Theory

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory
International Sociological Association
Spring/Summer 2012

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Editors' Introduction

We believe that this issue highlights the vitality of contemporary sociological theory. As the RC Presidents note below, the mid-term conference will have a larger number of participants than any previous meeting. The significant work that is being done today in sociological theory is also reflected in in this issue's contributions. We look forward to seeing you in Trento.

Craig Browne & Paul Jones

From the Presidents

We are only a few weeks away from RC16's mid-term theory meeting in Trento,

Italy. The theme for the conference is "Cultures and Civilization in the Contemporary World." The conference begins in the afternoon on June 27, with a keynote lecture by Paolo Mancini as well as the Junior Theorist Prize and the opening reception. This will be the largest mid-term meeting the RC has ever had, and we are excited to see everyone in Trento.

For those who are attending, please register for the conferences as soon as possible if you have not already done so (http://events.unitn.it/en/isa2012). Information about travel and accommodations can also be found at the conference website.

Ronald N. Jacobs & Guiseppe Sciortino

A Note on *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*

Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the use of theory in the human sciences (University of Chicago Press, 2011) is a short book with broad goals; the telos that guides the project is the development of a causal hermeneutics as a major basis for social research. In contrast to certain traditions in the philosophy of social science, I started my arguments with well-known, empirically grounded truth claims from various sectors of the human sciences (e.g. comparative-historical sociology, cultural anthropology, women's and gender studies), rather than first principles. I parsed these claims with an eye towards epistemology, and thus attempted, via critical reflection, to develop both a semiotics of their inner workings, and an intellectual path to a better epistemology for human science. By adopting this conceptual strategy, I hoped to navigate some of the tensions between descriptive and prescriptive accounts of truth-seeking inherent in any consideration of the nature of social knowledge. Descriptively, I attempt to develop a map of how theory is used in different ways in social research. In a more polemical voice, I argue for a specifically meaning-centered approach to the use of theory in social research. I thus aim to lift the "interpretation of cultures" out of relegation to what W.G. Runciman (1983) called "tertiary understanding" and to make it, instead, a necessary aspect of both explanation and critique.

The book begins with an analysis of a paragraph from Marx's *18th Brumaire,* the point of which is to show how, in the human sciences, truth claims exist on a spectrum that runs from "minimal" to "maximal" interpretation. The latter are claims about the world that are infused with theoretical language and thus with increased strength and depth—and also with increased risk of tendentiousness. My point in introducing these terms is to argue that as interpretations in the human sciences make increased use of abstraction, they move up the spectrum from minimal to maximal; this means that while even facts are achieved and communicated semiotically, some interpretations are more evidentiary, and more clearly referential, than others. Using this frame, the book sets out to discuss social knowledge claims as interrelated species of maximal interpretation. I argue that there are three 'epistemic modes' in this regard: realist, normative, and interpretive.

First, I examine truth claims by Theda Skocpol, Barrington Moore and others to grasp the anatomy of realism as an epistemic mode. I then criticize both critical realism and more strictly 'scientific' realisms as epistemologies for the human sciences. With the assistance of arguments made by Anthony King (2004) and Justin Cruickshank (2004), I attack realism's strange reliance on "ontology" to ground inquiry, suggesting that the adoption of the transitive/intransitive distinction essential to Bhaskar's realist theory of science is, for the human sciences, a misstep. Related to this, I criticize the rhetoric of "retroduction" in Bhaskar as a slippery justification for and understanding of argumentation in social research. While retroduction, broadly speaking, refers to a mode of inference—not unlike what C.S. Peirce called abduction—whereby one reasons from a phenomenon to that which explains it, Bhaskar uses the term to justify naturalism in a way that is

unsustainable. For, Bhaskar analogizes scientific experiment to the use of theory to build explanations in social science in a tricky way. First, he suggests that retroduction indicates that, if scientific experiments are intelligible and rational, then natural forces must be real. He then *analogizes* this philosophical argument to the process whereby social scientists argue from actor's *experiences* of the social world to the underlying, real, and generative social structures of that world. This analogy, I argue, does not hold, and draws too bright of a line between hermeneutics and causal (and mostly social-structural) explanation.

