



Jean-Louis Fabiani, Dr.

Directeur d'études

École des hautes études en sciences sociales,
Paris

Born in 1951 in Algiers, Algeria

Studied Philosophy and Sociology at the École Normale Supérieure
and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

PROJECT

Attributing Artworks: The Display of Evidence in Art History

Attributing works to painters and sculptors is a major activity in art history and in museum life. Changes in the attribution of masterpieces can lead to enormous variations of value in the art world and to a partial rewriting of art history. It can either create or destroy the reputation of attributers. Indulgent or false attributions are matters of deontological debates. Attribution is also a political game, in that it focuses attention on national characters or schools in painting, sometimes colonizing or excluding other traditions. Attributing artworks is a complex activity, based upon the recognition of common elements, but also on trusting the "eye" of the learned viewer, an eye that cannot be acquired by formal training (but more likely by early familiarity with art). How can a single individual's visual certainty be considered the criterion of evidence? Drawing first on historical material, and especially on disputed cases in French art history (e. g. the case of the "Primitifs français" at the turn of the twentieth century), then on observation of the attributing processes (including the process of accepting attributions by colleagues and institutions), it is possible to identify the main steps in attribution as well as the different ways of displaying evidence in highly conjectural matters. Disciplinary cultures, changing technical devices that supply evidence, the exhibition of individual quality (the gentleman's eye) as constructing a sort of social evidence, styles of presentation and communication, and explicit and implicit criteria of evidence will be examined.

Recommended Reading

Fabiani, Jean-Louis. *Les philosophes de la République*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988.

- . *Lire en prison: une étude sociologique*. Paris: BPI, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995.

- . "Clôre enfin l'ère des généralités." In *Emile Durkheim: L'évaluation en comité: textes et rapports de souscription au Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques 1903-1917*, edited by Stéphane Baciocchi and Jennifer Mergy, 151-189. Oxford, New York: Durkheim Press, Berghahn Books, 2003.

COLLOQUIUM, 17.01.2006

Le sujet et le concept:

A Historical Sociology of French Philosophy, 1880-1980

One of my goals here at the Wiko is to complete a book devoted to a socio-historical analysis of French philosophy since the beginning of the Third Republic. Although I have worked on very different topics in the sociology of culture and of the environment for more than twenty five years, philosophy has remained a constant preoccupation for me, and I should like to explain why I have been so obsessed with it. Rather than giving you an overview of the book, instead I will take the last text Foucault wrote before he died and discuss his argument concerning the main

dividing line in French philosophy, namely the one which distinguishes between a philosophy of subject, life and experience, and a philosophy of concepts, rationality and knowledge. Foucault's model is of course incomplete : many philosophers are not present in his short list of names, particularly Charles Renouvier, the "criticiste", who was so important in building the program of a republican-rationalist philosophy . But I was struck by Foucault's outline because it fits quite well with my early analyses of French philosophy, circa 1900, which I described as the polar opposites of spiritualism (the official French philosophy before the Third Republic) and a mix of rationalism and positivism (which just then was an emerging conceptual construct) linked with the development of universities and the desire to compete with Germany intellectually following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. I shall then sum up my argument by presenting the main tools I am using to describe the specific circumstances behind the emergence of certain concepts, philosophical disputes, and intellectual change. I will draw comparison with "science studies" that have been influential in reorienting the analysis of scientific processes. Although the tools of science studies as such cannot be employed in giving an account of philosophy, I will try to show that philosophy is a locally situated activity, based on interactions. I distinguish my work from both Randall Collins' attempt to do propose a global theory of intellectual change in philosophy and from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields. What I propose is a framework which links the structural properties of scholarly interactional settings with the activities of philosophers which may, when they succeed, transform the "horizon of questions" or "the space of the possible". In the third part of my presentation, I will analyze in simple terms the French institutional framework for philosophy, which is characterized by a notable stability over the past century. I will thus be making a contribution to the sociology of the "crowning discipline" which is always more than a discipline, since it offers a theory of disciplines.

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L'éducation populaire et le théâtre : le public d'Avignon en action

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Art, culture, publics

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La généralisation dans les sciences historiques : obstacle épistémologique ou ambition légitime?

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Fabiani, Jean-Louis (Paris,2007)

Après la culture légitime : objets, publics, autorités

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À quoi sert la notion de discipline?

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Anthropologie du monde occidental

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Le goût de l'enquête : pour Jean-Claude Passeron

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Controverses scientifiques, controverses philosophiques : figures, positions, trajets

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