

A foundation based on “Merleau-Ponty” for Bourdieu’s methodological approach in Algeria

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to show that Bourdieu’s first methodological approach to overcome Dilthey’s opposition between “explain and understand” has a misrecognized basis in the remarks by Merleau-Ponty on the same topic. We will verify that this is understandable if one considers that Bourdieu was trained as a philosopher in the framework of learning oriented toward the phenomenological tradition and that such “philosophical cultural capital” works in his first methodological experimentation in the passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology in Algeria (1957-1964). This will show that although the thesis on “explain and understand” reappears in *The Weight of the World* 30 years later, it does not respond to a wink of accommodation to “postmodernism”, but to a methodological approach that is a clear development from the beginning of Bourdieu’s reflections on the statute of social sciences.

Key words: Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty, methodology, understand, Anthropology.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar que la primera apuesta de Bourdieu en el terreno metodológico, relativa a la superación de la oposición diltheyana entre “explicar y comprender”, encuentra un fundamento desconocido en señalamientos de Merleau-Ponty sobre el mismo tópico. Afirmaremos que esta fundamentación se comprende si se tiene en cuenta que Bourdieu se formó como filósofo en el marco de un aprendizaje orientado hacia la tradición fenomenológica y que ese “capital cultural filosófico” opera al jugar sus primeras cartas de experimentación metodológica en el pasaje de la filosofía a la socioantropología en Argelia (1957-1964). Esto permitirá evidenciar que si bien la tesis sobre “explicar y comprender” reaparece en *La Miseria del mundo* treinta años después, ello no responde a un guiño de acomodamiento al “posmodernismo”, sino a una apuesta metodológica que encuentra un claro desarrollo desde el comienzo de la reflexión bourdiana sobre el estatuto de las ciencias sociales.

Palabras clave: Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty, metodología, comprender, antropología.

Introduction¹²

This work starts from the supposition that in order to understand the genesis of Bourdieu's methodological stances in his debut in socio-anthropology,³ it is necessary to account for, in the first place, the encounter between his academic training in philosophy and the social conditions of war and revolution in which his empirical researches in Algeria unfolds (1957-1964).

Although the relation between Bourdieu's philosophical training and his theoretical/methodologic experimentation in socio-anthropology is something noticeable in the development of various of his key concepts of the "theory of practice — ethos, hexis, eidos, habitus, schema (schème), among others— (Bourdieu, 1972, 1980; Heran, 1987; Hong Sung-Min, 1999; Martínez, 2007: 31-159), it does not seem to be sufficiently worked as for certain methodological endeavors in empirical research: his debt with the works of Durkheim, Weber and Bachelard (Baranger, 2004) is noticed at this point, however much lesser with one of the philosophical traditions that he takes as a "toolbox"; this is to say, with the phenomenological line from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty (of course, passing through Heidegger and Sartre).⁴

In this article we will point out that such "philosophic cultural capital" turned into dispositions, *libido sciendi*, operates when Bourdieu plays his first methodological-experimentation cards in his initiatory passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology in Algeria (1957-1964). This way, we will argue that the Bourdieu's first heavy bet on the methodological in relation to the overcoming of the Dilthey's opposition between "explain and understand" (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963) finds an unknown fundament (*méconnu*)⁵ in some remarks by Merleau-

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2 In this article I deepen into articles previously developed in my doctoral thesis (Dukuen, 2013) on the fundamental link of Bourdieu's practice theory with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. I am grateful to Graciela Ralon de Walton for sharing her deep knowledge on Merleau-Ponty's work; Denis Baranger and Ana Teresa Martínez who provided me with out-of-print or hard-to-find books; and Carolina Ferrante because of the interesting comments.

3 Even though Vázquez García (2002) defines it as ethno-sociology, we prefer to talk of socio-anthropology, because of the importance that the dignifying of anthropology made by Lévi-Strauss and the translation made by Foucault of Kant's Anthropology have for Bourdieu; as well as because of the need to overcome the distinctions between ethnology, ethnography and labor division between data recollection and their interpretation (Bourdieu, 1987).

4 And this because the fact of locating or not Bourdieu's practice theory in the framework of a phenomenological tradition is object of debate both among Bourdieusians and among the critics that operate from a phenomenologically-oriented sociology. On this last debate, see: Sapiro (2007a, 2007b), Throop and Murphy (2002), Bourdieu (2002), Haber (2004), Bimbenet (2006, 2011), García (2008), Ralon de Walton (2010), Belvedere (2011a, 2011b, 2012) and Dukuen (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013).

5 In a strictly Bourdieusian sense, we use *méconnu* in this case, to indicate a negation of knowledge, supported on the recognition of the legitimate linages where to place the trajectory of the author, fruit of a state of force relations in the intellectual field.

Ponty (1945) on the same topic. We will state that Merleau-Ponty's foundation⁶ is understood if one bears in mind that Bourdieu was trained as a philosopher in the frame of learning oriented to the phenomenological tradition that includes Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. This will allow making it evident that even if this thesis reappears with clarity in the paragraph "Understand" in *The weight of the world*, 30 years later (Bourdieu, 1993: 910), it does not so as a wink to fit into the postmodernism, but as an methodological endeavor that finds clear development from the inception of Bourdieu's reflection on the statute of social sciences.

