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Social influence by Artefacts

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*A review of the paradigms of social influence - suggestion, imitation, normalisation, conformity, compliance, conversion - leads me to diagnose a triple malaise: the shrinkage of paradigms to cognitive dual-processing theories of information; the dominant methodology of laboratory experiments falls short of the reality of (mass) communication; and the focus of social influence on inter-subjectivity is only half of the story. I will suggest two extensions of social influence theory to include **mass media** communication and the **inter-objectivity of artefacts**. We need to be able to conceptualise the modalities of why, how and to what effect somebody might put up a wall to influence neighbours instead of contenting themselves with putting up a public note 'Do not trespass!'. **Social influence by fait-accompli** needs to be within the remit of social psychology, otherwise it looses its relevance in a technological society where artefacts mediate most inter-personal relations.*

"Fait accompli: an action which is completed (and irreversible) before affected parties hear of it having been undertaken; a fait accompli can wait for an official raison d'etre" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989)

Social psychology has traditionally dealt with social influence in relation to inter-subjective norms, our mutual expectations regarding belief, opinion and attitude towards the world and people; it deals with how we think and act, and how we ought not to. My motivation to explore artefacts as types of social influence stems from years of research and teaching on controversies related to nuclear power, information technology and genetic engineering. In this context it appears that social psychology, because it has little to say about 'objectification', is relegated to the role of **'acceptance provider' for the 'fait accompli'**. Psychology is called to offer a 'box of tricks' to persuade and to influence a sometimes

reluctant public to adopt new products, and to prevent and counter-act 'ill-informed' resistance to technological projects. This might be satisfactory to create opportunities for consultants and cohorts of university students, but it does not satisfy theoretical aspirations. I will explore in this paper avenues to render social psychology theoretically relevant for more than a good ride on the back of technocratic dreams.

Sunnyville: a story of somewhere

Let us start with the story of a small town called 'Sunnyville'. Mr and Mrs Wall and their three children live in a comfortable house. The extended front garden is open into the street where people pass by going after their daily routine. The town's children are playing in the street, and occasionally they extend their playground into Wall's immaculately kept lawn. From time to time cars appear on the lawn, in particular when a concert in the nearby Park creates a shortage of parking space. Also, drunkards and hooligans litter the lawn during their nightly sprawls. Mr Wall and his family feel that their garden should be a no-go-area and everyone should respect the boundary between public street and private lawn. How might they achieve this?

Mr Wall is a respected community elder and has acted for years as the mayor of Sunnyville. One day Mr Wall calls a community meeting to discuss the unclear boundary of his garden and the attitudes and actions of passers-by. He hopes to define once and for all, what is street and what is lawn, and how to behave accordingly. Thus, a new communal norm is established, in a manner of compromise after different views were duly heard: henceforth, the street/lawn boundary will be marked with a line of small stones in the lawn. Everybody seems happy and normal life in Sunnyville resumes.

Then newcomers arrive in town. They have little knowledge of the community, and 'misuse' the lawn of the Wall family. Wall takes advise from a local 'hermit' who suggests that newcomers may be too busy or cognitively challenged to take notice of local habits. They have no time or are unable to consider any issue in depth, they would need some 'cues' to fall in line. Mr Wall designs a leaflet entitled 'Do Not Trespass!'. He describes beautiful and peaceful Sunnyville and offers a history that accounts for the boundary between lawn and street. He stresses his status as town mayor, and urges everyone to abide by the rule under

threat of naming and shaming, or even exclusion from the community. This leaflet is widely distributed and handed to every newcomer upon arrival. It works; the newcomers respect the rules. However through rumours, Mr Wall discovers that not all communards are in agreement. Some disagree with him in private, while publicly they keep quiet and stick to the norm. Wall steps up his leaflet campaign, revising it to stress how beautiful and peaceful this town is and deserves to continue to be.

Soon, some ignominious few – and it turns out they are the people behind the town's Rock concerts – start to voice dissent and to challenge the demarcation between lawn and street. Wall is worried that this challenge might be 'contagious', in particular the local youth might be prone to imitate those admired 'musical heroes'. He is particularly apprehensive about large public gatherings. He has recently read a book by an author called LeBon. Apparently, people in groups are out of their usual minds, and prone to listen to demagogy.