Second, I examine how some maximal interpretations mobilize a theoretical sign-system whose ultimate referents are not the (supposed) ontological structures of the social, but the utopias and dystopias of political philosophy and various social imaginaries (this is the epistemic mode I call "normativism"). In doing this, I first try to show that the knowledge claims of such classic texts as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Discipline and Punish,* as well as Leela Gandhi's more recent masterpiece *Affective Communities,* are full of minimal interpretations—that is, well-founded empirical truth claims about things that happened. For this reason, debates about social knowledge that are driven by skepticism or the specter of radical epistemological relativism are, in my view, somewhat misleading. It is not the possibility of empirical responsibility that is at issue, but rather how and for what purpose one uses theoretical architectures to situate, intensify, and ultimately recode empirical knowledge claims. Thus, what is different about the truth claims of the normative epistemic mode is the way in which their maximal interpretations hinge on a dialogic relationship established between the extant (or, historically verifiable) social meanings under study and theoretically articulated visions of the good (or bad) society at issue in the community of inquiry. This relationship is just as fraught with theoretical trouble as is the search for structural explanations in realism, but one should not be mistaken for the other.

All of this leaves open the problem of how to conduct explanation in social research if one is not an "ontological realist." Thus I investigate the "interpretive" epistemic mode as a specific way of using theory in human science. To do so, I read closely two classics of the genre: Geertz on the Balinese Cockfight and Bordo on anorexia. I analyze how these texts work, and in so doing articulate a more general argument about the use of theory to interpret the meanings in which a set of social actions is enmeshed. I attempt to show how theory and evidence develop together to limit interpretive possibilities of the investigator, thus enabling the development of 'deep' or strong truth claims from an interpretive point of view. The difference between interpretive and realism is not the search for truth, or even the search for causal explanation; it is, rather, the use of theory. In interpretive work, theoretical constructs, or bits and pieces of theoretical architectures, that are ontologically inconsistent in the abstract can, when mobilized with evidence, come together to form a meaningful whole that constitutes a good interpretation.

One thing that has surprised me about the early reception of the text has been the way this argument for theoretical pluralism in constructing historically bounded interpretations has drawn wildly different reactions. Some have found it both true and useful, pointing the way out of certain essential dilemmas; others have found it radically misguided, or even a *non sequitur* unrelated to epistemological dispute. I suspect the reason for these different reactions is a kind of after-effect of the science wars. Because of the way we have embraced either (1) a positivist reading of Popper, (2) the Bhaskar-Bunge-Archer attack on hermeneutics, or (3) a stereotyped reading of Kuhn-Feyerabend, we have not really developed a good language for the ways in which interpretivists can use theory to construct truth claims; we do not really know how theoretical pluralism could produce investigative rationality.

In the last chapter of the book, then, I consider how such interpretations can be explanations, and the implications of

"interpretive explanation" for the human sciences. My argument develops out of the scholarly literature in four areas: on reasons-as-causes, on social mechanisms, on the idea of "vocabularies of motive," and recent arguments in the philosophy of explanation. I end up arguing that Aristotle's four causes can serve as a starting point for a more elaborated, historically responsible format of social explanation; in particular, while various forms of social scientific realism have accounted well for material, final, and efficient causes in social life, it is *formal* causes that have to be included if the human sciences are to produce social knowledge that is true, deep, and useful. Thus my argument ends by suggesting that while motivations and mechanisms are forces in social life, they are given concrete form by signification and representation. Aristotle imagines a sculptor pouring bronze into a plaster cast; I argue that the shape and form of the cast of social life is what the interpretation of meaning allows us to access.

