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From Feelings to Emotions (and Back Again): How Does One Become an Animal Rights Activist?

Christophe Traïni

Accounting for emotions when studying collective action is no easy task. Pointing out the affective dimensions of social movements easily arouses suspicion of a regression toward the archaic mob psychology that resurfaces even today when critics attempt to disqualify those causes that they deem illegitimate. However, since the end of the 1990s, collective action experts have recognized the importance of acknowledging the role of emotions.¹ The principal steps and reasons for the return to grace of emotions have already been analyzed elsewhere.² The scope of this article will be limited to four methodological arguments. First, in order to rise above the problems that result from familiar preconceptions, the study of the affective dimensions of activism must “redefine the words that belong to a system of concepts that are explicitly defined and methodically refined.”³ To be precise, the semantic contents of the terms “feelings” and “emotions” truly deserve to be clarified and unpacked. Second, such terminological precautions must remain subordinate to the analysis of empirical data that is collected during a survey. Third, the attention given to affective dimensions must aim not to toss out some supposed explanation behind group activism, but rather to analyze the different processes that characterize the activist’s *work*. Lastly, one of the principle objectives of the perspective advocated here consists of better articulating two lines of questioning that are often disconnected by studies of collective action: on the one hand, the “why” of activism, the drive – as much micro as macro – behind an individual’s commitment to a cause; on the other hand, the “how” of activism, how one solicits support, formulates appropriate demands, and weighs in on the decision-making process. This article claims to be essentially programmatic in the sense that it attempts to present certain

¹ Cf. James M. Jasper, “The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements,” *Sociological Reform*, 13 (3) (1998): 397-424; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991); Ronald R. Aminzade and Doug McAdam, “Emotions and Contentious Politics,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, ed. Ronald R. Aminzade et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 14-50.

² Cf. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, *Passionate Politics...*, 1-24; Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, “Emotions and Social Movements,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, ed. Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner (New York: Springer, 2006), 611-35.

³ Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le métier de sociologue* (Paris: Mouton, 1983), 37.

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theoretical and methodological elements that will prove indispensable for empirical analyses developed elsewhere.⁴

A Primordial Analytic Distinction

Fear, anger, aversion, hate, sadness, joy, tenderness, shame, guilt, resentment, pride, etc.: the lexical field of emotions contains such varied terms that it often seems necessary to begin studying them using a typological structure that allows them to be identified and distinguished more easily. These types of approaches, though not without their own merits, present two drawbacks. On the one hand, they tend irreparably toward an infinite proliferation of the criteria for distinguishing between affective states – depending on their intensity, their immediate character, simple or complex, universal or cultural, lasting or fleeting, pleasant or unpleasant, spontaneous or stylized, etc. – whose contribution to the study of mobilization seems to be relatively weak.⁵ On the other hand, such taxonomic approaches run the risk of simply duplicating the work already begun by the subjects being studied: as we will see, the techniques used to identify and name affective states are often at the heart of the very activist practices that researchers are trying to account. Thus, I will attempt to show here that the questions faced by experts of group activism require an analytic distinction between “feelings” and “emotions,” a distinction whose theoretical justification is both more concise and complex. In order to accomplish this, a preliminary detour into neuroscience, such as that which Georges E. Marcus advocates in *The Sentimental Citizen*, seems beneficial.⁶

Indeed, the most recent advances in neuroscience allow us to clarify the role played by emotions within certain brain activities that enable the human body to adapt to the multiple events and circumstances that it confronts. Even the simplest action requires the human brain to deal with an influx of information about the physical state of the body, the sensory input that emanates from the environment, and the data from motor memory. It is easy to see, given the complexity of processing simultaneous inputs of information, that the vast majority of these processes are automatic and out of the control of the conscience. Certainly, only a specific process of the selection and reassessment of certain information can lead the body to react in a way that is conscious and appropriate for the situation. Thus, it is precisely this type of operation that clears the way for affective experiences. Such experiences generally take place after a break in the continuity of the interactions between the subject and his environment.

⁴ An initial study will aim to demonstrate the ambiguous and progressive character of the meanings – and, notably, of the affective dimensions – behind the animal rights cause since its inception in the early nineteenth century: Christophe Traïni, *La cause animale. Essai de Sociologie historique* (Paris: PUF, 2011). Recall, for the moment, that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was created in London by 1824, and inspired numerous imitations first in Europe, and then in the United States. In addition, I anticipate effecting a more systematic approach to analyzing of the role of emotions in other publications that will be based upon on survey data collected about organizations and activists operating in France today.

⁵ I gained some personal experience with this type of exercise in *Émotions, paradoxes pragmatiques et valeurs sociales : les resorts de l'engagement*, rapport en vue de l'obtention de l'habilitation à diriger des recherches, (Paris: Université Paris 1-Panthéon Sorbonne, 2007).

⁶ Cf. George E. Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

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In order to illustrate this phenomenon, we only have to imagine one of the episodes that dot our daily life. While I am at the wheel of my car, my brain controls multiple activities in which my body is currently engaged: my sweat responds to the heat of the car’s interior; my eyes blink to avoid the beating of the sun; I adjust my speed according the limits posted on the road; I listen to the music broadcasted on the radio; I recall a remark from one of my colleagues; etc. Suddenly, a vehicle pulls out from behind a parked truck: my body bristles, my muscles contract, my pulse increases, my attention from that point on concentrates exclusively on identifying this threat and, in a split second, my brain orders my arms to do their best to avoid the threatening vehicle. What has just happened demonstrates the activation of an emotional system called “fight or flight,” which stimulates the consciousness in order to let the body produce the most appropriate immediate action at the slightly sign of danger. The feeling of fear results from the process of transforming unexpected information – for example, the intrusion of the previously invisible car into my field of vision – into a signal ordering a group of reactions that involve multiple properties of my body: endocrinal (adrenaline production), visceral (uneven cardiac rhythm and breathing), physical (muscle contraction, change of posture in preparation for the appropriate action). The affective reaction, which results from the combination of these elements, thus immediately interrupts the automatic activities that my brain was previously processing almost mechanically. This reaction directs my attention toward the intruding object in order to respond to it with an appropriate action. Generally, well beyond the particularly eloquent example of being “struck with fear,” affective reactions are accompanied by an increase in the potential for activity, which prepares the subject for determining the action best suited to what he is experiencing, or believes he is experiencing.

This simple assessment demonstrates the unjustifiability of the classic opposition between affect and rational activity. In reality, the *adaptive function* of affective reactions consists of introducing a rupture or signal into the center of the cerebral processes in order to direct the body to react using movements that are best suited to the situation. Georges Marcus says as much when he writes that “our emotional faculties are more in harmony with than in opposition to our ability to be rational.”⁷ However, we cannot stop at noting that “emotion” results from the transformation of a part of the automatic cerebral processes in preparation for a more “conscious” mode of reaction. Even if it is not difficult to recognize that affective experience always consists of both a physical action and a subjective personal experience, it still seems much less easy to determine the exact nature of this “*awareness of the reflex changes* that are produced in the visceral organs and in the skeletal muscle structure.”⁸ As we will see, this difficulty owes much to the fact that familiar terms such as “feeling,” “emotion,” and “consciousness” deserve to be broken down first in order to best illustrate their semantic content.

To start, I suggest using the term “feelings” only in reference to the bodily states that result from the alteration of part of the cerebral processes brought about by affective reactions. Feelings thus represent that which results from our ability to feel. They are accompanied by the more or less clear awareness of a physical sensation, of an *impression*—the imprint left on our body by events that occur. Of course, the effects in question have been shown to be of a highly varied intensity and duration: certain episodes, quickly forgotten, only produce effects on the body for a few seconds, whereas others produce lifelong traumas. In the end, repetitive affective experiences

⁷ Marcus, *Le citoyen sentimental...*, 20.

⁸ Bernard Rimé, *Le partage social de l’émotion* (Paris: PUF, 2005), 19.

