Remembering Serge Moscovici and the making of EASP

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1 The birth of social psychology and its post-war resurgence

Wilhelm Wundt and his Völkerpsychologie

We all know the work of German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, who is recognized as the father of psychology. At the University of Leipzig he created two different types of psychologies. The first he labelled physiological psychology, and the other relating very much to the social branch Wundt referred to as the "Völkerpsychologie" which we might translate as folk psychology or social psychology. But it would take decades for the institutionalization of a uniform social psychology to emerge in Europe in the middle of the 20th century, shortly after the devastating effects of one of the worst wars in human history. Yet before discussing the birth of modern social psychology in Europe, I want to briefly recall the early influence of several scholars who concentrated their work on what would become modern social psychology. Many of those scholars left Germany and Austria to settle in the United States and conduct research that were an attempt to understand what was happening in Europe, and in so doing really created our field.

Kurt Lewin and modern social psychology

We can certainly categorize Kurt Lewin as a social psychologist, universally recognized as the founder of modern social psychology. His work ranged from studies of leadership style and group decision-making to participatory action research. His influence is reflected in the work of Leon Festinger, as the seminal figure in the creation of the EASP. Festinger studied psychology with Lewin and would eventually develop an interest for social psychology after joining Lewin's Research Center for Group Dynamics in 1945 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Fascism and the massive exodus to the US

Apart from Kurt Lewin there was a massive exodus of German and Austrian social psychologists who, as Jews, fled Nazism and settled in the US. These included Theodor Adorno, who with his F-scale investigated the rise of fascism, Erich Fromm, another member of the Frankfurt School elaborating critical and social theories researching the totalitarian posture of Germans before the ascension of Hitler to power, and Paul Lazarsfeld, who investigated what he called the "Two Step-Flow of Communication" highlighting how most people are first indirectly influenced by mass media, then turn to their leaders, whose opinions help shape the opinions of the wider population. Also from Austria, we should reference Fritz Heider, whose work was closely linked to the Gestalt tradition analyzing how people see the causes of behavior and how they seek to explain such behavior, and Gustav Ichheiser who was well anchored in the tradition of phenomenology and wrote on person perception, social attribution, ethnic relations as well as political psychology.

2 WWII, the Cold War, and the emergence of the EASP

Understanding the varieties of social context

I am mentioning those amazing scholars within the context of remembering Serge Moscovici, because they were central in helping the institutionalization of the EASP. It is through their role in the creation of a modern social psychology in the United States that is was possible to build a social psychology in Europe capable of explaining and addressing the cultural trauma caused by the Second World war.

In the course of the 1950's we saw an intense and determined attempt in Europe for social scientists to work in synchrony within a constructive and common framework. This effort was supported by the United Nations of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). They argued that the influence of our environment was crucial in shaping our behavior. In stating that, they implied that we needed to study and understand the varieties of social contexts. For this challenge to be met, it was necessary, after WWII and also during the Cold War, to produce data that could be compared. It is only through this lens that we would be able to develop a fundamental and unitary theory of human behavior. The production of such information should support their postulate and would therefore make it possible to generate the empirical validation of such endeavor.

The comparative cross national research

The establishment of the Comparative Cross National Research was indeed fundamental for the emergence of the EASP. It provided the support to assure the vitality of our organization. The symposium on the "Cross National Research: A Case Study" involved seven countries and was coordinated by the Institute for Social Research in Norway. Several Fulbright scholars participated, including among them Leon Festinger. Indeed after receiving several awards, including the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1959, and having been named one of the ten most prominent scientists by Fortune magazine,

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Festinger assumed the leading role in helping to structure the EASP. Several European scholars were indeed considered. Yet Festinger decided to give the grant from the Ford Foundation to Serge Moscovici, one of the founding fathers of the EASP who then also became its first president in 1965.

The controversy around Moscovici's presidency of the EASP

I know from many conversations with Serge Moscovici that he spent decades wondering why (and under what conditions) he received this grant and how that gesture shaped his subsequent friendship with Festinger. It took more than a decade for me to understand why he was so obsessed with that aspect of his past, apart from the obvious role this selection had played in launching his glorious career.