Since writing *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*, I have come to view my exceedingly brief turn to Aristotle near the end of the book as a haltingly expressed and somewhat strange symptom of a developing need in social theory, rather than an expression of some underlying goal or idea of my own. That need is to kick the door of causal thinking wide open, and thus to create lively debate across the human sciences about root metaphors for causality (we need more than 'mechanism'). The gloriously messy and unwieldy landscape of thought invoked by terms like causality and possibility, or history and structure, can only be made more rigorous and useful through collective discussion. For this reason, it is an honor to be able to discuss some of my ideas in the intellectual context of RC16.

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Isaac Ariail Reed

Before 'Agency' and 'Emancipation' Became Buzzwords-and After

Gabriel Peters proposes to renew the project for a sociology that enlightens lay agents' perceptions of their contextual predicaments and thereby emancipates them to become proactive. I find his recommendations apt, even though I might not stay with Bourdieu as a *locus classicus* for this project. To my mind, that agenda figures prominently in Western sociology for more than a century. Its proponents include William Graham Sumner, Emile Durkheim, Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Robert E. Park, W. I. Thomas, David Riesman, C. Wright Mills, and Talcott Parsons.

On the matter of agency, recall that Sumner, famous for noting the tenacity of custom, nevertheless spoke repeatedly of the human tendency to produce change, voice dissent, seek withdrawal, correct noxious norms, and employ "the power of the intelligence . . . a human prerogative." Sumner's distinction between institutions that were deliberately "enacted" and those that merely grew ("crescive") has a family resemblance to Tönnies's distinction between formations based on deliberate will as contrasted with "natural will" (*Wesenswille*). Voicing a creed that animated so many early American sociologists, Sumner intoned: It would be "a mighty achievement of the science of society" if it could lead up to enlightened social choices, thanks to efforts designed "by education and will, with intelligent purpose, to criticize and judge even the most established ways of our time, and to put courage and labor into resistance to the current mores where we judge them wrong" (Sumner, 2002: 118). In a similar vein, Cooley urged us to attend both to the "social and individual aspects of mind"–to consider

the interface among self-consciousness, social consciousness, public consciousness, and broad "impersonal tendencies" ([1909] 1962: 12, 20). Cooley rejected the view that *any* institution could be understood merely as a result of impersonal forces, stressing that they necessarily involve human thought and moral judgment, and indeed that all forms of social organization embody "the life of the human spirit" (22).

At least three traditions produced a paradigm that prefigures precisely what Peters describes as "the passage from a tacit activation of ingrained propensities of conduct to a consciously pondered choice of action alternatives" (2001: 7). Durkheim announced that the project of scientific sociology would have no justification if it did not lead engender more informed choices about alternatives in praxis ([1893] 1984:xxvi). In Germany, Simmel analyzed the nexus between social constraint and human agency in numerous analytic venues. He featured agency in the construction of social forms and in the continuous process of protest against established forms. He depicted the effects of a monetized economy on both new kinds of social constraint and new forms of individual awareness and choicefulness. He analyzed, in particular, the different types of autonomy and creativity embodied in post-Enlightenment individualism and the modern growth of individuality. More formally, Weber's first typology of social formations for his *verstehende Sozoiologie Gemeinschaftshandeln/Gesellschaftshandel*, echoing Tönnies–made them dependent on varying degrees of deliberateness in action, and proceeded memorably to extol choiceful action as an alternative to humans' living like cattle, even though, like many other classic sociologists, he was also attuned to the overwhelming role of habit in directing human action (Camic, 1986). Weber considered it a major task of sociology to provide resources for individuals to dialogue and examine critically their social situations and their ethical choices.

Back in the United States, John Dewey formalized a paradigm of moving from "ingrained propensities of conduct" (Peters, 2011: 7), which he called 'habit', to conscious reflection on choice alternatives. His emphasis on reflective creative action prompted by impulse in the face of problems influenced many of his students, including Park and Thomas. Park celebrated "the public" as an arena where participants deliberate actively about presenting issues. Thomas favored this theme in his emphasis on the dynamic processes of disorganization and reorganization, the individual's wish for new experience, and the actions of persons active in "social reconstruction." Thomas's schema of the philistine, the bohemian, and the creative was reactivated by Riesman's typology of adjustment, anomie, and autonomy, and his search for conditions that favored the growth of autonomy. Mills articulated the mission of sociology as that of helping actors realize the linkages between individual biography and societal context, and between personal troubles and public issues (1959).

