EUROPEAN POLITICAL IDENTITY

An attempt at conceptual clarification

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RESUMEN

Las cuestiones sobre la identidad y la identificación política en parte buscan respuestas a la pregunta, ¿Quién soy? Dentro de una perpsctiva política, las respuestas normalmente se tratan como uno de los elementos, los otros componentes básicos son las demandas y las expectativas. Se defiende que la identificación no es algo que las personas construyen de forma voluntaria, además tiene sus raíces más profundas en la manera que nos planteamos y estamos motivados para comportarnos políticamente. El territorio, el idioma, las ideas, la cultura y la historia son elementos que sirven de base para analizar la identificación política, cuando quremos definir la identidad polítical en general, y la identidad política europea en particular. En el debate francés sobre la integración europea, la oposición entre los objetos de identidad se ve sobre todo como un conflicto entre modernismo y voluntarismo, más que como conflictos entre clases sociales o afiliaciones políticas. Esto da una dimensión específica a las discusiones sobre la identidad política que no suele ser tan común en otros países.

ABSTRACT

Inquiries into political identity and political identification partially search for answers to the questions, Who am I? The answers are usually treated as elements in a political perspective, the other major components being demands and expectations. It is argued that identification is not something which we voluntarily create and that it has deeper roots in the way we have been brought up and are motivated to behave politically. In attempts to delineate political identity in general, and European political identity in particular, territory, language, ideas, culture, and history may all serve as objects around which we can analyse political identification. In the French debate about European integration, the opposition between objects of identity is basically seen as a conflict between modernism and voluntarism, not in conflicts between social classes or party alignments. This gives a specific dimension to discussions of political identity which is usually not so common in other countries.

Key words: European integration, political identity, political identification, objects of identity

Identity and identification

"Europeanisation," meaning the political *unification* or *integration* of Europe, as we have recently come to think of it, is a relatively new phenomenon. More precisely, it refers to attempts at creating a European federal union, a distinct entity in relation to its surroundings.

To the surroundings, such as people in the former colonies, or in the United States, *Europeanisation* has a different meaning from that revealed by the integration perspective. Edgar Morin (1990, p. 20) says that "Il est difficile de percevoir l'Europe depuis l'Europe." From the outside it is often associated with expansive tendencies such as "European cultural imperialism" (in the former colonies) or "Cultural snobbism" (in the United States), that is, a *colonialisation of the minds* of people outside Europe, both in Africa, Asia, and America.

Somewhat paradoxically, it is difficult to distinguish *Europeanisation* as such from what we, in Europe, sometimes call *Americanisation* or *American cultural imperialism*. The difference for the political order, however, seems to be a matter of quantity and authencity. Critics of Europeanisation so conceived such as of the francophones and German visionary intellectuals like T. W. Adorno search for an European identity exempt from such denotations.

Besides for this ingroup-outgroup aspect of Europeanisation we must deal with on-going processes of how European identity evolves —if it exists, or whether it is emerging. How is it *created*, *sustained*, and *dispersed*?

To what an extent and in what respects can we characterise the formation of a European political identity as an outcome of learning, memory and information retrieval processes?

To some people, particularly the contributors to the French intellectual debate on the future of Europe, the contradiction between technocracy and meritocracy on the one hand, and democracy on the other (*Eurocrats versus Europe des citoyens*), poses the major challenge to the process of a politically unified Europe². It is, for example, presented as the end of minority rule generally by Wolton, who says (1993, p. 95), "Le passage de l'Europe technocratique à l'Europe démocratique signe la fin du règne de la minorité." It is an expectation resembling the classless society expressed by Marxism.

Conceptualisations and definitions

Let me first mention some definitional issues that might be helpful in a search for appropriate conceptualisations of identity. According to Webster's: 1a: sameness of essential or generic character in different instances or 1b: sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing or 2: unity and persistence of personality or 3: the condition of being the same with something described or asserted.