To understand the rationale relation between phenomenology and sociology expressed in this particular methodological endeavor, we will begin describing briefly the tone of Bourdieu's training in philosophy; then we will expose the social conditions of production that allow framing his passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology by the end of the 1950's decade in Algeria, to finally show that his methodological proposal to overcome the opposition between "explain and understand" finds a key antecedent in the teachings by Merleau-Ponty, whom the sociologists apprentice "placed" in the frame of the formation of his philosophical habitus.

From philosophy to socio-anthropology

Born in 1930 in Denguin (Bearn), a town in the south of France, son of a mailman, with a peasant background, Pierre-Félix Bourdieu studied philosophy in École Normale Supérieure (ENS) funded by a series of grants because of his academic excellence. He graduated (agrégation of philosophy) in 1954 with a commented translation of Leibniz's *Animadversions*, in the promotion of Jacques Derrida, Louis Marin and Jean-Claude Passeron. Bourdieu's philosophical training is framed both by philosophy of science, logic, and history and phenomenological philosophy that marked all that litter of normaliens (Pinto, 2007).

To begin with, we point out that for the access course of ENS, Bourdieu reads *The structure of behavior* (*La estructura del comportamiento*) by Merleau-Ponty (1942), who back then made an interpretation of Husserl's work in his lessons—mainly of genetic phenomenology—different from that of Sartre, focusing on *Ideas I and II* (Husserl, 1962, 1997), *Experience and judgment* (*Experiencia y Juicio*; Husserl, 1980) and *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (*Lecciones sobre la fenomenología de la conciencia interna del tiempo*; Husserl, 2002). Bourdieu's training in phenomenology is intense in those years in relation

⁶ We do not use the notion of substantiation in a phenomenological sense.

to Heidegger and his studies on public time and history present in Being and time (Ser y Tiempo; Heidegger, 2002), as well as the researches of Husserl in Ideas I and II (Bourdieu, 1987, 2003) always mediated by Merleau-Ponty's teachings.

In a philosophical context marked by positioning before Sartre's existentialism and the incipient entrance of structuralism in social sciences (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1967; Bourdieu, 1987, 2003, 2004); for Bourdieu (1987: 15), Merleau-Ponty held a separate place in the French academic sphere:

He was interested in the sciences of man, biology, and produced the idea of what a reflection on the immediate present—for instance with his texts on history, on the communist party, on the Moscow processes—capable of escaping the sectarian simplifications of political discussions. He seemed to represent one of the possible solutions outside the charlatan philosophy of the educational institution.

The other solutions, according to Bourdieu (1987), were the tradition of the philosophy of sciences in which Bachelard, Canguilhem, Vuillemin, and Koyre were. Bourdieu's references for the works of Bachelard and Canguilhem are well known, as they have been underscored by both the sociologist (Bourdieu, 1987, 2004, among others) and distinguished analysts (among them Wacquant, 1992; Baranger, 2004), being weighty in Bourdieu's configuration of sociology as a science, something clearly noticed in the postulates on the construction of the object of study and the epistemological vigilance in Craft of sociology (*El oficio de sociólogo*; Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1973).⁷ However, it is the reference to Merleau-Ponty is the one we want to underscore in particular, mainly bearing in mind it operates at two levels:

a) The first level remits to “anthropologization” of phenomenological problematics (Martínez, 2007; Dukuen, 2013) present early in Bourdieu's work. In his first empirical research articles (Bourdieu, 1962, 1963), in which his passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology is produced, Bourdieu retakes the phenomenological problematics proper to his training as a philosopher, related to body (Leib) and preobjective temporariness, especially the traditional peasant kabil society and French Bearn, whose foundation are researches by Husserl (2002) and Merleau-Ponty (1945).

⁷ One can read with interest the later auto-critical transformations, epistemological differences and developments of the two central authors of *The craft...* in the case of Bourdieu in *Science of science and reflexivity* (2001), his last course in Collège in France; in the case of Passeron in that notable work: *Sociological reasoning: a non-Popperian space of argumentation* (2011). For an analysis of the agreements and disagreements between them, we distinguish the works by Baranger (2004: 59-88, 147-204), Martínez (2007: 272-281) and Moreno Pestaña (2011).

This resumption, which we have extensively analyzed in other works (Dukuen, 2011b; 2012, 2013), makes room for the notion of habitus and for the dispositional theory of practice (Hong Sung-Min, 1999; Martínez, 2007; Grange, 2011; Rey, 2011) which are distinctive marks of Bourdieu's work. Besides, in this line two important questions are understood: after graduating in philosophy—and up to his departure to Algeria in 1955 to perform military service—, Bourdieu was a docent in the Lyceum of Moulins, where he dedicated his final course to the teaching of the conception of temporariness in Husserl.

Moreover, back then, and under the clear influence of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Bourdieu studied physiology and psychosomatic medicine with Georges Canguilhem, who directed his never-concluded doctoral thesis project on the "temporary structures of affective life"; as research in which he continued working in Algeria until he decided to give it up (Bourdieu, 1987; Sapiro, 2007a and 2007b) and of which there are traces in the annex on "the discovery of sickness" in *The uprooting. The crisis of traditional agriculture in Algeria* (Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964) and in *Outline of a theory of practice* (*Esbozo de una teoría de la práctica*; cfr. Bourdieu, 1972: 253).

b) Other reference level is the meeting point between a series of gnosiological reflections of Merleau-Ponty, and certain epistemological and methodological presuppositions of Bourdieu's anthropological researches. An exemplary case, which we will mention—as it is part of his passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology—are the methodological remarks of the first grand empirical research that Bourdieu directed: *Labor and laborers in Algeria*, published in 1963 and the strong and unknown connection that he presents, in the framework of the explicit reference to the "classics" of sociology (Marx, Durkheim and especially Weber), in the shape with which Merleau-Ponty has already described (1945) certain regulations of the "existential analysis" of the human world and of the link between philosophy and sociology (Merleau-Ponty, 1960).