Parsons famously launched his career–after a decade of seminal papers–with a volume that celebrated what he called a "voluntaristic theory of action" (1937). It is so ironic that Parsons came to be taken as an author who ignored the phenomenon of human agency, that's what he claimed he was all about. To some extent, I have argued, Parsons is largely to blame for this ironic reversal, since he did little to explicate his notion of voluntarism, used it in vague and often contradictory ways, and stopped using the concept ever after (Levine, 2005). Even so, the notion remains engrained in a scheme of action that points systematically to problematic tensions among so many different components and engrains the theme of choice among identified multiple options.

Peters need not apologize for imputing to actors "greater powers of reflexivity than Bourdieu had allowed" (2011: 8). He could draw bounteous support for his wish to provide actors with a richly empowered grasp of the connections between biography and macro-social location by drawing on Parsons's paradigm of the two-directional cybernetic hierarchy. To paraphrase G. H. Mead, whom Parsons found congenial, selves are both socially and culturally constructed *and* comprise seats of critical

reflection thanks to organismically grounded impulses and internal psychic processes including the capacity for self-reflection.

Most sociologists today may be uninformed of the discourses I have listed here. Indifference to earlier literature has become widespread among the current generation of sociologists and indeed humanistic scholars more generally. To my mind, this tendency has two sources and two baleful consequences. For one thing, it reflects the diminished attention to classic literature in the education of today's social scientists. Relatedly, it may involve a pressure toward collegial conformity, the wish to be seen using the most fashionable argot and buzzwords.

The downside of this is that in many instances, classic authors have clothed their notions with a depth of intellectual sophistication and humane insight that is often lost in subsequent reinventions. In the present instance, they offer insights and analyses into diverse modes, locations, causes, and consequences of emancipatory reflexivity that current formulations have failed to appropriate. Disuse also unfits academics to use those texts in their curricula, with a resultant failure to develop their students' intellectual powers to the maximum (Levine 2005).

To be sure, the brouhaha over agency and emancipation, albeit formulated at times in obscurantist terminology, has successfully put these older themes back on the table, and may lead to a re-energized attention to important foundational issues. With luck, it may inspire fresh inquiries into the self-society nexus. Three lines of such inquiry would seem to me particularly fruitful. I'll formulate them in the framework of Isaac Reed's suggestive new book, *Interpretation and Social Knowledge* (2011*)*.

I.   The realist mode.   This involves theoretic constructs that purport to represent real structures and processes that underlie surface phenomena. Question: what can be employed as a more differentiated, revealing theoretic schema to catch the dynamics of the self-society reflexivity dynamic? An outgrown

of more than a century of German idealist philosophy, Max Scheler's *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1927) offers a neat schematic representation of the two-directional flow of influence, from Nature up and Culture down. Parsons's cybernetic hierarchy paradigm offers a much more differentiated version of such a schema (Parsons and Platt, 1973: 30-2; Parsons, 1978). Frontier inquiries there would carry the Parsonian paradigm further, for example by deepening analysis of the level of the behavioral system, or by explicating its value at the level of middle-range theory.

II.   The interpretivist mode. Here one seeks to recover the meaningful orientation of a set of a population of actors. Question: How can representations of the worldview of a collectivity or a period be enriched? To my mind, an exceptionally fruitful way to do this is to work to reconstruct the array of choices, actual and potential, that were available to an actor or a collectivity in a certain historic situation. Something of this sort what was I presented in my analysis of the situation of decisional points in Ethiopian political history over the past half-century, and reviewing the choices actually made against others that could have been made. Such an analysis by-passed the usual notion of history events unfolding in response to pre-existing structures and patterns by entering into the minds of those involved– in which review I glossed them as "missed opportunities" (Levine 2007).