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and significant traumas end up endowing individuals with a *temperament*—a group of *sensibilities* or predispositions that favor certain ways of feeling and reacting. Although common language leads us at times to characterize someone as having a choleric, timid, calm, or apathetic temperament, it is important to note that this term should be reserved for references to a combination of heterogeneous sensibilities at the center of which a certain tendency can predominate.⁹ The question of the relationship that exists between temperament and the subjects’ history obviously seems crucial. On the one hand, certain social experiences lead individuals to experience types of feelings that, when they are repeated, mold the sensibilities that make up their temperament. However, it is no less true to say that, with each new situation, these sensibilities, which are derived specifically from individuals’ past experiences, predispose them to well-defined affective reactions. An individual who has been marked by certain threatening situations over the course of his life tends to manifest fear when faced with certain events that others would deem rather harmless. This is why it is never sufficient to simply observe an anxiety exhibited in individuals when faced with a given object. The analysis must still investigate how much the affective state is due to past experiences or the progressive molding of their sensibilities, which result from the combination of their social experiences—their socialization.

As far as the importance of personal experience relating to feelings is concerned, neuroscience experts tend to speak of *phenomenal consciousness*. All organisms that demonstrate the ability to alter their somatic states (such as being curious, timid, aggressive, or affectionate) are shown to be equipped with this primary consciousness that allows them to *feel* personal experiences according to what their perceptions incite within themselves. Experts sometimes speak of *qualia* in reference to “the sensory experience (‘what is it like to be...?’ to recall to Nagel’s well-known text, “*What is it like to be a bat?*), seeing, hearing, feeling, suffering, etc.”¹⁰ The important thing is to distinguish clearly between these types of phenomenal experiences and those authorized by the *consciousness of access* or the *reflective consciousness*.

One is tempted to accept, along with many other authors, [writes the neurobiologist], the distinction between the phenomenal experience (our “personal experience,” be it conscious or borderline unconscious), an operation said to be of the “first order,” and the awareness of this personal experience, which would be a metaconscious operation of the “second order” (reflective consciousness).¹¹

⁹ Researchers in the social sciences, who are used to alternating their focus between individuals and the groups that they seem to be related to, can expect to examine unique temperaments, or conversely, temperaments that contain certain traits shared by a rather large group of people that have some characteristic in common, which the analysis must take into account (age, sex, nationality, class, similar experiences, profession, commitments, skills, etc.). In other words, if certain sensibilities seem *idiosyncratic* – linked to a singular succession of extremely personal experiences – others may appear shared rather communally at the center of the social environment of the activists being studied.

¹⁰ Pierre Buser, *L’inconscient aux milles visages* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005), 108.

¹¹ Buser, *L’inconscient...*, 145.

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Regarding the affective domain, it would be therefore permitted to distinguish the phenomenal experience of feelings (first order) from the reflective consciousness of emotion (second order). This involves considering *feelings* as “perceptions that are conscious without being ‘metaconscious,’ ‘perceived in primitive ways’ and not with the usual self-reflection that humans use to ‘perceive that they perceive.’ One way to do it would be to locate a kind of vague and attenuated realm of conscious understanding.”¹²

The important point for the rest of our argument is to note that the immediate, primitive mode of perceiving feelings is the pressure point – the foundation – of subsequent neural activities that pave the way for a mode of processing information that is both distinct and complementary. At each stage, in fact, the data processed by the brain undergoes a form of reduction that makes it lose certain properties while gaining others that make it compatible with a kind of differentiated understanding. Thus, after the transformation of one part of the body’s automatic processes for affective reactions, other operations can be set in motion in order to convert those feelings into a *representation* that is then turned over to the judgment and control of the reflective consciousness. The subjective personal experience, then, would remain only vaguely perceived if the subject were not to carry out “a cognitive search whose purpose is to clarify or elucidate the current state. The individual proceeds toward a cognitive scan of the internal or external context, in preparation for searching for an element to which its physiological activation could be reasonably attributed.”¹³ From this point of view, the example highlighted above – the “adrenaline increase” provoked by the threat of an accident – appears extremely elementary: here, the reflexive consciousness has no difficulty in identifying the origin of this experience, which it would simply define by the generic term of “fear”. Similarly, reflexive consciousness easily identifies the necessary response (the quick turn of the steering wheel). The simplicity of this purely instructive example must not make us lose sight of the fact that a large number of feelings experienced by social actors turn out to be more complex and difficult to understand. If we may speak about feelings in terms of *impressions*, it is because the latter often manifest themselves across a multitude of confusing, tangled, and indefinable sensations whose understanding escapes even the very people that experience them. Therein lies the necessity of a neural study that consists of processing the body’s reactions while evaluating them against a sufficiently clear and coherent system of representations. It is only by turning to this type of system of representations that the subject can access *understanding*—the faculty of grasping the intelligible as opposed to sensations, and putting experiential data in order using well-established categories.

It seems crucial to reserve the term “emotion” to refer to an individual’s activity so long as it depends on the reflective consciousness’s action of selecting and transforming information. Contrary to what common parlance would have us think, when it constructs “emotion” as the antithesis of “reason,” “emotion” cannot survive in the absence of either *reflexivity* or *intersubjective comprehension*. Experiencing an emotion thus requires the ability to reflect on oneself, an introspective task that enables an individual to compare his own mental state to a taxonomy of behaviors that correspond to certain types of circumstances. The process of being moved emotionally involves an initial cognitive *evaluation* – emanating both from the situation and from the subjective personal experience that it provokes – which facilitates the

¹² *Ibid*, 92.

¹³ Rimé, *Le partage social...*, 28.

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comprehension of the affective reactions that overtake the body.¹⁴ This almost immediate operation is often prolonged into an evaluative secondary phase or “*reappreciation*” during which physiological changes and any tendency toward action are judged either desirable or undesirable, and in turn bring about either the full deployment or suppression of the action.¹⁵

We have witnessed in all cases that a manifestation of emotions proves to be inseparable from the previous learning of a set of *social rules* that prescribe the terms of their expression using body language and verbalization based on the circumstances at hand. This reveals at what point emotion must be considered an *expressive action* that contributes to the reinterpretation of individual experiences that are partially inexpressible within a socially recognized system of meanings and normative prescriptions. As Marcel Mauss has already noted about the shrieks and tears present in Australian oral funerary rituals, “all of these obligatory simultaneous group expressions of moral value [...] are more than simple demonstrations: they are signs of understood expressions—in short, a language.”¹⁶ Indeed, it is certainly not by accident that the etymology of the word *emotion* indicates a “movement that occurs in a population.”¹⁷ Emotions are thus indispensable elements in the inter-comprehension of members of the same collective. Furthermore, public expression of emotions often produces effects on the subjective experience of other spectators in attendance.

It should now be far clearer why we must distinguish between “feelings” and “emotions.”¹⁸ The analysis up to this point must not make us believe in an exclusively reactive and visceral origin of emotion, which might be nothing but a secondary objectification of more fundamental physiological phenomena. It is therefore important to take note of the potentially reversible character of the chain of successive neural operations. As we all know, the contemplation of ideas by the reflective consciousness can lead certain people to literally “make themselves sick.”

¹⁴ The absence of this capability might be one of the characteristics of autistic people who seem to have difficulty understanding the intense feelings that overtake them. Interestingly, this introspective inability appears strongly linked to limited inter-subjective communication. More precisely, autistic people seem to have trouble mastering what psychologists call “theory of mind”—a cognitive capacity for understanding the mental and intentional states of others, just as we do for our own states. This ability, which depends on the experience of one’s own feelings, requires these feelings to be well handled: the experience must be neutralized in order to imagine oneself dealing with what the other feels, and better make out one’s supposed intentions.

¹⁵ Rimé, *Le partage social...*, 30.

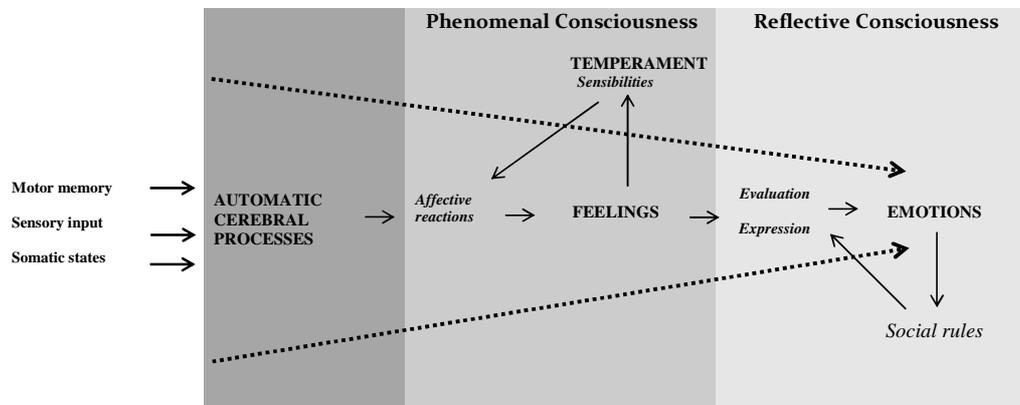
¹⁶ Marcel Mauss, “L’expression obligatoire des sentiments (rituels oraux funéraires australiens),” *Journal de Psychologie*, 18 (1921). Reprinted in *Œuvres*, t. III: *Cohésion sociale et division de la sociologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 269-78.

