

## Psychosocial approach to the masses: The debate between Serge Moscovici and Pierre Bourdieu and contributions to education

*Abordagem psicossocial das massas: o debate entre Serge Moscovici e Pierre Bourdieu e contribuições para a educação*

*Approche psychosociale des masses: le débat entre Serge Moscovici et Pierre Bourdieu et contributions à l'éducation*

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### ABSTRACT

In Brazil, the problem of the masses has been little addressed in social psychology, which tends to prioritize more the study of small groups or organizations. The actions of social movements, especially those of multitudes without a determined leadership, have increasingly called attention, which puts the phenomenon of the masses and, above all, of their management in focus. Given this perspective, this article aims to present the debate that took place between Serge Moscovici and Pierre Bourdieu at the Maison de la Radio France, in 1982, regarding the book published by Moscovici entitled "*L'âge des foules: un traité historique de Psychologie des Masses*" seeking contributions to education. It presents the discussion of the concept of "masses" held by Moscovici (1981) and, subsequently, problematizes some points of the debate between the two authors who, believe, can contribute to think challenges of the current Brazilian educational context from a psychosocial perspective.

**Keywords:** Masses. Crowds. Serge Moscovici. Pierre Bourdieu. Education.

## RESUMO

*No Brasil, a problemática das massas tem sido pouco abordada na psicologia social, que tende a priorizar mais o estudo de pequenos grupos ou de organizações. As ações de movimentos sociais, principalmente as de multidões sem uma liderança determinada, têm chamado cada vez mais a atenção, o que coloca o fenômeno das massas e, sobretudo, de sua gestão, em foco. Diante dessa perspectiva, esse artigo tem, como objetivo, apresentar o debate ocorrido entre Serge Moscovici e Pierre Bourdieu na Maison de la Radio France, em 1982, a propósito do livro publicado por Moscovici intitulado "L'âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses", buscando contribuições para a educação. Apresenta a discussão do conceito de "massas" realizada por Moscovici (1981) e, na sequência, problematiza alguns pontos do debate entre os dois autores que podem contribuir para se pensar desafios do atual contexto educacional brasileiro a partir de uma perspectiva psicossocial.*

**Palavras-chave:** Massas. Multidões. Serge Moscovici. Pierre Bourdieu. Educação.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Au Brésil, la problématique des masses a été peu abordée dans la psychologie sociale, qui tend à privilégier davantage l'étude de petits groupes ou d'organisations. Les actions des mouvements sociaux, surtout celles des foules sans direction déterminée, ont de plus en plus attiré l'attention, ce qui met le phénomène des masses et, surtout, de leur gestion au centre. Dans cette perspective, cet article vise à présenter le débat qui s'est déroulé entre Serge Moscovici et Pierre Bourdieu à la Maison de la Radio France en 1982 à propos du livre publié par Moscovici et intitulé "L'âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses" cherchant des contributions à l'éducation. Nous présentons la discussion sur le concept de "masses" menée par Moscovici (1981) et, par la suite, nous soulevons certains points du débat entre les deux auteurs qui, nous croyons, peuvent contribuer à penser les défis du contexte éducatif brésilien actuel d'un point de vue psychosocial.*

**Mots-clé:** Masses. Foules. Serge Moscovici. Pierre Bourdieu. Éducation.

## Introduction <sup>1</sup>

"Existe un misterio de las masas"<sup>2</sup>. (MOSCOVICI, 1993, p. 16)

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<sup>1</sup> Writing this text was made possible thanks to the legacy of our colleague and friend Moisés Domingos Sobrinho, who generously provided us with the audio recording and transcription of the debate between Pierre Bourdieu and Serge Moscovici, which took place at Maison de la Radio France, in 1982. This article came from this material, so it is based on the act of solidarity of this dear person who left us in 2021, without having time, himself, to write about the classic debate between two authors who were his contemporaries and professors at the Ecole de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), in Paris (France). We acknowledge and pay tribute to him.

<sup>2</sup> "There is a mystery in the masses" (Our translation).

This article has its origin in the debate that took place, in 1982, in the Maison de la Radio France, on the then recently released book by Serge Moscovici called *L'âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses*<sup>3</sup>, and which had Pierre Bourdieu as the debater. Even if it were not for the theme, which is so current and, in many ways, to this day little explored, in and of itself the meeting between the two great social thinkers would already have sufficed to spark a range of discussions.

Convergences between the studies of Pierre Bourdieu and Serge Moscovici have been proposed by authors such as Abdalla (2013, 2019), Abdalla and Villas Bôas (2018), Domingos Sobrinho (2016, 2019), Domingos Sobrinho and Lira (2019), Campos and Lima (2015, 2017, 2018), Lima and Campos (2015a, 2015b), and Jesuíno (2018). While they seek to defend their respective areas of knowledge (Bourdieu, in sociology, and Moscovici, in social psychology), often in environments of academic struggle, there is a common point in their work: The transcendence of the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy in the relationship between individuals and society (LIMA; CAMPOS, 2015a). Jesuíno (2018, p. 52) refers to a constructivist consensus, leading the authors “[...] to give more emphasis to the structuring structure, as will be the case of SM [Serge Moscovici] in the wake of Jean Piaget, and others, like PB [Pierre Bourdieu], who stressed the structured structure.”

