

# Field and group: a conceptual approximation between Pierre Bourdieu and the social representation theory of Moscovici

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the view of social reality (or social space) both in Pierre Bourdieu's thinking and in Serge Moscovici's social representation theory (SRT), starting from a discussion on Bourdieu's notion of field, particularly when he explains the sociology of taste, and on the notion of group in SRT. In Bourdieu's sociology, the field is organized by principles such as economic and cultural capital, assuming that struggles occur in the social space according to agents' social positions, *habitus*, and cultural practices. In the social representation theory (SRT), groups orient themselves, in their communication, towards the field of an object that mobilizes them, assuming that there is equality in the relationships of members as they build consensual, common sense knowledge about this object. In a sociology of the taste of artists, for example, the Bourdieusian sociologist can also make a description of the social practices in this group, rather than describing only practices referring to a single object (art). However, Bourdieu does not seem to focus on the study of groups. On the other hand, social representation researchers could be criticized for not always giving enough importance to the foundation of material objects. Both authors have in common the fact of privileging the symbolic dimension in the construction of social reality. They also have in common the challenge of overcoming the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy in the individual-society relationship. By means of such conceptual approximation, the article aims to build a psychosocial view of education, particularly of the school, without adopting in advance one theory (SRT) to the detriment of the other (Bourdieu).

## Keywords

Field theory – Groups – Social representation theory – School – Education.

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# ***Campo e grupo: aproximação conceitual entre Pierre Bourdieu e a teoria moscoviana das representações sociais***

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## **Resumo**

*O objetivo deste artigo é examinar a visão da realidade (ou do espaço) social no pensamento de Pierre Bourdieu e na teoria das representações sociais (TRS) de Serge Moscovici, tomando por desencadeador uma discussão sobre a noção de campo, proposta por Bourdieu, particularmente quando expõe a sociologia do gosto, e a noção de grupo na TRS. Na sociologia de Bourdieu, o campo é organizado por princípios como capital econômico e capital cultural, supondo lutas no espaço social, conforme posições sociais, habitus e práticas culturais dos agentes. Na teoria das representações sociais (TRS), os grupos, em suas comunicações, voltam-se para o campo de um objeto que os mobiliza, supondo igualdade na relação de seus membros ao construir um conhecimento do senso comum, consensual, a respeito desse objeto. Em uma sociologia do gosto dos artistas, por exemplo, o sociólogo de inspiração bourdieusiana pode fazer também um quadro das práticas sociais desse grupo, não somente as referentes a um único objeto (arte). Porém, Bourdieu parece não se ater ao estudo de grupos. Paralelamente, pode-se reprovar os estudiosos de representação social por nem sempre darem importância suficiente à base dos objetos materiais. Os dois autores têm em comum o fato de privilegiarem a dimensão simbólica na construção da realidade social. Têm também como desafio comum superar a dicotomia subjetividade x objetividade na relação indivíduo-sociedade. Por meio dessa aproximação conceitual, o texto busca constituir um olhar psicossocial para a educação, particularmente a escola, sem adotar de antemão uma teoria (TRS) em detrimento da outra (Bourdieu), mas problematizando-as reciprocamente.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Teoria dos campos – Grupos – Teoria das representações sociais – Escola – Educação.*

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## Introduction

A discontent has been afflicting for some time the studies founded on social representation theory (STR). The trouble is no less on the side of a few current forms of constructivism which care greatly about the notion of *subjectivity* against the so-called non-critic determinism. However, considering their greater distance from the field of sociology, they (the socio-historical constructivists) currently seem introverted enough not to appreciate an *intertheoretical* debate or, as postmodernists would prefer, a transtheoretical debate.

The discontent refers, not by chance, to the challenge that authors like Bourdieu and Moscovici propose to themselves of overcoming the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy in the individual-society relationship. At first, this common point may lead education researchers, including graduate students, to establish close relations between Bourdieu and Moscovici's (1976) SRT, at the risk of simplifying what is not so simple. The present article seeks to understand better certain theoretical principles defended by these authors, situated respectively in the fields of sociology and social psychology, and to emphasize the relevance of this conceptual approximation to found complex questions related to education.

