

Of Names and Men

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A game, a language, a rule, is an institution

L. Wittgenstein

ABSTRACT

This article, in memory of Jean-Claude Abric, constitutes an opportunity to develop two main ideas. The first one has to do with the history of social psychology and points at the absence of reference to this author in history chapters from French-language textbooks in the field. The second, drawing upon writings on game situations, states that the main virtue of the representation-capable layman, which is never questioned in social psychology, is that of anonymity.

Keywords: history of social psychology, names, social representations, common sense, anonymity.

On this solemn occasion, full of memories of life, exchanges and ideas, my paper will be structured by the range of variations around a core idea: that of names. In memory of a man, an author and therefore a name, I intend to approach this topic in two ways; at first from a historical perspective and then from an epistemological one.

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I had the privilege, as did many others, to be around Jean-Claude Abric in the living and working context of our community for the past fifteen years, more or less occasionally. I think I was the last to benefit from his HDR¹ supervision in Aix in 2009, and I will always keep the memory of delightful intellectual exchanges, with trust and collusion, which are two required ingredients in the accomplishment of this intellectual and capital academic stage, certainly two rare qualities he, more than others, knew how to spread and share. Some of our exchanges about that work were centred around a topic he specifically cherished, which is the history of ideas in the field.

A FAME WITH NO HISTORY

I had the opportunity to work with Jean-Pierre Pétard and Sylvain Delouvé, on narratives about social psychology's history (Delouvé, Kalampalikis, & Pétard, 2011 ; Pétard, Kalampalikis, & Delouvé, 2001 – for a recent replication of our work in english-language textbooks, see Billig, 2015). These narratives were taken from a very specific body of work, that of french textbook chapters about the history of social psychology from the post-war era to the late 2000's. Our main aim throughout this research was precisely to shed light on the way a field's history is written, told and spread. Rhetorical styles, authors, schools of thought and cited publications, the presence or absence of an epistemological and historical perspective drawing upon history of science, these are some of the numerous questions we ask ourselves and then ask our material.

Thus, we were able to highlight different types of results through our publications on this peculiar literary style, which globally reveal the collective writing of the field's narrative, with a historical aim. One of the preferred figures of these history of social psychology chapters is the author, and more specifically his name. In this respect, we succeeded in isolating all of the cited authors' names among these chapters, with the help of computerized text analysis methods. It yielded a collection of approximately 700 names, which we classified by chronological order. By chronology, we mean the dating of the author's work, or, if not available, the corresponding period in his intellectual biography. We created a typicality index of cited author names, on the

¹ HDR : « Habilitation à diriger des recherches » is a French academic degree required for supervising PhD students.

basis of their distribution in analyzed chapters (min. 25%). Similarly, we evidenced the ten most cited authors (among which was only one social psychologist, Serge Moscovici).

If a result is characterized as much by the significance threshold of its presence as by the meaning of its absence, here is a big one. On the 702 author names from the analyzed body, there is not a single reference, no named mention of Jean-Claude Abric. Put another way, even still today, his name has not been associated to the recent history of social psychology as exposed in textbooks, moreover written in French. The contrast is even more striking when one thinks of the almost automatic and often superfluous use of his name in some publications about social representations, specifically about the structural approach. We pushed the analysis by including, this time, in an extended body we are currently working on, the first decade of the 2000's. The results were the same.

What can be deduced from this absence? In the case of such an influent author whose first publication goes back to 1967, this absence is surprising and intriguing. However, if one thinks about it, does one know of any writings tracing back the complete trajectory and the vast contribution of Jean-Claude's thought? This special issue is undoubtedly a contribution of this kind.