In the midst of the Cold War many American social psychologists were working for the CIA, having started working for the US intelligence community during WWII in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). When American social scientists launched their post-war effort to rebuild an infrastructure of academic institutions in Europe, they were much concerned about the influence of Communists and other left-leaning thinkers. Serge, who had in his youth clearly declared himself openly sympathetic to the Left, was obviously wondering to what extent his political leanings had been known to the Americans as they made their choice in his favor. Gradually, in the course of several conversations during the mid-1990s, Serge implied that there had been controversy about Festinger's decision to pick him for the Ford Foundation grant.

One day, in the early fall of 1997, Serge asked my husband Robby Guttmann to drive him 100 miles north from New York City to the Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park without telling him what this trip was all about. When they arrived at the location, it was obvious that Serge had already established a rendez-vous with the librarian there. He spent about an hour and half going through a lot of documents until suddenly he exploded with a loud scream, feverishly taking notes on a loose sheet of paper which he then put in his trouser's pocket. From then onwards he was calm, serene, and full of smiles. Robby asked him what this experience had been all about, and Serge just said "I have just found the solution to a riddle I have been thinking about for decades, and it is true that Jerome Bruner was a CIA agent; who first worked for the OSS".

3 The friendship between Moscovici and Festinger

Similarities in research agenda

Festinger's decision in favor of Moscovici cemented a deep friendship between these two men which lasted until Festinger's death in 1989. The name of Leon Festinger is synonymous with American post-war social psychology. His theoretical contributions to the field helped propel social psychology to a new level. He had an exceptional understanding of the relationship between theory and data, having started out in the 1940s as a statistician. His ingenuity in designing research is still widely recognized today. Although he left the discipline in the mid-1960s there is no doubt that his transformative influence took the field in a new direction and helped develop new frameworks for our inquiries.

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While there is a hierarchical relation between experiments and field studies shaping mainstream social psychology, Festinger did not endorse such structuring. In a devastating assessment of Zimbardo's prison experiment Festinger criticized it as nothing but "staging a happening". It did not explain relations between variables, nor did it yield any new knowledge. It is therefore important to remember the link between Festinger and Moscovici through that lens, because they shared in the end an emphasis on the importance of theory as well as maintaining an epistemological pursuit.

The legacy of Moscovici is embedded in the importance of Festinger for the field of social psychology. When Festinger moved into his last phase on a long journey of discovery, which took him from statistics to social psychology to perception and finally to archeology in support of his masterful book *The Human Legacy* (1983), Moscovici was very much there to encourage him – not just in conversation initially centered around Moscovici's trilogy on society and nature and moving subsequently to Festinger's ideas about the origins of modern civilization, but also concretely in facilitating Festinger's encounters with French archeologists and paleontologists as well as traveling with him to the Middle East. Their friendship was mutually enriching in marking their respective research efforts and innovations.

Many of Serge's research projects have endured the test of time. However, he transformed the discipline in the process and brought to it originality as well as purpose. Similarly to Festinger, he always said "The start of everything in social psychology is to have an idea that tackles important problems of our society." I may say that Serge was particularly gifted in sensing the pulse of culture and managed to address important problems of our time convincingly.

4 The "New School" days

In order to understand the totality of Moscovici's scholarship, it is important to include his fifteen years at the New School for Social Research in New York City during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s. He would typically spend the fall semester there, developing an idealized view of New York in the fall.

His time at the New School not only served as the background to the crystallization of his friendship with Festinger, but it also took him back to his historic roots as a Jewish scholar. He was now finding himself implanted in what had been the so-called "University in Exile" for so many European scholars fleeing Nazism and where Gestalt psychology survived. One cannot underestimate how important this historic context was for Serge as New York enabled him to re-create his Jewish identity.

While the Graduate Faculty building of the New School concentrated all of its activities on the first three floors, with Psychology taking up most of the third floor as the largest department of the school, Moscovici and Festinger shared an office on the fourth floor all the way at the end of the corridor. That particular floor was not a gathering space. Therefore you rarely saw anyone in the hallway. Festinger's old Perception Lab was located right next to that office, managed at the time by Arian Mack, still today the editor of Social Research. This is where I worked from 1987 onwards until I went to Paris two years later to pursue my DEA at the Ehess

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and then my doctorate with Serge. So I had a perfect vantage point during those two years to observe these two characters and their interaction with each other, often guided by their secretary Sallie Marx with whom I developed a close friendship at the time. Sallie Marx also helped Serge with translation, continuously revising his English manuscripts.