Jesuíno (2018) highlights the proximity between sociology and social psychology and situates Moscovici's and Bourdieu's ideas in the triangular dynamics that make up the natural sciences, the social sciences, and philosophy. The author refers to Moscovici's epistemic triangle, ego-object-alter, as the core of social psychology, as alter could be another person, a group, or an idea, including in that the pursuit of meanings. Insofar as Bourdieu is concerned, Jesuíno (2018) proposes, as a triangular metaphor, the field-habitus-capital triad, although it was not explained by Bourdieu, habitus being a symbolic instance between field and capital. In other words, Moscovici and Bourdieu are both interested in how individuals construct meaning in social contexts. According to Jesuíno (2018), the social sciences, as mediators, can provide a balance between the unstable triangle formed with philosophy and the natural sciences. As such, he sees the complementarity between the works of Bourdieu and Moscovici as a significant contribution.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Age of the Crowd: A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology” (Our translation).

While today we recognize similarities and complementarity between the two authors, the 1982 debate can be seen more as a “clash,” a combat, in which each seeks to defend the place of their fields of knowledge. At the heart of the discussions, Moscovici’s book *L’âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses*, published by Fayard in 1981, allowed the authors to expose agreements and disagreements – in fact, more disagreements –, which also shed light on the relationship there was between social psychology and sociology at the time.

With this background in mind, this article endeavors to present a few elements of this dialogue that, after more than 40 years, still remain little known to the public at large, especially Brazilians, aiming to recover the problematization about the theme of “masses” and “crowds” from a psychosocial perspective, as well as to indicate possible interfaces with education. To achieve this, we will first examine Moscovici’s (1981) discussion on the concept of “masses” as a means to then analyze a few points raised in the debate between him and Bourdieu as a way of pointing out important axes of discussion that, we believe, can contribute to reflecting on the challenges faced by the current Brazilian educational context.

## L’âge des foules of Moscovici: A few notes

*“L’âge où nous entrons sera véritablement l’ère des foules.”*<sup>4</sup> (LE BON, 1895)

Although crowds were not a creation of the 19th century, it was toward the end of that century, and in the early 20th century, that different theorists associated with the field of sociology and psychology began to study the masses and analyze communes and labor strikes aiming to gain an understanding of collective behavior, specifically of how psychic factors affect social behavior in groups.

According to Silva (2004), the crowd phenomenon emerges in this context and goes on to be seen as a threat to the maintenance of social balance, and “social” becomes an object of knowledge largely due to the contradictions inherent in the new norms of the industrial society.

During this period, there was an understanding that the social body was formed, on one hand, by an anonymous mass, and, on the other, by minorities (leaders) who

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<sup>4</sup> “The age we are entering will truly be the age of the crowds” (Our translation).

guided collective behavior. Therefore, it is not without reason that, at the time, psychology was specifically interested in identifying the psychological mechanisms that would guarantee the dominance of minorities over masses, the process by which the leader is established as such, and the modes by which such minority is produced. Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde, and Sigmund Freud, for example, studied this.

There have been many appropriations, transformations, and inaccuracies involving the concepts of mass and crowd since then. As indicated by Jesus (2013, p. 496),

examples are found in the French '*foule*,' used by Gustave Le Bon (1954) in his seminal study of mass behavior titled '*Psychologie des Foules*,' published in 1895; in the English word '*group*' that McDougall (1920) used in '*The Group Mind*,' and in the German '*masse*,' appropriated by Freud (1921/1991) in '*Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*,' a fundamental study for critiquing mass culture and its relationship with the popularization of the fascist ideology, identified by Adorno (1951/2006).

Coblence (2011) asserts that Freud's work, *Massenpsychologie*, was first translated into French by a team coordinated by Jean Laplanche, who chose to translate *masse* (mass) as *foule* (crowd). To the author, this choice was due to the fact that Freud was inspired by Gustave Le Bon's *La psychologie des foules*, a book translated into German under the title *Psychologie der Massen*, and Freud's use of the word *masse* to describe the characteristics of what Le Bon called *foule*.

The author also points out that a different choice was made in a translation the same team did ten years later, in which *masse* (in German) was translated as *masse* (in French). She states that this turning of the term "multitude" to "mass," in literature and vocabulary, can be considered an indicator that it is no longer the same phenomenon or the same apprehension (COBLENCE, 2011). This aspect does not go unnoticed by Moscovici, who gave his 1981 book the suggestive title *L'âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses*.

To Moscovici (1993), the theses of Le Bon, Tarde, and Freud had to be recovered to understand the society of the time, dominated by a minority of leaders: Mao, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Fidel... However, it is not his intention to expose the theories of each of the three theorists, rather to formulate a theory based on a joint reconstruction of the system of mass psychology that, in his opinion, the three authors had built together. In the early 20th century, he writes, people believed in the victory of the mass movements, and, towards the end of that same century, we are captives of those who lead them: "*Uno tras*

*otro, los trastornos sociales que han sacudido a la mayoría de los países del mundo han ido a dar a un régimen que tenía al frente un conductor de hombres prestigioso*<sup>5</sup> (MOSCOVICI, 1993, p. 9).

