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Daniel Cefaï, Pourquoi se mobilise-t-on ?



Présentation de l'éditeur, notes et premiers commentaires, conférence vidéo sur l'histoire des enquêtes de terrain à Chicago.

Présentation de l'éditeur

Pourquoi se mobilise-t-on ? L'un des traits propres aux régimes démocratiques est que leurs citoyens disposent d'un droit de regard sur les affaires publiques et, en contrepoint des élections, d'un droit à la critique et à la révolte. Ils discutent, s'associent, s'organisent. Ils constituent des collectifs, revendiquent dans l'espace public, passent des alliances avec partis et syndicats et entrent en conflit avec les pouvoirs établis. Mais qu'est-ce qui les y pousse ? La mobilisation a un coût en énergie et présente des risques, y compris financiers. Pourquoi ne pas laisser les autres se mobiliser à notre place ? Ce livre propose une cartographie de l'état des savoirs sur l'action collective, à partir de tout ce qui a été écrit sur le sujet depuis plus d'un siècle, sur les deux rives de l'Atlantique. L'histoire commence avec les travaux sur les foules et les publics de Tarde et Le Bon, à la fin du XIX^e siècle. L'auteur exhume la tradition du comportement collectif née à Chicago dans les années 1920. Il montre le virage accompli par Touraine et Melucci au moment de l'émergence des nouveaux mouvements sociaux étudiant, féministe, éco-logiste & dans les années 1960 et 1970. Il passe en revue les théories de l'action rationnelle, les modèles du processus politique et les analyses des réseaux et des organisations, qui prédominent aujourd'hui. Et il propose de nouvelles perspectives, inspirées de la sociologie culturelle nord-américaine et de la microsociologie de Goffman. Un ouvrage indispensable à tous ceux qui s'intéressent aux mouvements sociaux de notre temps.

[Une note de lecture](#) de Séverine Mayol

(...) à la fois ouvrage de référence, grâce à la compilation d'un large savoir encyclopédique, il (l'ouvrage de Daniel Cefaï) saura intéresser tout étudiant s'interrogeant sur l'étude des mouvements sociaux ; et à la fois ouvrage d'analyse critique des paradigmes de l'action collective qui proposera aux chercheurs de porter un regard différent et de s'engager vers de nouveaux raisonnements.

Une autre note de lecture de James M. Jasper, parue dans l'*American Journal of Sociology* (Graduate Center of the City University of New York)

Like Alexis de Tocqueville taking the measure of American democracy in the 1830s, Daniel Cefaï¹ toured the United States some years ago in order to document the history of (primarily) American research and theory about collective behavior and action. Also like Tocqueville, his outsider's perspective has given him fresh insights and a welcome historical perspective. Although no survey can be exhaustive, Cefaï's book will remain the definitive effort for many years. Even better, he uses his history to generate a number of concepts that researchers can put to good use.

American scholars of protest have settled on a capsule summary stable now for a generation of our field's prehistory in crowd theory and collective behavior as a kind of preparadigmatic jumble, best forgotten. Cefaï¹ digs into that history with enthusiasm, mining overlooked nuggets of insight that fit his pragmatist and interactionist approach. He doesn't so much upend our sense of intellectual history as disrupt it with sparkling qualifications.

This hefty book is divided into four parts. Each of them has the length and intellectual interest of a book in itself. The first unearths the Chicago heritage of Robert Park and his intellectual descendents. Cefaï¹ summarizes diverse literatures, from rumors and fads to Enrico Quarantelli's pathbreaking work on natural disasters to investigations of the riots of the 1960s. He argues for the power of Park's idea of publics, as opposed to the more easily dismissed

crowds and masses. He also traces a Chicago tradition through researchers like Orrin Klapp and Joseph Gusfield, a constructionist point of view that never quite disappeared under the structuralism that came to dominate the field in the 1970s. Rejecting the idea that crowds are irrational, Cefaï shows that plenty of "collective behavior" occurs in and around social movements.

The second part of *Pourquoi se mobilise-t-on ?* covers more familiar territory, with chapters on rational choice theory and resource mobilization, on political institutions and opportunities, and on networks and organizations. All these are important factors in understanding collective mobilization, but they are limited when puffed into entire theories. None adequately grasps how people make sense of their situations, as Cefaï rightly insists. Structural images, such as the sharp distinction between insiders and outsiders to a polity, prevent researchers from understanding cultural processes.

In the third section of his book, Cefaï returns to France, examining Touraine's breakthrough in linking social movements to social conflict and historical change even while trying to respect participants' own sensemaking activities. He admires Touraine's "sociological interventions" for their quasi-ethnographic observations of groups of protestors engaging one another (poignantly, Cefaï sees these books as snapshots of an optimistic era, now long ended), but he finds the paradigm's notion of culture poorly defined. (This may be ironic, but it is not surprising, as many theoretical frameworks use a central concept more as a root metaphor and rallying cry than as a tightly defined tool.) He fills this gap with a series of discussions of concepts through which we can understand the practical creation of meaning : discourses, codes, moral boundaries, collective identities, emotions, rituals, and so on, ending with a fascinating plea for greater attention to law.

In a daring intellectual twist, the fourth part of the book deals with Erving Goffman's legacy, as Cefaï tries to ground the interactive construction of meaning in microlevel encounters. Rejecting the reification of levels into distinct micro-, meso-, and macrophenomena, he uses concepts such as encounters and situations to describe a range of interactions in which individuals group and regroup and attach meaning to their activities. In doing so, he helps us rethink the ultrapopular idea of frames. Here, Cefaï makes the strongest case for his methodological argument that ethnography is the surest way to understand the situations in which humans work and rework their understandings of the world around them. Yet he also recognizes that we need to build up beyond the face-to-face situations that preoccupied Goffman.

I am pleased to report that recent developments are following the cultural and microsociological path that Cefaï maps out. He hopefully mentions emotions, which a number of researchers are currently using to rethink the nature of action, grounding it in bodies and interactions. In my view, emotions reflect how we are related to a series of physical, psychological, and social contexts ; they should help advance Cefaï's pragmatist project. Collective identities, narratives, discourses, and other bits of meaning are also the subject of ongoing research and theory. We now have a large enough tool kit that meaning need not be crammed into a single concept such as a frame or an identity.

There has also been a widespread embrace of a "mechanisms" approach, looking for small bits of interactions to use as building blocks for bigger explanations. Individuals, decisions, strategic dilemmas, and small-group dynamics all show potential as causal mechanisms (although Cefaï persists, surprisingly, in seeing strategy as more structural than cultural). Cefaï's hope for a cultural and microlevel sociology of collective action is being realized, and for that reason it is useful to have his monumental history of our intellectual ancestors, both acknowledged and not. I can only hope that some valiant editor will devote the resources to translating *Pourquoi se mobilise-t-on* into English so that it can influence an even larger audience.

Daniel Cefaï a présenté et commenté un ensemble de textes publiés sous le titre : [L'enquête de terrain](#) , publié en 2003 par le MAUSS.

Cet ouvrage rassemble des textes de : John A. Barnes, Howard Becker, Michael Burawoy, Aaron V. Cicourel, James Clifford, Robert Emerson, Clifford Geertz, Raymond Gold, Martin Hammersley, Jennifer Platt, George W. Stocking, Anselm Strauss et Juliet Corbin, James Urry, Peter Winch.



Le 16 septembre 2004, il prononce à l'ENS une conférence qui lui fait directement écho, intitulée *Pourquoi étudier l'histoire des enquêtes de terrain à Chicago ?*

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Post-scriptum :Coll. Recherches/MAUSS, 2007, 736 p., 39 –