Indeed, the small group of sworn music lovers gains momentum expounding 'drivel and abuse' (according to Wall's friends) in the local pubs and by picketing the Town Hall. Women's gossip alerts Wall that many townsmen are beginning to dither. Wall calls a Town hall meeting to hear the arguments. After much to and fro, new boundaries and rules are established: cars are now allowed to park on the lawn on concert days, and children may play there on Wednesdays after school, and during religious holidays. The community norm has shifted. Mr Wall, his family and friends gave way, they were persuaded that the previous boundary was wrong, but also that the new agreement will keep the peace.

The classical psychology of social influence

What is the point of this slightly unrealistic story? The story shall illustrate how social psychology conceives of social influence (see the fine overview of Paicheler, 1988) and how this might be limited.

Social psychology studies the establishment of norms within the paradigm of **normalisation**: a group is constituted by the establishment of an aggregate compromise of how to see things. This compromise establishes a frame of reference to which participant are committed (Sherif, 1936). The modalities of how to sustain an established norm and attitude in the face of challenge is the focus of experiments on **majority influence** (Asch, 1952). It is demonstrated

that peer pressure enforces conformity with rules by capitalising on the human need for affiliations: the individual avoids social exclusion (in relation to others), but also tries to reduce uncertainty (in relation to the object world) by listening to others, and to maintain a positive self-evaluation (in relation to the self). The obedience and compliance paradigm (Milgram, 1974) dramatically demonstrates the **power of authority.** A 'man in white coat' is able to stall moral inhibitions and make everyman inflict harm on others in the name of science or some other respected cause. By complying to moral and scientific authority which we invest with reasonable trust, we abdicate control, enter an 'actant state', and potentially behave abhorrently. Many studies explore how obedience and compliance is contingent and therefore expressive of culture (Blass, 2000). The paradigm of **minority influence** (Moscovici, 1976; Maass & Clark, 1984; Mugny & Perez, 1991) demonstrates how established norms change under dissent and introduces the distinction between active and passive deviance. Consistent active minorities inform the majority and lead them to reconsider their take on the world. Organised minorities influence by inducing a latent conversion among the majority but misses out on the credit for achieving this: the 'sleeper effect' assures that we remember the message but not its source. This all suggests two different processes of social influence: majorities achieve conformity in public, while dissent might continue in private; minorities make us rethink privately, while we still conform publicly, but maybe only for a while. Minorities induce a rethink about the world (informational processes), while majorities make us consider others (normative processes). In inter-group action these processes are nested: an active minority needs conformity among its members to assure that it can act and is perceived consistent which is the key to its potential success among the majority (e.g. Cranach, 1996).

These paradigms have a rational core – people yield to influence by assessing claims to be morally right, true and authentic - which contrasts with older theories that stress the irrationality of social influence. LeBon's Crowd Psychology (1895) and Tarde's Laws of Imitation (1890) modelled unconscious human suggestibility. Human association in public spaces alters, according to LeBon, rationally minded individuals into shadows of themselves, reduces them to 'passive masses' waiting to be manipulated by a determined leadership. Irrespective of whether this theory ever was a valid analysis of collective behaviour or more a fin-de-siecle expression of moral panic, it received widest reception amongst societal elites well into the 20th century (van Ginneken, 1992). Tarde (1890) elaborated the theme of social contagion. Similarities in mores and behaviours arise from genetic inheritance or social

imitation. What common ancestry cannot explain, must do the **laws of imitation:** for example, imitation follows the social hierarchy top-down (but consider today's Haut-Couture, it seems to work bottom-up as Punk elements enter the main stream); or inward change anticipates outward change, thus the imitation of thinking and feeling precedes the copying of behaviour (this idea lives on in minority influence and conversion). The ad-hoc nature of these regularities is demonstrated by 'thirst is stronger than hunger' which apparently explained the prevalence of alcoholism over obesity in the late 19th century. The recent revival in theories of contagion focuses on 'memes' in analogy to genes (e.g. Lynch, 1996). Contagion and suggestibility is not a rational process, but subliminal and atavistic. Apparently, certain 'content features' make some beliefs stick and others not, and universally so. The revival of the 'doctrine of suggestion' often merges with the polemical tradition of 'debunking': the sport of denouncing as 'Mumbo-Jumbo' the 'false beliefs' that carry the popular imagination (Wheen, 2004; Mackey, 1841).

Post-WW II paradigms of social influence research show that 'suggestibility' has a rational core: preserving a relationship of trust within a community. The total suspension of reason is at most a special case (Asch, 1952; Moscovici, 1985). Being influenced allows for rational considerations of the state of the world and the effectiveness of action, the handling of social relationships and the maintenance of a positive self-concept. However, the moral problem remains whether seeking influence is a strategic action with the purpose of seeking unilateral success or whether it is part of communicative action to reach a common understanding (Habermas, 1981).

