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**An award that honours us all: Serge Moscovici and the Balzan Foundation**

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Be they musicians, dancers or painters, if they have the good fortune in life to find one, most artists choose their own paths with the help of a mentor. Not everyone is so lucky, even if most have at some point been involved with teachers and schools. Therefore, each artist acquires the habit of organizing his or her curriculum vitae by proudly citing the teachers who were responsible for initiating them into their particular art or for refining that work, play and passion that is the artist's profession.

There is an on-going transformation of intellectual work in academia from a close and face-to-face apprenticeship with more or less important and authoritative mentors to a system of impersonal and diffused networking in which the quality of exchanges is not always equal to their quantity. This, in a way, has contributed to the erosion of the artisan apprenticeship tradition as well the tradition of publicly recognizing one's own educational debts to one's mentors, if fortunate enough to have had them.

Our entire scientific community can be proud to have had a very special mentor. One who, because of his scientific and political passion for movements as a breeding ground for human relations, is open to the modern logic of réseaux. On this theme, I refer you to *Penser la vie, le social, la nature. Mélanges en l'honneur de Serge Moscovici* edited by Fabrice Buschini and Nikos Kalamalikis in *Réseaux de relation/Human Network, Communautés de pensée/Communities of thoughts*. However, it must also be said that Moscovici's openness to the networking logic never led him to sacrifice that personalization of the scientific relationship that makes intellectual exchange a meeting of souls as well as minds.

I will not speak here about my own special relationship with him. Each one of us has the sensation of having a privileged relationship that he makes special for each of us. That is because it is personalized, made to measure like a custom garment. He has a style of communication and a way of approaching relationships with the simplicity of the great and the care of the wise. I will limit myself to mentioning just one simple and effective indicator of Moscovici's personal and personalized way of communicating, even in today's world of anonymous contact. In his unmistakable handwriting, he writes his own letters, hand addresses the envelopes and mails them without the help of his secretary. When he does use e-mail, it is rare that there is more than one addressee. Never does he send an e-mail to a long list of addressees. You know the kind, where you have problems in deciding if the message was written for you and get the feeling that you are surrounded by a mass of names, very often that you do not recognize at all. I have often asked myself how he manages to conduct in such a personal manner the relationships that he has with all those of us who share with him both scientific exchanges and friendship.

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Considering how many of our colleagues have bought small apartments in Paris, undoubtedly more to maintain this relationship than to revisit the Eiffel Tower, I once gave some thought to how his presence in Paris had influenced real estate prices! It seems that even Paris is grateful to him for having chosen her over the Italian cities that he passed through during his flight towards freedom. A strange fate for a Romanian, a naturalized French citizen, and sometimes accused of being “too French” by colleagues who have narrower approaches to the discipline and who did not understand the breadth of his vision on science and knowledge.

To return to the purpose of this brief introduction, I'd like to mention the rumors, bouncing from one laboratory to another around Europe, that led me to anticipate that something very special was about to happen: colleagues asking me for the documents published on the occasion of the Honorary Doctorate conferred on him by my University in Rome, bio-bibliographic documentation and then a series of hints about a certain Balzan Prize, which was said to be a sort of Nobel Prize for the social sciences. Then came the confirmation and a date was set.

I remember how thrilled I was that this special event was about to take place, but also being sad because I could not be there personally to express my happiness and share the joy in that award that not only honoured Serge Moscovici, but also the discipline in which he believed so much, ending its status as a secondary discipline among more widely recognized sciences.

I don't know how much you may know about the Balzan Foundation. You can find complete information on the foundation's mission and founder on its website: [www.balzan.com](http://www.balzan.com).

**Eugenio Balzan** and his daughter **Angela Lina Balzan** created the basis to establish a foundation of international significance. Born in 1874, **Eugenio Balzan** worked for many years as a journalist on Milan's "Corriere della Sera" newspaper, becoming its managing director and co-owner. As well as being a gifted journalist, Balzan was also a successful businessman. In 1933 he abandoned Italy in opposition to fascism, and moved to Switzerland where he lived until his death on July 15, 1953. It is for this reason that the Balzan Foundation today still has one [headquarters in Switzerland](#) and one in [Italy](#). On the death of her father, Angela Lina Balzan contribute to the development of the [Balzan Foundation](#) established in Lugano/Switzerland in honour of her father.

The International Balzan Foundation operates through **two separate foundations** which are legally independent of each other. The foundations hold the [annual award ceremony](#) for the Balzan Prizes alternately in Berne/Switzerland and Rome/Italy

The Balzan Prize is one of the highest awards for science, culture and humanitarian achievement, ranking close to the Nobel Prize. In contrast to other foundations, the [fields](#) in which prizes will be awarded are newly designated each year. Since 1961, 95 [people and humanitarian institutions](#) have been honoured with the Balzan Prize, and more than 42 million Swiss francs have been paid out in prize money.

