

## **Tribute to Willem Doise (1935 – 2023)**

Willem,

I would like to express the gratitude of your first students at the University of Geneva. Gabriel Mugny, then busy finishing his thesis under the supervision of Serge Moscovici, was your first assistant. I was your first doctoral student. Shortly afterwards, Jean-Claude Deschamps joined us. Now these colleagues and friends have left us...

How grateful, we are for the guide you have been for us. You introduced us to the art of doing research and inspired our first steps in a powerful way. From the outset, you shared with us an extraordinary enthusiasm that has deeply marked our involvement in research, even beyond the days spent together.

Not only did you inspire us, but you have also generously introduced us in your vast network of contacts right from the start, and at a time (the early '70s) when this was not at all common thing to do, you encouraged us to reach out of the country, not only North and West, but also East and South. I remember, for example, a colloquium in 1977, convened in a beautiful house deep in a Polish forest, reached at night (we had to be discreet), where we tried (language was quite a barrier!) to share our research with colleagues from a dozen different countries. At break time, we used to stroll among the flocks of geese. At the end of the day, Augusto Palmonari used to sing opera to us from the top of the grand staircase.

You taught us scientific courage, daring to tackle subjects that were off-putting at the time. I'm referring, for example, to our research into the relativity of so-called "social *determinisms*" of school failure, conducted with Gil Meyer; or - even worse for the time and place! - I'm thinking of your desire to go beyond certain boundaries of Piagetian theory so as to highlight how thought is rooted in the social interactions that allow it to germinate and grow. This had earned us a certain amount of "guerrilla warfare" (fortunately soon enough over) from the hyper-orthodox disciples: we had to change offices several times (!), each time finding ourselves ever more distant (physically) from the Piagetian center at the Palais Wilson. We came up against scientific criticisms that we had to learn together to deal with - but this helped us a lot to progress. We were experiencing the virtues of socio-cognitive conflict in the first person. It also aroused our curiosity in exploring this intrigue: why did the arrival of social psychology in Piaget's institute released such diverse reactions, sometimes extreme in their emotional charges?

I can't forget either that at the height of the Cold War, you were inviting us to read the Russian author Lev Vygotsky - and not to systematically prove him wrong! This was before Vygotsky was "discovered" by American research. It was also a way - and a very important one - of taking on and stitching together the legacy of the great thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries who had been in dialogue throughout Europe (including Russia!) and as far afield as North America - a dialogue that had subsequently been largely lost in identity-based national chapels that closed off minds. Yes, Willem, it took courage and a fine ideal to commit yourself to this adventure, and involve us! You also knew how to recharge your batteries by traveling to join like-minded colleagues wherever they were staying.

You felt concerned by contemporary problems. You used to leave documents open on your work table for us to discover them. We asked: "- To be read?" Your answer: "Yes, it's not indiscreet. What's lying

around on my desk, is for you to read, if you wish. Confidential matters, I take home". Some of these documents revealed dimensions of the research world that we, as young beginners, were not suspecting.

And now, a more personal note: you and me discovered that we had some common sensitivities. We both had Flemish relatives (yours very close, mine more distant), so we knew from experience the difficulties of minorities and inter-group relations. We knew how much inter-community relations can weigh on interpersonal relationships, how difficult it can be to reach consensus - but we also knew how, in person-to-person encounters, these obstacles can become irrelevant. This is important for culturally complicated countries such as Belgium and Switzerland. That's probably why I liked your "Levels of Analysis Theory" so much, right from the seminar when you told us about it for the first time with the aim of putting it to the test in confrontation with our young critical minds. I've used it a lot since then.

Willem, for all this, for your profound honesty, for your kindness, I'm not the only one to say a big THANK YOU!

*Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, University of Neuchâtel*

January 13th, 2023, during the funeral service in Peney (Geneva, Switzerland)

*(This text was first published in French. Some colleagues have asked me to translate it into English).*