Le Nouveau Petit Robert (1993, p. 1122) is somewhat more exhaustive: 1. Caractère de deux objets de pensée identitiques, *Identité qualitative* ou spécifique -> similitude. L'identité d'une chose avec une autre, d'une chose et d'une autre. Identité de vue. ... -> communauté. 2. Caractère de ce qui est un. -> unité. ... 3. PSYCHOL. Identité personelle, caractère de ce qui demure identitique à soi-même. Problème psychologique de l'identité du moi. Crise d'identité. —Identité culturelle: ensemble de traits culturels propres à un groupe ethnique (langue, religion, art, etc.) qui lui conferent son individualité; sentiment d'appartenance d'un indivu à ce groupe. -> acculturation, déculturation. — PAR EXT. -> sommier. ...

Psychologists and psychoanalysts say that identity equals "The sense of one's continued being an entity distinguishable from all others" (Rycroft, p. 68). As Rycroft also says (ibid.): The sense of identity is lost in fugues and perverted in schizophrenic delusions of identity in which, typically, an underlying sense of nonentity is compensated for by delusions of grandeur.

A *fugue* designates a process by which an individual looses her or his sense of destiny and location. In psychoanalysis, fugues are classified as instances of hysterical behaviour and cited as examples of dissociation of consciousness. They typically arise out of *role confusion* when an individual cannot cognitively handle the information she or he faces.

A transposition of psychoanalytical concepts to a figurative political language, I believe, may create some fruitful associations, which can assist us when we try to explain, for example, disintegrative processes in central and southeastern Europe, or integrative processes in Western Europe.

Taking a preliminary view of what identity is from the psychoanalytic description, we may consequently look at *identification* as: The process by which a person either (a) extends his identity into someone else, (b) borrows his identity from someone else, or (c) fuses or confuses his identity with someone else. In analytical writings it never means establishing the identity of oneself or someone else. (Rycroft p. 67).

The expression "to identify with" bridges an *individual* identity and a *shared* identity ("I" "me" and "we" "us"), that is, some kind of *social* or *political* identity.

The place of identity in modern political research

In political science, (Cf. Lasswell, 1965) identity (answers to the question, *Who am I*? is usually treated as an element in a political perspective, the other major components being *demands* (What do people like me want?) and *expectations* (Which are our chances to get what we want, provided we are what we are?).

Probably influenced by sociological role theory, which is wider in scope than psychological identity theories, since it incorporates *behaviour* as

well thought and emotional process, some authors seek a solution to identity uncertainty in the concept of *multiple identities*. But who should determine what these identities should be like? The concept of identity cannot be patented by any traditional political-sociological group. It is not part of the traditional ideological quest for a distinct political vocabulary, as revolutionary socialists tended to believe before World War I. As Wolton says (1993, p. 48):

L'identité, la nation, la tradition ne sont pas des valeurs de "droite", elles appartiennent à toutes les familles politique et il y a un conformisme eurocratique à diaboliser ces mots.

As a matter of fact, the dynamism of a pluralistic and democratic conception of political identity presupposes that multiple identity pragmatism need not be present at *the individual level* of analysis at all, but only at *the social level* in the form of choice options (Wildawsky, 1987).

From a theoretical point of view, the lack of hierarchical priorities of identity objects may lead to the kind of psychological state called fugues, previously described. Mixed or uncertain political role conceptions are not the same as cultural pluralism and may eventually lead to hyper-vigilance (psychological distress), decision evasion and paralysis.

Territory, language, ideas, culture, and history may all serve as *objects* with which we wish to establish notions of *political identity*. But which objects are of primary, of secondary or of lesser importance to the citizens of Europe? Which objects are *necessary* and which are *sufficient* for the establishment of a notion of European identity?

In the French debate, the opposition between *objects of identity* is basically seen as a conflict between modernism and voluntarism, not between social classes or party alignments. Modernism is seen to be creating a link between identity and nationalism, and voluntarism is seen as creating a link between identity and history. Moreover, the construction of the new Europe, according to the French debate, does not simply mean a democratisation of the technocratic Europe which has been the foundation of previous attempts to integrate Europe politically, economically and culturally, but *a radical break away* from *both* the modernistic and the voluntaristic *paradigms* (Wolton, 1993, p. 67). The cardinal issue revolves around the opposition between democracy and totalitarianism. It picks up where the opposition to the Communist menace left off around 1990.