The two spent an incredible amount of time together in deep conversation. The Festingers, both Trudy and Leon, always organized Serge's housing until after Leon's death and Serge's loss of his favorite apartment in the St. Germain building on Greenwich Avenue. From that point on this task became my responsibility with Robby. In retrospect I have come to appreciate more and more how much those two influenced each other. American social psychologists, many of whom admired Festinger, have had a hard time accepting that the two were very close friends.

One of my striking remembrance was how differently Serge behaved in New York as opposed to Paris where I had a chance to observe him with his colleagues and students while doing my DEA in 1990 and 1991 at the Ehess and Paris 5. In New York Serge came to work almost every day, motivated not least by his ongoing interactions with Festinger. He was very available to students, often punctuated by walks in the Village and visits to coffee-houses for a break. I took two courses with him at the New School, allowing me to appreciate him as a teacher. His spoken English was tolerable if you managed to abstract from the thick accent. But there were many words he did not know how to translate – and he always had students, including me, finding the English equivalent for the French words he threw at the class.

The most interesting thing, however, was what happened after his class. Moscovici usually taught in the evening as was typically the case at the New School. His classes would typically end around 8pm. Each time, after class, a group of us – usually always the same students all of whom had developed a strong affection for him and interest in his work – would gather around him and then go out with him. There Serge would essentially continue his class of the day, going over key points of his lecture and expanding on them, most of it delving into his incredible reservoir of knowledge about the history of psychological thought or science. Every now and then he would ask us – a group of six to eight students – about the news or an aspect of New York, a city he was obviously deeply obsessed with. For me these evenings were unforgettable, both in terms of getting to know a great thinker and learning so much from him about social psychology.

One day, in February 1989, Festinger died. I went to Festinger's memorial a week later during which Serge openly wept. There was only Joe Miller and myself as students present at this event, and Serge came over asking me why I had come to the memorial, what my relationship had been with Festinger. I told him about my four-hour meeting with Festinger on the day of his death, and from then on he and I talked more regularly, in French, gradually fostering a friendship that would last until the day he died in November 2015.

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5 Concluding remarks

The role of friendships in academic work relations

Friendship is a relationship of mutual affection between people. It is a stronger form of interpersonal bond than an association. There are some clear characteristics present in these types of bond. They include affection; sympathy; empathy; honesty; mutual understanding and compassion; enjoyment of each other's company; trust; and the ability to be oneself, express one's feelings, and make mistakes without fear of judgment from the friend.

I don't know what I can say about friendship and work. It is something to think about. What is the meaning of friendship? It also take a specific significance in academia. For Serge Moscovici it was crucial. He often talked of the need to work with friends. He believed that professional work engender true friendship. As the line between professional and personal life become blurred, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because you spend more hours working together and talking to each other. In the process you crystallize that friendship.

Friendship is about trust, mutual engagement, and deep relationship. The loyalty created by this commitment creates space for disagreement. The benefits of such relationship can only be positive. So Michael Gazzaniga stated when he was in Paris, spending evenings with Leon Festinger, Serge Moscovici and David Premark smoking Camel cigarettes, playing endless backgammon, and consuming Scotch at an alarming rate.

I too value friendship with people who train you. My relationship with Serge had many phases. It went from teacher to thesis director, on to mentor and finally a friend so close that he almost was like a member of my family. My two children, Alexandre and Maxine, were always very curious in trying to understand Serge's relationship to us, asking us many times what Serge was for us as they attempted to verify if there was a family connection. Staying a few times with us in New York (and, believe or not, I even let him baby-sit my kids twice – the first time he spent four hours on the computer with Maxine trying to understand a 5-year old computer game called Freddy Fish, and the second time around he made a deal with Alexandre to buy from him a painting, showing a self-portrait of our son entitled "King Alexandre" which some of you may have seen upon your visits to Serge's place on rue d'Aligre.

I miss him dearly!

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