Since the beginning of their academic careers, one attitude is foundational of Bourdieu's and Moscovici's thinking: to recover the value of the symbolic dimension in the construction of reality, without seeking basic, *déjà lá* structures like the ones that inspired Lévi Strauss's works. Inspired by, and breaking with, Lévi-Strauss's thinking, thus can we situate, not without some discussion, the works of both authors analyzed here. Viewing the social space as consisting of fields in which symbolic structures and formations combine to form one whole, one single articulate reality, imposes breaking with the determinism that structures the notions of social class and

mode of production. A break, equally, with the so-called left wing determinism, without returning to the determinisms inherited from Hobbes, Durkheim and Weber.

The epistemic attitude of this break and the intention to integrate subjectivity and objectivity are not enough to found a view of social reality. Structures, institutions, groups, *habitus*, practices, roles, and identity can merge into one assertion that seems to bring everyone together: the social is a construction. The scenery is one of twilight: one could affirm that we can see the social reality, since it is not yet dark, but the image that meets the eye is dim. A psychosocial glance presents itself like a will-o'-the-wisp that sociology spares no effort to exorcise as it struggles with concepts of identity or trajectory (DUBAR, 2009; DUBET, 1994; LAHIRE, 2002).

The aforementioned discontent can have its edges questioned: how to approach the school like a social institution, or more precisely, like a psychosocial *event*? The school, with its space, territory, work conditions, schedules, routines, rules, and procedures (planning, evaluation, teaching, ludic activities, among others). The public school with its double identity injunction: the school institution (the place of the teaching-learning relationship and knowledge transmission and production), and the public institution, the apparatus of the state. Or the private school, in its triple identity injunction: the school, the company, and also the apparatus of the state.

The school may be studied in its institutional dimension, examined as to various features that mark its weight as a space or a social reality instituted. The problem is that in so doing, i.e., by parts, any possibility of breaking is smashed, since the description of the instituted is the force of reproduction. As if the school were the very place of inequality, the source of reproduction, of the social division of labor, of gender difference, and of all domination therefrom. The possible narrative in this perspective would be a very ironic one:

the school thought by Enlightenment thinkers as a social practice for producing the new order to fight traditionalism and aristocracy (*l'ancien regime*), dreamed of as the Republic's apparatus for creating and sustaining the new, would eventually become the reproduction machine that adapts individuals to the society of (unequal!) social contract.

This glance at the school allows questioning the distance between Bourdieu's (1979, 1980, 1982, 1984a, 1984b, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1998) thinking and social representation theory (MOSCOVICI, 1976, 1986, 2003), in order to reach a third prism of investigation, i.e., another parameter to approach the school institution as a constituent of social reality. In other words, we aim at building a psychosocial glance without adopting in advance one theory (SRT) to the detriment of the other (Bourdieu), but rather reciprocally problematizing them. Two reading perspectives can be immediately introduced and announced: in the view (common to both thinkers) of social space as a space constituted by and through social conflict, the field is necessarily a field of tensions; the second reading perspective is the postulating – or not –, in both authors, of an explanation for social change. Social conflict is the engine of change. However, what we pursue as the second reading perspective is to understand and explicate the nature of change processes, based on a set of concepts that each theory establishes as the scope of such changes.

In this framework, the present work proposes to examine the view of social reality (or space) both in SRT and Bourdieu's thinking, starting from a discussion on the notion of field proposed by Bourdieu, particularly when he explains the sociology of taste, and on the notion of group in SRT. Both will be questioned about the importance of the notion of field (social field, in Bourdieu; the field of the object of representation, in Moscovici).

We can still advance a working hypothesis which would justify a gain in such articulation: Bourdieu's conception

both allows and encourages perceiving social space (with its view of field) as a space of conflicts (tensions), but it does not offer conceptual resources to explicate the processes of change or the very dynamics of change, particularly when this change concerns group interactions. On the other hand, SRT presents, in a reversely complementary way, a more homogeneous view of space (with its notions of field of the object of representation and of "anchoring"<sup>1</sup>), in which conflicts may or may not be explicated, but it does allow identifying and examining the processes (whether through individual, group, or institutional agents, or by studying the relationships between symbolic formations and structures, as well as between social representations and groups), and it does clarify the dynamics of conflict and change. In synthesis, we can suppose, as a working hypothesis, that Bourdieu encourages us to look at the social reality (the framing of society in fields of struggles), while Moscovici provides us the tools to see conflicts in operation (*mis-em-marche*) in the perspective of concrete, living, quotidian individuals and groups.