Reconsidering the psychology of social influence

Let us go back to Sunnyville. This story is far from a complete account of any similar situation that might occur in real life. Let us explore some of the real-life issues.

Firstly, it appears that underpinning the story of Mr Wall is the existence of a community of people with 'civic commitment', who will follow calls for meetings to discuss and agree an amicable compromise, enforce these by naming and shaming contravening persons, and shift their opinions in the light of strong arguments. It is assumed that the 'guns are silent' and neither violence nor authority play a part. The story as well as the experiments of social

psychology, which stage social influences for the purposes of research, assume such a context as a condition sine qua non. However, this moral community might be an 'ethnocentric' desirable, historically situated, rather than a universal fact.

Secondly, the attempts of the Walls to protect their garden from undue trespassing will be, at least in the context of modern societies, within the statutory law, formally written and enforced by courts and a state monopoly for force. This should guarantee the Walls their property and testify the boundaries of their estate. However, formal law requires a general attitude of respect towards the law, which binds the community to a context wider than itself. If property is trespassed, it becomes a matter for the police to enforce the law under punishment of fines or prison. In real life, the Walls might call the police rather than a community meeting. Furthermore, property law and the highway code are part of the constitution of the land. Sunnyville is not an isolated world onto itself, but linked to other entities through the legal constitution.

Thirdly, in real life Mr **Wall is likely to build a fence or a solid wall** to avoid trespassing. Rather than relying on a toothless sign 'Do Not Trespass!', or on the occasional police patrol, simple brickwork will do the job most effectively. This technical solution, an artefact, will demarcate, solidify and objectify the boundary. It will lead those unfamiliar and even those who might dissent to behave properly on that patch of land. This wall will do many things, and it is important to know how it came about. Several scenarios are thinkable.

Mr Wall might have called a town meeting, argued his case, listened to others, and obtained consent to build the wall between his garden and the street. The wall will become a feature of the community. Thus the wall was built in a civic spirit where common understanding prevails over the instrumental attitude of particular interests: a solution was found that works, that is morally right, and with the promised mural paintings, it might also be aesthetically pleasing. Much of this scenario describes the public deliberation that is modelled on the assemblies in 18th century New England religious communities or London coffee houses (Habermas, 1962).

In a different scenario, Mr Wall put up the wall as a 'fait accompli', quasi over-night, and counts on the normative power of facts: what is, ought to be. Artefacts are strong enforcers in and of themselves. A wall functions as a physical 'lock-out', keeping people out or dissuading

certain actions: only the most determined and able bodied will make the effort to climb, taking the risk of injury or ruining their clothes. Long Island bridges were built too low for public transport and thus kept out, at the time of construction, poorer people who depended on public transport. Or gadgets are built so that you cannot open and repair them, you can only buy new ones. A wall might also be a 'lock-in', preventing people from leaving a space. Another lock-in are skills and habits built around a certain word processing programme. To shift to another one is too complicated, so one is loyal to a product that one learnt to handle many years ago, and dutifully updates the software on a regular cycle whatever the costs. The Sunnyville wall also 'inter-locks': to reach the park behind Walls' house, people have to go around the house rather than through the garden. With inter-locks, designers ensure that one action is a necessary antecedent of another. So, we might be required to fasten a seatbelt before the car engine will start, or, at an ATM machine, take our card before the money is dispensed. Hotel keys are too big to carry so we leave them at the hotel reception before we leave the Hotel for the day (see for a general discussion, Brey, 2005). Designers talk of 'captology', persuasive design (Fogg, 1998) and 'emotional design' (Norman, 2004) to highlight their powers to mould attitudes and behaviour of users. Objects are in-scripted with actions, and 'feel good' things are desirable and work better. Artefacts influence people directly and subconsciously. A wall offers **affordances** (Gibson, 1977), i.e. perceptual characteristics linked to certain actions: most people will see the wall 'to be respected', 'not to climb' and 'to walk along', and that relatively to a whole range of motive. Only a well trained climber intending to trespass might see a 'surface to climb', where most others would just see 'a barrier'; but there might be an electrified wall top to dissuade also the former. The wall frames the life of passers-by in Sunnyville. Parking and sunbathing on the lawn is now impossible, and this very intention will fade from the range of local leisure activities. The imperative of a moral appeal or a police patrol is **delegated** to brickwork (Latour, 1994). Functionally equivalent for achieving the desired outcome, it might even be cheaper and more effective. The wall enforces itself: through direct pain of collision or through the anticipation of electrocution.