III.   The normativist mode.   Here one deliberately applies a utopian conception to the relevant phenomenal universe. Question: what would it look like to extrapolate deliberately a world scenario pitched to certain specified ideals? Something of this sort was ventured by Dan Silver and myself when we speculated on what kind of sociology might appear if one used Simmel's notion of authentic individuality as a point of reference (2011:xxix). In the Peters-Bourdieuan case, it would be the creation of a population of optimally self-reflexive actors, and the relevant utopia would, I surmise, have to include an enriched system of liberal learning. The pursuit of such awareness might even lead to a searching critique of proposals for

dedicating sociology to the promotion of reflexive self-consciousness. . . .

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Donald N. Levine

Going Small

Perhaps now is the right time to revise the recent history of sociological theory and bring some order in the galaxy of micro-sociology. To focus the attention of the reader, we propose to rename micro-sociology. We will call it instead 'nanosociologia' for two reasons. First, the story about agency and structure no longer appears insightful or creative; as such, we here wish to sidestep the issue of the micro-macro linkage altogether. Second, micro does not refer to a domain of social existence, but rather to a certain way of looking at the minutiae of social life to find out how actors skillfully bring it about. There is no reason why the sociological microscope should stop at the molecular level and not explore the infinitely or infinitesimally small. Society is ultimately made up of individuals, but as Gabriel Tarde said in his *Monadologie e sociologie*, the last elements at which science arrives are themselves complex and composed.1 And if one does not want to focus on individuals, but like pragmatists, symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists, one wants to look at situations of action, why not go all the way and look at short stretches of action that can vary from a couple of hours to a couple of minutes or even seconds?

It has now become a fixture of introductions to sociology to present the recent history of the discipline in terms of antinomy between agency and structure or action and order– as if sociologists had to wait for Jeffrey Alexander, Pierre Bourdieu or Tony Giddens to look for a dialectical theory of practices that solves the conundrum! This canonical history is not only

uninspiring and repetitive; it is also misleading. Whoever looks at the Californian 'micro-revolution of the 1960´s' without the blinders of the agency-structure debate will notice that Goffman, Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, the champions of situational analysis, were obsessed with the question of order. For them, the challenge consisted in demonstrating the orderly nature of everyday life. Waiting for the bus, driving down the motorway, looking in the microscope, all these ordinary activities are orderly, i.e. predictable, witnessable, accountable as concerted activities in concrete situations. Similarly, they did not oppose agency to structure, but found structure at every level of society and, more particularly, at the nanolevel of agency.

Apart from this historical objection to formulating the problem of action in terms of the structure-agency couple, there is an epistemological objection that we would here like to raise. In the space of our current sociological imaginaries, the structure/agency conceptual pair works according to a logic that Cornelius Castoriadis was attributing to 'inherited categories'. In short, inherited thought (which for Castoriadis runs through the entire Western philosophical tradition, calling for its radical revision) is defined by a notion of coexistence based on ensembles of distinct and well-defined elements, relating to one another by means of well-defined relations; and by a notion of succession centred on the schemata of causality, of finality, or of logical consequence.2 Inherited categories are thus scripted into binary oppositions and they carry compulsions of separation. Even thoroughly dialectical articulations defined around the structure/agency problem end up under the spectre of the same perplexing imperative to differentiate between the two elements of the pair.