### **The sociology of taste: taste patterns, *habitus* patterns, social groups?**

Bourdieu (1987) refers to fields, in the domain of sociology, by associating them with what is normally called social classes, yet with the purpose of widening and advancing this concept of Karl Marx. According to the author (BOURDIEU, 1994), social classes are logical classes which are theoretically determined by delimiting a group of agents who occupy the same position in the social space. Bourdieu opposes this idea by affirming that the social space is formed by different types of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital –, the distribution of which results in a space structured by fields,

**1-** The process that forms social representation (in connection with objectification) concerns the social fixation of a representation. It classifies something that is initially threatening by comparing it to a prototype already familiar to subjects, as though something lost which was then anchored in people's social space (MOSCOVICI, 2003).

which are conceived as markets where these capitals struggle among themselves.

According to the author (BOURDIEU, 1979), the notion of capital initially assumes the economic approach, owing to the analogy with its properties, i.e., accumulation through financial investment operations, and transmission through inheritance, which allow agents to negotiate their incomes in various social fields. When he refers to cultural capital, accumulated by acquiring culture, the author resumes the different types of capital which structure the social space: economic capital (income, wealth, material goods); social capital (an individual's social relations reflecting sociability, such as reciprocal invitations and leisure); and symbolic capital (rituals, honor-related protocols). Bourdieu (1979) affirms that capital accumulation converts into struggles in the social space, since it has a relevant role in terms of social reproduction, mainly in school forms, thus involving symbolic struggles through which the economic capital is reconverted into cultural capital<sup>2</sup>.

Agnès Jaoui's film *The Taste of Others* initially allows an association with the idea of fields in Bourdieu's sociology of taste, particularly concerning the theoretical reflections presented by the author in an empirical study of the French culture conducted approximately 40 years ago. In that study, the author proposes that taste reflects the struggles occurring in the fields of the dominant class and of cultural production. The film depicts conflicts involving the tastes of people from diverse sociocultural environments – a financially successful businessman, his decorator wife, an actress who is also an English teacher, a waitress who sells drugs to complement her income, a driver who is also an amateur flutist, and a bodyguard –, particularly the difficulties of the businessman who owns much economic

capital but lacks enough cultural capital to be accepted in the art world. The film's relationship with Bourdieu's sociology has already been examined by a few researchers (VERGARA; MAGNI, 2008; GROGNET, 2008; BELLAVANCE, VALEX; RATTÉ, 2004; DABÈNE, 2002), as the social stratification of the characters' tastes can be founded on the correlation between cultural practices and social structure, evoking concepts proposed by the author, such as *habitus*, cultural capital, and field theory itself.

In his proposition of a sociology of taste, Bourdieu (1979) privileges the analysis of aesthetic dispositions and judgments by viewing them as products of struggles between social groups. According to the author, taste (manifest preferences) is the principle of what we have and what we are to others, as well as what we classify and are classified as. It is the practical affirmation of a recognized difference, chiefly the aversion to different life styles, that constitutes a strong barrier between classes. In every space of preference and every possible universe of style – mineral waters, wines, cars, newspapers, holiday places, furniture, house decoration, landscaping, political programs –, distinctive traces express social differences, leading to the search for distinction.

Bourdieu (1979) refers to culture in two senses: on one hand, as cultural works, and on the other, as man's ways of feeling and doing. He mentions nobler cultural areas (e.g., classical music, painting, literature) and less noble ones which have progressively gained social legitimacy (e.g., cinema, photography, jazz). A relationship between economic and cultural capital is therein perceived which opposes different lifestyles, or different tastes, i.e., a more luxurious one, associated to economic capital (ownership of art works, luxury cars), and another, less luxurious one, yet with an emphasis on culture (reading, classical music, theater). According to the author, a lifestyle is a set of tastes, beliefs and practices typical of a certain class. Although Bourdieu affirms that the dominating class maintains its position through

**2-** Later, in *La domination masculine*, Bourdieu (1998) proposes another principle that also sustains symbolic struggles in the social space: gender, owing to the domination of men over women in our society.

**3-** Originally titled *Le goût des autres*, released in French theaters in 2000.

a distinction strategy and imposes good taste on society, one of the author's interests is to understand the social production of perception schemes and of practices that define taste, which brings him closer to a genetic approach, rather than just a structuralist one.