Texts do not travel their contexts, Bourdieu (2000) used to say. As his passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology takes place during his stay in Algeria to perform military service, it is necessary to understand that particular production context marked by war and revolution, which finds a first publication in 1958 of a *Que sais-je?* Entitled *Sociology of Algeria* (later translated into the English language as *The Algerians* in 1961) (*Sociología de Argelia*; Bourdieu, 1958). We will take this work as a starting point—mainly based on a work about secondary sources—to give an account of the social conditions of production that make Bourdieu conduct the surveys (between 1958 and 1960) that will give rise to his first socio-anthropological researches. In these researches we will analyze the

methodological proposal related to overcome the opposition between “explain and understand” proposed in *Labor and laborers in Algeria* (1963), which is part of an actual experimentation, both epistemological and methodological, in which philosophy, anthropology and sociology cross paths in an original manner.

The social conditions of production of Bourdieu’s researches in Algeria

The new philosophy graduate Pierre Bourdieu arrives in Algeria in 1955, he was sent there to fulfil his military service (originally in Versailles) due to bad behavior, after having a heated discussion with high-rank officers who wanted to convert him to the “French Algeria” (Bourdieu, 2004: 54). The consequences of this incident are key in the intellectual and political trajectory of the author and mark, as himself has pointed out, “a critical moment” in the transformation of his vision of the world (Bourdieu, 2004: 78). As Martín Criado (2006: 15) indicates,⁸ it is the inception of his public political commitments with the Algerian population—which he supported until his death—and of his first socio-anthropologic researches, being Kabylia the region in which he centers his ethnology studies (Bourdieu, 1972, 1980; Reed-Danahay, 2006: 69-98), which are the foundation of praxeology or the theory of practice, in the frame of the Kabyl anthropological paradigm (Addi, 2002).

In 1956, Bourdieu is deployed to an infantry regiment in Cheliff, with the task of helping write letters and perform night watches. Shortly later, he is transferred to the military cabinet of the General Government in Algiers, due to his mother’s intervention, who contacted a colonel of Bearnese origin (Bourdieu, 2004: 54-57). In the library of the General Government, in 1957, he writes *The sociology of Algeria* (published in 1958) and while engaged in this task he met the first researchers of this country. Among them distinguishable are the director of the library, Emile Dermenghen, specialist in Islam, who contacts him with a series of researchers such as Jacques Berque and André Nouschi (Bourdieu, 2003: 84), historian and communist militant from who Bourdieu obtains assistance to write his book (Martín Criado, 2006: 37-38; Nouschi, 2003).

In *The sociology of Algeria* (1958). Bourdieu retakes the sociologic and anthropologic researches produced over the colonial period, taking as an axis the analysis of the three Berber “cultures”: Kabyle, Chauoi and Mozabite, and the Arab-speaking population, later considering the common elements and analyzing the de-structuring that the colonial situation has exercised in such populations. The research is based upon a thorough bibliographic research and firsthand knowledge,

⁸ As for the understanding of The Algerians our greatest debt is with the analyses by Lane (2000) and Martín Criado (2006) which we retook. On the “Algerian period” and Bourdieu’s anthropology, we have to distinguish the works by Addi (2002), Vázquez García (2002), Reed-Danahay (2006), and number 21 and 27-28 of journal *Awall* (AAVV, 2000, 2003).

pursuing the goal of "telling the French, mainly the left, what actually occurred in a country of which the most ignored almost everything, and it once again to be useful, and also to conjure the bad conscience of impotent witness of an atrocious war" (Bourdieu, 2004: 56-57).

From Lane's (2000: 12-13) perspective, Bourdieu writes his book in frontal discussion with the stance of other contemporary researchers, especially Germaine Tillion, an ethnographer who having been councilor of the general governor of Algeria between 1955-1956, supported reformist position based on the underdevelopment of the Algerian masses. In his 1957 book, *L'Algérie*, he stated that the introduction of European medicines, hunger alleviation and the monetary economy had undermined the stability of the traditional society, without integrating it into a modern rational economy; and he proposed an illustrated policy of assistance and education to produce "real social mutation" from tradition to modernity, which produced pacification and the disappearance of Algerian nationalism.

Tillion's stance played a fundamental role in the leftist reforming humanism, and in the debates of the moment. Bourdieu on the contrary, will go on insisting on the integration and functionality of the original cultures and pointing out that the reformism is utterly unrealistic: the objective logic of the colonial system based on the search for economic exploitation necessarily implies the de-structuring of Algerian cultures and their "underdeveloped state". This explains that the reforms proposed by Tillion were not undertaken for over a century; this way Bourdieu took the side of the independency cause, which made that The sociology of Algeria was disavowed by the supporters of French Algeria, and the author engrossed the black lists of the colonialist extreme right.

