

# MENTALITY AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATION

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**Résumé :** Dans la culture académique, la nécessité d'un positionnement adéquat par rapport à la métaphore culturelle comme représentation fondamentale s'impose, comme partie du flux entre la réalité mentale et la réalité sociale. Nous avons besoin de méthodes de recherche qui, selon nous, peuvent servir nos objectifs. La compréhension des relations entre mentalité et représentation sociale nous conduit à la manière de construire et de recevoir des métaphores culturelles, reflétées dans la littérature. Cette approche oriente l'interprétation des textes vers les messages essentiels. C'est ainsi que nous pouvons apprécier le pouvoir d'influence d'une métaphore culturelle sur notre esprit. La mentalité reflète à la fois la pensée et l'action d'un homme réel, dans la dynamique de son héritage spirituel et culturel, dans le mouvement vivant des règles de vie reçues, dans le scénario existentiel de sa famille, de la nation dans laquelle il est né et du monde où il vit. La mentalité réunit l'homme intérieur et l'homme social. Elle projette le travail du monde extérieur sur l'intériorité de l'homme, mais surtout, elle montre la réaction personnelle de la conscience envers la société.

**Mots-clés :** mentalité, représentation sociale, métaphore culturelle.

In a Babel of critics, literary historians and literature teachers, the necessity of a proper positioning with respect to the *cultural metaphor* as fundamental *representation* is imposed, as part of the continuous flow between *mental reality* and *social reality*. We need research methods that we believe can serve our purposes. An understanding of the relationships between *mentality* and *social representation* leads us to the way of building and receiving cultural metaphors, reflected in *literature*. This approach directs the interpretation of the texts towards the essential messages. This is how we can appreciate the power of influence of a cultural metaphor on our mind.

The mentality reflects both the thinking and the action of a real man, in the dynamics of his spiritual and cultural heritage, in the living movement of the received rules of life, in the existential scenario of his family, of the nation in which he is born and of the world where he lives. Mentality brings together the inner man with the social man. It

projects the work of the outside world on man's interiority, but above all, it shows the personal reaction of consciousness towards society. Mentality means, therefore, the positioning of the person in the dynamics of the events he goes through, and the positioning creates internally and externally precisely the unique history of the person, as a cellular part of the history of his world. Mentality is simultaneously reaction to the event, emotion, and acquisition of the memory, the trace, the consequences of the reaction.

An integrative perspective on mentality does not yet exist. We cannot identify any tutelary model to follow closely. There are, however, particular models. I mention only three of the most original possible hypotheses and their rich lineage in Western culture. Max Weber (*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905), Serge Moscovici (*Social Influence and Social Change*, 1976; *Psychologie des minorités actives*, 1979; *Social Representations: Explorations in Social Psychology*, 2000) Erving Goffman (*Presentation of Self in Every Day Life*, 1957) and the psychosociological or anthropological schools that they generated can certainly inspire languages for reading the connection of the individual being with society.

Max Weber's logic of secularization and "disenchantment", then the valorization of the action and influence of minorities on the history of the majority - central theory in Moscovici's studies, but also the interpretation schemes proposed by Goffman with his "social dramaturgy" are sources of inspiration for a study in the imaginary of mentalities. On the other hand, we cannot forget the great triad that founded psychological schools and generated very influential currents of thought: Sigmund Freud, Adolf Adler and Carl Gustav Jung. However, if we are going to look for the metaphor and its creator, we must see in man the person, and not the individual (as part of a crowd), the memory of the creative person with a metaphorical view of reality, and less the unconscious or his social performance, his social biography.

Then, we come to see society as a world, with a history of autonomous people and a living memory of people. There the "rules", representations and "social dramaturgy", "roles" and "actors", the staging of each individual appearance are all just sequences of a much deeper, layered and dynamic content, subtly placed in the minds of individuals, but reflected in the texts, including literary ones, left by them. We intuit that Goffman's social dramaturgy, because we took it as an example, however useful in research, just like all psychosociologists' recipes, actually exclude the spirit and reduce the person to a game of social involvements and circulated information. To be clear, I bring a quote from Goffman's book, from the very beginning of the book, because sometimes a single essential phrase indicates the author's entire vision of things:

"When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude towards them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him." (Goffman, 1957: 7).