The Sunnyville wall has been embellished with murals by a famous artist and has become a local venue, a **symbol of local identity**, attracting sightseeing tourist to a piece of renowned artistic expression. Erecting a wall to manage community relations is just one of many 'social constructions', it is a technical solution to a problem in community life. What is less clear for walls is more in evidenced with other artefacts: tools require the **physiological and**

psychological adjustment of the user. Boesch (1997) shows how a violin player, in her struggles with the recalcitrant instrument, gains a posture and senso-motoric agility of fingers, arms and shoulders, and buys into a culture and a **utopian project**: the 'Apollonian' ideal of producing 'the pure sound without noise'. This aesthetic quest for the purity of the 'sound object' more than any other potential outcome sustains the painful efforts of practicing. More generally, the presence of artefacts re-presents how a community wants to live; an object is a project for a subject (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

The brick wall brings peace and quiet, but it also makes **dependent.** Somebody supplies the bricks and bricklaying. With years the wall will decay, so repairs are needed. This not only ties the Walls to the building trade, but the building trade itself is variously locked into skills, standards and machinery beyond rational control (David, 1985). Artefacts are places where the **present meets the past**: whoever engages the wall, engages with an entire chain of people who contributed in a distant past: brick makers, bricklayers, engineers and their frameworks of rationality that include utopian visions of a better world. Thus past actions frame present and future behaviour. The wall tells us what not to do, here and now, and thus takes us into its reasons past. The wall adds to an **infrastructure of** cars, streets, houses, energy supply, computers, and everyday gadgetry. It adds to the societal constitution of artefacts and their afforded routines, the inter-objectivity (Latour, 1996). It is therefore not surprising that many people sense that such powerful artefacts should require public consent. Artefacts like social norms require legitimacy; their sheer facility seems not enough. They require reasoned consistency with values and ambitions. However, we face a traditional asymmetry here: that new norms need legitimacy is the very business of politics. However that new artefacts need legitimacy seems not be taken for granted. First, we need to recognise that artefacts are the continuation of politics by other means, thus artefacts are political, too (Winner, 1985).

In my story the mural solution of Sunnyville is a metonymy for **technological solutions in general**. One of the key issues for Mr Wall is to ensure that his brickwork is legal and is seen to be **legitimate.** Therefore the question of due process arises: how has the wall come about, was consent given, or how can consent be achieved after the fact? Is this consent binding for newcomers?

If Wall constructed his wall as a fait-accompli, he would have hoped that people will find good reasons to accept the wall. A fait-accompli apparently can wait for its raison d'etre. The

inter-subjectivity of norms the problem of establishment, enforcement, and redesign in the face of dissent is relatively well understood, as I showed above. By contrast, the inter-objectivity of artefacts is largely seen as a matter of 'conformity' and 'compliance' after having been put into place by an authority of experts. Technical artefacts are the remit of scientists and engineers, and the role of social psychology is offer a box of tricks to secure public acceptance in the market place and in the arena of politics. Technocrats see in uninformed political interference, and the public is assumed to be uninformed, a recipe for disaster; they fear a 'cow designed by a committee'.

In modern societies the process of establishing, enforcing, and changing of norms happens within a public sphere buttressed by the freedom of speech and mass communication (which is my fourth point of unreality in Sunnyville). Issues are aired, circulated, brought to attention in public forums mediated by professionals according to operating rules: newsprint, radio, television or the internet generating genres of communication. The making and breaking of norms takes place in this formal context, and no longer exclusively in face-to-face interaction. We must ask: how do the public sphere and face-to-face interaction, as modelled by social psychological experiments, go together?