Born from a "civil impulse more than political" (Bourdieu, 2003: 85), The sociology of Algeria is Bourdieu's book with the most of amended reeditions (eight in total), and in that journey one notices the radicalization of his posture, up to defending for one time, revolutionary solution, and also a clear change in the comprehension of the occurrence that is expressed in the use of language (Lane, 2000: 17). In 1960, Bourdieu publishes "War and social change in Algeria"; that which in 1958 was pointed out as a "conflict" (Bourdieu, 1958: 125), in the book it is analyzed as a "war", giving an account of the actions of the armed wing of the National Liberation Front.

In the following article, 1961, entitled "Revolution in the revolution", Bourdieu analyzes the possibilities for the liberation war to turn into a socialist revolution. The second edition of the book in 1961 includes important changes related to the theoretical references —substitutions and removals of theoretical frameworks—

fruit of the honing of certain “scholar” readings —especially Weber and Levi-Strauss— which produce variations in the analysis of the various systems or societies —“cultures” in the 1958 edition— in virtue of the results obtained in the surveys, one in 1958 and two in 1960 (Sapiro, 2007a: 44) and to the conclusions reached in the two articles we have referred.

This way, it can be understood that Bourdieu supports the proposal that the “colonial system” had to be “radically destroyed [...] from top to bottom” by the Algerian population so that it “takes up its own destiny with total liberty and responsibility” and it builds a new society, product of the “active, creative and resolute participation in a common task” (Bourdieu, 1961: 125-126, cited in Lane, 2000: 18).

In 1962 the English translation of *Sociology of Algeria* appears, entitled *The Algerians*, which closes with an extended version of “Revolution in the revolution”. The third edition of 1963 is almost identical to the second, save the final part in which there is a compelling positioning before political development. There, Bourdieu affirms for the only time a revolutionary solution: Algerian society “deeply shaken by colonization and war” demands “objectively, revolutionary solutions”. As Algeria became independent in 1962, the mass exodus of Europeans makes “of the access to independence the opportunity for an economic and social revolution” (Bourdieu, 1963: 126, citado en Lane, 2000: 18).

This section will be rewritten in 1985 (Lane, 2000: 18-20) in the light of changes amidst occurrences and research: in his researches entitled: *Labor and laborers in Algeria* (1963) and *The uprooting. The crisis of traditional agriculture in Algeria* (1964), Bourdieu distances from his own most radical stances. As pointed out by Lane (2000: 19), in the articles written between 1962 and 1963 he confronts the position of Fanon and Sartre, loaded, according to Bourdieu, with a totally unrealistic political voluntarism. One can already glimpse a first disagreement both theoretical and political with the Sartre’s existentialist phenomenology, especially with the model of revolutionary subject proposed in *Questions de méthode* (Sartre, 1960).

This way, Bourdieu becomes increasingly skeptical as he observes the development of post-independence occurrences, calling to attention to the error of believing that peasants and sub-proletariats are a revolutionary force per se, an ideology disseminated by the bourgeoisie and the State bureaucracy to secure a support base among them (Bourdieu, 1985: 125, in Lane, 2000).

However, the original research that produces *The Argelians* (*Sociology of Argelia*, 1958) —clarifying the variations of later editions— was not based upon fieldworks/surveys carried out by Bourdieu himself. A graduate from philosophy,

he was neither theoretically nor methodologically prepared to move as a researcher to anthropology and sociology, deemed as “lesser” by a ENS graduate. Indeed, to understand that passage and the specific weight of the philosophical habitus in this theoretical/methodological experimentation of “disciplinary transfuge”, we will stop in the empirical researches of Bourdieu in Algeria as of 1958 and especially in the collective work *Labor and laborers in Algeria*, in which “on the go” and over the terrain, he starts learning the “craft of sociology”.

Learning the craft over the terrain

As of 1958 —after concluding his military service— Bourdieu lectured at the University of Algiers on Kant, Durkheim, Saussure and Levi-Strauss. The period as a professor in this university allows him to deepen into the structuralist versions of human sciences and recruit students to perform the researches that will yield two collaborative works: *Labor and laborers in Algeria* (1963) and *The uprooting. The crisis of traditional agriculture in Algeria* (1964) and articles that summarize dimensions of those researches, such as “The fear of unemployment in Algerian laborers” (*El temor al desempleo en los obreros argelinos*) (Bourdieu, 1962b), and “Traditional society” (*La sociedad tradicional*) (Bourdieu, 1963). Moreover, Bourdieu make a fieldwork in his hometown, in the Béarn zone, between 1959 and 1960, which produces a long article: “Celibacy and peasant condition” (*Celibato y condición campesina*), published in 1962 in the journal *Rural Studies*.

In this fundamental work, Bourdieu introduces for the first time the notion of habitus retaking the seminal article by Mauss ([1936]1979) on “techniques and corporal movements”, and focusing on the relationships between sexes in peasant society, one can find the traces of a genesis of a theory of corporal symbolic violence of phenomenological orientation; issues which we have dealt with somewhere else (Dukuen 2011; 2013). The researches in Algeria which produced the books *Labor and laborers...* and *The uprooting...* have their origin in three fieldworks/surveys; one in 1958 and two in 1960 (Sapiro, 2007a: 44). Bourdieu undertakes this task with a selection of students among which there is Abdelmalek Sayad — coauthor of *The uprooting...*— and statistics students from Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE), who went to Algeria to create the Service of Statistics appointed by President De Gaulle. Among them there are Alain Darbel, Jean Paul Rivet and Claude Seibel, with who Bourdieu writes *Labor and laborers in Algeria* and together with a series of Algerian researchers will create Association pour la Recherche Démographique, Économique et Sociale (ARDES).