Returning to Agnès Jaoui's film, a relationship can be recognized between the characters' sociocultural contexts and Bourdieu's works, chiefly regarding his field theory, in which the author privileges the weight of institutions (such as family and school) and of cultural capital – the latter being related to the arbitrariness of the erudite school culture, socially recognized as legitimate – as the film approaches the material and symbolic relations between different groups in the same social space. Would the characters' places in the film make us think of Bourdieu's (1979) affirmation about the constitution of a new *petite bourgeoisie*? In other words, on one hand there are the *petit bourgeois* with a strong cultural capital, and on the other, agents from the bourgeoisie who did not acquire from the school institution the titles which allow them to remain in the dominant class, since they lack the cultural capital in its institutionalized form, with certificates to ensure distinction.

In this context, in a Bourdieusian perspective, the fields of artists, intellectuals, and sportspeople, for example, would have particularities, even though they are situated in the same social space, and they could convert into a field of (symbolic) struggles by using cultural practices according to their *habitus*, which is mainly influenced by social determinants. *Habitus* is thus structured in relation with a field (the scientific field presupposes agents with a certain *habitus* different from that of people in the politics field). Although the author emphasizes the set of objective relations that connects an agent to others in the field, he also considers the symbolic dimension. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) affirm, the relationship between *habitus* and field is one of conditioning (the field structures

the *habitus* as a product of the field's needs) and of knowledge or cognitive construction (the *habitus* contributes to constitute the field as a world of meanings).

With regard to studies of the educational area, it is relevant to mention one of the aspects which pervade Bourdieu's (1987) work: his attempt to overcome certain oppositions which divide the sociological field. Among the most evident oppositions are those between: theoretical and empirical researchers; subjectivists and objectivists; structuralism and phenomenology. According to the author, a typical example of fictitious opposition is that between the structuralist approach (understanding objective relations regardless of individual consciousnesses and volitions) and the phenomenological, interactionist, or ethnomethodological approach (understanding the experiences of agents' interactions and social contacts, as well as their contribution for the mental and practical construction of reality). In this sense, Bourdieu's work reflects a critical rereading of classic anthropological and sociological questions.

Within what the author calls "structuralist constructivism" (BOURDIEU, 1987), the starting point are elements closer to an objectivist tradition, the initial datum of which would be the existence of social structures, with a system of objective relations determining individuals' both practices and representations. Reality itself and the specific effects of what is subjectively experienced by these individuals are dealt with in a later moment (ACCARDO, CORCUFF, 1986). Bourdieu (1987) understands the structuralist constructivism or constructivist structuralism thus: according to the structuralism/structuralist, there are objective structures independent of agents' consciousness and volitions, which are capable of orienting their practices or representations; according to the constructivism/constructivist, there is a social genesis, on one hand, of schemes of perception, thought, and action that constitute the *habitus*, and on the other hand, of social structures,

particularly what the author calls fields (or groups). In other words, in this social genesis, *habitus* and fields do not dissociate.

Bourdieu (1987) affirms that the social conditions of existence (or objective factors) are interiorized by individuals in the form of unconscious principles of action and reflection, of sensitivity and understanding schemes, or *habitus*. After this *habitus* has been structured by the social conditions of existence, it continues to produce perceptions, representations, opinions, tastes, desires – in sum, a subjectivity relatively independent of the outside world, which is expressed and externalized in the action of individuals and groups, thus contributing to produce and reproduce the social structures and institutions. Social structures and institutions, in turn, impose themselves on individuals and groups as objective conditions of existence.

Since it reaffirms the reducing character of the objectivism/subjectivism opposition, the concept of *habitus* is proposed by the author as an instrument to overcome it. Although a view is found in earlier studies according to which *habitus* is determined by the social structure (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1970), later works privilege the fact that it allows the organization of an experience which has its own consistency (BOURDIEU, 1987, 1989). Although *habitus* is influenced by the social structure, it does not fully depend on it. After some time, Bourdieu gradually arrived at the formulation that takes into account agents' strategies, creation, and invention (DURAND; WEIL, 1990). Such capacity of innovation, which is closer to constructivism, is fundamental in the concept of *habitus*.