Let us go back to Sunnyville one more time. Mr Wall, faced with the need to defend his wall, considers using the mass media for legitimizing his mural fait accompli. His previous use of leafleting was already a rudimentary form of mass communication. But now larger guns are mobilised. He and 'friends in high places' have the initial advantage, but their story line is not guaranteed. Mass media are part of an information market, more or less free, that balances news with the tastes and interests of large audiences. Here the voices of dissent might have an opening. The initially small group of dissenters is an 'active minority', who by consistent and persistent agitation draws attention to their cause: the wall is not an acceptable solution. They might organise a press officer with friends in the media, who feeds the mass media with stories on the 'Scandal of Sunnyville'. Resistance might take the form of nightly sabotage to the wall; or more symbolically, 'guerrilla marketing' (Amann, 2005) is staged in front of TV cameras that make the national news. The wall issue might become a main news item. Thus, the issue is reframed in the wider public: the 'Peace and Comfort in Beautiful Sunnyville' (sponsored by Wall and his friends) becomes the 'The Ugly Abuse of Power in Sunnyville' (sponsored by the active dissenters). Faced with a barrage of media coverage, Mr Wall and his

friends can no longer ignore the local resistance. Like reacting to physical pain, they reluctantly recognise that 'something is wrong', they re-examine the issue and warm to a change of mind and project (Bauer, 1995). With the help of 'hermit' advice, Mr Wall reconsiders the situation. He begins to see the wall in the light of the 'lock-out' it creates; his relationship to the community changes from a paternalistic attitude to one of 'enlightened citizenship'; and he consider a redesign of the wall or even its dismantling. Ironically, the latter might not be necessary, because as local resistance succeeds the mural artefact becomes a symbol of 'evil overcome'. Thus a part of the wall will be preserved as 'local heritage' (Breeze, 2000). Resistance fosters social identities and reassures existentially: "*Je* me revolte, donc *nous* sommes" [I dissent, there we are] (Camus, 1965, 432).

The development of technological projects is tied, on a much larger scale than the Sunnyville wall, to the association of people and things into a common purpose. This suggests that technology is a quasi-social movement that mobilises resources and anticipates, confronts, assimilates and accommodates resistances and navigates the future like an expedition into unknown territories driven forward by the quest for El Dorado (Sloterdijk, 2005; Bauer, 2002). To study the contributions of resistance to technological projects is therefore a necessary compliment to the bias for innovation in technology management, and this is a part of a research programme on the development of genetic engineering in the late 20th century (Bauer, 2005; Bauer & Gaskell, 2002; Bauer, 1995).

Excursion: recovering the fait-accompli in the making

Models of influence focus on the 'soft side', the intangible inter-subjectivity of mutual expectations (norms) and shared judgements (attitudes) that constitute social groups and inter-group behaviour. However, Asch (1952, p178) still noted that social interaction has a twofold outcome with relative permanence: social norms and technical artefacts. But henceforth social psychology specialised in the making and breaking of inter-subjective norms, while 'objectivity' became a principle of methodology rather than a phenomenon in its own right. The focus of social influence research is on 'soft' inter-subjectivity, face-to-face communication, while the 'hard' inter-objectivity of affordances and 'persuasive designs' does not enter the frame.

It is not entirely a novel concern to include artefacts in the remit of social psychology. Already, Wundt's 'Vőlkerpsychologie' had such ambitions in the late 19th century (see Farr, 1983). Equally, Mueller-Freienfels, a psychologist of the inter-war years, urged in his 'Psychology of Science' (1936) and in his 'Social and Cultural Psychology' (1930) that we needed to consider objectifications (externalisation) and subjectification (internalisation), the two processes of achieving world and social adequacy in human activities. In the 1920s, applied psychology distinguished 'Objekt-Psychotechnik' - the design of objects to fit human anatomy, physiology and psychology (later to become Ergonomics) – from 'Subject-Psychotechnik' - the adaptation of people to tools and machines through training of motivation and skills and the selection on traits. The latter came to prevail in applied psychology; although late 20th century work psychology, based on activity theory, has a more balanced record (see Frese & Zapf, 1994).

Anders (2002), musicologist and psychologist, called for a **thing-psychology** in the 1950s to break the mental stupor that modern civilisation apparently suffered in the face of technology. We seem awe-struck as if technology was sacred, terrifying and fascinating ('Der heilige Sachzwang' according to Heinrich Boell). Anders saw human relations dominated by object-relations; however this fact was taboo and not perceptible. Social psychology's bias towards inter-subjectivity is an ideological frame of mind clouded by the logic of powerful machinery. It was the technocratic outlook which was shared across the ideological divides of the Iron Curtain. Anders was thinking in the context of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