While explaining the reasons for the birth of mass psychology, Moscovici (1993) describes crowds, leaders, and the predominant method of governing them, which, he says, was popularized through advertising. In reconstructing this history, Moscovici relied, fundamentally, on the work of Le Bon, who, in his opinion, analyzed masses as elements of social order, seeking to describe and characterize them, above all, through the concept of “suggestible,” derived from the process of hypnotic suggestion, so as to understand how masses obey minorities. To do so, Moscovici (1993) emphasized Le Bon’s notion of prestige to explain this capacity for domination.

In the prevailing view of the late 19th century, the *foule* was formed by the popular classes qualified as potentially “dangerous,” because they lacked judgment and restrains on emotional exposure, something that could explain, among other things, the transformation of an individual when inside them. In his classic work on mass psychology, Le Bon (1981) argues that individuals, when gathered in agglomerations, lose their personal characteristics and are taken by “[...] a kind of collective soul [...] that makes them feel, think, and act completely differently from how they would separately” (p. 30). To him, it is the victory of a collective mentality over individual thinking (GRAUMANN; KRUSE, 1986).

In keeping with the ideas of the time that advocated the free, conscious, and autonomous individual as a fundamental value, Le Bon (1981) argued that the only way to avoid the chaos arising from the rule of the masses is to submit them to a leader who will hypnotize them and dominate them. Roosevelt, Mussolini, and Hitler are said to have read Le Bon, but this has not been confirmed. In any case, because Le Bon seeks to understand the masses so that it may be possible to have more control over them, Moscovici (1993) wrote that this author “[...] *se ve en la posición de un Maquiavelo de las sociedades de masas*”<sup>6</sup> (p. 83), although it is an exaggeration to claim that these leaders’ actions directly reflect Le Bon’s ideas (THIEC, 1983).

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<sup>5</sup> “One after another, the social disturbances that shook most countries in the world culminated in a regime that had at its head a prestigious leader of men” (Our translation).

<sup>6</sup> “[...] sees himself in the position of a Machiavelli of mass societies” (Our translation).

As Thiec (1983) says, Le Bon was a neo-Macchiavellian and elitist thinker, whose ideas were based on a conservative liberal ideology that rejected the notion of equality between individuals, which, according to him, was already obsolete in the early 20th century. By advancing this argument, Thiec (1983) criticizes Moscovici for trying to show the relevance and legitimacy of Le Bon's thought in the context of the 1970s, making his study a fundamental element for the current understanding of mass psychology.

The chapters dedicated to reconstructing Freud's explanation of mass phenomena, which, according to Moscovici (1993), represented the synthesis and culmination of the work of his predecessors, indicate that, in his view, Freud has a much more critical view of Le Bon's ideas. By focusing on minorities, Freud replaces the hypothesis of hypnotic suggestion with the principle of identification, which has an element of love (THIEC, 1983), since a bond is established with the leader, "[...] *qui recompose ainsi une figure de père*"<sup>7</sup> (p. 122).

At this point, Moscovici (1981) refers to Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1988). Considering him a disciple of Sigmund Freud, Moscovici emphasizes that Reich will approach the roots of the psychology of the masses of fascism, basing it on the family and on the voluntary submission to a totalitarian power that would lead man to renounce his freedom and what is called "human rights."

Considering the years of crisis in Germany, between 1930 and 1933, Reich (1988) draws attention to the contradiction of a divided average worker and a middle-class individual, neither revolutionaries nor conservatives, whose psychic structures are the result of the social situation, which can lead to revolutionary acts and to submission to an authoritarian society, giving rise to the contradiction between a feeling of revolt and reactionary goals. Therefore, the author exposes the relationship between the economic structure and the psychological structure of the members of the masses, in which contradictions in the economy are rooted in the psychology of the oppressed masses that are based on sexual repression and submission to patriarchy. The irrational ideas of the masses cannot, therefore, be explained by socioeconomic aspects alone. The understanding of the fascist wave of the time needed, therefore, to consider this reality of contradictions (REICH, 1988).

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7 "Who thus recomposes a father figure" (Our translation).

While providing a concept of "masses" connected to the late 19th century, Moscovici (1981) emphasizes that Reich will bring up fundamental questions about leaders, for example: How is it possible for someone like Hitler to rule over millions of people? And seeks, through mass psychology, to understand Hitler and the Nazi movement. Moscovici himself (1981), however, does not consider that Hitler assimilated this psychology to create his movement and become Hitler. Although Reich supports aspects, to a certain extent defended by Le Bon, Tarde and Freud, Moscovici (1981) criticizes this author's emphasis on the psychic constitution of the German masses.

In the context of this discussion, Moscovici (1981) points out that, although Freud offered a more viable explanation for mass dominance, "prestige," identified by Le Bon as a necessary component for the minority, is still unclear. In this attempt, Moscovici (1993) approaches the Weberian concept of "charisma," considering it, in some passages, as synonymous with "prestige:" *"Entre las dos nociones [prestigio e carisma], no existe diferencia esencial, como no sea que el carisma tiene un aspecto más profético y el prestigio un aspecto más afectivo que lo coloca en el origen de toda forma de poder"*<sup>8</sup> (p. 369).

Thiec (1983) thinks that Moscovici misinterpreted the Weberian conception because he uses it very lightly. For example, to Thiec (1983), while Le Bon's notion of "prestige" is vague, Weber constructs his concept of "charisma" quite precisely, and the difference between these two notions would lie precisely in the idea of duration, because, to Weber, charisma was an element limited in time, since it would tend to disappear after domination was assured through routinization, rationalization, or traditionalization. Contrary, therefore, to Le Bon's idea of prestige, in which domination is maintained in time despite routinization.