There is an annual sum of CHF 4 million for prizes in the humanities, social sciences, physics, mathematics, natural sciences, and medicine.

Every 3 to 5 years there is also a special prize of CHF 2 million for humanity, peace and brotherhood among peoples. The number and value of the prizes is set each year by the board. The [prize award fields](#) are determined anew each year by the Prize Committee. Every three to five years the Prize Committee selects a winner of the [Special Prize for Peace and Humanity](#).

On September 9, 2003 the Prize Committee of the International Balzan Foundation has announced the **four Balzan Prize Winners 2003:**

**In the category Humanities, Social Sciences and the Arts**

European history since 1900: [Eric Hobsbawm](#), U.K.

Social psychology: [Serge Moscovici](#), France

**In the category Physics, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Medicine**

Genetics and evolution: [Wen-Hsiung Li](#), Taiwan/USA.

Infrared astronomy: [Reinhard Genzel](#), Germany.

Each prize has a value of 1 million Swiss francs. The Prize Winners will allocate half their prize money to [projects involving young researchers](#).

The unique previous winners for psychology and social sciences were: **Jean Piaget** (CH) in 1979 and **Jerome Bruner** (USA) in 1987.”

The complete text of the "*Laudatio*" published at the time of the award contains an interesting and well-constructed profile by Giovanni Busino. Its title, "Interpreting *Moscovici*", is excellent as it provides a key for venturing into his immense scientific production, which I am trying to collect in its entirety at the Research Centre and Multimedia Lab of the European PhD that carries the name of one of his most important theories. The text is available in French and Italian on the Balzan Foundation website. I am working on an English version that will be available on the European PhD website with a link to the Balzan Foundation. As with all authors that have an extensive scientific production, the versatility of Moscovici's contributions to knowledge is reflected in the diverse interpretations of his work that, over time, continue to grow. Each of these adds new insight and interpretative angles. You need only read *Mélange en l'honneur de Serge Moscovici* to understand how many different interpretive tracks can be found in his work, still too complex to be codified in a single volume by one author. His work dominates various fields of research and disciplines, from the history of science to psychology and sociology, among which he has moved freely and with originality in his viewpoints.

In brief, the Prize Committee's motivation in awarding him this honour was:

**"Moscovici's works are characterized by their great novelty: they have overthrown the canonical paradigms of the discipline, renewing its methods of research and its orientations, and creating an European tradition in social psychology whose originality is recognized everywhere. In the sciences of man and society, Moscovici occupies the eminent place, which, until the end of the 1960s, was occupied by Jean Piaget."**

Because his personal and intellectual biographies are tightly entwined, I would like to mention here the biographical notes prepared on the occasion of the award that tell of his adventurous life, flanked by experiments at scientific institutions on how relationships between individuals, social groups and social institutions function and develop. These notes are available in English, Italian, French, and German and are also found on the Balzan Foundation website.

**Biographical data of Serge Moscovici, France  
Balzan Prize Winner 2003 for Social Psychology**

"From turner to social psychologist. Hebrew school in Bessarabia; concentration camp in Nazi Romania; psychology studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. Destined to be a grain dealer on the banks of the Danube; but in the end, a night owl along the banks of the Seine in the company of Paul Celan. Romanian-Parisian Serge Moscovici has led an unconventional life. As original as his studies, and, since the '70s, capable of renewing European social psychology and freeing it from the hegemony of American social psychology thanks to three fundamental "discoveries". The theory of "social representations" (those mental constructions in which reality is no longer what it is but how a community shapes it). Then the theory of "social influence of the minorities" (more incisive than that of the majority, and the root of social and mental change). Finally, the theory of social consensus and collective decisions. Three lines of research – for 30 years leaders in European psychosociology – in which attention to the effects of society on the mind prevails and in which the dimension of social change is given top priority. Serge Moscovici is also responsible for a new ecological sensibility, which came before its time and led him to put nature back on the political agenda (apart from the new subjects in the social sciences): one of the most original and long-lasting results of 1968 of which he was undoubtedly the undisputed "maître à penser".

Moscovici's life: an odyssey. Born in Romania in 1925 to Jewish parents. He lived with his father, a grain dealer. He followed him to different cities and got used to living with his new women companions. When Romania sided with Hitler, Serge Moscovici had to leave school. He escaped the pogrom, but was sentenced to forced labour with boys of his age. He survived and held out by reading Spinoza and Descartes. After the liberation in August 1944, he became a welder; he studied and travelled: Palestine, Germany, Austria. At the first signs of the Cold War he fled to Paris. He arrived in '48, at age 20, after a detour of 2000 kilometres, with a stay in Italy: "my secret country", he says, (where he would like to "die in Venice, on an autumn evening"). He studied psychology at the Sorbonne; worked in a factory; spent the long Paris nights in the

company of poets and intellectuals. In the '60s he finished his studies in the United States (Stanford and Princeton). He still teaches today at the École des Haute Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. An unusual, full life, which he himself has told in *Cronique des années égarées* (1997), written in part for his two children, one of whom, Pierre, was Minister of European Affairs under Jospin.