¹⁷ *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Littré, 2004) (1^{re} éd.: 1863-72).

¹⁸ This distinction intersects with the one proposed by William Reddy, and used by Deborah Gould in her study of the Act Up movement, between the English term “emotions” (subjective experiences felt by individuals) and “emotives” (group conventions that allow the display and verbalization of emotions to people other than those who feel them). Cf. Deborah B. Gould, “Passionate Political Processes: Bringing Emotions Back into the Study of Social Movements” in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 155-75. In French, there is no word exactly equivalent to the English “emotive”.

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Figure 1. Neural operations at the source of emotions



It is common that just thinking about an affective episode can momentarily inspire feeling and bodily changes (spasms, hot flashes, sweats, etc.), or even more permanently, psychosomatic troubles. Furthermore, the constraining force of social rules about expressing emotions sometimes requires people to engage in a type of simulation aimed at setting up anticipated bodily adaptations: showing sadness during a burial, exhibiting compassion during a victim’s testimony, showing enthusiasm during a party with friends, laughing at your boss’s one-liners.¹⁹ Furthermore, one notes the importance of the concept of emotional work analysed by Arlie Hochschild in reference to the situational activity of conforming oneself to or distancing oneself from social rules of emotional adaptation.²⁰ Far from being exclusively the object of the body’s reactive impulses, an individual often engages in conscious, voluntary efforts in order to mold his emotions according to socially established models. From this perspective, he can strive to effectuate different states: bodily (not shaking, sitting up straight, breathing slowly...); expressive (smiling, scowling, frowning); or cognitive (expressing or suppressing more or less appropriate thoughts).²¹ In all cases, it is obvious that the ability to play within the framework of emotional conventions by controlling our own body and the feelings that surround it is directly related to one’s reflective consciousness.

The writing strategy that I have adopted for this article must not mislead the reader. By beginning my argument with the clarification of a series of concepts that are both distinct and complementary, I do not mean at all that these concepts result from a primarily hypothetico-deductive approach according to which the formulation of theoretical generalizations necessarily precedes a kind of litmus test for them based on actual facts. Actually, the summary presented

¹⁹ Cf. Patricia Paperman, “L’absence d’émotion comme offense” in *La couleur des pensées: sentiments, émotions, intentions*. Directed by Ogien Ruwen (Paris: EHESS, 1995), 175-96.

²⁰ Cf. Arlie R. Hochschild, “Travail émotionnel, règles de sentiments et structure sociale,” *Travailler*, 9, no. 1 (2003), 19-49. There is also mention of the application of the concept of emotional work in the field of health in Fabrice Fernandez, Samuel Lézé, Hélène Marche (dir.), *Le langage social des émotions: études sur les rapports aux corps et à la santé* (Paris: Economica, 2008).

²¹ Cf. Christophe Broqua and Olivier Fillieule, “Act Up ou les raisons de la colère” in *Émotions... mobilisation!* Dir. Christophe Traïni (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2009) 141-68.

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above (see Figure 1) owes much more to the constant worry of subordinating the identification of concepts to the possibility of indexing them against the mixed elements of the corpus created over the course of my survey: interviews, life stories, activist bulletins, archives, pamphlets, testimonies, audiovisual material aimed toward inciting emotions, observation of protests and other public actions... The initial detour through a reading of neuroscience texts is none other than a means of preparing the reader for a more thorough description of the concepts that are indispensable for the proper prioritization of the data from the survey. These concepts, far from resulting only from preexisting theoretical scaffolding, have been adjusted to the tendencies that have emerged in the corpus. As we will soon see, this approach, inspired in part by the *grounded theory* advocated by Glaser and Strauss,²² compels us to linger a while longer on two other categories of analysis that allow the *coding* of empirical data in order to better respond to the inquiry of the research. How can we assess the motivations behind commitment to the animal rights movement? Why are certain individuals preoccupied – much more than others – with promoting the protection of animals? Once their commitment has been confirmed, how do these activists work in order to solicit support from their peers? What is the relationship between their strategies and the affective dispositions that arise from their social history? To what extent does the success of the activism that they advocate depend on their ability to adapt emotions according to the terms set by their public? These are precisely the questions that dominated the data collection during the entire survey. Thus, I strived to observe the modes of action developed by various types of activist organizations dedicated to improving the fate of animals. At first, I concentrated on anti-bullfighting associations²³ before gradually expanding my attention toward organizations with other aims: shelters and the care of abandoned animals, animal experimentation, industrial livestock, circuses, fur, hunting, anti-speciesist philosophies²⁴.... At the same time, with the aim of reconstructing exactly what in the early affective history of the activists makes them direct their activism toward the protection of animals, I consulted two very different types of sources of biographical information. On the one hand, the interviews were conducted in a way that invited the activists to situate the history of their activism within the larger story of their lives.²⁵ On the other hand, I have gathered as many (auto) biographical sketches as possible concerning the paths of activists that are often cited as noteworthy because of their contribution to the history of the animal rights movement. Among these, we can cite such

²² Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, “La Production de la théorie à partir des données,” *Enquête* (1995). Posted online January 7, 2008: <<http://enquete.revues.org/document282.html>>, viewed on October 20, 2009.

²³ On the anti-bullfighting movement, I refer the reader to three of my own texts: “*Aficionados et opposants à la tauromachie: les formes plurielles de la civilisation*,” *Politix* 16 (64), (2003), 103-25; “L’opposition à la tauromachie” in *Émotions... mobilisation!*, dir. Christophe Traini, 193-213; “Dramaturgie des émotions, traces des sentiments: filmer et observer les manifestations anticorrida,” *ethnographiques.org*, n°21, (2010), <http://www.ethnographiques.org/2010/Traini>.

²⁴ For the moment, I am more interested in anti-bullfighting associations (CRAC, FLAC, Alliance Anticorrida), the Société protectrice des animaux, the Ligue française des droits de l’animal, the Œuvre d’assistance aux bêtes d’abattoir, the Ligue française contre la vivisection, and the world-wide protection of farm animals.

²⁵ At this writing, I have completed thirty-four interviews with activists belonging to seventeen different organizations. I foresee completing a new series of interviews specifically with activists for anti-speciesism and/or vegetarianism.

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figures as Frances Power Cobbe, champion of the English antivivisectionist movement of the end of the nineteenth century; the sportswoman Camille de Gast, the first female president of the SPAⁱ in 1929; Fernand Méry, a media-conscious veterinarian, founder in 1970 of the *Conseil national de la protection animale*, who worked to legitimize, in the midst of his profession that was initially reticent, the amount of attention given to household pets; Brigitte Bardot, icon of animal protection since the 1960s, who published her memoirs in two thick volumes; Théodore Monod, whose patronage has given rise to several animal protection associations; Tom Regan, the anti-speciesist philosopher, author of an autobiographical work entitled “A Bird in the Cage....” As I have already noted, a detailed summary of the analysis of this corpus will be developed elsewhere. For the purposes of this article, my topic will be limited to indicating – through a few necessarily limited examples – the manner in which certain categories of analysis ought to be closely indexed according to the elements that can be collected over the course of the survey.

The Empirical Traces of Moral Shock

The analytical distinctions proposed above are obviously too abstract and general to be immediately useful. Analyzing the role of emotions – in both the motivation for commitment to the animal rights movement and the dynamics that engender collective mobilizations– requires a return to more shorthand concepts: those which are limited to organizing the list of relations that link together several typical elements.²⁶ From this perspective, it is helpful to highlight the usefulness of the concepts of “moral shock” and the “apparatus of sensitization”.