Which, then, are the attitudes of the general public towards the European Common Market of yesterday, as it was usually referred to in the 1980s, and the European Union of today and tomorrow? Should decision

making in Europe be confined to the approximately 50 000 Eurocrats, or to the 343 million citizens? If the Eurocrats, as a caste, are indispensable in the process of European integration, how do we secure that they are made accountable to democratic institutions and that they take considerate attitudes to the citizens of Europe? What should the role of national parliaments and the European parliament be in the future? With the present tendency to transfer power from government(s) to markets, what will the scope, weight, and domain of political power in the political system of Europe be in the future? Let us first take a look at the *objects of identification*, and see if they provide us with adequate criteria for choice and commitment.

Geographical criteria

What first comes to our minds when trying to outline what it means to be a European is, perhaps, Europe as a geographical unit. Political systems such the Italian political system, the French political system or the Danish political system all embrace a notion of territory. So important is this that Max Weber made territory a major component of his definition of what a state is.

But how do we establish where the boundaries of Europe are? Should Greenland be included if we look at the map before it gained autonomy (Hjemmestyre)? The Faeroe Islands? Madeira? The Canary Islands? The Malvinas (Falkland Islands)? Cyprus? Malta? Uzbekistan?

Linguistic criteria

In France it is sometimes maintained that (Wolton, 1993, p. 84), "Le fractionnement linguistique est ... consitutif de l'identité européennne." At the same time, the practical problems of the language barriers are realised (ibid.): "Le principal problème de l'Europe est l'absence de langue commune avec d'insolubles problèmes de communication, notament à Bruxelles et au Parlement. D'ailleur sur 13 000 fonctionaires à la Commission, il y a 1 700 traducteurs soit 2 traducteurs pour 13 fonctionaires."

Many people see this lack of linguistic unity as an indication of how difficult it is to unify Europe:

L'Europe est aussi un carrefour de langue, puisque quarante-trois langues y sont parlées, à des degrés divers. (Wolton, 1993, p. 17)

What about English? Many people in most European countries, however defined, speak English. But so do many people in America and Australia, and as a native language of a European state, English is not spoken by so many people as for example German. And French, Italian and Spanish are strong competitors within the European context. So language cannot easily be used as a common denominator for establishing a unified sense of European identity.

Still, as Edgar Morin points out, English may very well be used as a *working language* without the creation of an Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony (1990, pp. 232-33):

L'Europe ne court aucun risque culturel à ce que l'anglais y devienne langue principale de communication. N'a-t-il pas constitué la langue de communication entre les diverses culture et ethnies indiennes sans les corrompere, sans dévaluer les langues régionales, sans surimposer l'identité anglais sur l'identité indienne? L'utilisation de l'anglais, accompagnée de la connaissance de deux autre langues européennes, aurait en outre l'avantage de faciliter les communications avec le reste de la planète ³.

Cultural-Ideational criteria

One can, of course, subsume life styles, traditions and behavioural patterns within some European territory, more or less arbitrarily defined, as constituting a "European culture." But even within nation states it is doubtful to speak of specific political cultures, since other criteria such as class, urban versus rural, north versus south, and similar criteria tend to give more explanatory power to the notion of "political culture." The political culture of the British working class is definitely different from that of the middle class and the gentry, the political outlook of farmers in rural Holland definitely differs from that of city dwellers in Haag, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and northern Italian conceptions of politics are very different from those held by the population of Sicily and Naples. And as the two world wars in this century have shown, Marx was definitely wrong in believing that the working classes of the world had so much in common, that they would prefer class to nation as a chief identifying object.

Analytical criteria

If a political perspective reflects aspects of political cultures, and if identity is a necessary element of a political perspective, then it follows that we must give further consideration to political culture. At a somewhat high level of analytical abstraction, Wolton argues that one can intuitively speak of culture in three senses. *In the first place*, as an opposition to nature, that is, as the results of human labour. *In the second place*, culture can be seen as that which unifies a people or ethnical group and which allows us to distinguish between different cultures from each other. *In the third place*,

finally, culture can be seen as "high culture," that which is implied when we speak of being cultivated, familiar with literary traditions and art, etc. In Europe all three notions have always co-exited at the same time. (Wolton, 1993, p. 312). Yet there were dynamisms and developments as Laqueur has pointed out (1970, p. 344): With all its vitality, post-war European culture faced grave problems. The stultifying effects of mass culture, the standardisation of the mass media, the commercial production of cultural goods, constituted an insidious danger which in this form had never existed before. At the other extreme there were the futilities of an esoteric, precious, often sterile 'high culture', divorced from real life and from people, a dead end rather than a narrow pass on the road to new cultural peaks. Culture had become less spontaneous and far more costly ...

