit the field of possible communications, manage the values and ideas present in the visions adopted by any community, regulate desirable or accepted behaviors, specify prohibitions or limits at the level of a group's habit.

The visual culture and, after the explosion of the Internet, the virtual culture, constitute today real autonomous machines for manufacturing representations, enormously accelerating the process of their coagulation, change and schematization of representations, a phenomenon that decisively influences the contemporary flow of mentalities. Serge Moscovici and the entire psychological school initiated by him invite us to have a fundamentally intercultural vision of human thought. Imagining social groups in contact, with different situations and humanities, that advance, build, select, sort, recompose and renew the stock or archive of knowledge at their disposal, we can see the film of the mentalities and social-historical realities from which they come. The key to Moscovici's theory on social representations lies in the definition of objectification and anchoring mechanisms through which it is demonstrated that the influence of a community or a reference group can be decisive in the formation of major cultural orientations, within a vast social ensemble or in relation to certain values more or less universal.

In the description of mentalities, researchers prioritize the study of social representations and self-representations reflected in the discourse of freedom, knowledge, altruism, intolerance, religiosity, social justice or democracy, totalitarianism, the leader and the money, the sovereignty of the law, etc.

### *Conclusions. Mentality, a product of the known world*

In order to analyze the mentality and to quantify it in images able to compose its identity imprint, we should know how to enter the mental space, how to read it and then how to translate it. But as long as we look at the mental space as an autonomous world, today we cannot speak of a parcelling and a universally recognized scientific regulation of it, especially after the partial bankruptcy of psychoanalysis and psychologism. "Pure" travel in mental space, totally independent of the outside world, is perhaps as nebulous and difficult as travel in outer space.

Fortunately, mental space is both autonomous and dependent on the outside world:

*Even if we describe our mental space, with all its strange “mental substance”, as a complete universe, existing in parallel with the world perceived as being outside of us, both are nevertheless interdependent, to different degrees: the external world could not exist without the mental universe that perceives it, and instead the mental universe borrows its images from perceptions. Thus, at least the scenery and scenario of the mental universe depends on the real structures of perception.* (Culianu, 2002, p. 38)

Therefore, there is an intangible fabric between society, nature (the real world, the perceived world) and the mind of each person. If we cannot describe the mentality as a product of the mind by situating ourselves only in its pure interiority, it is possible instead to analyze the mentality as a response of the mind to the demands of nature, existence, and society. We cannot know precisely what is happening in people’s minds, but we can observe how they act and how they react to reality, as a dynamic ensemble of stimuli and conditioning, limits and freedoms, chance, and predictability. On the other hand, the socio-natural environment influences and shapes individual mental spaces, feeds their imagination and memory, can direct the type of thinking and action.

In order to show the importance of the interweaving between *mind, nature, existence* and *society*, as a mechanism for expressing mentality, we must understand that the world known to any person orders and conditions his mental space, legitimizing a certain type of mentality. The mental space is an individual and collective reality in whose subtle dynamics the structure of the world known in childhood and adolescence often intervenes authoritatively, as a factor regulating perceptions and motivating decisions and value judgments. In these terms, the “*known world*” is synonymous with the original cultural model for an individual, for a group or for a generation. The need to preserve the original model is usually greater than the temptation to change or overcome it because it provides security and satisfies the eternal human nostalgia of returning to the past, a past often mythologized and associated with “lost paradises.”

When the known world brutally changes its face and becomes oppressive towards the Persian, in the specific terms of totalitarianism, a radical transformation of the space outside subjectivity occurs, which automatically leads to “...*the severe restriction of the limits of imagination and the imaginable and therefore of the perception of the real itself (for the real and the imaginable feed and enrich each other).*” (Călinescu, p. 202) The observation belongs to Matei

Călinescu and is the result of personal experience lived in the communist world in post-war Romania.

The world primarily known by the person and the community shapes the soft relief of the mental space in forms that, once installed, tend to stiffen and self-reproduce. This is how the representations that dynamically nourish the mentality are born. Fortunately, however, the ultimate content of the mind remains an unknown, in scientific terms, a great mystery that is part of the divine nature of man.

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