As a conclusion, the author (1983) mentions that Moscovici's intention to resurrect mass psychology is severely undermined: On the one hand, because most of his discussion focuses on minorities, and the issue of leadership is more predominant here than the issue of the masses themselves; and, on the other hand, because he ends up becoming a direct heir of Le Bon's ideas.

It is possible to perceive that the work of Moscovici (1981) on the psychology of the masses has provoked intense discussions since its publication, as evidenced by the

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<sup>8</sup> "There is no essential difference between the two notions [prestige and charisma], except that charisma has a more prophetic aspect, while prestige has a more affective aspect that places it at the origin of all forms of power" (Our translation).



emblematic debate with Pierre Bourdieu, in the *Maison de la Radio France*, in which Bourdieu expresses criticism of the work, as will be explained below.

## Debate between Serge Moscovici and Pierre Bourdieu: A few elements

In this section, we will present a few aspects of the debate between Moscovici and Bourdieu, in the *Maison de la Radio France*, which lasted about an hour. Moscovici states right from the start that it is a controversial topic, since it touches on values, passions, and above all, the wounds of recent history. We will examine some of Bourdieu's criticisms, answered by Moscovici, and we will emphasize the themes that constitute points of reflection in this article: Masses and beliefs.

The following critical point was present throughout the debate: What is mass, a concept with so many meanings, and what does it represent? To Moscovici, investigating the problem of "the age of crowds" implies resuming several studies, fragmented writings, reconstituting something with a relatively coherent system, based on a science, or quasi-science, which would be the psychology of the masses, which has as its backdrop the question: What does an individual do in front of the masses? Referring to his book, Moscovici approaches the mass issue from three perspectives: Its definition, its political dimension, and the history of the social sciences.

In the first, he highlights changes in behaviors and states of consciousness when individuals are not alone. He notes that, in a mass, people act according to their affections and emotions, their thoughts and movements take on an extreme nature, and masses may behave irrationally. As a result, people abandon their rational mechanisms, their habitual judgments, and what could be called "unconscious phenomena" take place. In this sense, when individuals are together, they identify with each other and invest almost passionately in an idea or in the leader who represents that idea.

The second aspect, continues Moscovici, is political, in the sense that mass psychology indicates the importance of considering a psychology directed at people in groups, in order to govern collectivities. When politics is done through the mobilization of the masses, this psychology exposes political actions. The author begins from the hypnotist/hypnotized model: The hypnotized masses and the command strategies of hypnosis convey ideas, languages, penetrate, in practice, through mechanisms that are not

rational argumentation. The author recalls that mass psychology penetrated not only the practices of Nazi and fascist movements, but also that of other social movements.

The third perspective is that of the history of the social sciences, and Moscovici refers to resistance and criticism when mass psychology emerged. To the author, this did not prevent it, through anomie, from penetrating the sociological model. However, he continues, the mass psychology issue in French social science is difficult, as is the whole of psychology in the system of ideas and the French university, something that would deserve a separate chapter. Moscovici says that mass psychology is an important science because it makes history.

After Moscovici's presented these three aspects of the book, Bourdieu began his comments with a provocation, questioning whether mass psychology is a science or a mythology with a scientific aspect, stating he believed in the latter. To the author, mythology with a scientific aspect helps to explain its social effectiveness, and this is how he develops his criticism: Is the social effectiveness attributed to this "theory" not supported by the fact that it is a myth spontaneously created by producers of a certain historical conjuncture? According to Bourdieu, theories appear associated with certain moments of time, with socially situated characters, producing certain types of discourses about the social world. Despite their lack of proof value, mythologies are important indicators for understanding what the author calls the "social ghost:" Each person has an idea of the social world, and needs to represent the social world in order to live, to defend their position and interests, and to justify their existence, which is the great function of ideology.

Bourdieu believes mass psychology is much more an object of the social sciences than a social science, even posing an obstacle to the construction of a social science. It is a first form of sociology. The author states that, if French sociology resisted recovering certain themes, such as anomie, it was because it had to exist as a rational science against the temptation to integrate mythological visions into scientific discourse. In the context of these discussions, the author raises questions about mass psychology: a) is it an instrument of knowledge of the social world or a social mythology?; b) is it possible to scientifically decide what is true and what is false? Mythologies are not falsifiable, they are irrefutable, which explains their eternal rebirth; c) does this collective ghost that is always reborn and present itself as science convince? The author asserts that if ideology is a well-founded error, in this phantasmatic discourse, there may be a loss of truth.

In response, Moscovici states that when these problems are addressed, there are not only epistemological difficulties, but difficulties of belief, touching on what can be called politics, or human nature. Thus, the author does not necessarily feel obliged to defend the scientificity of crowd psychology. During the debate, he says he is not bothered by the fact that science includes mythology. He explains that every social science can be an object of science and comments on aspects raised by Bourdieu, such as: a) mass psychology was born in France, after the Paris Commune, but it cannot be forgotten that the entire French 19th century was busy with two issues: Revolution and order. Mass psychology was born out of an inspiration of order; b) what matters is the paradigm and the materials from which it originated. The description of “mass” is what happened during the French Revolution.