James M. Jasper uses the expression “moral shock” to refer to the type of social experience that is recorded before the commitment to a cause, and which is characterized by four complementary traits: Moral shock results from an unexpected event or an unforeseen change, usually sudden, in an individual’s environment. It involves an acute, visceral reaction that is felt physically even to the point of nausea or dizziness. It leads the person who is confronted with it to measure and assess the way in which the present world order seems to diverge from his own values. Lastly, this social experience inspires feelings of terror, anger, and the need for immediate reaction, which commands a call to action, even in the absence of other factors generally thought to lead to collective action.²⁷

Over the course of my survey of animal rights activists, the concept of moral shock has indeed been shown to be indispensable for the empirical description of some of their most salient characteristics. Interviews, autobiographies, and activist documents are sprinkled with tales in which activists recall previous experiences that contain all of the traits that define “moral shock.” For example, the website of the *Œuvre d’assistance des bêtes d’abattoir*ⁱⁱ claims that everything began in 1957, when an old donkey escaped from the Menton slaughterhouse and placed itself under the protection of Jacqueline Gilardoni, who, moved by this sight, decided to found the association to which she devoted her entire life. The following passage comes from the website

²⁶ Cf. Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique: l’espace non poppérien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris: Nathan, 1991) 116.

²⁷ Cf. James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997) 106-on.

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of the Association Stéphane Lamart, which recalls that, on December 23, 1992, its founder was struck by a scene that “revolutionized his whole life”:

It was just a small rat no doubt looking for a bit of food. The panic-stricken animal tried hopelessly to escape the blows from the broom that they were using to make him leave. Once outside, the rat hid himself under a car, but was still ruthlessly pursued and beaten, still with the broom, by the wild horde of hateful human beings. It was too much: Stéphane was revolted by this cruel and unjust execution. For him, this would be the trigger. The little rat would not die for nothing. Thanks to him, thousands of animals would be saved because the child, offended by the violence of man, took an oath: he would consecrate his life to saving animals.²⁸

During other interviews, it is not rare for the activists being questioned to evoke memories that are related to a moral shock. Thus, among so many others, this activist from the *Comité radicalement anticorrida*, who evokes scenes of monkeys, dressed up in ridiculous costumes for circus shows that used to make all his childhood friends laugh but plunged him into a state of extreme sadness. One of the most remarkable facts is that a large part of the moral shocks that arise for animal rights activists occur during the early stages of childhood. Such is the case, for example, in the two following incidents, on which we will linger longer in order to examine the methodological care that the use of the concept of moral shock necessitates.

Claude Bernard’s daughter was the only child of the great physiologist who adored her. She had reached the age of fourteen without ever being suspicious of the type of study her father took part in. Here’s how she found out about it. “One day,” said M. de Cherville, “the child had gone to visit one of her friends. She found her grief-stricken; a white greyhound that she loved had been lost, and with her mother and father gone, she had no idea which saint to pray to in order to find the dog. The other girl suggested going to the University to find the Doctor and explain their dilemma to him. They went there, and since the girl had her father’s name, a foolish assistant let them into the laboratory. What they saw made them stiff with terror. On a marble table, two young people were holding down an unfortunate dog along whose flanks the Doctor was running the scalpel, his hands dripping with blood. The animal had stopped struggling and moaning: it produced only that raspy breath that is the prelude to agony. However, in spite of her malaise, in spite of the blood covering the poor animal, the friend had recognized the dog that she was looking for; overcome by emotion, she murmured the name “Léda,” and ran away in agonizing shrieks. At the sound of this familiar voice, the greyhound managed to escape from the two assistants who had looked up; it fell on the table, tried unsuccessfully to get to its feet, and lay there moaning on the concrete floor. As for the professor’s daughter, she had not moved, nor spoken a word. Whiter than a ghost, staggering, eyes barely open, she looked without seeing, and moved her lips without making a sound. The Doctor was so absorbed in his work that he had not seen the beginning of this scene; but when the friend

²⁸ During an interview conducted in April 2009, Stéphane Lamart confirmed and completed the details of this story.

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cried out, he had noticed his daughter, unmoving, petrified with terror. He ran toward her and arrived just in time to catch her in his arms when she fainted. The next day, she fell victim to a nervous fever that threatened her life for a long time. Since that evil and devastating discovery, Mademoiselle Bernard devoted her life to animals just as Saint Vincent de Paul did for lost children. She adopts stray dogs that she encounters, and since she has but modest means, she makes difficult sacrifices in order to feed the poor animals that she rescues from scientists in memory of Léda.

As we can detect, M. de Cherville, the narrator of this text (whose author we will identify below), does not hesitate to assert an explanation of the motivations for Claude Bernard’s daughter’s commitment to helping animals. That she would later, among many other things, participate in the SPA’s “commission on pounds and shelters,”²⁹ contribute to the creation in 1899 of a dog cemetery on the island of Asnières, seems immediately understandable after reading this story. The concern for mistreated animals that the daughter demonstrated her entire life appears to be the direct consequence of the brutal affective experience sustained in her father’s laboratory. A second story also indicates a similar explanation:

I think back to my childhood, and one scene that disrupted my life, which has changed course drastically forever because of it... I was ten years old, in 1963, when I first saw animals being killed at the slaughterhouse... A mare, followed by her foal only a few months old... Heⁱⁱⁱ was free, and trotted in circles around his mother, carefree. The mother was moving forward with an anxious gait, led into the center of the slaughtering room by an employee with a rope and halter. The employee put the rope through a ring stuck in the ground and pulled it tight... The foal pressed itself against the mare, right against her shoulder... She turned her head to look at him, to get his scent in her nose... A man approached the foal slowly, holding out his left hand, as if to offer it something... In his right hand, he held a slaughtering gun. Very slowly, he raised it up to the height of the foal... He had to make sure the foal didn’t move... It was there, snuggled up against its mother’s shoulder... The man got his gun closer and closer to the foal’s ears and “bang,” he pierced its skull... The little horse collapsed on the ground. The mother leapt to the side, frightened by the explosion. The rope came undone... The man recharged his gun while the mare sniffed her son, lifeless on the ground. Taking advantage of the mare’s lowered head, the man placed his gun on her forehead and “bang” again: the mother collapsed as well, her head lying upon her son’s back, as if to protect him one last time. As a child, my eyes had just witnessed for the first time the end of the world—the world of childhood. I left the slaughterhouse quickly, crying. I wanted to find my mother, I was afraid they would do the same thing to us... This terrible scene has remained etched in my memory and comes back to me every time I pass a slaughterhouse... or when I go inside one. For the first time, from the perch of my ten years of age, I truly experienced the feeling of injustice. I was clearly aware that what I had just

²⁹ *Bulletin de la Société protectrice des animaux* (1884), viewed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (microfilm M-8525).

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witnessed constituted a kind of transgression, an insult to life, an illegal act of evil.

This text is a passage from the work *Abattoir... Agir autrement (Slaughterhouse... Act Differently)*, written by Gil Raconis, who was appointed as an investigator for the *Œuvre d’assistance aux bêtes d’abattoir (OABA)*. Yet again, this story invites us to construct a childhood trauma as an explanatory factor behind an activist commitment, a factor that shocks because of its extreme and intense nature. For almost twenty years, Gil Raconis never stopped believing that “the very existence of slaughterhouses will be for a very long time a kind of wart, a black spot on our enjoyment of life.”³⁰ Up at three o’clock in the morning, Gil Raconis goes into these slaughterhouses that he loathes, and where he is often greeted with mockery, and even hostility. He doesn’t care!

Let me scream loudly in your ears that I have compassion for them: You, slaughterhouse director; you, employee; you, killer and slaughterer. Your mockery, your sarcasm, make my beliefs stronger.³¹

His flawless knowledge of slaughtering techniques and current regulations pushes him at times to interfere steadfastly with men engaged in a business that leaves little place for compassion.

This is my task to watch over, to survey and prevent these deplorable dealings that add to the suffering and the stress of the animals that we must kill. It’s a difficult position. I put myself between man and animal. It screams, it thrashes, it insults, it threatens, it calms down, and finally, I try to explain that I was right.³²

Moral Shock, Biography, and Commitment

The analytical distinctions proposed above invite us to considerably stretch the immediate explanatory link that we might too quickly assume to exist between the early experience of moral shock and later moral protests. It is undeniable that the particularly intense affective reactions that have resulted from the scenes evoked here have deeply branded future animal rights activists. However, moral shocks, as well as the commitments that appear to arise from them, are inserted in the greater series of experiences that make up an activist’s social history. In other words, the temperament of a future activist may have been impressed upon by other feelings without which it would be difficult to understand why the individual was inclined to be shocked by a particular event or aspect of his environment. From this vantage point, the biographical elements scattered throughout *Abattoir... Agir autrement* seem even more valuable.³³ In the first place, it is still important to mention the characteristics of the Gil Raconis’s family background, as well as his first professional experiences.