Martín Criado (2006: 54-55) points out that the empirical researches that produced these two books have an appointment of the French army as a starting point: study the displaced populations after accusations in the press. By means of a series of decrees, as of 1956 Algeria was divided into three zones: “pacifying”, “military operation” and “forbidden for the population”. In the “introduction” to *The uprooting...*, Bourdieu and Sayad (1964: 11) points out:

between 1954 and 1957 many a peasant were pure and simply ejected from their villages (...) only after 1957 and in certain regions (...) did the regrouping policy acquire a methodic and systematic character. According to official instructions, the primordial objective of forbidden zones was to “evacuate an uncontrolled country and subtract the population from rebellious influence”.

Facing this situation, Bourdieu is appointed to conduct field research and interpret statistical data. Being his first important empirical research and especially having a philosophical training, Bourdieu operates a redefinition of the object of study as a negative to perform what we may call “intelligence work”: the demand of the colonizing State is inverted to study the de-structuring produced by colonization on the Algerian population (related to labor and habitat in sub-proletariats and peasants), on the passage from a pre-capitalist society to a capitalist one in the context of war and forced displacements-regroupings.

Fieldwork focuses on both the “regrouping camps” and on the cities, and combines the most varied socio-anthropological techniques: photographs, participatory observation, clandestine recording of conversations, in-depth interviews, reconstructions of kinships, description of rituals, among other (Martín Criado, 2006: 55-56). It is worth underscoring the great dangerousness in which the research was carried out, an aspect Bourdieu remembers in his “self-analysis” (Bourdieu, 2004: 65-73).

In this context of war, there clearly appear the first Bourdieu’s concerns on the epistemological and methodological order that will produce in 1968 *The craft of sociology*, which has a clear antecedent in the “introduction” of *Labor and Laborers in Algeria*. The researchers were followed by the military and in this framework, the interviews might lead to “correct” answers. Hence, the first concerns on the “epistemological vigilance” that implied, in practice, being able to establish nonviolent communication with peasants in a context where violence prevailed.

In 1960, as we previously pointed out, Bourdieu is forced to leave Algeria as he was ticked in an extreme-right blacklist. Through a colleague in the University of Algiers, who had been partner of Raymond Aron in *École Normale Supérieure*, Bourdieu becomes acquainted to him. With Bourdieu’s life in danger in Algeria, Aron offers him to be his assistant in La Sorbonne, where Bourdieu heads to, then he moved to Lille where he teaches between 1962 and 1963.

Under the guidance of the sociologist—how will become his director in a thesis based upon Algerian researches, but which the former did not consider worthy of Bourdieu—he participates in the collaborative writing of *Labor and Laborers...* and *The uprooting*. There one already glimpses the growing importance of Weber in his work, something not surprising if one bears in mind that Aron was a recognized specialist in the German sociologist (who also introduced his work into France) and prompted Bourdieu to read Schutz (Bourdieu, 2004: 80), whose first book initially approaches a re-elaboration, phenomenologically substantiated, of Weber's Action theory (Schutz, 1993). However, against all odds, Bourdieu reaches Weber by other means, which we have to underscore and it becomes understandable if we keep his training in phenomenological philosophy in sight: his first contact with the author was mediated by the reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the dialectic*, as he clarifies in an interview by Schultheis and Pfeuffer:

It was by means of *Adventures of the dialectic* by Merleau-Ponty that I found really impressing. This book had a deep impact in me, in my youth, and I remember there was a brief chapter in which he talks about Weber. I believe it was the first time that I knew of Weber (Bourdieu, Schultheis and Pfeuffer, 2011: 112).

Indubitably, Bourdieu refers to the first chapter of *Adventures...* entitled "The crisis of understanding", in which Merleau-Ponty (1955) retakes Weber in extenso, which is understandable in the frame of his interest in "the sciences of man" (Merleau-Ponty, 1977). It is worth mentioning that in the context of his collaboration with Aron, Bourdieu produces the displacement from a properly scholar reading of Weber—as the one on *The Argelians*—a productive deepening as for:

a) Studies on protestant ethos and the origins of capitalism (Weber, 2007) which he used as a theoretical model to analyze the transformation in Algerian society and especially what we may call "the behavioral structure" of laborers, sub-proletariats and peasants in their link with temporariness and labor (Martínez, 2007: 31-58).

b) The rereading of the notion of social class by means of crossing the Marxist and Weberian traditions that is sketched in *Labor and laborers...* is crystalized in the 1966 article *Class condition and class position* (Bourdieu, 1966).

c) The methodological imprint both in the construction of ideal types (Webber, 2007)—either the case of the notion of "traditional society" (Bourdieu, 1963) or the interpretation of the relation between explaining and understanding in the crossroad of statistics and sociology. On this relation we will stop, because it has a key and unknown antecedent in a series of remarks by Merleau-Ponty (1945), firstly revisiting the methodological approach of Bourdieu in *Labor and laborers...*

Explain and understand or a methodological proposal with a Merleau-Ponty perspective

Labor and laborers in Algeria⁹ is the first collective work in which Bourdieu takes part, it is the result of “a bi-disciplinary collaboration between sociology and statistics and suitable to the concerted utilization of different but complementary methods” (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 12), based on fieldwork/interviews we previously pointed out. This work represents two well-defined parts. The first in which Darbel, Rivet and Seibel carry out the statistical analysis of the Algerian society, in which the main demographic structures of the cities and the forced regrouping fields. The second part, entitled “Sociological study” and written by Bourdieu on his own, is based on interviews with a 10-percent subsample, in views if “determining the attitudes and opinions of the interrogated individuals” (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 13).