Trying to relate these common sense notions to the debate on European political culture, Wolton says that empirically there are three national approaches with ingredients borrowed from these notions:

Le premier sens, *française* insiste sur l'idée d'æuvre, de création. Il suppose une identification de ce qui est considéré comme culturel, en terme de patrimoine et de création, de connaissance et de savoir.

Le deuxième sens, *allemand*, est proche de l'idée de civilisation. C'est l'ensemble des æuvres et des valeur, des représentations et des symboles, du patrimoine et de la mémoire tels qu'ils sont partagés par une communauté, à un moment de son histoire.

Le troisième sens, *anglo-saxon*, est plus anthropologique au sens où il insiste sur les modes de vie, les pratique quotidiennes, l'historire au jour de jour, les styles et les savoirs quotidiens, les images et les mythes. (Wolton, 1993, p. 312).

Historical criteria

To the extent that we wish to speak of a common European historical destiny we would find that there are more competition, rivalry, strife, war and other forms of non-co-operative behaviour than forms of co-operative behaviour. In an attempt to summarise the results of a historical survey of Europe's origins, Morin (1990, pp. 22-23) says that:

L'Europe se disout dès qu'on veut la penser de façon claire et distincte, elle se morcelle dès qu'on veut reconnaître son unité. Lorsque nous voulons lui trouver une origine fondatrice ou une orginalité intransmissible, nous découverons qu'il n'y a rien lui soit propre aux origines, et rien dont elle ait aujourd'hui l'exclusivité.

In this sense it seems inappropriate to speak of the long-term historical origins of a European identity, which —according to both Webster, Le Petit

Robert and the psychoanalytical definition— would have to denote a form of sameness.

In the period before W.W. II, the term Europeanisation tended to express the effects on Australian, Asiatic, American and African cultures and civilisations of the peculiar civilisation that grew up in modern Europe — including what we today call Eastern and Central Europe— as a consequence of the Renaissance, the Calvinist and Lutheran Reformation and, later on, the industrial revolution.

As George Young wrote in the 1934 edition of *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1937, p. 623): Europeanisation may be expressed politically by imposing the idea of democracy, in the sense of parliamentary and party government, or of sovereignty, in the sense of suppression or subordination of all government organs to the sovereign state, or of nationality, by creating a semi-religious solidarity in support of that sovereignty. It may be expressed economically by imposing ideas of individualistic capitalism, competition and control on community enjoying more elaborate and equitable, but less productive and progressive, collectivistic or communal civilisations; or industrially by substituting the factory and the foundry for the hand loom and home craft.

Subjective versus objective criteria

Should we satisfy ourselves with just noting that *European* is that which one is, if one says so? If we reason along this line, National Socialists and Arab Socialists would be *socialists*, National Democrats (that is, Neo-Nazis of the 1960s) and representatives of the former *People's Democracies* would be Democrats. If political science equals the creation of political clarity rather than confusion, a purely subjective approach seems inappropriate.

For reasons of expediency, I would suggest that we opt for something like a *minimalist objective* approach. For a person to be European she or he would at least have to:

- Be a citizen of a state, located by stipulation, to be geographically within a geographical entity called Europe.
- Speak a language which is officially accepted as one of the official languages of that state.
- Share a historical destiny with other people, within that state, speaking the aforementioned language.
- Share a cultural pattern with other such people, where the cultural pattern is seen as consisting of similar cognitive, evaluative and emotional elements.

Citizenship is basically a legal criterion. An Australian citizen would not qualify even if he had lived for a long time in a European state, neither would aspiring immigrants or refugees. Language is somewhat weaker as a criterion variable, as I have already mentioned. Shared history is also a weak criterion: What about people living in territories that historically have been contested such as south Tirol, Alsace-Loire, Slesvig-Holsten, parts of the former Habsburg empire, or the former USSR? What about the Basque separatists and Catalonian nationalists, not to forget the Balkan states?