According to Bourdieu (1979), *habitus* is a system of durable dispositions interiorized by individuals in their objective conditions of existence, and it works as unconscious schemes of action, perception and reflection. The most durable acquisitions come from the primary socialization within the family – an institution which occupies a position in the social space. However, *habitus* is not fixed, since it is

restructured according to the social trajectory, implying that practices and representations are neither entirely determined (agents do make choices) nor entirely free (choices are oriented by *habitus*).

Despite its emphasis on the social dimension, it is possible to see in Bourdieu's work that the concept of *habitus* allows the articulation, rather than opposition, between the individual and the social, or between the inner structures of subjectivity and the external social structures. The author defines *habitus* as “an acquired system of generative schemes” (BOURDIEU, 1980, p. 92) which enables the free production of thoughts, perceptions, and actions related with their conditions of production. According to him, the structure that produces *habitus* governs practice, not mechanically, but by means of obligations and limits attributed to its inventions.

It is worth stressing that, according to Bourdieu, *habitus* is a disposition created within a direct individual-society relationship with no intermediate instances, such as groups. If the author defines *habitus* as a disposition, then he can only inscribe it in the symbolic order, since the biological or organic argument is foreign to his view. If it is a disposition of the individual, then it is either a corporeal or a cognitive-affective one; and with no other alternative, *habitus* becomes the cornerstone of the symbolic order. That is, unless Bourdieu had postulated a return to the Marxist ideology or to Durkheim's collective representation. Therefore, the notion of collective history can only be constituted as a set of *habitus*. Extending the sociology of taste, we could inquire whether a style of taste could correspond to the homogeneity which defines a psychological group, as in K. Lewin. However, Bourdieu does not focus on, or provides criteria for, such a discussion. By referring rather to classes than to groups, Bourdieu sometimes seems to settle for Marx's concept of class. For example, the author refers more commonly to the class of artists than to the group of artists. However, real life (in the *real*) is much too

diverse for the word “class”. In Bourdieu, classes are categories or parts of a field, and the author avoids confronting the concept of group. Had he confronted it, perhaps the style of life could approximate the Moscovician group. In Bourdieu, a field is constituted of classes (parts, categories), each with its own different style. A field’s organization is not given by such difference (which could be the focus of SRT), but rather by the historical distribution of the principles proposed by Bourdieu: cultural capital, economic capital and, later, gender (BOURDIEU, 1998).

The theory of fields is important for a better understanding of how Bourdieu views this social structure so much associated with *habitus*. According to the author (BOURDIEU, 1991), the cultural inheritance materialized and incorporated in the form of a *habitus*, despite having laws of its own which transcend individual consciousnesses and volitions, acts only on the struggles occurring in the fields, through agents willing to continuously reactivate it as a space of possibilities. According to Durand and Weil (1990), the notion of field connects to the symbolic relations situated at the center of markets with specific logics in the social space, where specific goods are exchanged according to specific interests.

The individual-society relationship that Bourdieu proposes in sociology can also occur in the psychosocial sphere, based on a social psychology that considers a group as a collection of subjects who share common identities and practices. According to Bourdieu’s field theory, how does a formation like taste or taste style, characterized by identity processes, distinguish itself from, and/or approximates, the sociologically marked social group? From the viewpoint of social representation theory (SRT), which sits at the crossroads between psychological and sociological concepts (MOSCOVICI, 1976), how can different objects of representation mobilize the communication and conflicts between socially situated groups?

As we think of groups, it is important to reflect on the fact that Bourdieu (1987, p.147) sometimes refers to fields or to groups, and that Moscovici (1976) often refers to the individual or to groups in his work presenting SRT, understanding that the individual exists as a member of a group. In neither author there is much explanation while mentioning groups. In Bourdieu’s sociology, the field is organized by principles such as economic and cultural capital, assuming struggles within them, according to agents’ social positions, *habitus*, and cultural practices. In Moscovici’s (1976) SRT, groups orient themselves, in their communication, towards the field of a new object that provokes and threatens them, assuming equality in members’ relationships as they build consensual, common sense knowledge about this object. In other words, in Bourdieu’s sociology, there are agents with *habitus*, situated in a field constituted as a social space of struggles, and in SRT, there is the field of the object of representation which mobilizes the groups affected by it. This conceptual approximation can contribute to the study of complex questions related to education involving in-group and intergroup relations within a social reality founded on institutions.