As a matter of fact, instead of opposing agency to structure, one might as well oppose action to practice and distinguish the various micro-sociologies according to whether they look at the actor from within or from without, whether they adopt the first person perspective of the participant or the third person perspective of the observer, whether they try to interpret social behavior or whether they merely describe it. While the sociology of action is an interpretative sociology that can legitimately claim to go back to the opening pages of *Economy and society*, the sociology of practice is a descriptive sociology that finds its main inspiration not in Weber nor in Marx, but in Durkheim.3 Coming from phenomenology and pragmatism, they creatively read Durkheim (or ´misread´ him, as the late Garfinkel instructed his fellow members of the gang) and projected his structuralist analysis of social facts to the micro-level. In between a phenomenological sociology of action that investigates the motives, meanings and typifications of actors and stresses intentionality and reflexivity on the one hand and a micro-structuralist sociology of practices that describes ordered sequences of situated doings by anonymous agents who routineously do what they do without much thinking on the other hand, one finds a sociology of interaction that analyses how actors define the situations they find themselves in to coordinate their actions with others who find themselves in the same situation. This interactionist sociology of action, which can be traced back to Georg Simmel, Marcel Mauss or G.H. Mead, can go either way. When it stresses the connection between agency and culture and conceives of language as the symbolic medium that allows Ego and Alter to coordinate their actions and act together, it rejoins the phenomenological-hermeneutic theory of action of Weber, Schütz and Parsons. However, when it focuses more on the situation of action than on the actors themselves to analyse how agents are faced with situational constraints that form a micro-system that rigorously conditions their practices, it joins the theory of practices of Goffman, Garfinkel and Wittgenstein.

The problem of coordination holds the key to a strong interactionist agenda in sociology. Being coordinated – or differently put, being synchronic – necessarily appeals to the quality of social action of being *in time*. It is surely not a merely repetitive, mechanical time; but a qualitative one, which is adjusted to the 'rhythms, pulsations and beats' of a certain locality.4 As a basic condition for the achievement of social synchronicity, actors feel each others' presence in the social environments, they adjust their movements to the others', in accordance to what Tim Ingold

calls an 'ongoing perceptual monitoring', which involves watching, listening and even touching.5 Furthermore, the rhythms of human life and activity are in resonance not only among themselves; but also with the rhythms of other non-human living things, and with the rhythms of non-living things. Nanosociologia promises to create the space where all these rhythmic adjustments, resonances and entrainments can be treated as 'large' enough to ground our theories.

'Going small' along the lines of this situation-centred revision does not come without important ethical consequences. There are several intriguing questions to ask here: how small is meaningfully small for sociologists? and which type of 'going small' can perform some ethical rewritings in sociology? And, in a more ambitious formulation: do we need a nanoethics in order to arrive at an act of ethical-theoretical retribution for the times when most of our attention went to 'huge' topics, such as social structure or social order? We here argue that nanoethics is indeed a very necessary gesture: it does not go back to reifying the individual under a new guise; nor does it dis-invent the human domain altogether (as many versions of posthumanism have tended to do lately); instead, it asserts the fact that while looking closely at situations, sociologists can trace the way humans and non-humans come together in complicated rhythmic amalgamations. Nanoethics thus brings an important retribution in a field of theorising where 'the agency-structure debate' has often displayed a bias toward conservatism and has misrepresented the problem of human and non-human creativity.

Notes

1. Tarde, G. (1999): *"Monadologie et sociologie", Oeuvres de Gabriel Tarde*, vol. 1, p. 36. Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser em rond.

2. Castoriadis, Cornelius. (1997 [1975]) The Social Imaginary and the Institution. In *The Castoriadis Reader*, edited by David Ames Curtis, pp. 196-217. Oxford: Blackwell.

3. Paragr. 1.: "sociology ... is the science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a casual explanation of its course and effects"

4. Sorokin, Pitirim. A. and Robert K. Merton. (1937) Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis. *American Journal of Sociology* 42: pp. 621-3.

5. Ingold, Tim. (2000) *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 196.

Frédéric Vandenberghe & Raluca Soreanu

Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Performance

Critical cosmopolitanism forms one of the competing theoretical research programs in recent sociology. Critical cosmopolitanism forms a part of the theoretical tradition which aspires to generate a critique, which breaks the limits as to what it is possible to conceive of as meaningful. In the words of Gerard Delanty (2009), critical cosmopolitanism makes possible new modes of world disclosure. Respectively, as Ulrich Beck (2007) states: it leads us to a re-examination of the fundamental concepts of modern society and to develop a new conceptual framework to understand our contemporary world.