Pitirim Sorokin brings an impressive vision in *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1957/1985), a work that can inspire any interpretation of cultural metaphors, but which is very poorly integrated in contemporary theoretical and analytical thinking. Likewise, Ioan

Petru Culiănu, with his perspective on *intertextuality*, with his profoundly anti-psychoanalytic vision on the mental (*Journeys to the Beyond World, Mind Games*), personalizes the content of the mentality, of social representations, and leads to a personal dimension of the transmitted energy through cultural metaphor. All these readings legitimize the need to problematize mentality as a living text and as the power of the person's mind. We then identify openings towards the relationships between the memory of the *person* (who writes) and the fictional being (about whom it is written) with the historical and cultural context and intertext, in order to arrive at the *cultural metaphor*, as the core of this highly complicated fabric in its functionality.

Mentality represents *a personal* good, and not a social good. Mentality resides in the mind of the real man, not in the world in which he moves and in which he leaves traces and influence, through action, thought, reaction. And the densest spaces of mentality are metaphorical, because they unite the concrete with the *non-concrete*, the seen with the unseen, reason with the irrational. But mentality outside of at least one *canonical narrative* does not exist. The nuclear cell of any canonical narrative is the cultural metaphor. Of course, mentality operates in the social horizon, outside the person, and only its social-historical expression reveals it, discovers it and offers it to knowledge. The canonical narrative nourishes shapes and legitimates the mentality of the person. It keeps her permanently connected to her world. This is how the mentality represents, equally, the product of the person's mind and the known world, where the person is born, grows, evolves. But mentality does not stand outside man, it has no life outside him, but only in the unseen of his mind.

The nature of mentality, together with the nature of metaphor, is therefore and fortunately mysterious. Hard to define and hard to understand, just like the nature of the human mind. Both mentality and metaphor guide mystical-philosophical thinking and poetic thinking, but also dominant attitudes in theoretical-social thinking. The unseen content and mysterious fabric of mentality, especially its metaphorical spaces, is extremely generous in research. And the canonical narrative, on the contrary, has very accessible expressions, easily subject to analysis and interpretation, because it is located in canonical texts. The link between mentality and the canonical narrative is inseparable, complementary. The canonical narrative wants to produce mentality. And every person acquires and assumes his own mentality primarily thanks to the canonical narratives where his mind grows.

In order to highlight the living dynamics of consciousness in the literary text, the instrumentalization of this link – *mentality & canonical narrative* – is very productive, especially through the interpretation of cultural metaphors and the influence they generate. If we focus on the links between mentality and cultural metaphor, through the canonical narrative, as a living text of the knowing mind, we arrive at the living expression of the person's consciousness, of his encounter with the world, but also at the living participation of the person in the perpetuation, historicization and extinction of the known world. The meditation on mentality, as a text of the mind, at the interpenetration between man and the world through the formative canonical narrative/narratives, compels us to look for languages to reveal the content left by the person's consciousness in the unseen and influential fiber of the evocations, representations and fictions of literature, as a trace of the being, but also of the world from which it originates and which it carries in the core of its biography. Mentality means the inner positioning of man towards the world, revealed externally in everything he does, says and thinks. But any mentality is originally dependent

on the canonical narratives where it learned how to understand the world, existence, the person. And canonical narratives, circulating cultural metaphors for legitimation or de-legitimization, generate social representations.

Representation would be 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.

Literature, story, poetry, theater - art, in general, helps us a lot to get closer to this amazing process and, fortunately, impossible to know in detail. Also, in art and through art we practice the knowledge of this dynamic most freely. That’s why the representation is not reduced to the image or the idea, it includes them in 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. The most complex representation is the *metaphor*, as a form of transporting the mind from a close plane to a less predictable one. Communication becomes possible through representation, 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 completed by a *non-mimetic* economy, specific to *metaphor* and 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 person 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 alterity to which the personal self is constantly related, whether it is another person 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 personal subject and the social subject. The person himself is never completely alone, just as he is never completely consumed by social otherness. 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 or competition, never exhausted, from the birth to the death of the person, translated through victories and defeats on one side and the other, through negotiation and truce, through collaboration and incompatibility, through adaptation to the social reality and the loneliness of the person 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 a major place of birth and reflection of the mentality. 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 person, 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. One of the major sources of social representations most influential to the human mind is cultural metaphor. During the use of social representations, the public and private spaces are populated with beings, with heroes and anonymous 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 1970s, 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. In the last decades, numerous psychosociologists and sociologists use social representations in the study of the origin of attitudes, prejudices and discriminations towards any type of minority, the development of racist ideology and xenophobia, intergroup relations, etc.