³⁰ Gil Raconis, *Abattoir... Agir autrement* (Paris: Œuvre d’assistance aux bêtes d’abattoir, 2004) 10.

³¹ Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 23.

³² Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 22.

³³ Conducting an interview would have been, obviously, very desirable in order to complete these fragmented biographical elements. Unfortunately, Gil Raconis passed away in June 2008.

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I am a butcher’s son, I was raised in this milieu. I left school at the age of fourteen because my father wanted to make a butcher out of me. In 1970, I passed the butcher’s CAP.^{iv} My family’s friends were all in meat working: livestock farmers, cattle dealers, slaughterhouse employees, butchers... My entire childhood was bathed in meat and butchering animals: calves, cows, pigs, chickens, and others. Our Sunday family outings were for visiting small farmers. My father bought animals that, two days later, would be driven to the slaughterhouse [p. 9].

A butcher’s son, raised in meat, with meat, essentially fed with meat, and even having my CAP in butchery, I worked for several years at my father’s butcher shop. Even today, I would be able to de-bone a sirloin steak, cut out a rump steak, carve a drumstick, a shoulder, split open a neck, prepare a pork roast, a cushion of veal, or a plate of ribs [p. 19].

It is fair to say that it is not only because of his young age that the child Gil Raconis was acutely shocked by the death scene of the mare and her foal. More fundamentally, since he was affectively linked with his father, whose vocation involved the slaughter of animals, the child was deeply *troubled* by a scene that would return to his memory each time the OABA activist would enter a slaughterhouse almost twenty-five years later. In accordance with his father’s will and the professional vocations valued by his entire family, Gil Raconis first had to acquire the skills necessary for transforming the bodies of slaughtered animals into cuts appreciated by epicures. His later remarks indicate a certain uneasiness that he felt when practicing a profession that ran against a sensibility imprinted upon him by a previous moral shock.

Why do they have to die? To make a cutlet, of course, my dear sir!... Oh, how good does that taste, a cutlet with cream and mushrooms, or breaded, with lemon. The life of these calves has no other use than to tempt your taste buds. So who would ever worry about that? Well, me, obviously!³⁴

Hence, we can assume that the moral shock felt over the course of his childhood is at the origin of Gil Raconis’s inability to adapt to the profession that his family background had commanded him to practice. Unless, that is, there were other difficulties in adapting to this profession that may have inspired him to rekindle his past affective experience as a justification for his reluctance to accept its constraints. Whatever it is, one of these sensibilities – originating in the feelings experienced during successive social experiences – prevented him – upon being asked to de-bone a sirloin steak or carve a rump steak – from ignoring the violence carried out on these “slaughter animals condemned to death in order to satisfy our carnivorous appetites.”³⁵

After turning away from butchery, Gil Raconis devoted himself to a substitute vocation that attests to the uniqueness of his temperament. After 1978, the repented butcher took up the profession of stuntman. He created more than eighty motor stunt shows both in France and abroad. He designed, organized, and executed car, motorcycle, and truck stunts for more than 130 films, TV movies, and advertisements. In 1981, he set the world record for longest jump in an automobile (100 meters, unbroken to this day). From 1986 to 2001, in the Center for

³⁴ Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 14.

³⁵ Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 151.

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Specialized Training, of which he was the founder and director, he trained more than 600 VIP chauffeurs in defensive driving safety. It is fair to say that Gil Raconis seems to have demonstrated a certain appetite for intense affective experiences, and more particularly for the adrenaline rushes that result from confronting danger. We have come to wonder if this propensity for "flirting with death" does not support a certain relation with the moral shock experienced as a child. Might this intense affective experience have left traces mixing aversion and fascination? Might the stunts have represented a chance to experience affective states that were as intense as "that scene that disrupted his life, which changed course drastically forever because of it?"³⁶ Here, it seems impossible to respond with even the slightest amount of certainty. However, what is certain is that his service to the OABA seems to have prolonged his commitment to being a stuntman. For several years, Gil Raconis's visits to slaughterhouses were interspersed between his film shoots and training sessions. Furthermore, numerous statements betray a sensibility that – initially in his profession, then in his duties as an activist – drove him, so to speak, to strive to look death straight in the eye.

During these experiences with death, whether it was during my profession as stuntman (several times, I had a narrow brush with death), or while observing its workings in the slaughterhouses (I have been present at the slaughter of thousands of animals), I acquired a profound conviction: "I will be on life's side forever" [p. 6].

We are willing to commit an insult to creation, to life, which has been lucky to appear on this tiny planet. I have understood it; I have seen it in the gaze of animals whose throats were being slit. I have dared to fix my gaze upon a cow while an employee killed it. I fixed my eyes on her eyes during her entire agony, up until the moment when her pupil dilated, announcing death... This lasted more than four minutes. I did it willingly, to know. Now, I know... [p. 10].

[The bovine] moved forward in the stall, up to this impassable obstacle: the front of the stall; it can't move any farther forward. Finished, life ends there, its muzzle against the side. This wall represents the end of its life, the end of its march forward, the last thing it will see. I am on the other side; I watch the wall that measures two meters high and ten centimeters thick, and symbolizes death. Ten centimeters of thickness separate me from death. I'm lucky to be on the good side. Occasionally, I touch her by placing my hand on this side with all that this gesture makes me think of. I wonder if the mason or worker that built it knew what he was building? Was he thinking the same thing as me? Did he know that he was building an obstacle to life? No! I don't believe that he knew that the living being that would look at his work would have to die. Except for me, who looks at it too, but on the good side, on life's side [p. 66].

Thus, it is not so much the intensity of feelings felt during a moral shock taken in isolation that leads to commitment, but rather interdependence, and the eventual tensions which tie together the multiple sensibilities that make up an activist's temperament. In this sense, we cannot help but be struck by the fact that Gil Raconis exhibits two sensibilities that are incompatible in

³⁶ Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 12.

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principle: on the one hand, a strong response to animal suffering, on the other, affection toward those who kill them.

My heart (writes Gil Raconis) is filled with compassion for those that I must watch die. I love them, I know them, I feel what they feel, I hear what their eyes tell me [...]. I have bizarre admiration and compassion for those who kill them and slit their throats [p. 22].

Each of these sensibilities, or affective predispositions, was molded over the course of a social history that mixed collective and individual experiences. As for his tenderness towards animals, Gil Raconis’s own testimony highlights the importance of the bonds of affection that tie him to Lytiss, the dog that accompanies him everywhere. In addition, *Abattoir... Agir autrement!* finishes with a chapter devoted to the story of Titus, a bull whose photographs adorn the book’s cover. Titus, after being mistreated, was rescued by Gil Raconis, who established with the animal an unusual relationship for a man and a bull. In a very touching story, Gil Raconis relates the excitement of the animal’s training progress, the tenderness and care that he carries at all times, the joys of a growing bond, the hopeless attempt to save it from a hernia, and finally the immense grief brought about by its death.

It is necessary to note that the temperament trait exhibited here, which is hardly unique, harkens back to a communal experience that a large number of animal rights activists share: the fact that they were affected, over the course of their childhood, by tender relations with their pets (dogs, cats, hamsters, horses, etc.). The importance of this sensibility for the exchange of tenderness with the animal deserves more attention, given that the concept of moral shock might unfortunately give credence to the idea that activists might be determined exclusively by affective reactions that are not only dysphoric, but also exceptionally brutal and intense. Contrary to this exclusively catastrophic perspective, it is important to note that emotions experienced during an activist’s commitment can also prolong sensibilities that result from mild and repetitive affective experiences. Modeled after Proust’s delight in the literary evocation of the taste of the *madeleines* from his childhood, the activist often tries to recall the sensations and feelings forged over the course of his socialization by familiarization.³⁷

Though tenderness for household pets comes close to a social arbitrariness that is shared by nearly everyone, the sympathy that Gil Raconis reserves for animal killers comes close, on the other hand, to a much more restrained form of familial arbitrariness. As an aside, the most remarkable fact lies in the way that this attachment shows through in the “mission” to which the OABA’s investigator was devoted. Whereas the indignation inspired by the victims’ fate usually involves anger and contempt towards slaughterers,³⁸ Gils Raconis never stops emphasizing the respect that slaughterhouse killers deserve. Several times, he salutes the fact that these men are

³⁷ According to Annick Percheron, socialization by familiarization is equivalent to “the mild and insidious imposition of familial and social arbitrariness, effected by a daily repetition of movements, remarks, and practices.” (Annick Percheron, “La Socialisation politique: défense et illustration” in *Traité de science politique*, ed. Jean Leca and Madeleine Grawitz (Paris: PUF, 1985) 165-235 (citation from p. 209).