### **Social fields and the field of the object of social representation**

According to Bourdieu (1984a), social space is multidimensional and has relatively autonomous fields. Its history manifests itself each moment, in a materialized form (in institutions) and in an incorporated form (agents’ disposition either to make those institutions work or to fight them). The author considers that this conception breaks with objectivism, since objectivism disregards the different fields as places of the symbolic struggles that originate representations of the social world, as well as the hierarchy in each field and between different fields. According to the author, the social world can be represented as a space of several dimensions, founded on principles



of power differentiation and distribution in this universe mainly expressed by the above-mentioned different types of capital.

Therefore, the social field structure is defined by the distribution of the capital and profits of particular fields at different times. Agents and groups are thus defined by their positions in a space that can be described as a field of forces, i.e., according to the author, a set of objective force relationships which impose themselves on those who enter the field, and which is irreducible to the individual agents or their direct interaction. Bourdieu (1984b) refers to symbolic struggles aimed at preserving or transforming the field's structure, as he affirms that the social world is, to a large extent, something that its agents make at each moment. However, these agents can only unmake and remake it based on a realistic knowledge of what it is, of their possibilities concerning it, and in function of the position that they occupy.

In Bourdieu's theory, a field is always a field of forces:

Sociology is not a chapter of mechanics, and social fields are fields of forces, but also fields of struggles to transform or preserve these fields of forces (BOURDIEU, 1982, p.47).

This is also emphasized by authors close to Bourdieu:

The structure of the field is a state of the power relations among agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orient subsequent strategies (ACCARDO, CORCUFF, 1986, p. 87).

What makes the notion confusing is that, at several times, Bourdieu delimitates a field by calling it the field of a specific group: the

field of artists, the field of scholars, the field of governors. That which any ill-advised reader would recognize as a group in a certain tradition is, in fact, the confluence of two dimensions of social reality:

The principle of historical action – that of the artist, of the scientist or the politician no less than that of the factory worker or the low-level bureaucrat – is not found in a subject who would confront society in the manner of an object constituted in externality. It resides neither in consciousness nor in things but in the relation between history objectified in things, in the form of institutions, and history incarnate in the body, in the form of that system of durable dispositions I call habitus. (BOURDIEU, 1982, p.38)

As he explicates what a field is, the author again seems to refer to groups. Bourdieu (1991) affirms that it is in the field, as a space of positions, that lies the principle of the space of position-taking, i.e., of strategies intended to transform or preserve it. In this sense, a field is not reducible to a population (understood as the sum of individual agents connected by simple relations of interactions and, more precisely, of cooperation). The author reinforces the place of the objective relations which form the field structure and orient the struggles for preserving or transforming it. Therefore, the field of power forms a space of force relations among agents or institutions which have in common the necessary capital to occupy dominant positions in different fields, chiefly the economic or the cultural one, revealing a hierarchy in social relations involving different capitals and their holders.

A field is defined by delimiting specific stakes<sup>4</sup> and interests which are irreducible to other fields' stakes and interests. Thus, on one hand, we consider the set of stakes and interests of each individual agent and agency; these are different and, at times, mutually opposed. On the

**4-** The word 'stake' is used here as a translation of the French word *enjeu*.

other hand, all elements (stakes and interests) preserve a certain number of fundamental interests regarding that which founds the field, its specificity.

The parallel with SRT and the field of the object of SR is inevitable; a social object, phenomenon, or event which agglutinates around itself – around its social phenomenon specificity – a set of interests. The perspective of SRT is operated by the existence both of an object and of some range of knowledge (marked by previous knowledge, and regulating subsequent knowledge) which are built on the foundation of the specificity of the new (new social object).

In the 1970's, Moscovici (1976) defines social representations as a knowledge comprising three components: the field of the object; attitude; and communicative practices. Later, in 2003, the author adds something new without causing a break with his previous affirmations, by proposing that "representations are prescriptive, that is, they impose themselves on us with an irresistible force. This force is a combination of a structure which is present before we have even begun to think, and of a tradition which decrees what we should think" (p. 36). In his definition in 2003, there is another focus, since Moscovici presents social representations as an organized set of beliefs. What is in the foreground now is their prescription character, i.e., representations as norms, their character of conduct regulation. Therefore, we can start to refer to representations as a system of prescriptive beliefs oriented to, and anchored in, actions.