Let's go back to that body of work before sketching any beginning of an answer. In parallel to names, we questioned it on another property of scientific production; space. We started with the idea of a map investigation of the field, through its own instituted historical narratives (Kalampalikis, Delouvé, & Pétard, 2006). This idea was fueled by a hypothesis, which is that, unlike discoveries in the natural sciences, it is more difficult to map the birth of social science or remarkable events in these fields, such as sociology, anthropology, history or psychology. With the exception from schools of thoughts, which not only characterize ideas but also locate the place where these ideas and authors gathered, worked, thought, published. One can easily think of the Frankfurt School, the Vienna Circle, the Prague School, Macy conventions or even the notorious Chicago School. Let's briefly digress, because this difference typical to social science schools is given a specific relish when projected onto our own field, and more specifically onto our own social representations community. Let's think of the words used, by some, to appoint trends, evolutions, approaches, models; by others to name schools and more pragmatically cities (Aix, Paris, Genève) or even lakes...

The results of this inquiry of history chapters were damning. More than half of chapter's authors had not felt the need to refer to cities, and just as many had not considered mentioning institutions useful. When spacial indicators were mentioned, it was more for labeling purposes than for investigating the reasons why a school of thought develops in this or that place or institution.

What matters most to the authors of our chapters are peoples' names. Here it comes again. The history of social psychology is, for most part, a history of authors, whether we appreciate their diversity or mostly their use. Ethereal creatures often disconnected from their work places, teams; from the social, economical, historical and political contexts in which these authors work publish and theorize the psychological and the social. The language that is used to comprehend, tell and teach the history of social psychology therefore has a specific style: it is a nominative language. The field's past is mobilized as an apologetic chronology for remembering, that is, essentially, as a list of dates and names. These to jointed elements constitute a very specific kind of writing, with a narrow didactic aim, commonly called note cards. These note cards are for mnemonic learning, and as such are volatile, characterized by the obvious absence of yet essential reference to other works in epistemology or in history of science. In other words, nominative language overrules informative language, which leads us to conclude that social psychology's historical places are its own names.

Once again, we are faced with the same conclusion as before regarding Jean-Claude Abric; if his name is not, yet, present in the field's history chapters and if the school of thought he could and has represented – with others in Aix – has a labeling role, it seems to me there is much to do in and outside textbooks to gibe historical, institutional and collective perspective to his contribution. Teaching history and current theory in social psychology and the social representations' approach are all at stake here (Kalampalikis, 2013).

THE ANONYMOUS PLAYER

I mentioned one – if not the first – of Jean-Claude's publications in *Psychologie française* in 1967, about the role of partner image on cooperation in a gaming situation with co-authors Claude Faucheux, Serge Moscovici and Michel Plon. The goal of this paper was to maximize an

actor's efficacy in a conflictual interaction with a low information rate and a high other representation rate.

Based on a prisoner's dilemma-like design, the authors demonstrated the impossibility of representing others when they are dehumanized, as it happens when replaced by a machine, which generates low cooperation. Thus, they stressed the importance of context, well beyond a simple informational aspect or a limited benefit-computing approach. It would be tempting to allude to the metaphor describing a dehumanized situation and the technocratic imposition of profit from our main partners in our individual and collective research effort, that of academia, but it would be too long here, especially as it would involve international comparisons.

The reflection I want to briefly develop regards this other. The big idea in this study has to do with the human nature of the partner involved in an interaction. Authors suggest the outcome of a conflictual interaction to demand cooperation, sustained by a play of psychological and situational factors. We are very close to one of Jean-Claude's inspirations, symbolic interactionism, a reference that seems in line with his own training – alongside his doctorate – in morenian psychodrama and group dynamics. When reproducing this experiment some thirty years later for a tasteful chapter written in honour of Serge Moscovici (Abric, 2001), a tremendous change happens: the experimental situation becomes real, in that of a social group, the laboratory is replaced by another spatial setting – a room – and the game is not a prisoner's dilemma anymore but a card game Abric liked: poker. Reflections that are made regard professional players, but an opening towards other social group, to friendship groups is made by the author.