³⁸ Cf. Luc Bolstanski, *La Souffrance à distance: morale humanitaire, médias et politique* (Paris: Métailié, 1993).

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burdened with a “dirty job” that meat consumers give them in order to ease their conscience. The touching story of a little pony saved from slaughter at the last minute is narrated in detail in order to demonstrate that slaughterhouse personnel have “a great sensibility [and], just like everyone else, experience emotion and pity.”³⁹

Aside from meat industry professionals, breeders, transporters, and livestock and meat brokers, everyone has a bad image of slaughterhouses. They suffer from a bad reputation. Those who work there are the primary targets. However, they do what we refuse to do. They kill animals for us because we want to eat meat [p. 21]. We prefer to pay people to do this dirty job for us. But the paradox is that, rather than being grateful to them for it, we use them as targets, criticize them, and insult them [p. 20].

In the end, the meanings that Gil Raconis attaches to his fight within the OABA – considering his social history – appear much more complex than a single revolt against the injustice experienced by slaughter animals. Of course, he seems undeniably taken up by a deep tenderness and compassion toward animals. However, read out loud, it seems clear that he aims as well to contribute to the *softening-up of butchers*.

If we want to give help to slaughter animals, we can do this by only one means: inspire the compassion of those who kill them, so that they can ease their death. We must respect these people, those who do what we refuse to in order to eat meat. They agree to do this dirty job for us. We owe it to ourselves to thank them, to show them our gratitude [p. 38].

Prayer: “I call upon you, my friend who kills the cow, who bleeds out the pig, and slits the lamb’s throat; you who take life, listen only to your heart, act according to your conscience, listen not to those who criticize you for it, for these hypocrites need you. It is not you who have condemned the animal to death, it’s all of us. You are our arm, our hand; it is in all our name that you take the life of an innocent. So, please, sir, give that innocent a death that is as sweet as a caress. As for me, I hold back my tears when I watch you do it; my heart bleeds as much as the throat that you slice. Listen to my petition, and I’ll be grateful to you for it. Don’t let them suffer; be precise in your deathblow. You are a human being [p. 39].

Thus, analyzing insertion of moral shock into a social history allows us to bring out one of the primordial aspects of activism. Through his activism, his slaughterhouse visits, and writing *Abattoirs... Agir autrement!*, Gil Raconis strives to transcribe the troubling *feelings* from his childhood into the language of *emotions* that are shared collectively among those who support the OABA or the animal rights movement in general. This effort of transcription deeply involves the transformation of the results of a relatively primitive phenomenological consciousness into the product of a reflective consciousness that, as we will see below, often intersects with the strategic considerations of the activist organization.

³⁹ Gil Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 37.

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Apparatuses of sensitization and the Strategic Expression of Emotions

The concept of moral shock must never lead us to confuse sustained experiences with deliberate methods of action aimed at promoting a cause. Thus, it seems necessary to turn to another concept in order to better describe those practices that always incorporate a fairly developed strategic dimension. From this perspective, I will take up the concept of apparatuses of sensitization as previously discussed in *Émotions... mobilisation!*. I take this term to mean “the group of material support, the arrangement of objects, and the performances that activists display in order to inspire the affective reactions that predispose those who experience them to support the proposed cause.”⁴⁰

In this case, *Abattoir... Agir autrement!* does not appear only as an attempt to reduce – through a writing style that contributes to activist activity – the tensions that are particular to a single temperament. This work, of which the OABA made 1,000 copies, sold to members, sent to slaughterhouse groups and to the ministry of Agriculture, is truly an apparatus of sensitization geared towards asserting the urgency of the cause supported by the association. Throughout the text, the reader is invited to let himself be won over by an emotion that is inextricably linked to a reflection of the measures necessary to reduce these scandalous practices. Several interdependent aspects of the work contribute to extracting the reader from his initial indifference. The succession of experiences put into writing by Gil Raconis contain all the traits of a *testimony*—that is, a form of narration that seems even more moving because it mixes a summary of a past experience with a present-day recollection of how that experience affected the witness.⁴¹ The photographs of the bull and his loving friend that illustrate the book (notably on the front and back covers) make the passages that are devoted to the exceptional relationship between Titus and the investigator appointed by OABA even more telling. Generally, the intensity and authenticity of the emotions that Gil Raconis attests to are continually corroborated by his thankless efforts, often courageous and always grueling, within the slaughterhouses that he loathes. The alternation between personal testimony and very precise technical considerations about the slaughtering conditions required for reducing suffering plays a crucial role. The ability demonstrated by the OABA investigator affirms that the compassion that he feels toward slaughter animals is not due only to his own personal history. The painstakingly detailed analysis of the suffering brought about by the wrong slaughtering equipment, badly-practiced techniques, and an inefficient organization, represents a reflective distance – a cognitive control – best able to disarm those who wish to drive out blind and persistent “sentimentality.” Thus, we can see to what extent the story of the childhood moral shock makes up only one of the elements of a complex apparatus of sensitization aimed at reinforcing members and potential funding, in the assurance of the necessity to support the OABA. For most readers, who are often less than tuned in to the goings on of a slaughterhouse, reading this work presents an opportunity not only to learn about certain practices, but also to experience emotions in whose absence they never would have spontaneously considered acting to improve slaughterhouse practices. For the newly-converted, the emotions experienced because of the apparatus of sensitization most likely prolong the sensibilities that they owe to previous experiences shared between the mobilized

⁴⁰ Christophe Traïni, *Émotions... mobilisation!* 13.

⁴¹ Cf. Dominique Mehl, “Le témoin, figure emblématique de l’espace privé/public” in *Les sens du public: publics politiques, publics médiatiques*, ed. Daniel Cefaï and Dominique Pasquier (Paris: PUF, 2003) 489-502.

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group. However, only a supplementary interview within this group can allow us to understand how diverse temperaments, linked to varied life paths, adapt to identical apparatuses of sensitization.

The passage about the daughter of Claude Bernard attests even more to the necessity of making a clear distinction between two phenomena that intersect only partially. Indeed, when we speak of moral shock, we must not confuse an actual experience sustained by an activist – which he then associates with his commitment to a cause – with the *anecdotal* form of this experience – which does not necessarily have to be lived first-hand in order to be a powerful apparatus of sensitization. Furthermore, it is important to note that the story about the misfortune of Claude Bernard’s daughter was printed in issue 149, second trimester 2001 of the *L’Antivivisection*, a journal of the *Ligue française contre la vivisection (LFCV)*. The author’s identity is not clear, and the text is presented simply as a passage from the anthology *Les Animaux dans la littérature et dans l’histoire*.⁴² Despite a description that poses as realistic, it is obvious that we are far from a true autobiographical or historical testimony. Indeed, a close reading of the text reveals several obvious approximations. It declares that the daughter of Claude Bernard was an only child, while in reality M. Bernard had two daughters.⁴³ Furthermore, the assumed historical fact of the moral shock as retold by Paul Brulat must be evaluated in light of what other sources tell us about the family life of the famed physiologist.⁴⁴ In 1847, Claude Bernard, who needed money to pursue his research, married the daughter of a rich doctor from Paris. She was especially disappointed not to find in her husband – who often neglected her in favor of his experiments – the personification of the idealized paternal figure of a well respected city doctor. A devout catholic, very fond of the cats and dogs that filled her apartment, she criticized her husband for bringing into the house the smells of death that he bathed in day in and day out. She set out to make his life impossible, most notably by feeding public clamoring by denouncing his nasty experimentations. She brainwashed her daughters against their father; they took their mother’s side. The physiologist’s wife joined the newly founded Society for the Protection of Animals and became one of its most active members. Indeed, it is not rare to read in works by antivivisectionist activists of that period – especially English – that the wife of one of the movement’s nemeses rallied to their cause because of the constant vivisections that were performed in her own home (in the kitchen or the cellar, depending on the version).⁴⁵ Suffice it to say that Paul Brulat’s text dedicated to the moral shock of Claude Bernard’s daughter purports to report a discourse (“‘one day,’ said M. de Cherville”) that was peddled by multiple speakers

⁴² Robert LeStrange, *Les animaux dans la littérature et dans l’histoire* (Paris: Ophrys, 1937). The summary of this work, obtained from the library of the National Museum of Natural History, tells us that the author of the passage entitled “The Greyhound and the Daughter of Claude Bernard” is, in fact, the novelist Paul Brulat (1866-1940).