Bourdieu responds that, even today, these manipulated masses no longer exist. On the contrary, there are masses that are much more organized, suited, have more content in their objectives, and are much more rationalized. The authors thus enter into a debate on the issue of the rationality/irrationality of the masses. Moscovici states that the first field of study to look at the issue of mass organization, taking the Church and the Armed Forces, was mass psychology, even before sociology. The author believes that the central issue is not an irrational organization, but the way in which this rational organization manages to mobilize, integrate, and promote the masses. To the author, this is a very hybrid theory. On the one hand, we refer to this very organized rationality, and, on the other, to the idea of the spontaneity of revolt as a reaction to economic data. The ideological phenomenon, says the author, plays an important role in mobilization.

At this point, Bourdieu recognizes that Moscovici brings up a real problem: That of the effectiveness of leaders. He thinks, however, that crowd psychology is displaced, and the symbolic effectiveness lies in people acting at a distance, without violence. By emphasizing psychological mechanisms, the author aims to resolve a very fundamental problem, which is the role belief plays in politics. That is, reintroducing the problem of belief is a break with this tradition.

The debate between the authors, at this moment, focuses on belief. Moscovici states that if there is a discipline that has belief as its object of study, it is exactly mass psychology, because what defines a mass is not numbers, but the unity of their beliefs. Bourdieu responds that a common belief is built, and that presupposes an education, for years. To him, it is not by means of an instantaneous fluctuation in the crowds that a

common belief is created. The author claims that the main obstacle to scientific construction are mythologies that contain a little bit of truth. In relation to belief in politics, there is a difficult problem: Is there a rational knowledge of this form of irrationality? Is there a rational knowledge of belief? Is there a logic of political chemistry? The author says that in order to base a belief on its own prestige, on its own symbolic value, it is necessary to understand these issues.

Moscovici argues that there are people who have acted politically, and for whom the object is the mass problem. To Bourdieu, this is a false representation of politics because the social history of important events in politics, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social history of worker movements, of communist regimes, shows that the historical issue is to know how certain types of people, called leaders, have the ability to manipulate organizations rather than masses. In other words, how these people know how to manipulate small groups, say the points of order in assemblies, write motions, make coups. In addition, knowing how these people, with the ability to manipulate small groups, manipulators of apparatuses, are selected, formed, and succeed. The author believes that once they have ascended into their world of mass movements, there is no need for hypnotism.

Moscovici answers with this question: How do you reach the elite? Once at the top, you manipulate. The author asserts that there is precisely something that psychosocial analysis shows, with regard to a certain number of characters, of social movements, and announces that what is at stake is not manipulation. On the contrary, it is the ability to be immersed in a belief, in an idea of sharing and arousing in others what they want. The bureaucratic agent is unable to deal with bureaucracy. Bureaucracy often only follows leaders. Moscovici argues that, in this respect, sociology has shrunk the problem and separated politics from culture. When we talk about belief, we talk about the combination of politics and culture. And Moscovici argues that neither sociology nor historians are concerned with this.

Bourdieu mentions that, in one respect, he agrees with Moscovici: Do you have to believe to make people believe? Bourdieu says that in certain cases, not universally, there is a division of the political work in which there are people who believe and make believe, and others who do not believe and use those who make believe to make believe that they believe, when they actually do not believe. For the author, sociology and social psychology serve the same purpose: To make the science of spontaneous social technology that social

agents use among themselves without even realizing it. A social science of spontaneous social technology that people use in companies, for example, to manipulate or defuse a labor strike. A social science of this technology would discover people who believe and whose symbolic efficacy resides in the fact that they believe, that they make people believe. It would also discover that there are manipulators. These are people who introduce a living knowledge in their daily political practice, a half spontaneous social psychology and social technology, that is, based of belief.

Moscovici states that blows, devices, and manipulation can only occur with a certain background, created by someone or a group, who constituted a group of people with a well defined belief, which is based on certain values, on certain ideals, and on living or dead characters.

While the debate between the authors explores a variety of topics, with several controversies, we can conclude this item with one subject on which they seem to agree: The relevance of beliefs in social life. Bourdieu draws attention to sociology's assumptions, which refer to divided societies, differentiated in sex, age, social class, which are generative principles constituting drives. For the author, it is not by chance that some do some things, and others do others. In Bourdieu's view, it is still necessary to make a social science of the conditions within which people are made and based on which they act. Moscovici maintains that the work of reflection and analysis in a serious situation, in a profound issue, is always incomplete. He stresses that he never denied that social and economic conditions intervene. However, it cannot be said that there is a general explanation. The author asserts that there is a lot of work to be done, and he says that there are people who are hypnotizable and others who are not, and that the theory does not address the issue.

In light of this debate, which evokes many reflections in sociology and social psychology, in addition to their convergences and divergences, we return to what seems to us to be central to the proposal of this article: To recover the notion of masses and the role of beliefs in this context in order to consider the current scenario of Brazilian education.

## The current relevance of the Moscovici-Bourdieu debate and its implications for the educational context

We begin with the first axis of discussion: The problem of the masses. In an article titled "*L'eclipse de la psychologie des foules*," Rouquette (2006) points out three main aspects that he asserts were decisive for social psychology, in general, to have put aside the theme of masses and crowds as an object of study.