This sharp division of sociologic work can call to attention, bearing in mind that Bourdieu will criticize in extensor years later in *The craft of sociology* (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1973), and will not retake it in any of his later works. However, in *Labor...*, Bourdieu start to move away from it, which against a prophetic reading of the intellectual trajectories demonstrates a great work to objectify the very operations to build the study object. Some important remarks of this critical operation will be noticed in the Introduction, written by Bourdieu under the title of “Statistics and sociology”. Here we notice a first methodological approach of Bourdieu, in which he defends the complementariness of qualitative and quantitative methods, calling to attention on “what we have to denounce is not the use of statistics, but the fetishism of statistics” (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 9), because “in the dialectic between hypothesis and statistical verification, the classic opposition between explanation and comprehension is overcome” (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 10-11).

Let us stop for a moment at this point: Bourdieu alludes to the overcoming¹⁰ of the excluding opposition pinpointed by Dilthey (1900), against positivism, between explain as a method proper to the “sciences of nature” (*Naturwissenschaften*) and understand as a method proper the “sciences of the spirit” (*Geisteswissenschaften*). As Ricoeur (2001: 131 and ff.) explains, in Dilthey the excluding alternative indicates that or else is explained, in the fashion of a naturalist scientist; or else is understood, the historian when interpreting, as a particular province of comprehension.

⁹ *Labor and laborers in Algeria* was never reedited in English or translated, there is only an abridged and corrected version published by Bourdieu in 1977, with the title *Argelia 60* (Bourdieu, 2006).

¹⁰ Martín Criado (2006: 84) points out that “surpassing” was a common rhetorical figure among the intellectual “mentors” of Bourdieu—it is the case of Merleau-Ponty (1945) with the overcoming of empiricism and intellectualism—which consist in opposing contrary explanations and proposing a thesis that expresses the partial character of both and surpass them.

Dilthey differences two sphere: the region of nature subject to mathematization from Galileo and from Stuart Mill to inductive logic; from the region of the spirit, proper to psychic individualities, to whose interior every psychism can move, since it appears in exterior signs: "we call comprehension to the process by means of which we learn something psychic with the help of sensitive signs which are its manifestation" (Dilthey cited by Ricoeur, 2001: 132). Among these signs are those manifestations durably fixed, especially preserved by writing. Interpretation is the art of understanding those particular signs.

Against the opposition between explain and understand, which allows wondering how to substantiate the scientific nature of the sociology that intends to go beyond essayism, resorting to the possibilities of statistics dodging the plain positivism of psychologism, Bourdieu positions himself in favor of the legitimacy of social sciences, as sciences: on the one side, against the ruling model of natural and exact sciences—in which we do not find the question because of the meaning—; on the other, against the derivation of positivist sociology into the "abstract empiricism" (Wright Mills, 1961; Bourdieu *et al.*, 1973); and at the same time, against the "grand theory" in way of Parsons. Neither theorist nor empiricist, sociology is built as theoretical-based empirical research.

Denis Baranger has pointed out that with this epistemological supposition, related to surpass the opposition between explain and understand, Bourdieu "intends to overcome the duality between scientific and humanistic training, avoiding positivisms nevertheless" (Baranger, 2004: 92). This indicates the resuming of the old debate—whose epigone is Durkheim (2008)—with philosophy as queen mother of knowledge of mankind, and a possible exit from social sciences before the critique of positivism and the objectivist attitude proposed by Husserl (2010) in *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*: an introduction to phenomenological philosophy.

This way, the novel sociologist begins to settle scores (which will never end, as it is noticed in *Pascalian meditations*, 1997) with all tensions and ruptures produced by the contradictory dispositions that inhabit him, proper to his training as a philosopher and the fact of accepting that he undergoes a transformation—and demounted in the French intellectual hierarchy—in and by the practice into an anthropologist/sociologist.

Having said this, the overcoming of the supposition between explain and understand, which Bourdieu presents as is initial approach in methodological terms, can be ordered as a triple movement, unfolded from the analysis made by Baranger (2004: 92 and ff.) to which we will add the original and originating meeting point with Merleau-Ponty's theses on the same topic. The triple movement is:

- a) Around the explanation from a “Durkheimian” standpoint;
- b) Around the comprehension/interpretation from a Weberian/Merleau-Pontyan standpoint;
- c) Around the method for a “description of social classes” from Marx’s standpoint.

Bearing the object of this article in mind, even if we describe the three points, we will pay especial attention to b, inviting the reader to deepen into a and c in the notable Baranger’s (2004: 89-94, 113-117) work on epistemology and methodology in the work of Bourdieu. Well now, let us begin:

a) Around explanation, for Bourdieu the statistical datum allows establishing relation between variables. “From the ‘Durkheimian’ standpoint (...) the analysis of variables is planned as the substitute of experimentation for sociologic research” (Baranger, 2004: 92), as not only does it allow establishing new relations and thus introduce new hypotheses, but also contesting those that have guided the research:

In addition to their probative value, statistics has a heuristic value as it allows discovering relations that had not been thought of (...) and for the sociologist it is what experience for the physicist; statistics opposes to the hypothesis of that given, thus it forces the production of new hypothesis (Bourdieu et al., 1963: 10).