More recently Joerges (1988) reminded psychologists of the dominant ex-post facto concept of artefacts: Firstly, diffusion researchers profile psychological types of people by their timing of acceptance, e.g. early adopters, late adopters and laggards, and to change their attitudes by designing 'sticky messages' for formal and informal communication (Valente & Rogers, 1995). Secondly, attitude researcher consider artefacts only **ex-post-facto** for the making or breaking of subjectivity. Attitudes to not-(yet)-existing facts are treated as a measurement problems: people will express opinions on anything if asked, and these are often 'non-attitudes'. Attitude research says nothing on how objects come about, and the role played by attitudes in that. Thirdly, people **cope symbolically** with novel artefacts and associated dangers (e.g. Wagner et al, 2002; Joffe, 2003). The stress metaphor 'coping' suggests reactivity ex-post-factum. Similarly, **cognitive dissonance** modelled how people adjust their mentality to a fait-accompli. People balance any conflicts of after-thoughts by foregrounding

the positive outcomes and ignoring the negative ones, so that the act appears as reasonable in hindsight. It does not matter how the act came about, by impulse or by affordance of a fait-accompli. And surprisingly the lesser the reward, the more we find good reasons in the act itself (for a review see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p505ff). Fourthly, artefacts have **symbolic value.** Possessions defer identity by marking social status and individual self-expression in public and private spaces (Habermas, 1999). The meaning of artefacts goes beyond use-value, but again they exist a-priori. And finally, in the ontogenetic perspective 'thing constancy' signals the demise of infantile ego-centrism, as the child enters the given world. The self-other differentiation, role-playing and the acquisition of symbolic language open the child to higher cognitive functions that are needed for tool making and other achievements of human life. But again the child seems to arrive in a pre-existing world, albeit this remains a contested issue for educationalists.

The assumption of objects ex-post-facto buttresses the traditional focus on inter-subjectivity. Social psychology has little to say about **objectfication**, the making and breaking of artefacts as social influence. Why this blind spot? Social psychology is not isolated here, but shares a heritage of shying away from giving 'hard' facts their due with other social sciences. The term 'inter-objectivity' has recently been introduced by Latour (1996) to mark this malaise for sociological thinking. An anxiety of attributing influence to objects prevails which is traceable to Biblical or equivocal iconoclasm and polemic against fetishism. A 'fetish' is a thing with agency. The separation of a realm of causality (nature) and a realm of agency (society), and the cleansing of nature from agencies is the culmination of a long process of disenchantment and **rationalisation** of the world, however incomplete (Boehme, 2006; Keane, 2003; Festinger, 1983). The dualistic fallacy - nature there, society here - buttresses the view that artefacts are EITHER inevitable Progress OR fetish type reification to be smashed, because they alienate us from our real concerns. It is important to see that they are neither, but are part of a changing societal constitution that requires legitimacy.

Excursion: face-to-face or mass communication

Social psychological experiments, like those on majority and minority influence, gave generations of college students, obliged to participate in these exercises, their degrees (Sears, 1986), and social psychology its 'scientific credentials'. The laboratory stages ad-hoc groups

meetings, and recently also computer-mediated interaction. Generalisations of results from these paradigms must be limited to these types of situations. This is not a problem, when the contingencies of the laboratory are clearly defined (Hovland, 1959; Farr, 1984). Many of these experiments gain renewed relevance in deliberative policy making which involves face-to-face focus groups, public forums, and consensus conferences for controversial areas of policy making. However, the power of these paradigms is limited in modern mass media systems. Modern social life is a mixture of informal and formal communication. Social influence is underspecified when we consider these parallel modes of communication. Formalized communication provides an environment for face-to-face interactions and vice-versa. How do we conceptualise compromise, conformity, compliance and conversion when communication is one-to-many and professionalized into genres of print mass media, radio, television, and internet?

Let us go back to Sunnyville one more time, where some 'ignominious few' raised the doubts over the mural solution. Mr Wall might, with the help of 'hermits' that know about these things, attempt to control the mass media: he puts dissent into disrepute, presents the mural solution as legitimate, praises his wall as a 'revolutionary design using hi tech materials', and deplores the split of the community when unity is required in a ongoing dispute with central powers; he might try to force the pen of the editor by threatening to retract from a Town advertising contract. For his and the interests of the community are the same. For the casual reader of the *Sunnyville Tribune* it will appear that majority opinion supports the wall. A straw poll taken by the newspaper puts the figures at 63% in favour, 18% against, 19% undecided (n=117). The headline reads 'Majority Supports Wall'. Dithering citizens of Sunnyville will take this as a cue on the majority opinion and a reason to conform: few like to be brandished as a 'dissident'. Noelle-Neumann (1990) called this dynamic a 'spiral of silence': dominant press coverage is experience as peer pressure. Dissenters increasingly shut up and withdraw into private exile. This spiral, difficult to demonstrate experimentally, is working reliably in circumstances where a real community feels 'under siege' from threatening adversaries.