The first one would be linked to a change in the conception of the historical process. If history is over, as Fukuyama (1992) argues, and if economies turn to liberalism and political systems turn to democracy, then it is no longer a project, but almost a "destiny," and, in this scenario, mass psychology would be obsolete. The second aspect stems, to a certain extent, from the first, since, according to Rouquette (2006), it is possible that the social psychology of the masses has been incorporated into common knowledge in accordance with the characteristics of our time: Mass communication, social, mass education. And, finally, the third aspect, it itself, or its object of study, would continue in other fields of action, such as political science or history.

Also, in the Brazilian context, the problem of the masses has been little addressed in the scope of social psychology, which is more concerned with the study of small groups and/or organizations. The actions of the social movements, in particular of crowds without a determined leadership, continue attracting attention, putting the mass phenomenon under the limelight. Although, as Jesus points out (2013, p. 494):

Masses require a different level of analysis. Crowds cannot be understood through the same spectrum of social movements, given their breadth and disconnection from the principles of affiliation typical of social movements. Using the same parameters to understand one and the other phenomenon leads to fallacious understandings about how human masses function.

In this direction, some studies, based mainly on the ideas of Allport, which were developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, have pointed to the behavior of the masses as a product of the individuals' purposes, and not as a product of the mass (JESUS, 2013).

These new interpretations of mass psychology led to other ways of understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the notion of crowd, understood by Le Bon as a "'unit in grouping' (crowd-mass), begins to be understood in a different way, as a 'multiplicity in dispersion' (crowd-power), capable of generating unique alternatives to the capitalist logic" (CAIAFFO et al., 2007, p. 28).

The problematizations of Hardt and Negri (2004) point in this direction, since they understand crowds as a constitutive power, which produces a tension that can lead to a transformation of the *status quo*:

To develop 'wise' masses, that is, people who perform well in decision-making, there must be decentralization in the use of information, freedom in individual access to information, independence to form individual opinions, and the ability to translate individual judgments in collective decisions (JESUS, 2013, p. 498).

Jesus (2013, p. 501) also indicates that “[...] one of the biggest challenges is to understand if the mass influences individuals, if collective action is the outcome of individual decisions, or if such influences occur concomitantly.” In the wake of this thought, and considering the main aspects developed so far from the debate between Moscovici and Bourdieu on *L'âge des foules: un traité historique de psychologie des masses* (MOSCOVICI, 1981), we pose the following questions: How could the problem of masses influence the field of Brazilian education, affected, in recent times, by a pandemic and by a social and political context of displacements, setbacks, and ruptures? And to what extent could education be both contributing to or influencing collective action in the sense of promoting “beliefs,” a “symbolic effectiveness,” or both, that would foster “wise masses” toward “unique alternatives” to this neoliberal logic impregnated in our current society?

Therefore, we move on to the second axis of discussion: The question of beliefs. One of the issues that seems central to the debate between Moscovici and Bourdieu is the reintroduction of the issue of belief, keeping in mind that Moscovici considers belief as an object of study in mass psychology, while Bourdieu emphasizes that belief is constructed, which, for this author, implies education.

To us, the problem of belief thus becomes fundamental. Toward this end, we discuss a few aspects pertaining to displacements, setbacks, and ruptures that redirected new ways of thinking and acting in the educational field within the context of the conditions we are facing every day. Among these aspects, we mention at least three that have been present in the history of education and have become beliefs for educational actors/agents: a) educational policies and their regulation and control norms; b) the possibilities of action and overcoming strategies in facing obstacles, and c) the effects of the influence of education in fostering beliefs in the subjects so that they understand the logic of the social world and their possibilities of exercising leadership in this sense.

With regard to the first aspect, we believe that educational policies play a significant role in the production of beliefs, especially when it comes to the non-democratic character they imprint on educational institutions, in their curricula and, above all, in pedagogical practices. In this sense, these policies, when translated into norms and rules for the functioning of schools and universities, end up either structuring and regulating or controlling these social spaces, the movements and groups of the subjects involved, or both, while provoking a wave of disappointments, insecurities, and contradictions that affect their practices, thus enhancing forms of conformism, on the one hand, and resistance, on the other.

We can say that current educational policies are also a result of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in August 2016, which had an impact on all sectors of civil society. Since then, according to the values and beliefs of the new managerialism, meritocracy, and of the entrepreneurial spirit, in tune with economic competitiveness, a strong crisis has unfolded in education and its ideals of democracy, justice, freedom, emancipation, cooperation, and solidarity. Also reinforced are the beliefs of effectiveness and efficiency, generated, for example, by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (BRASIL, 2017), among other resulting policies. These are technocratic policies, aligned exclusively to skills and competences, therefore to the privatist logic, putting public and private in opposition, which are developed under neoliberal premises, whose effects compromise the fight against inequality and injustice, reinforcing relations of uncertainty and of social exclusion (ABDALLA, 2021).

Thus, as Moscovici (2011b, p. 246) would say, it is a “[...] model of social influence,” which has the “creation of conflicts” as a “necessary condition.” And the field of education can (and should), in this sense, reveal these conflicts, question the rules of this game and, even further, establish the will to change them. And, from this perspective, it will be necessary to reveal that this logic, as Bourdieu (1998, p. 141) would say, “[...] seems to be founded on an order of 'competencies,' or, worse, 'intelligences'” (emphasis of the author), and that gives us a “[...] profound feeling of insecurity and uncertainty” (p. 141) about ourselves and the future to be faced.