With respect to a notion of European identity, rather than the subsumed national identities of Europe's constituent states, peripheral territories will constitute problems since Europe is a peninsula, rather than a continent. Hence we have had problematic notions such as the old *cordon sanitaire* which was invented between the two World Wars to define a buffer zone between the Soviet *dictatorship of the proletariat* and the rest of Europe and the "Partnership for Peace" within the new world security order.

Shared *culture* also seems insufficient when we wish to create a distinction between European and non-European identities and, besides, cultural criteria seem to cut across the other criteria, as I have already mentioned. Since culture can be based on any of the three aforementioned elements of a political perspective (identification, demands, and expectation), we run the risk of exposing ourselves to definitional circularity if we use that as an exclusive criterion.

Three kinds of motives

Some people tend to conceive of themselves (to identify) on the basis of what they think they *are* and *have been*, and draw their political conclusions on the basis of that: "I am a Danish farmer or Danish farmer's son, so I must vote for the agrarian party." They are characterised by their "because-of" motives. Other people tend to conceive of themselves in terms of what they want: "In order to promote a free society I will vote for the liberal party." These people are characterised by their "in-order-to" motives. Still others conceive of themselves on the basis of what they expect: "Activism is required if I wish to gain what I want or preserve what must be preserved; in order to live a good life." "Fatalism or free-riding will be better for me than activism." This third group can be characterised by their optional-choice motives.

The first requirement for a political identification to occur is the recognition of a *self* distinct from others, that is, *them*. This is identification proper. What is distinctive about being European today, if we compare it with being, say, Australian, Canadian, or Mexican? What is the significant

characteristics of being European today in comparison to being, say, European before and immediately after the second World War? The accumulated efforts of Schumann, Adenauer, de Gaulle, Monet, and Delors have all made a difference, but will it continue?

In the second place, there must be a recognition that this self, this identification is in opposition to them. This is regrettable for those who advocate world federalism and continued responsibility toward the Third World. In order for an identity to thrive there must be a challenge, a recognised competitive edge or conflicts of interests. The political self-recognition and the recognition of opposition between the "self" and "others" tend to reinforce each other, as in Marxist theory which claims that the class in itself (Klasse an sich) becomes more distinct as it fights for its interests against other classes, so as to emerge as a class for itself (Klasse für sich). As the social psychologists Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills say in Character and Social Structure (1979, p. 288), "It is in controversies that symbol systems are tightened up."

Although we may recognise a competitive edge and a conflict of interest with *non-Europeans* with respect to, say, economic issues, Europe is still integrated in a wider global community through GATT, the United Nations and NATO, etc. So despite attempts by the European Union to create a separate identity for Europeans, not unlike the Marxist notion of a *Klasse für sich*, there are other centripetal and centrifugal forces at work to create wider as well as more narrow political identities.

The third step in the establishment of a separate political identity involves a cognitive simplification of the world, where most events are interpreted in dual categories such as "European versus non-European". The cognitive simplification process has two explanations, each of which are equally valid. Man faces great and complex problems but has limited capabilities to process information. In order to focus attention and regain perceptual control, aspects have to be disregarded, otherwise chaos follows. Politically this is also necessary, because the audience of the politically active must be influenced by simplified images that reach down to everyone.

When it comes to speaking about the identifications of Europeans, such a simplified *black-and-white* perspective is probably (and hopefully) not an enduring characteristic of the electorates of Europe. Black-and-white thinking and stereotyping tendencies seem to have more in common with the kind of totalitarianism propagated within the ranks of the German *Republikaner*, the French *Front National*, *Vlaamse Belang* in Belgium and a few more marginal groups —perhaps inadequately described as totalitarian—

such as the Danish *Fremskridtspartiet* and the Ulster nationalists. Not even the neo-fascist Italian *MSI* (now calling itself the National Alliance) and its sub-organisations can be accused of such xenophophia and simple-mindedness as that which goes into simple cognitive dualisms.

Lowell Dittmer describes the process of identification when he says (1977, p. 573) that, "The process of political identification involves generalisation from objective perception to subjective wish-fulfilment..."

However, Wolton (1993, p. 82) says that it is possible and even desirable to accept the old distinction of out-groups *versus* in-groups, but that it must be given a new content:

L'Europe se trouve donc aujourd'hui confrontée au même enjeu: retrouver une figure contre-identitaire, ou inventer un nouveau mode de structuration identitaire.