The concept of critical cosmopolitanism was invented by Paul Rabinow, an anthropologist who actively participated in the critical discourse symbolized by the book *Writing Culture* (Clifford, Marcus 1986). His contribution to the development of the critical cosmopolitan imagination was disregarded by Delanty, Beck as well as Mignolo. As I hope to show, his contribution does not rest merely in inventing the connection of words "critical cosmopolitanism" but setting out the core theoretical meaning-system of critical cosmopolitanism. In his text (Rabinow 1986) from the mid 1980's one can already find the articulation of critical cosmopolitanism as a normatively grounded discursive subject position which could be adapted by anthropologists/sociologists. The perspective

that was later developed by Mignolo (2000), as a result of his post-colonial critique of Beck's risk society based cosmopolitan manifesto, is in many respects parallel to that established by Rabinow. In addition, Rabinow justified his theoretical claims with reference to a sense of historical rupture, namely globalization (without necessarily using the word), while insisting that the effect of this historical rupture on the shared horizon of understanding is mediated by historically particular discourses.

Critical cosmopolitanism arises in Rabinow's work as a result of his search for an adequate anthropological research program of understanding Others. Rabinow's research strategy proposes a radical historization, which at the same time means also a social contextualisation of the observer. Rabinow's text starts with the problem of epistemology, situating his own object of concern by outlining the debate over the philosophical discourse which announces the irrelevance of epistemological issues. He builds his arguments on Michel Foucault's claim that the problem of correct representation cannot be reduced to a philosophical problem (Foucault 1972, 1973, 1980: 109-133). That the search for modes of correct representation is a general cultural concern, characterizing many discursive domains of modernity beside philosophy. In this way, one can move beyond epistemology by showing that epistemology is not merely a philosophical issue but a wider, social concern with the subject, order and truth. For Rabinow, this Foucauldian approach generates the chance for the invention of new anthropological research program of understanding the Other, insofar as it treats ideas as always interrelated with social practices. At the same time, it offers the chance to find an alternative to the Marxist approach, which treats this relationship of ideas and social practices in terms of ideology.

As a research strategy, critical cosmopolitanism should, according to Rabinow, take into consideration the modern Western observer, instead of looking for the theoretical grounds for the correct representation of the Other. In other words, before observing the Other, the observer has to gain a reflexive knowledge about his own cultural and historical position. This constitutes the task of developing a discourse which reveals how it is that the Western reality is constituted, how forms of knowledge claimed to be universal, like the epistemology of economics, are in fact historically particular and linked to social practices.

To reconstruct the way Rabinow invented the concept of critical cosmopolitanism one needs to understand how he conceives the discursive and social field into which he intervenes. Rabinow moves his critique in a direction that is oriented towards audiences and micro-power relations. Rabinow turns to Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production (Bourdieu 1984, 1988) to make sense of meanings articulated in texts, to interpret these texts out of the authors' field-position and habitus. The politics of interpretation in the academy, as Rabinow (1996: 50) calls it, reveals the crucial role of power relations in the process of writing and reading academic texts. By discussing cases of the politics of interpretation in the academy, he arrives at a decisive point, which is articulated by means of a comparison of natural and social sciences. The competition between different schools/perspectives in the social science cannot be reduced to epistemological problems. Political and ethical differences play a decisive role in the disagreements between these subjects and their interpretations.

We can grasp the sense of Rabinow's innovation - imagining the perspective of critical cosmopolitanism - by contrasting it with two other anthropological innovations: with the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz and with the postmodern anthropology of James Clifford. He distinguishes himself from both Geertz and Clifford through claiming that both of them left unexamined their own discursive position. For Rabinow to situate himself – that is, to be located in a position - is a core value, for both normative and theoretical reasons. The invention of critical cosmopolitanism is nothing else than the specification of the discursive position in which cosmopolitan intellectuals can be situated:

"The ethical is the guiding value. This is an oppositional position, one suspicious of sovereign powers, universal truths, overly

relativized preciousness, local authenticity, moralism high and low. Understanding is its second value, but an understanding suspicious of its own imperial tendencies. It attempts to be highly attentive to (and respectful of) difference, but also wary of the tendency to essentialize difference." (Rabinow 1996: 56)