In SRT's current state, a representation is fully accepted to be a cognitive system that acts simultaneously on the individuals who make it and on the social situation around it. Such a system acts on individuals through relations of meaning, which allows understanding the meanings attributed to objects by certain social groups at particular social situations. A representation gives a social situation a meaning as well as it does to the

observed behaviors and conducts. Therefore, the study of representations allows researchers to understand the meaning that a social group attributes both to the situation itself and to behaviors therein (ABRIC, 2003; CAMPOS, 2005; RATEAU et al., 2012). We must make this clear: a social situation in which a group constitutes its identity in relation to a particular social object is the *field* of this object.

A belief refers to an idea or hypothesis maintained by a cultural group as a foundation for judgment bearing the acceptance of something to be true, even in the absence of evidence. Beliefs are the mental convictions which we have about human beings, their relations with their societies and with collectively reified social objects of phenomena. Our beliefs are social constructions accepted as truths, and they are not based on objective evidence, but rather acquired through social agreements. The difference between belief and knowledge sits precisely on the fact that beliefs may not necessarily be demonstrated by empirical evidence. They have a critical role as they provide meaning by describing some aspect of our social reality (PHILOGÈNE, 2002; MERTON, 1968; GILOVICH, 1991). Beliefs structure our daily experience by cognitively filtering information so that the data obtained make sense. Thus, a representation works as an organized set of beliefs to guide a group in relation to an object in the social space defined by this same object.

Based on the aspects approached, it makes no sense whatsoever to study a social representation without also studying the context that marks the specificity of its object. Studying a representation in order to understand a social reality cannot be conceived without studying the anchoring of this representation. Therefore, there is a pronounced similarity in Bourdieu's notions of field and SRT. However, caution must be taken here to avoid hasty conclusions: while making a sociology of artists' tastes, for example, the Bourdieusian sociologist would, no doubt, be generically outlining the practices of

this group, but not only the practices referring to a single object, such as art, for example. On the other hand, social representation researchers could be criticized for not always giving enough importance to artifacts or to the foundation of material objects in their studies (LAHLOU, 2011).

We can affirm that, in Bourdieu, there is no doubt about the constitutive role of the conflict: the social field is a field of forces and struggles. As to SRT, such an understanding only becomes clear by articulating three works, the second and third of which do not directly approach social representations: *Psychoanalysis, Its Image and Its Public* (MOSCOVICI, 1976), *Psicologia das minorias ativas [The Psychology of Active Minorities]* (MOSCOVICI, 1996), and *Conflicts and Consensus* (MOSCOVICI; DOISE, 1991). An exclusive reading of the first of these points to the necessity of individuals and groups to dominate reality: the subject is a producer of meanings and, in face of a social stimulus (the social object), he produces a representation, causing this development (this production of meanings) to be intervened by ideas, values and models of his group of belonging. The conflict character is diluted, as if developing a social representation were a cognitive process framed in a symbolic context which is that of his group of belonging; the group's interest in dominating the object is neither directly nor explicitly inscribed in a context of conflict with other groups, and no mention is made of the notion of struggles or forces.

Great emphasis is also placed on communication processes. Developing a social representation responds to a certain *utility* of the object to the group (MOSCOVICI, 1976; JODELET, 1984). In the first SRT works, the visibility of social space as a field of forces requires the reader to be doubly attentive, since this conception is diluted and appears on at least two moments. The first one is the reading of empirical results, particularly when Moscovici compares the views of the catholic press and the communist press. Secondly, it appears when

the writings approach practices, indicating that they are mutually distinct, and there are strong indicators that these practices are inscribed in a field and that they sustain norms and values (i.e., they sustain the social representations) and mark positions.

When SRT's founding writings approach practices, there is a slide, a change, albeit a subtle one, in language (space, positions...). A reader unfamiliar with the French social sciences academic context of the 1950's to the 1970's period may have the feeling that he is reading a work strongly influenced by Bourdieu (DOISE; CLÉMENCE; LORENZI-CIOLDI, 1992). This feeling will be later reinforced by the positional approach to the study of social representations (DOISE, 2002).

However, the view of social space as a field of forces in Moscovici cannot be attributed to Bourdieu's influence. Its roots can be found in two main sources: the first is constituted by his inspiration in Kurt Lewin's view of groups; the second, by the insertion of his experimental works in the field of social influence. It is the reading of Moscovici's works on social influence, which he further developed in his joint works with Willem Doise on consensus and decision processes in groups, that ensures the conception of conflict in social space.