The function of the cultural metaphor in this entire theoretical construction is not valued by Moscovici's sociology. But, the energy of the cultural metaphor manifests itself precisely in the mechanisms of *objectification* and *anchoring* of social representations, which the metaphor generates, because it is the dynamic cell, primarily of the canonical narratives from which we feed our personal mentality. The hermeneutics of the cultural metaphor, along the proposed route – mentality, canonical narrative, social representation – can be strengthened by associating the concept of intertextuality. The concept was invented by Julia Kristeva in 1966 and then, in the 1980s, it attracted the attention of anthropologists and researches in the history of religions, becoming, at the same time, a kind of emblematic springboard for postmodernist literature.

How does *intertextuality* help us if we want to highlight the mentality of the person and his world, reflected in literature, in the functionality of the cultural metaphor? In the intertextual relationship, the relationships are not of subordination, because the two or more sign systems entered in the same cultural space, they simply coexist thanks to biunivocal relations. Intertextuality thus reveals the simultaneous or paradigmatic communication of sign systems. If we take a step back from the intertextual theory, we understand almost spontaneously that any mental space and any cultural space is an intertext, that we live intertextually, that the world itself is a continuous intertext, as the postmoderns have already demonstrated. Mentality, be it social, economic, religious or political, aesthetic or familial acts as a dynamic intertextual structure. The core of this moving texture is again – the cultural

metaphor. For Culianu, intertextuality is a mental phenomenon that means transmission and that uses more unwritten “texts” than written texts:

“All previous experiences seem to converge and deeply influence what we consider to be a new, fresh experience. This convergence occurs especially below the threshold of consciousness and involves a mental synthesis of several elements, an active processing of the new event, which is not a simple repetition of something from the past. [...] ...historians conclude that transmission is based on texts. They would be surprised to learn that the explanation is a simpler one, unexplored by their methods: people think, and if they have a model for their thinking, they give rise to predictable ideas from the start.” (Culianu, 1994: 40).

Culianu rejects the hypothesis that the transmission of information and cognitions can be done genetically, just as he opposes the idea that the collective unconscious would have a cognitive basis, ensuring the transmission of sign systems through what the theory developed by Carl Gustav Jung calls the *archetype*. The explanation of the transmission of sign systems can be found, according to Culianu, only in the cultural tradition. The perpetuation of the same beliefs, the same ways of thinking about death, life, the Divinity, the same behaviors and ritual practices, over extensive cultural areas and over thousands of years has been possible because it does not depend on the complete transmission of sets of norms and ideas. Culianu’s hypothesis is that “...a simple set of rules would generate similar results in people’s minds over a virtually infinite period of time.” (Culianu 1994: 40).

We adhere to Culianu’s hypothesis and see it acting especially through the transmission of religious practices and beliefs in fundamental stories. Intertextuality thus unexpectedly acquires a syntagmatic character and a strong historical dimension. It explains how, here, an education without written texts, despite wars, long-lasting conflicts, beyond major socio-historical ruptures, through the transmission of stories that heroically legitimize a minimal set of moral rules (about man, life, death, time, etc.), ensured continuity by preserving an inherited pattern. And the moral energy that gives life to these legitimizing stories is provided by the cultural metaphor on which each of them is based. Social representations associate, collaborate, intersect. Any segment of mental reality, any sequence of social reality is the result of the intersection of a number of voices and multiple “textual” interventions of personal subjects and social subjects, combined in a unified semantic space. The mentality of the person, but also of the community of that belong, are the result of the collaboration of the voices of countless historical ages and as many worlds that have disappeared, but are still present, through representation, thought, idea, principle. The story, the poetry, the theater – in literature reflect in unique discourses precisely this human dynamic set both during historically, as well as in unseen, inner time.

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