We call top attention on the index of the realistic index related to the “resistance of that given”, which Bourdieu himself will critically correct in *The craft of sociology* (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1973) understanding the statistical datum as a construction. This, once again, shows the slow and laborious nature implied by the process of multiple rupture by means of which Bourdieu produced the fundamental suppositions of his theory.

b) After substantiating the importance of statistics for sociology as a science from a “Durkheimian” approach, “immediately in the text the Weberian orientation surfaces” (Baranger, 2004: 92):

The statistical method allows grasping the causal links in which they are inserted, by means of interpretative hypotheses, motivations objectively provided with meaning. And, conversely, statistical data, to the extent they are referred to the development or the consequences of an attitude that comprises something comprehensible, are only truly explained if they are actually interpreted in such manner that they reach meaning in the concrete case. Therefore, the causal interpretation of a behavior or opinion is only attained when the manifest action and its motivations have been learnt and the link that joins them has become comprehensible under the aspect of meaning. This way, the regularities have a sociological value only in the case that they can be understood. And conversely, subjectively comprehensible relations are only sociological models of the actual processes if they can be observed with a significant confidence degree (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 11).

In this paragraph, one can notice a sort of dialectic in which the statistical methods allows grasping the causal links only by means of interpretative hypotheses that make them comprehensible—whether the sociologist recognizes or not, there is no pure datum, Bourdieu used to say against positivism in *The craft of sociology* (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1973). This way, the action and their motivations—the Weberian language is recognized—objectified under the statistical form acquire full sociological value when they “become meaningful in the concrete case”, when they are “comprehensible under the aspect of meaning”.

It is observed that before Dilthey, comprehension here does not suppose the reference to an interior psychism as a source of action, but the starting point is the very behavior/action as primary sociological observable. Somehow, this is the Bourdieu relation (with Durkheimian orientation, indubitably) against a possible psychologistic adrift the author will observe even in Weber (cf. Bourdieu, 1971 a and b). It is in the dialectic between statistical method and interpretative hypotheses where one notices the seed of an attempt—not explicitly formulated yet—of an overcoming between objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu, 1972, 1980), centered on the imbrication between explanation and comprehension.

When reading this argumentation, it becomes evident that Bourdieu's thesis connects the Weberian stance on “the meaning of action”; an aspect on which Baranger (2004: 92 and ff.) has decidedly call to attention. But if we do not lose sight that Bourdieu reads Weber for the first time mediated by Merleau-Ponty (and then by Aron), it is worth paying attention to the imprint of the phenomenologist in the argumentations of Bourdieu himself (at first sight only Weberian), of which we find fingerprints in the thesis of *Labor and laborers*..., bearing in mind that the absence of quotations should not lead us astray: considering that in this context Bourdieu's training in phenomenology is strong and recent, that the importance of Merleau-Ponty in this training is central and that the reading of Weber is mediated by his work, it is worth underscoring the encounter with some defined remarks of the French phenomenologist, prior to *Adventures of the dialectic*, as a matter of fact present in *Phenomenology of perception* (1945), which Bourdieu thoroughly knew, together with *The structure of behavior* (1942) (Sapiro, 2007a, 2007b).

To begin with, we can pinpoint a clear coincidence of Bourdieu's thesis with that stated by Merleau-Ponty 18 years before in the section of *Phenomenology of perception*, entitled “The spatiality of the proper body and movement ability”.¹¹

11 On this point one can read the research by García (2012) and especially the article by Pintos Peñaranda (2008), which approaches the critical and productive relation of Merleau-Ponty with psychiatrist Goldstein's work and the “existential analysis” of the well-known “Schneider case” that works as empirical source for the debate.

There, against empiricist physiology, which resorts to the causal explanation of certain “psychical disorders” —such as aphasia, phantom limb, anosognosia, psychic blindness —and against the intellectualist psychiatry that appeals to reflection in cases like these, Merleau-Ponty states there are no “explanations without understanding” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 134) and proposes a “new way to analyze —the existential analysis— that overcomes the classic alternatives of empiricism and intellectualism, of the explanation and reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 158).

We might ask ourselves what this proposal means in the work of this particular phenomenologist, indubitably the most interested in the sciences of man. To understand it in the general framework of the crossroads of philosophy and sociology, it is pertinent to review a clarifying comment by Merleau-Ponty in “Liberty” chapter of *Phenomenology...* (1945) and the extensive thesis proposed in the articles “From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss” and “The philosopher and sociology”, published in *Signes* (1960).

In “Liberty”, in the context of a discussion with Sartre which reminds many points of the critique later performed by Bourdieu (1972, 1980) in *Outline...* and *The practical sense*, Merleau-Ponty points out that it is necessary to understand that “generality and probability are not fictions but phenomena, therefore we should find a phenomenological foundation for the statistical thinking” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 505).

In the face of this imperative affirmation we wonder to ourselves: doesn’t the question on the “meaning” that later will ceaselessly concern Bourdieu appear there? We dare say, continuing with this interpellation by Merleau-Ponty, this proposal by Bourdieu appears when it is stated —as we previously noticed— that “statistical data (...) are only truly ‘explained’ if they are actually interpreted in a manner in which they become meaningful in the concrete case” (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 11).