Moscovici's studies have also been like his life: original and "on the run" from acquired knowledge. But capable at the same time of refounding social psychology, especially in Europe, of renewing it and differentiating it from the American approaches which had been prevalent up to that time. While in the United States studies on social cognition predominated (how we perceive others and analyse information about them), Serge Moscovici put "social representations" at the centre of his psychosocial research. He was the first to study what they are and how they are formed in the mind in his first, very famous book of 1961: *La psychanalyse, son image et son public* (1976) where he shows how a new, unexpected theory – psychoanalysis – was transformed at the moment when it became widespread in French society in the '50s. Moscovici identified a series of processes in which psychoanalysis was reconstructed, and in the end, in the French mind, it was no longer what Freud had formulated. It was not a question of impoverishment, but of a transformation that social groups always carry out in order to make something new and extraneous to common sense more familiar. Social representations are thus a vital necessity for societies in which change and the diffusion of information prevail.

And it has always been in the interest of social change that Moscovici has brought about a true inversion of the paradigm in contrast to current studies on social influence, which consider it only in terms of conformism to the authority of the majority and hence inadequate for explaining the processes of change. In *Psychologie des minorités actives* (1979), and in other studies, he formulated as an alternative his most elaborate and complete theory: active minorities that produce effects that are much more pervasive and relevant on an individual and social psychological level than "majority influence" itself. This last element produces stability, the minorities innovation and change, not only on the social level but also – and this is what counts more – on the level of our mental structures. As he himself says "the application of cognitive rules depends on the social and... the inference is a function of influence". One can see here – as in the theory of consensus and collective decisions– what Serge Moscovici thinks is the ultimate aim of social psychology: understanding the mental processes of individuals. "A science" he states "that was born to formulate the laws of the social mind".

Apart from being an innovator, Moscovici has also been ahead of his times, and not only for the preference he gave to change, which is so typical of our own era. Already in the sixties he showed an ecological sensibility that led him to introduce nature as one of the new subjects of the social sciences and, at the same time, a priority of politics. His books from those years – *Essai sur l'histoire humaine de la nature* (1968) and *La Société contre nature* (1972) – became the reference texts for the newborn ecologist and feminist movements. Just like his teaching at the department of ethnology at Paris VII at Jussieu, where he was one of the "maître à penser" of the French May. At the beginning of the '90s he stated that "the main event [political-social] of the last twenty years... consists in a notable shift that can be seen on all sides of public opinion in favour of the cause of nature..." and, more recently, that "the natural question will dominate the XXI century". For this reason he hopes that the environmental movement remains an "active minority"

The Balzan Prize is an event that completes a long history of recognition received from prestigious academic institutions around the world. This brings honour to us all and brings us together to honour him again, with the respect that his intellectual and personal life deserves.

My disappointment, and that of those others who were not able to be present the day he accepted the Balzan Prize, is mitigated by renewed joy in a recognition that reflects upon our entire scientific community. This is not out of vanity, but rather we see it as a sign that history, which can often be very ungenerous to the living, can sometimes be enlightened in recognising talents.

Albert Pepitone, who has been asked to write a speech honouring Kurt Lewin at a conference dedicated to him in Poland in September, recently wrote to me: "The history of science only begins to recognise great contributors after at least half a century. The only exception I know is Freud, but this may be because psychoanalysis was a subject of great interest to the popular culture and propagated by the media".

We cannot be anything but happy that Moscovici has also been spared history's avarice, both in terms of recognition for his intellectual value and for the painful experiences that life prepared for him, and not only those that were personal in nature. He has written a brilliant account of these

experiences, demonstrating a "Proustian" literary vocation. His emphasis on writing, even in the language of his adoptive country, is almost equal to the time he dedicates to people. One of his favourite sayings is an invitation to young researchers not to conform to the a-tonal boredom of the communicative standards imposed by current journals and to adopt an evocative style of language that he jokingly calls, "sexy".

Only our respect for the man and his thought preserves us from the vain temptation to bask in his reflected light. We are well aware that one does not become tall by gazing at a tall man. However, we can broaden the horizon of our own view of things if we can visualize them through the eyes of someone who is taller than we are. His stature is indeed as monumental as his work. One day, Clotile Pontecorvo, a colleague to whom I had introduced him, said: He is like a "monument" as well as a "document" and both belong to history!

As you may have heard, the Balzan Prize also consists of a large financial contribution for the awardee and for his research. A measure of his intrinsic value is this prize has not altered Serge Moscovici lifestyle or his relationships with others. He is and remains the same special person that he has always been.