Critical cosmopolitanism can be read as a specification of Rabinow's own position as a critical, cosmopolitan intellectual, while the alternative positions constituting the structure of that field are: interpretive anthropologists, political subjects, and textual critics. This is very clear in the case of his stressing the relationship between the ethical and the epistemological, with a primacy of the ethical dimension of practice over epistemological inquiry. His critical remarks on Clifford's style make explicit how ethical questions are treated by him as core aspects of scientific practice. While Clifford's theoretical insights are unquestioned by him - he acknowledges that Clifford revealed how a particular form of writing ethnography was suppressing the dialogic dimension of the fieldwork - he treats the fact that Clifford's texts themselves continued to be written in the criticized monological mode, and that his texts are not themselves dialogical, as an ethical failure.

Rabinow's outline of his interpretive strategy is in line with the "new mood" characterizing the social sciences in the 1980's as it was described by Reed and Alexander (2009). Epistemological discourse, general theorizing about the possibilities of truthful representation, started to be then conceived as a historically particular form of knowledge, which does not offer us the way to the certainty of truthful representation of objective reality. Epistemology is, in this sense, a result of a distinctive social practice that emerged out of specific historical conditions like any other event. Nothing more, and nothing less. Therefore the task of the anthropological observer is not to search for a new theoretical grounding, a new epistemology which will guarantee the correctness of his representation of the Other.

Rabinow claims that critical cosmopolitanism emerges out of our shared condition of existence. There is a specific form of historical experience which articulates the consciousness

(or discursive subject position) designated in terms of critical cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, to share this condition of existence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of critical cosmopolitanism. That is, only in the case that one is able to accept, share and practice historically specific ethical and epistemological principles will one then be able to become aware, comprehend the real world as it is, and to grasp the world from a perspective of critical cosmopolitanism. However, this sense of historical rupture does not serve for Rabinow as a foundation for the kind of strong epistemological (as in Beck's case) or ethical (such as can be found in the work of Delanty and Mignolo) claims of other cosmopolitan sociological theorists. Rather, in a theoretical logic of social performance one can interpret critical cosmopolitanism more as an appeal to an audience to generate fusion on the ground of a shared diagnosis of our time. It can be treated as a call to assemble a new audience.

Interpretations are meaning constructions in the sense in that they always point to an audience that exists as an interpretative community behind the individual acts of interpretations. All interpretations are made possible by their relationship to other interpretations. This intersubjective character of singular interpretative acts, contrasts with the disqualifying classification of interpretation as purely subjective, and demonstrates that one cannot resolve disagreements in the field of social sciences by means of appealing to objective interpretations related to facts that can then be contrasted with subjective ones. In other words, we cannot end the competition between different schools by an appeal to the facts, while from the post-positivist perspective facts always emerge in the context of some theoretical perspective.

From the above, it should be clear that to conceive conceptual innovation from a post-positivist perspective one should not forget to take into consideration that part of the innovation game is also what is talked about by this concept and with whom one is talking to by means of this new concept. In this sense, new research programs cannot be separated from the question of the possibility of new interpretive communities, in other words

audiences. Beside the establishment of a theoretical meaning-system, radical innovations generate changes both in the nature of audience as well as in the relationship between the author and the audience. For instance, in the case of anthropology, as it was demonstrated by Paul Rabinow, one can see the attempt to alter the triadic relationship of the observer, the observed Other, and the readers. The aim is not merely to develop better interpretations in the epistemological sense of a more accurate representation of the Other's reality. The transformation of the research program, especially in the case of critical anthropology, was generated primarily by normative commitments and not merely epistemological interests.

Subjects' ability to be critical, even to discuss their own experiences and to describe their own world, are linked to their ideals, beliefs and emotions about what is right or wrong (Alexander 2003: 193). Sociologists are not an exception to this human condition.

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