A different scenario involves the mobilisation of expert opinions in mass media. Mr Wall found a famous Professor of Law and an equally high profile Historian of Architecture who testify that the wall solution is consistent with the law of the land and a 'vanguard' contribution to local landscape and architectural history by its fusion of technical and

aesthetic concerns. Rothman (1990) argued that 'consensual expert opinion', in the context of techno-scientific controversies, carries the opinions of a dispersed public audience. What in Milgram's experiments was the 'white coat' of the experimenter and his appeal to the 'scientific purpose of a learning experiment', is in the context of Storyville the consensual expert opinion on the mural solution: an ethos driver of public opinion.

Finally, I reconsider the dissidence scenario of Sunnyville. The 'ignominious few' managed to reopen the wall a public issue after what appeared to be a close issue, put it onto the agenda of Sunnyville. And finally the wall was rerouted and partially dismantled. How did they succeed? Not only did the sworn dissenters organise loud music events in the park, and picket the wall, but they actively sought the attention of the mass media. Newspaper coverage was given to their protest and the local radio station broadcasted several interviews where the activists could make their case. Through consistent action and public pronouncements over a period of time they convinced themselves that 'the wall had to move' and created a climate of opinion, where people paid attention to the issue and reconsidered the arguments. Finally a majority spoke against Wall in the Town Hall meeting. A determined group of activists managed to set the agenda in Sunnyville and reframe the issue: the 'threat to the community peace' became 'a Scandal in Sunnyville'. In the research literature this dynamic is analysed as agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1993) and issue framing (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

Media effects research, a historical spin-off of social psychology, moved to a new discipline: Media & Communication Studies. One looks in wane for media effects in recent handbooks of social psychology. However, it is necessary to articulate the reality of mass communication for a theory of social influence; otherwise social influence research will have limited relevance beyond passing exams. The recent handbook literature on social influence (Martin & Hewstone, 2001 & 2003; Caldini & Trost, 1998; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Chaiken, Wood & Eagly, 1996; Miller & Prentice, 1996) reduces this field of many paradigms to two theories of cognitive information processing: central and peripheral. The 'cognitive miser' follows the principles of 'least effort' (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and 'sufficiency' (Chaiken, 1987) when seeking a judgement upon being exposed to the images and sound bites of product advertising. Experiments abound, even automated via computer and internet, in an attempt to construct 'sticky' messages cued and clued up for particular groups of respondents. The attitude change appears to happen in isolated minds, taking the moral community for granted

that constitutes these individual dupes in the first place (see Taylor, 1989). This unfortunately reflects the discipline's consensus (see also Martin & Hewstone, 2003) which is unable to appreciate the formation of norms and values. Norms and values are given constraints on information processing, even genetically hard-wired (as in evolutionary psychology). Other people are bundles of emitted stimuli that are processed EITHER with conscious effort, systematically and centrally, elaborating the registered messages as arguments, OR peripherally, as heuristic and effortless processing of cues of recognition and of clues of allegiance. It is suggested that majority stimuli operate peripherally, while minorities stimulate central processes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The theoretically ambitious reader of social psychology looks in vane for guidance on how norms and artefacts, minorities and majorities, conformity and dissent, persuasion and manipulation, authority and obedience, central and peripheral processing might be part and partial of social influence.

Persuasion and social influence by norms and artefacts

The final question arises, how can the social psychological paradigms of compromising, obedience and compliance, conformity and conversion be generalised from norms to artefacts? Needless to say, new ideas and things are invented, prototyped and standardised (normalised), they spread and are redesigned under majority and minority influences, and scientific and expert authorities play a crucial role in this process, so do the mass media. If norms go through cycles of change and require legitimacy, so do artefacts.

A theory of social influence might be best located within a theoretical context of conflict resolution by mutually accepted constraints. Norms and artefacts are constraints in a double sense, enabling as well as inhibiting social interactions, framing and guiding actions. Chaos and arbitrary force is the alternative. Humans command several **ways of resolving conflicts**: by violence (e.g. brute or military force), by appeal to authority (courts or epistemic authorities), and by **negotiations.** A theory of social influence might model the modalities of the latter under the presumption of non-violence.