In this last cage, I quote “the situational norm is fun, relaxation, interactive play and not strategic-rational estimation” (Abric, 2001, p. 300). Beyond autobiographical aspects of this chapter, one of the main differences between the two groups of players, professional and friends, resides specifically in members knowledge in relation to each other. One can easily picture the friendship group calling out each other by their names, putting the task in other social perspectives, knowing each other. On the contrary, knowledge of names and last names is not a prerequisite for professionals to participate in a round. One could even argue that one would rather not know other players as to maximize one's odds of displaying a neutral game, with no sympathy bias or emotional collusion. In this particular case, anonymity protects, and even even becomes an asset for maximizing the variety of anticipated or displayed social roles. Anonymity creates a shield

for the ordinary man, a real chameleon on checkerboard of social life; it is a buffer on social knowledge, embodied in a mask of excellence, a common mask of the mind, that of commonsense.

If we think about it, we can figure out – and here is my point – that one of the most frequent forms of exemplification in social psychology, from its early inception (i.e., Lewin, Heider) is that of the “layman” (*ordinary person, man of the street*). A typical social actor, like the rest of us, an ordinary man living in an ordinary society. This entity has been used as a unit of measurement for many conceptualizations that sought to investigate different aspect of our social lives, thoughts and actions. It is the embodiment of a *socius*, a living thing that interacts with members of its kind, communicates with the help of a common language and sometimes performs actions which more or less correspond to its intentions and shares collective representations with its relatives. This person attends an everyday life which phenomenology is real to him. In this sense, our ordinary man is a perfect exemplification of the Husserlian expression of “common-sense world” (Smith, 1995).

His ordinary language is “different” from that of the scientist, whereas his thought is characterized by the spontaneous use of a culturally inherited form of knowledge; common-sense. It is a “vague” knowledge, according to W. James' words, and is used depending on relevance, norms and situations. Far from being an auxiliary knowledge, it constitutes man's sixth sense, according to Arendt (1958 – “the sixth and highest sense”), which guarantees his ability to think in representational terms, and to represent others to himself.

No doubt, one of the greatest qualities of this capable-of-representation man, which is never questioned in our social psychological thoughts, is anonymity. His prototypical nature is his master key, he is at the same time “Mr. Ordinary” (*anyone*) and nobody special (*no one*). Under the disguise of anonymity, he can appear to us as one of the many we regularly encounter on the streets, without ever seeing them again or being able to recognize them. His anonymity is the passport to his invisibility, the keeper of his authenticity and the common sense value he uses. Let's remember that “common sense is defined as a type of anonymous knowledge, unlike that of science or philosophy. These are very important categories of our culture, because what has a names is deemed lasting, outstanding, precious whereas what doesn't is ephemeral, transitory, perishable. No doubt that passion for naming is one of the strongest.” (Moscovici, 2013, p. 254).

This anonymous entity can be found in psychosocial experiments, but also in investigations, be they qualitative or quantitative. True, ethical rules in our science impose – justly – data and privacy protection of the people under investigation. We often replace them in our publications by pseudonyms or codes. We thereby create a common codified and anonymous language, with high generalization potential. We work with stratified samples, relevant groups from a demographic and from our research objects perspectives. We decipher their facts and gestures, more often their answers really, in order to build our theories and to draw our conclusions. Except that these have a name (i.e : the theory of « something », an author, a place) ; they become the descriptive and explicative reflection of a world inhabited by anonymous groups and beings. Our scientific language is a powerful tool which legitimacy stems from its capacity to name in a specific manner phenomenon under scrutiny.

No doubt one of social representations theory's aspirations is to demonstrate the underlying logics to anonymous actions, thoughts and facts: “on its humble level, social representations theoretical perspective encompasses everyday communication and thought in the modern world, and corresponding anonymous facts.” (Moscovici, 2013, p. 121). In a way, this aspiration incites to grasp the core of social phenomena, if they are considered as “not only objects, but, above all else, my lived situations in a living present, mediating my access to the whole of historical past” (Schütz, 2007).

The anonymous nature of common sense is a peculiar aspect of this kind of knowledge. One could even argue that it is precisely its own name. Anyway, it seems this property of common sense can question scientific knowledge, but also the way its place and production is considered in our social representations research. After all, as Jean-Claude (2001) said about poker players, “knowledge of representational mechanisms, their control and use (...) brings some non negligible advantages.”

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