⁴³ In addition to these two daughters, his spouse gave birth as well to two sons who died at an early age.

⁴⁴ See, among others, Pierre Debray-Ritzen, *Claude Bernard ou un nouvel état de l’humaine raison* (Paris: Albin-Michel, 1992). Note that Claude Bernard’s marital problems were, at that time, so well known that they were the inspiration for Emile Zola’s *Le Docteur Pascal*, a novel about the story of a scientist married to a religious reactionary.

⁴⁵ Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 101-2.

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who were all involved in some way with the antivivisection controversy to which Claude Bernard's wife, due to her conflict with her husband, contributed.⁴⁶

In such conditions, it must be obvious that it would be unwise to attempt to determine the degree of historical veracity of every moral shock described by activists. In reality, the question of veracity seems of secondary importance once we investigate the effects that the publication of this story in the LFCV bulletin attempts to invoke on readers of *L'Antivivisection*. As with other apparatuses of sensitization such as inflammatory editorials, repulsive photographs of lab animals in shreds, the exposure of dog trafficking to fulfill lab needs, or even poems such as "*In vivo: The Eye of the Vivisectionist*," the story of Claude Bernard's daughter contributes to the aversion to a practice that LFCV activists intend to abolish. The emphasis of this text induces the readers to share a mixed emotion of terror and compassion (as much for the animal as for the poor girl) that reinforces the belief in the necessity of commitment by the Righteous, as indicated by a comment that accompanies the story:

There have always been, and always will be, true humans... but still too few to change this world. It is up to us to cultivate our message of respect and love for creatures.

Obviously, nothing allows us to know if the writers for *L'Antivivisection* inquired about the veracity of the moral shock story that they featured. Whether true or not, the appearance of this text in the activist journal results from a reflective consciousness that is anxious to make its readers feel the horror of this practice. Prompted to imagine the moral shock described in the narrative, each person can measure, in terms of the emotions depicted in this single story, his determination to support the cause of the LFCV. Yet again, the ability to be moved by a cause probably prolongs those feelings that are linked to other social experiences about which we know very little. However, pending further investigation, we can already state that the account of the moral shock of Claude Bernard's daughter works well as an apparatus of sensitization that complies with crucial goals for the activist organization: to reach out and convert the public, and to reinforce the beliefs and loyalty of its activists.

Other information that has been gleaned from the survey directs our attention to how the reflective consciousness of activists can lead them to question the strategic efficiency of evoked emotions. When activists want to appear as legitimate actors in the eyes of their followers or in the eyes of the professionals and the officials in charge of regulating the offending practices, the appropriateness of the proposed apparatuses of sensitization can be subject to vivid internal debates. Inspiring supreme indignation by describing slaughterhouse executioners or laboratory workers as sadistic perverts is certainly not the best way to inspire them to heed animal activists. On the contrary, expressing these kinds of emotions can elicit contempt, indignation, hostility, and even counter-activism from the party under attack. Under these conditions, it is not surprising the president of the OABA has criticized certain associations' distribution of films of

⁴⁶ Here, I am not trying to insinuate that the entire antivivisection movement of the nineteenth century is none other than an extension of Claude Bernard's marital problems. On the contrary, I endeavor to reveal that antivivisection activism, which was especially strong in Great Britain, was based on sociological trends that should be kept in mind because they are the cause of major turning points in the history of the animal rights movement.

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horrible slaughterhouse scenes caught on “hidden camera” unbeknownst to professional meat workers who were then hunted down like executioners operating in the shadows. Even though such apparatuses are useful for encouraging participation from the general public, they run the risk of turning professional meat workers against any animal protections, and diminish the possibility for OABA investigators to impose significant improvements.⁴⁷

In general, then, observing collective mobilizations requires great care in the analysis of how appeals to emotions, strategic goals, and the articulation of the cause’s claims complement or contradict each other. Activism is often discerned by its tendency to put into action several interdependent plans that appear to be unevenly connected according to the circumstances and the types of activists and organizations. As far as animal rights are concerned, each of these plans reflects variations in the activists’ own sensibilities, through publicly expressed emotions, in the identification of adversaries (as “executioners” versus professionals that could be morally enlightened), in wording of the claims (“abolishment” or “regulation” of current practices), and in the type of justification system invoked (humanism? Christianity? Antispeciesism?).⁴⁸

Decoding Emotions: Signs, Traces, and Clues

The analytical reflections proposed above reveal to what extent the recent reemergence of emotions in the study of activism require our greatest care. Acknowledging the affective dimensions of protests is extremely complex and requires very different modes of understanding. On the one hand, apparatuses of sensitization constitute a tangible type of material that – similar to an utterance in linguistics or signs in semiotics – can be described in order to identify the codified processes and conventions that individuals use to elicit the states of consciousness necessary for building their cause within the audience. Just like any semiotic analysis, the investigation might concentrate on locating the grammatical tendencies that activists depend on to express such affective states, or on decoding emotions that occur in specific circumstances. Such an interpretation is nevertheless rarely dubious (unless the social distance between the observer and the observed is so great that they do not share the same cultural codes). Thus, it is fairly indisputable to infer from the moral shock stories mentioned above that they aim to inspire compassion for animal victims, terror with respect to the goings on of laboratories, and even sympathy for the children who had to suffer through a horrible event.

However, new methodological difficulties arise when the observer, far from reducing the expressed emotions to their semiotic value, considers them as bearing the *trace* of the processes that led to their genesis. In accordance with the logic of the *presumptive paradigm*,⁴⁹ hunting down traces – in their double meaning of involuntary marks and physical remains – and inferring causes from effects is the only method in any discipline that aims to acknowledge those

⁴⁷ Interview with Jean-Pierre Kieffer, president of the OABA, December 17, 2008.

⁴⁸ On the diversity and origins of the different moral philosophies developed for the defense of animals, please see, among others, Jean Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, *Éthique animale* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

⁴⁹ Whose history Carlo Ginzburg traces in “Clues: Roots of a Scientific paradigm”, *Theory and Society*, vol. 7, N°. 3 (May, 1979), 273-288.

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processes to which the observer does not have direct access.⁵⁰ Thus, feelings and temperaments – which, as I have noted, are important for understanding the origins of activist engagement – invariably result from an indirect and conjectural historical knowledge that arises from interpretive risk-taking.⁵¹ At the end of the translation made by the activists being studied, past feelings only faintly echo in contemporary emotions. They are merely residual traces, which cannot be directly observed and must be inferred by the researcher. Thus, the anecdotal form of a moral shock is not enough to prove that the described feelings were actually those that were felt, nor the possibility that they were a deciding factor in subsequent commitment to a cause. At most, these anecdotes suggest that an activist has tried to describe past affective states in order to share with others those emotions that inspire action in support of a social movement.

If one of these stories resonates with an activist’s “narrative identity,”⁵² the observer must consider it as one of many clues, or fragments of proof, that he must gather in order to present a *hypothetical reconstruction* that goes beyond just repeating the discourse of the subject being observed.

What am I doing here, at five o’clock in the morning, dressed in a white coat, white boots, white hat, standing up, wading in pools of blood, watching an animal being put to death, listening to squealing pigs flailing about violently, waiting for death with their throats slit?⁵³

It is in response to this question on that Gil Raconis evokes the memory of a moral shock, and thus invites the reader to consider this as the principle “cause” behind his commitment to the OABA. Contrary to this overzealous reading, I set out to align the evocation of the moral shock with other elements that are not only salient within the story, but also must be related to or distinguished from those that were gathered by other methods: interviews with other activists, observing acceptable behaviors within animal rights organizations, and looking back in history in order to resituate the commitment observed over the long-term evolution of sensibilities...