This new figure of contra-identification, according to the French intellectuals, should be anti-democratic political tendencies and sentiments.

The fourth and final requirement concerns expected and desired *goals*. Such goals can be elaborated as utopian systems or models, like the federalist and confederalist conceptions of a new European political, economic or security order, or as partial working solutions to pragmatically felt needs, such as those postulated by neo-functionalists.

There are at least six, more or less overlapping, contradictory and/or supportive models one can discern in the current debate on the integration of Europe and the development of a European political identity:

- The great Europe model —a confederal model, with an emphasis on *external* relations
- The united nations of Europe —a federal model, with an emphasis on internal relations
- The community model —a model for *inventories* of what has already been achieved as a result of so called neo-functionalist initiatives
- The Europe of the nations (de Gaulle) —a model which focuses on definitions of what should be included and excluded, and which would not necessarily include all European states in their geographical extensions
- The minimal Europe —a *liberal model* in which market forces are given priority, but in which political and monetary issues are played down
- The Europe of *space publique* —a *democratic model* for Europe to be shaped, which ignores the traditional cultural cleavages and focuses on the democratic *versus* totalitarian modes of identity.

Dominique Wolton says that these models have the quality of ideal types about them but that (p. 218):

En fait, l'Europe n'est pour le moment, et sans doute pour longtemps encore, ni une Europe des régions, ni une Europe des nations, mais une mosaïque de modèles et de responsabilités gouvernementales: supranationales, nationales, régionales, locales, municipales, où la souveraineté est partagée entre les différents niveaux de gouvernement.

This is a reasonably pragmatic conclusion since it allows for the theoretical debate about European political identity to continue, and this debate is in itself a major source of political identification.

Conclusion and some practical implications

It makes a difference whether we speak about *plural identities* or a *plurality of choices* when we look at the fears and hopes for a new Europe to be built. Plural identities are not necessarily "good" from the point of view of psychology, since they may cause distress, paralysis and confusion. The French intellectuals seem to believe that when using different criteria as identity objects, one should not focus exclusively on geographical units, since the national state is unlikely to be perishing anyway. When they advocate multiple perspectives they say that *political* criteria must be used, and that way the debate is being transformed into a debate about the future of European democracy, a debate with firm roots in European federalism.

Since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community and the other European Union *pillars* there has been a change in the extent to which people regard themselves as European. This can be seen in the Eurobarometer surveys which show that the sense of being European is greater among citizens of Member States that have been members of the EEC from the beginning than among the *new-comers*. But even if this is so, it may be misleading, because such *identification* may be based on parochial expectations of economic and other gains for the national unit to which one belongs, as for example in the case of Belgium, where European integration is demanded, but on the basis that the European politicians will further Belgian interests in the first place.

The enlargement of the European Union has brought new cultural patterns to the attempts for a consolidated European unity. Still there are many cultural denominators which can be brought to bear on a new and more unified Europe. Religion seems to exclude the democratic integration of countries whose culture is patterned on non-Christian and non-civic norms, as we can see from the recent referenda in Holland and France. These ref-

erenda were framed as quests for the support of a common constitution of the EU, but the major question was still if the EU should let Turkey, a non-Christian country, defamed by its violation of human rights, into the community, and why other countries such as Russia, which geographically are traditionally seen as European countries, should be left out.

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This article is based on discussion notes for the European Commission conference "How to define today and in the future the European identity" at Coimbra University, Portugal in 1996. After a reading of more recent literature in the field I have come to the conclusion that the ideas contained in the notes are still valid, and that the habit of confusing identity formation with role-taking only creates confusion and analytical obscurity.

² Wolton (1993, p. 232) says that this debate is more widespread than claimed here: "Le thème de la "technocratie européenne" est omniprésent dans tous les pays.

³ Others like Wolton (1993, p. 162) are more cautious and less optimistic: "L'identité postnationale" est le moyen de construire cette identité, reposant sur l'adhésion à des culturepolitiques démocratiques, communicationells qui attribuent une influence certaine à l'échange font notament l'impasse sur le problème de la langue. Comment communicquer des expériences sans langage commun?"

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