With this in mind, perhaps one of the roles of education, if it wants to support “wiser” “masses,” according to Jesus (2013), would be to seek to defend “[...] real solidarity to those who today fight to change society” (BOURDIEU, 1998, p. 41). And that this struggle can, as announced by Bourdieu (1998, p. 41), “[...] effectively combat technocracy,



both national and international, facing it in its key terrain, that of science [...].” Furthermore, it will also be necessary to respect “[...] more the men and the realities with which they are confronted” (BOURDIEU, 1998, p. 41). Therefore, it is necessary, to paraphrase Bourdieu (1998, p. 141), to always be in “incessant attention” and “permanent reinvention.”

Considering these reflections, the second aspect could certainly be related either to the forms or the strategies to face these current policies, or both. Action and overcoming strategies, which can also be translated into beliefs, because they create, in a way, a social alchemy (BOURDIEU, 2002) and guide spaces of possibilities (BOURDIEU, 1997a). Moscovici (2012, p. 426) asserts that these spaces could involve new beliefs, which would become “[...] a true ideal from which we can sometimes move away, but never become separate.”

Indeed, to move forward, despite the many obstacles, it will be necessary, as highlighted by Abdalla and Villas Bôas (2018, p. 17), to adopt an “epistemological stance” that can discuss a “[...] symbolic dimension of the social phenomena from a critical and destabilizing perspective.” This implies, on the one hand, analyzing the power processes that reinforce beliefs, which convey a kind of symbolic violence, placed in curricular programs, in training, and in learning proposals. And, on the other hand, from the apprehension of these logics imposed by the norms, develop strategies for action and overcome obstacles and challenges, so that alternatives are opened to also reflect on the logics of practice. These logics need to be reinforced by theoretical-methodological approaches that support the understanding of the reality of the social world, contributing, above all, “[...] to explain much of what happens in this world, and in particular, innumerable sufferings arising from the clash of interests, dispositions, and different lifestyles [...],” as Bourdieu teaches us (1997b, p. 12).

To achieve this, it will be necessary to understand “[...] the need for affirmation and social inclusion policies, as well as public investments, that facilitate the formation of a more pluralistic, a more democratic and, above all, of a fairer society.” (ABDALLA, 2021, p. 6). And to have strategies for action and overcoming that allow re-signifying and contextualizing the reality of students in training, enabling them to make choices and ethical decisions in the fight for acts of resistance against inequality and social exclusion and in the defense of a more democratic education and of socially referenced quality.

Finally, a third aspect, in line with the debate between Moscovici and Bourdieu, could address the “effects of influence” of education on the subjects involved, so that they can understand the logic of the social world. In addition, as the authors announce, it is also necessary to consider those who may (or may not) exercise leadership and create “[...] the conditions for a possible *social alchemy* and for the transubstantiation that it achieves” (BOURDIEU, 2002, p. 162, emphasis added). Or rather, reflect on the “magic of small groups” to which Bourdieu referred in his clash with Moscovici.

In the case of education, this “social alchemy” is in the hands of those who manage the social spaces of educational institutions, whether schools or universities. In other words, in the hands of a group of agents committed to the functioning of the educational field, especially managers and teachers, since, according to Bourdieu (2002, p. 162), it is they who mobilize “symbolic energy” and operations arising from it.

However, as Moscovici (2011a, p. 556) rightly indicates, it should be noted that: “[...] when material circumstances exert pressure on us, the meaning of this pressure and its results depend on the psychic operations through which we are able to select and internalize them.” What the author (2011a, p. 556) means is that: “These operations have a logic and exert a coercion on the symbols in which our interests and forces are expressed.” And, as he had already stated in his debate with Bourdieu, social and economic conditions intervene in the roles of leadership. All this is part of the process of social influence, which, to Moscovici (2011b, p. 116), “[...] implies tacit negotiations, the confrontation of points of view, and the possible search for a solution acceptable to all.”

If we consider these questions posed by Bourdieu (2002) and Moscovici (2011a), we once again note the influence and implications of educational policies in what we can consider as *democratic management* (or the belief we have in it). And, in this sense, we can highlight a few elements of analysis. The first one concerns the impacts of accountability policies, particularly in our public schools, with the intention of making “improvements.” This leads to changes in leadership practices, considering the vulnerability conditions of these schools and the performance of those who assume their “leadership,” or rather, the “school management.”

We realize, therefore, that, contrary to the belief of a “democratic management,” so publicized in the letters of the laws or in the social movements, or both, what we have is the expansion of regulatory and controlling practices that generate tactical behaviors of education professionals in the sense of teaching for assessment tests, focusing on certain

subjects in the curriculum, controlling the competences and skills regulated in educational policies, and introducing the logic of the market, whose concern is centered on the evaluation of results, disclosed in rankings, which are gaining more and more strength and external appreciation (BALL, 2003; DE LA VEGA RODRÍGUEZ, 2015; CANCINO; MONRROY, 2017; SOUZA, 2017).