Within this type of approach, which attempts to control for the convergence and cohesion of disparate clues, any proposed interpretations must avoid trying to draw conclusions that are too general. In this case, I have tried to determine the origins of the commitment of a single OABA activist in order to highlight the possibility of examining the relationship between apparatuses of sensitization and the dispositions of those who put them into action. It goes without saying that this hypothetical reconstruction has no value for other animal rights activists, even those who operate within the OABA. Generally, only a few sparse and fragmentary clues – collected during interviews in which activists unequally confide in the interviewers– allow us to trace how their temperaments were likely altered over the course of time. More often than not, and with the

⁵⁰ History, archaeology, and even paleontology, when they attempt to access objects as concrete and abstract as the extinction of the dinosaurs, can only infer the processes that occurred using traces that account for their presence in a series of events.

⁵¹ On the necessity of taking interpretive risks that do not involve falling into the trap of overinterpretation, see Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, “La violence faite aux données,” *Enquêteur, Interpréter, Surinterpréter*, 1996, <<http://enquete.revues.org/document363.html>>.

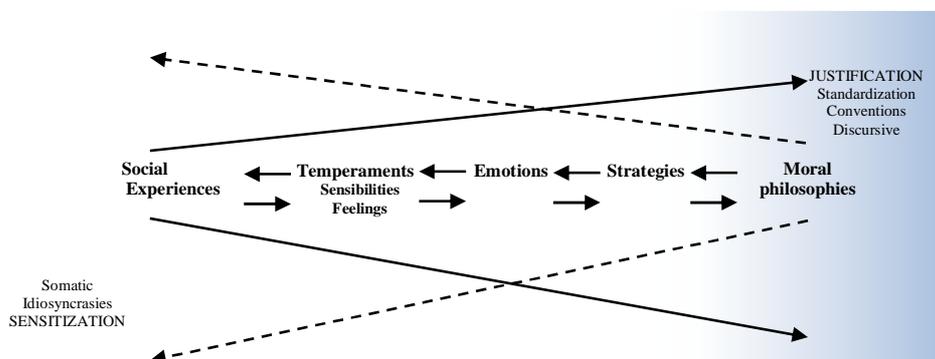
⁵² Paul Ricœur, “L’identité narrative,” *Esprit*, 7-8 (1988), 295-314.

⁵³ Gil Raconis, *Abattoir...*, 12.

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exception only of certain cases that were supplemented by substantial (auto)biographical material, the sociological interpretation of the origins of activism must be considered as an “ideal-type”^v in the sense that it attempts to outline the types of feelings and types of sensibilities that are most often shared within the organizations being studied.⁵⁴ Suffice it to say that it would be unwise to look for a single “emotional variable” which is supposed to explain in general the “causes” of collective activism. Far from being able to determine an “explanation” for group activism, the retracing of the origin and evolution of the sensibilities that make up temperaments, and the observation of the expression of emotions are only a first step toward analyzing the ways in which affective states are continually transcribed, amended, and reformulated over the course of an activist’s engagement in a cause.

Figure 2. Transcription efforts by activists



The attention directed toward affectivity ought to remain subordinate to the description, or reconstruction, of the multiple dimensions of activism.⁵⁵ In this sense, one must understand that throughout their activism, activists set about transcribing different forms of the necessary states of consciousness for fueling collective action. These efforts thus appear to be made up of something that falls in between somatization and justification. “Justification” refers to the discursive activity that consists of forming judgments of justice by relying on general principles whose validity outlasts the specific contexts in which they were created. Justifications can range from the ordinary ability to rely – over the course of a given situation – on preexisting principles,

⁵⁴ The distinction between feelings/sensibilities is aligned with the distinction between situational and diachronic analyses. “Feelings” refers to the corporeal effects brought about by affective reactions linked to a *situation*, clearly defined in time and space, which a sociologist can attempt to reconstruct from a later anecdotal form created by witnesses or using direct ethnographic observation. “Sensibilities” refers to specific and regular affective reactions that are exhibited during an activist’s life. As such, their identification requires a historical interpretation on the part of the observer, which is even more hypothetical (but less so than one that requires the reconstruction of the heterogeneous groups that make up temperaments).

⁵⁵ In doing this, we align ourselves with Lilian Mathieu where he recommends a pragmatic perspective that considers activism as a vocation that requires specific skills (Lilian Mathieu, “Rapport au politique: dimensions cognitives et perspectives pragmatiques dans l’analyse des mouvements sociaux,” *Revue française de science politique*, no. 52 (1) (Feb 2002), 75-100.

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to the much rarer skill of being able to draw together entire systems of moral philosophy.⁵⁶ Thus, a close examination of apparatuses of sensitization is very useful for an understanding of the development of social movements because such apparatuses work both ways. On the one hand, there are the transitions between activists’ personal concerns and the formulation of group demands justified by reason. On the other hand, we also have the transformation of philosophical and strategic arguments into a commitment that is viscerally felt. In other words, group protests would not even exist if individual activists were not able to articulate the feelings that impressed them into the public expression of an outrage worthy of being shared. However, it would be reckless to conclude from the above that moral philosophical arguments cannot – at the cost of a complementary sensitization effort that deserves to be described – lead activists to a distaste for meat and a compassion for hens or scalded lobsters. Indeed, it is necessary to set apart analytically these two divergent paths which are permanently enmeshed empirically.

The concept of temperament will no doubt inspire the strongest reservation. Far from reintroducing a simplistic psychology, its only aim is to better analyze the subjective perceptions of changes that the study of activism, following the lead of Howard S. Becker, attributes to activist *careers*.⁵⁷ Rather than just talking about “moving perspective”, the concept of temperament invites us to better distinguish between sensibilities which result from past social experiences, and those which are transcribed into the shared emotional codes. Furthermore, this concept suggests as well that the change in perspective that marks certain stages in activist careers⁵⁸ is evidenced above all by the modification of hierarchical relationships that – within the composite set that defines each temperament – link together sensibilities that are fairly heterogeneous. Thus, it is common for phases of commitment to seem to correspond to a period of an individual’s life when sensibility, initially thought to have played a secondary role in the future activist’s temperament, ends up playing a primary role. In the case that served as our primary source, it was only after experimenting with the dangers of being a stuntman that Gil Raconis rediscovered, by way of his activities within the OABA, the extent of his compassion for slaughter animals.

Feelings, sensibilities, temperaments, emotions, moral shock, and apparatuses of sensitization: I have attempted to define the analytical categories aimed at describing certain essential processes and procedures that underlie social movements. Thus, it seems that whereas one aspect of the origin of commitment results from the efficiency of apparatuses of sensitization that are so ingeniously designed, another, more fundamental part lies in the social history of the individual.

⁵⁶ On this topic, see Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *De la justification: les économies de la grandeur*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 122.

⁵⁷ Howard S. Becker quotes Everett Hughes: “Subjectively, a career is the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happens to him”. In its objective dimension, a career refers to the succession of experiences and social statuses. Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York, London: Free Press of Clencoe), 102.

⁵⁸ On analyzing activist careers, see Olivier Fillieule and Nonna Mayers, eds., “Devenirs militants,” *Revue française de science politique* (Feb-Apr 2001); Olivier Fillieule, ed. *Le désengagement militant* (Paris: Belin, 2005).

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Furthermore, the perspective that has been outlined here should allow us as well to examine the extent to which different aspects of activism are favored according to the types of activists and organizations. Indeed, there are some elements that allow us to understand the various skills such as gathering together tireless zealots, touching large groups of sympathizers, and even giving the impression of being a legitimate speaker within political decision systems. I will try to show elsewhere how a frame of reference of this kind actually allows us to better comprehend the unusual heterogeneity that characterizes the animal rights movement.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I would like to thank Johanna Siméant for her comments, which helped me improve on an earlier version of this text. Any errors in this article are my own.

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Translator’s notes

ⁱ The SPA (Société protectrice des animaux) is the French equivalent of the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals).

ⁱⁱ The OABA fights specifically for the rights of slaughterhouse animals.

ⁱⁱⁱ In French, there is no distinction between people and things for the third-person subject pronoun. For the most part, when “il” or “elle” refers to an animal, I translate as “it.” However, where I feel that Gil Raconis is considering the animal as *more* than a beast, I translate according to the gender of the animal: “he” or “she.”

^{iv} The CAP (Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle) is a vocational degree.

^v In the Max Weber sense of the term.