The field of an object of social representations is a field of forces, chiefly because every group is situated in a complex dynamic of in-group and intergroup influences (minorities vs. majorities). Thus, a group-versus-society dynamic is installed in which institutions represent stabilized structures (functioning for reproduction), although groups shape flexible structures, which can act both for preservation and transformation.

If we adopt a view of social space as being organized in fields of force, then we can affirm that social representations are forces of a symbolic nature which mark the positions of each group in the conflict and regulate the possibilities of action of the collectives called *social groups*. On the other hand, and

not likewise, *habitus*, styles of *habitus*, and standards of taste (if they can be unequivocally delimited) are also more than results; they are symbolic forces which directly impact the action of individuals. This conceptual approximation between field and group, inspired in epistemological fundamentals of sociology and social psychology, can be furthered in empirical studies involving several topics in the education area.

## Conclusion

This article sought to discuss Bourdieu's notion of field, seen as a field of struggles, and SRT's notion of group, associated with what Moscovici calls "the field of the object of representation", which may or may not involve groups in conflict. Both authors fight objectivisms and subjectivisms, with Bourdieu pursuing a dynamic sociology, and Moscovici, a dynamic social psychology.

According to Bourdieu, the social field consists of agents and agencies, or individuals and institutions, and the symbolic order occurs within the relationship between institutions and *habitus*, which is composed of individual dispositions marked by styles of tastes and by collective history. It is worth mentioning that Bourdieu (1986) refers to a constant, durable social identity that ensures a biological individual's identity in the fields he intervenes in as an agent, i.e., in his life story. In this context, the author mentions the notion of trajectory as a series of positions that an agent successively occupies in a space undergoing continuous transformations. Thus, biographical events are defined according to movements within the social space or, more precisely, according to the distribution of the different capitals in the considered field. According to the author, we can understand trajectories once we have built the successive states of the field in which they develop, considering the set of objective relations that connect an agent to others, who are engaged in the same field and confronted

with the same space of possibilities. Bourdieu (1986) affirms that the difference between the concrete individual and the constructed individual mirrors the difference between the agent, who is efficient in a given field, and the personality, understood as the socially instituted biological individuality with power to ensure its capacity to exist as an agent in different fields. In this context, the author refers to the notion of trajectories as positions that an agent successively occupies in the social space, according to the distribution of different types of capital existing in a field of struggles in which people are confronted with various possibilities. This is a subject that can be further studied in the future, in approximation with SRT and, more specifically, in studies on group interactions.

As for the field of the object according to Moscovici, the author takes into account the relations among individuals, groups and institutions in the symbolic formations that generate representations, ideologies, religion, and myths. The symbolic order would be modes of social thought, or social representations, as a *carrefour* notion that agglutinates the values, norms, attitudes, ideologies, and myths of groups.

By proposing the approximation between Bourdieu's field theory and SRT's notion of group, the present article, in its whole, encourages reflections about the foundations of a more sociological social psychology of education, within European traditions, as defended by Moscovici (1976) when he presented the theory of social representations in the sphere of a more sociological social psychology.

In this context, the proposal presented in this article presupposes a triple task. The first is the one developed above: to examine the view of social reality (or space) both in SRT and in Bourdieu's thinking, starting from a discussion on the sociology of taste and on the notion of group, both being questioned with regard to the importance of the notion of field (social field, in Bourdieu, and field of the object of representation, in Moscovici). The other two, which are clearly interconnected, will be developed in future works.

One of them refers to the study of the notions of conflict and consensus, including their roles in constituting the field, and their dynamics regarding the formation of social positions. To this end, we obviously rely on the works of Willem Doise and his collaborators, who instituted the so-called “positional approach to the study of social representations.” As for the third task, we will confront the concepts of *habitus*, practical sense, social practices, and activation, including a debate with sociologists influenced by Bourdieu, by examining the above-mentioned notion of trajectory.

This article sought to present the relevance of this conceptual approximation for the education area, particularly for the school as a psychosocial unit, and to stress the need to develop studies that involve conflicts among individuals and groups immersed in this social space. Establishing relations between Bourdieu’s field theory and SRT’s notion of group can thus contribute to better understanding of the symbolic processes and of practices in educational interactions, which often occur in the context of symbolic struggles operated by diverse social groups.

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*Received on: June 09th, 2013*

*Approved on: February 19th, 2014*

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