On the other hand, as Moscovici (2005, p. 354) warns, in this communicative model or in this process of creating beliefs, there are “[...] two directions, through which knowledge circulates and is transformed: The first goes from science, philosophy, etc. toward common sense, while the second from common sense toward science and other forms of knowledge.” The author points out that, in the first case, we are talking about “innovation” and, in the second, we are dealing with either “conservation” or “compliance,” or both. These are questions that certainly involve the conduct of those who are managing schools and how they see, together with other subjects/agents, ways of provoking “spaces of possibilities” (BOURDIEU, 1997a).

Thus, Bourdieu (1997a, p. 65) asserts that: “[...] the power relations between the 'conservatives' and the 'innovators,' the orthodox and the heretics, the old and the 'new' (or the 'modern') depend heavily on the state of external struggles and the reinforcement that both can find outside...” (emphasis by the author). And, in this sense, we consider that education can foster beliefs toward new “ways to create, ways to invent” (BOURDIEU, 1997a, p. 65) to develop wise masses (JESUS, 2013). In other words, masses that can choose and make decisions in the collective “[...] toward safer, more established possibilities, or toward the most original possibilities among those that are already socially constituted, or even toward the possibility that must be created from nothing” (BOURDIEU, 1997a, p. 63).

However, we know that these bets are not that simple. And, once again, Moscovici (2011a, p. 93) helps us to reflect, when he states that: “It is difficult to express more emphatically the idea that while separated individuals weaken, lose confidence in their beliefs and in the signs that represent them, but once reunited they regain their original vigor.” There are many clashes to be made these days, so that we can make our “existence bearable” and make “creations of social alchemy” possible...

Indeed, more than ever it will be necessary for education to contribute to a permanent space for resistance in the struggle for a more democratic and fair society. This means to invest, collectively, in ways of denouncing the domination that occurs through

power relations. In view of these reflections, we still have a few more questions: How can we assume propositional resistance, even more so when thinking in terms of “mass?” What would be the ways to overcome this neoliberal logic in the representation of the social world experienced by educational agents/actors? How to outline new beliefs and/or a symbolic effectiveness so that the masses could be “wise” and transform the “relations of strength and meaning,” in the perspective of being, as mentioned by Bourdieu (1998, p. 19), “[...] capable of mobilizing wills, without mystifying consciences?”

The concerns raised here remind us of Moscovici’s ideas (2011a, p. 516): “We understand, then, that a domination that seems to be brutal and repressive to those who position themselves from a legal point of view seems legitimate if we consider it from the viewpoint of the belief that it inspires in the masses.” However, as he teaches us: “Whatever happens, it is always good to look at the situation head-on” (MOSCOVICI, 2011a, p. 523).

Resuming, therefore, the dialogue, or rather, the clash between Moscovici and Bourdieu, we seek to summarize the *belief* discussed by these authors and considered herein as an essential element for translating the interests at stake, when thinking of a psychosocial approach to the masses today and its impact on education. On the one hand, Bourdieu (2002, p. 25) would be defending that these interests produce beliefs in the “[...] space of struggle for the monopoly of consecration power [...]”, and even determine “[...] what is possible and impossible to do or think at a given moment in time, in a given field” (BOURDIEU, 1997a, p. 63). And, on the other hand, Moscovici (2011a, p. 176) would instigate us with more questions on this topic: “Where does our strength to believe and act in common come from? Why is there a conformity to norms and a deviation that puts them in check?”

It seems to us that these are concerns that haunt us in this psychosocial approach of the masses. We believe, therefore, that education can contribute to elucidate them, if it can be prioritized as a right of all and for all.

## Concluding Remarks

This article was intended to shed light on some elements of the debate on the mass phenomenon that took place between Moscovici and Bourdieu in 1982, in order to reflect on their interfaces with education in times of uncertainty and great challenges. Times that

demand a social construction of beliefs, which seems to be a key and structuring theme of the discussions between these authors, and which is also present in the studies of social psychology and sociology.

In view of the elements of the theoretical debate mentioned here, we seek to reflect on aspects that can contribute to advancing toward a psychosocial approach to the masses with impact on the current educational context. If we consider the Brazilian context since the rise of Jair Bolsonaro, which culminated in his election as President in 2018, a point that draws our attention in the 1982 discussion between Moscovici and Bourdieu is the problem of belief.

Moscovici emphasizes the belief in politics within the framework of a psychology directed at people and groups to govern collectivities, highlighting the relevance of the relationship between politics and culture. Bourdieu, although criticizing its scientificity, highlights the effectiveness of mass psychology, mainly symbolic, as long as common beliefs are found, whose symbolic value is related to particular dispositions, associated with social and economic conditions. Although generically, the author brings education to the center of the discussion by stating that the construction of common beliefs presupposes an education for several years.

We are not interested in entering into the debate on the scientificity of mass psychology, a topic that seemed central to the discussion between Bourdieu and Moscovici in *Maison de la Radio France*, although it is clear that Moscovici defends a psychology of the masses within the scope of social psychology, while Bourdieu takes a critical position based on sociology. Resuming this discussion, after 40 years, seemed relevant in the sense of approaching beliefs that are at the base of a social psychology of the masses, a theme problematized by the two authors. In this article, we present a few clues for reflections that may encourage new studies and theoretical connections between beliefs and masses, further enhancing our understanding of educational issues today.

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