# In Memoriam: Jean-Claude Abric (1943-2012)

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*« Talking about force is probably the fairest way to talk about Jean-Claude. He had a life force which he demonstrated not only in the various facets of his life, but in an exemplary way in the disease. A life force that has animated all his creativity. We will be forever grateful to him for that ».*

Serge Moscovici (2013).

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On September the 12th of 2012, our friend and colleague Jean-Claude Abric left us. As Professor Emeritus at Aix-Marseille Université, Jean-Claude Abric left his footprint on French Social Psychology during the last 40 years. He also actively contributed to the national and international outreach of our University. Although Jean-Claude Abric's research is not limited to a single field of investigation, his name is specifically associated with the development of the core nucleus theory (see Abric, 1976, 1993, 1994, 2001a), which contributed to the international development and recognition of the Aix School for Social Representations.

The basic tenet of the central core theory (also called structural theory/approach to social representations) is to consider that, among the overall set of cognitive elements which make up a representation, certain elements play a different role than others. These elements, called central elements, form a structure named by Abric the "core nucleus". This internal structure of representations achieves two essential functions: "(a) a meaning making function (…) and (b) an organisational function" (Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, & Abric, 2012, p. 484). Jean-Claude Abric's work also allowed for the development and spreading of an experimental approach to social representations. He was the first to provide experimental empirical support for the regulating role of representations in real interaction situations (Abric & Kahan, 1972). His research, drawing upon game theory paradigms (i.e. prisoner's dilemma), aimed at demonstrating that individual or group behavior is determined by representations of situation, partner or task, and not their objective properties per say (Abric, 1987, 1989). Those who knew Jean-Claude will remember his interest in gambling was not only a pretext for studying social behavior and their psychosocial determinants, but also was an opportunity for him to work in a field he specifically cherished (Abric, 2001b).

Jean-Claude Abric regarded and practiced social representations as a space for developing and communicating social psychology. His qualities for concept and model synthesis for studying social representations, his harmonious integration of abstract structures into concrete experiential data opened access to our field for numerous researchers who were able to replicate his approaches and to produce insightful results about their own reality. In fact, by focusing on real social practices, Jean-Claude Abric was able to broaden the field of social representations and to give social relevance to our subject (e.g., Abric, 1996). Jean Claude's interest in our subject, as a tool for intervention among 'human affairs', lead him to develop professional practices in various fields (i.e. expert assessment, training, counseling…). He knew how to adopt

an authentic, brave and inhibition-free attitude towards epistemic openness, focused on real life and concrete social practice, an attitude of going back and forth from laboratory to the social laboratory (in Lewin's terms). At the epistemological level, he therefore supported an *in vivo* conception of scientific research, as opposed to nowadays' pseudo-objectivism which removes scientific practice's subjectivity and cuts it off the peculiar and social dynamics of its making.

His expertise and experience were major assets to his practice of academic teaching. Because he cared about knowledge handover and through his various commitments during the entire course of his career, he contributed to the acknowledgment and recognition of social psychology and the heuristic nature of social representations theory for analyzing modern social problems. On a methodological level, Jean-Claude specifically focused on what could be described as the 'un-said' during his career (i.e. the method of substitution for studying SR's hidden zone, lying and its psychosocial properties, bluffing in gaming situations, etc.). What captivated Jean-Claude's attention was individual strategies of opinion concealment and expression, as representations and intentions of individuals put in socially significant situations with high stakes for social actors.

As an exemplar theoretician, a committed supporter of a psychology of real problems and concrete social life and bearer of an authentic humanist attitude in human relations, Jean-Claude played an important part in the promotion of *in vivo* social psychology and in the propagation and popularization of his knowledge, on both the economic and the social level.

**THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF PAPERS ON SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**

In March 2014, the Laboratory of Social Psychology at Aix-Marseille University organized a symposium that aimed at paying tribute to Jean-Claude Abric through a presentation, of some aspects of his thought, his work and his professional activities by his colleagues and friends. After this event, and in collaboration with the editors of *Papers on Social Representations*, we decided to present a set of contributions from this symposium to carry on the memory of these three days, and to make Abric's work accessible to a wider audience.

With this special issue, our idea was not to build an exhaustive record of Jean-Claude's work influence, but to provide the audience of *Papers on Social Representations* with some

thoughts inspired by the essential contributions of Jean-Claude in the field of social representations, to draw some future perspectives, and to allow for the expression of testimonies from colleagues who collaborated with Jean-Claude during the last forty years.