Social psychology has traditionally considered social influence and persuasion, a distinction that is not entirely clear. In the textbook literature social influence falls into the dynamics of groups that are structured into majority and minority segments, while persuasion refers to

individual information processing in the context of attempted attitude change. Their relation is theoretically unclear beyond common outcome: attitude change. Social influence assumes normative and information processes, while persuasion mainly information processes. For our present purposes it might be useful to use social influence as the generic term, and define persuasion as the 'morally sound' form of social influence. This allows us to flag up the sense of a moral boundary that pervades much research on social influence and persuasion: namely the distinction between legitimate and illicit means. The boundary between persuasion and manipulation is fuzzy, where manipulation denotes the use of illegitimate means of social influence. To give an example: difficult negotiations are conducted with good food, wine, music and dance performances, and this 'setting of the scene' which might dispose parties to be persuaded more easily. Clearly people are persuaded by arguments under certain circumstances, so setting these circumstances becomes part of the process, but where is the boundary between legitimate and illicit setting of the scene?

This ties the theory of social influence into the discussions on the modern **public sphere** of communicative actions (see Habermas, 1981 and 2001), where persuasion and influence take place shielded from violence - the 'gun is taken out of politics' to use a phrase from the Northern Ireland conflict - and the recourse to authority is only a last resort (Personnaz & Personnaz, 2001). The defining characteristics of a public sphere are inclusiveness and a code of conduct oriented on a counter-factual ideal: the simultaneous evaluation of claims made on truth, rightness, and sincerity. The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts mark the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate means, between strategic and communication action: people abstain from deception and self-illusion and 'participants have to mean what they say' (Habermas, 2001, 34). Manipulation is 'strategic' in that it restricts truth claims exclusively to what is either true, what is right or what is sincerely held in isolation and specialisation. What then counts is exclusively 'sound science', or legalism, or the politically correct motive, never mind the outcome. The 'all for one and one for all' of the three musketeers, echoing the triad of logos, pathos and ethos of classical rhetoric of the arena (see Hoeffe, 2005), is separated for manipulative purposes.

In any real public sphere, representations are made under conditions of either power asymmetry or symmetry. With all parties equally empowered, the outcome will be **'normalisation'** through deliberation and compromise. If the parties are unequal, either A-the-stronger will urge B-the-weaker to conform, comply and act like As (**assimilation),** or B-

the-weaker will manage to convert the As, to recognise, think and act a bit more like Bs (**accommodation**). Ironically, in order for B-the-weaker to be successful, the discipline of the active minority must be enforced by conformity pressures; successful accommodation implies local assimilation. In this way it might become possible to see normalisation, assimilation and accommodation as phases of **collective learning** by structural change. Indeed, Duveen (2001) pointed to a structural analogy between Piaget's concept of 'genesis' in child development - the child balances the tensions of pretend play (assimilation) and schematic change (accommodation) with a series of spurts - and the 'genesis' of social representations and groups with one crucial difference: for the latter one has to relinquish the notion of directedness. The telos of the child is to become an 'adult'. However, there is no reasonable way anymore to conceive 'adulthood' for social groups and their mentality. This is where the concept of 'social representation' leaves behind much Comtean Positivist baggage (see Jovchelovitch, 2006). Social representations theory contributes to a theory of social change without a telos towards a point of culmination, e.g. the Secular Republic or the Nation State. While it remains within the remit of this theory to see how teleological notions might play a role as ideological contents, so for example in the tropes of change such as 'secularisation', 'Progress', 'scientific-technological revolution'. These tropes are powerful appeals that fuel the process of change, but not valid descriptions of the process itself.

I hope I made the case that we need to consider social influence of things and artefacts as we do of norms and attitudes. Norms and things are social representations that make and break social influence. Over the last 20 years, research in technology studies has amply demonstrated how artefacts are designed to influence behaviour, however not without conflict over how to conceptualise this. Artefacts have a history and as such are the continuation of politics with 'other' means; while 'other' might falsely suggest 'means outside politics'. Only the unreflective and biased mind considers a new regulation as a provocation, but a new technology a case for celebration.

Social influence works with inter-subjectivity and inter-objectivity. Taking up this challenge will have theoretical and practical consequences. It might finally resolve the puzzle of how social representations and social influence are theoretically linked; and it will allow social psychologists to consider new technologies in the making and not just post-festum, as the attitude object 'fallen like pennies from heavens' about which opinions may differ. Social psychology and other social sciences will be enabled to look at the process of making and

breaking of artefacts, and transcend the traditional role of encouraging social conformity to already established facts. This extends the relevance of social psychology and preserves its rich tradition of research into social influence into the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

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