This special issue is organized in two parts. The first part is dedicated to theoretical issues and new perspectives; the second part is more oriented towards testomies about Jean-Claude Abric as a researcher and a social psychologist. We inform readers that all the texts collected in this special issue are not necessarily "conventional". Some contributions strictly reflect the speech of their authors during their interventions in 2014. Further contributions have more "classic" content, and others have mixed content.

## First part: Theoretical issues and new perspectives

The initial contribution of the first part - *On structuring and outlining processes in the study of social representations* - is proposed by Denise Jodelet. Her contribution allows for thinking about the structure of social representation by questioning the distinction made between the *cognitive* and the *collective* in the way social representations' organisation is conceived. Her contribution stresses the importance of departing from a structural description toward structuring processes.

In his contribution Pascal Moliner, discusses two points regarding core nucleus theory, (1) the strength of observed consensus among core elements of social representations, and (2) the meaning making function of these elements. He proposes an extension of central core theory, called "matrix nucleus", in order to overcome some difficulties inherent in the "traditional functions attributed" to representations' central elements.

Dorra Ben Alaya discusses in her paper the structural theory initiated by Jean-Claude Abric in light of Popper's metaphorical description of phenomena prototypes studied in science. The theoretical insights presented in her text constitute potential formalizations enabling to merge social representations paradigm with the pole of predictable systems on Popper's metaphorical axis.

In their contributions, Grégory Lo Monaco, Fabien Girandola and Christian Guimelli present a possible inter-connection between central core theory and other theories/paradigms in social psychology (cognitive dissonance theory, paradigms in the field of persuasion, compliance

and binding communication). They propose a research agenda to question the relation between social representations and sociocognitive processes.

Carine Pianelli's and Farida Saad's paper present research they carried out with Jean-Claude Abric. Situated in the context of car driving (social representation of speed, speed limit and driving aid), this study highlights the links between pre-existing representations on the structuring of an emerging representation. This study constitutes a way to explore some of Jean Claude's theoretical insights regarding the relation between social practices and representations.

In his contribution, Lionel Dany presents the concept of 'distance to the object', initiated by Jean-Claude Abric. At first formulated to explain the functioning of social representations' core nucleus, this concept's recent development is focused on studying the relationships people engage with objects of representation.

**Second part: Jean-Claude Abric as a researcher and a social psychologist**

The first contribution of this second part is about the way Celso Sá became familiar with the structural approach to social representations, developed by the *Aix school of thought*. This text offers important points for demonstrating the relevance of Jean Claude's work and his colleagues': the complementary nature of core nucleus theory and social representations theory, the experimental 'spirit' associated with this perspective, the systemic approach, the importance of cognitive structures and the role of social practices.

In his contribution, Nikos Kalampalikis explores the history of social psychology in French-language textbooks. He questions the status of Jean-Claude in these chapters through the identity of the "anonymous player." In this text anonymity is the "keeper of authenticity".

Benjamin Jacobi, who collaborated with Jean-Claude in the group for intervention, education and research in humanities (GIFRESH in French), presents one aspect, one attitude that could describe Jean-Claude: intervention. As a professional practice, intervention as developed by Jean-Claude has contributed to link the study of concrete with everyday social practices in academic research.

In his contribution, Michel Morin goes back to the 90's Aix-en-Provence in order to highlight the debate going on within the Laboratory of Social Psychology regarding the relationships between social representations and social practices (i.e., controversy on causality, social change processes, and intervention strategies).

The final contribution of Jacky Singery and Marc Souville stresses the educational investment of Jean-Claude Abric in Aix-Marseille University. He created one of the first diplomas in occupational psychology in France (master's degree). Jean-Claude brought to his teachings his knowledge of the professional environment, his ability to "exploit" social expectations and needs, and his capacities for developing useful projects to students and to the recognition of social psychology.

We hope that this special issue will contribute to the « dissemination » of the works and ideas of Jean-Claude Abric. In addition, as a man with a passion for life, as an enlightened, beloved and voluntaristic leader, an outstanding teacher, a trustworthy and committed friend, Jean Claude touched everyone who had the opportunity to get to meet him; colleagues, co-workers, students, spokespersons, friends and close relatives.
We hope that testimonies included in this volume will allow the reader for discovering numerous aspects of Jean-Claude's personality as well as the authentic respect those he worked with bear him, be they from academia, business or elsewhere.

In the name of the Laboratory of Social Psychology at Aix-Marseille University, we want to express sincere thanks to all those who participated in the tribute to Jean-Claude Abric organized in 2014, to those who contributed to this special issue, and to the editors of *Papers on Social Representations* who gave us the opportunity, with this special issue, to perpetuate the 'spirit' of Jean-Claude.

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