To our mind, the concurrence of perspectives is notable, and frankly, the reflections of Merleau-Ponty operate as one of the dispositional foundations comprised in the *habitus savant* —not implying an explicit consciousness, obviously— that enables Bourdieu’s passage to anthropology: Bourdieu philosophically re-elaborates his relationship with the methodology of social sciences by means of the strictly phenomenological question on meaning. Then, the generality and probability Merleau-Ponty spoke of have to be found, for instance, in the change from laborer to revolutionary presented in “Liberty” in *Phenomenology...*: if generality and probability are phenomena, an existential analysis of the economy and society in which “I exist as a laborer”, “as I take them in me” will have to be performed and not as a “system of impersonal forces” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 506).

Perhaps the best transposition of this problem to socio-anthropology is indeed Bourdieu's analyses, which range from Algerian researches on the perceptive consciousness of time in peasants and sub-proletariats (1962) to the sense of honor in Kabylie society, the household, their chiasmatic relationship with the social world and their structural male domination (Bourdieu, 1962a, 1962b, 1972, 1980, 1990, 1998, 2003); issues that we have dealt with somewhere else (Dukuen, 2012, 2013; Ralon de Walton and Dukuen, 2013).

Returning to Merleau-Ponty and continuing with the developments of Phenomenology of perception, in the articles adequately entitled "From Mauss to Levi-Strauss" and "El filósofo y la sociología" published in *Signes* (1960) the criticism to sociology of "objectivist" kind is proposed. Martínez (2007: 151-152) has pointed out that the main disagreement between the perspectives of Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty is the division of tasks that the phenomenologist proposes between the sociology that describes things and the philosophy that interprets them dealing with signification: "the sociologist makes sociology, to the extent that he is in charge of not only registering the facts, but understanding them. At the time of interpreting, he is a philosopher" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960: 127).

Perhaps the problem is that Merleau-Ponty addresses the sociology/anthropology framed in the objectivist attitude, being back then the dominant trends back then, at one end Lazarsfeld "abstract empiricism", and at the other, Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. However, as pointed out by Graciela Ralon de Walton (2008) Merleau-Ponty's objective, in the proposal of a dialogue between phenomenology and human sciences (Merleau-Ponty [1953] 1977), is to find a common means or third dimension between the objective viewpoint (characteristic of science) that sees man in third person "only from his dependence in respect to the physical, organic and social medium up to the point that his appearance as a 'product of the medium' only grants preeminence to the external conditions" and the subjective-reflexive viewpoint (from philosophy) in which "man is considered the absolute source of meaning, vesting the interiority in absolute primacy, this is to say, to the consciousness understood as an activity that provides immanent and transparent objects with full autonomy" (Ralon de Walton, 2008: 1).

For the French phenomenologist, these extreme stances would prevent a possibility of dialogue between human sciences and philosophy. In the proposal of Merleau-Ponty, it is necessary to elucidate an "interworld" that in the *Adventures of the dialectic* (Merleau-Ponty, 1955) he calls "truth or history to do", that allow surpassing the opposition between objective and subjective, passivity and activity, autonomy and independence: in that "interworld" the facts are retaken and lived by an incarnate and socially situated subject and in this re-assumption the possibility of comprehension is to be found.

Indeed, Bourdieu tries early to find an exit for the objectivism and subjectivism, and proposes, by means of his methodological approach on the imbrication between explanation and comprehension, an overcoming of such division. Because of this, one can find concurrence in Merleau-Ponty's remarks with the critiques to objectivism, already present in *Outline of a theory of practice* (Bourdieu, 1972).

This way, we understand that in this phenomenological foundation the notions of *ethos* in *Labor...* and *o habitus* in *The uprooting...* will seat, as retaken by Bourdieu from the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy through the Weberian prism (Martínez, 2007: 31-59) to understand the "traditional society". Both notions intend to give an account of how "those impersonal forces" objectified by the analysis are incarnated in the agents by means of a "perceptive awareness" of time that differences the traditional capitalist *ethos*: generality and probability appear in the concrete case, as Merleau-Ponty would have wanted.

Finally, the key is to build a "total social fact" (in the sense of Mauss) in which far from impugning anthropological research by the researcher's national origin (in this case colonialist country), it indeed implies a analysis of the relation between "colonial system" and "existential situation of the colonized". This implies a productive movement between the reconstruction of "necessary and independent" objective realities—in the way of Marx— (that allow explaining) and the retaking, both Weberian and Merleau-Pontyian, of the subjective significant experience (that allows understanding):

There is no behavior, attitude or ideology that can be described, understood or objectively explained at the side of every reference to the existential situation of the colonized, such as it is determined by the action of economic and social forces characteristic of the colonial system (...) by the system of "relations determined, necessary and independent from the individual wills" by reference to which the attitude and behaviors are organized. Such is the actual responsibility of the ethnologist (...) reconstitute other men with the meaning of their behaviors (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 258-259).

In this sense, retaking Baranger's (2004: 92-93) analysis one notices the crystallization of the dialectic proposed by Bourdieu amidst hypothesis and verification; guided by a sort of game of "complementary oppositions" between Durkheim, Weber and Marx as later he would point out in Proposition 0 scholium 2 in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970: 18-19).

c) The methodological and epistemological indications in the prologue to *Labor and laborers...* are crowned with a reference to *Introduction to Contribution to a critique of political economy* by Marx: "Indubitably statistical nature tears apart

the concrete totality grasped by intuition, but only to reconstruct new totalities not less concrete" (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 11-12). The reference to Marx (Wacquant, 2001; Hong Sung-Min, 1999; Gutiérrez, 2003; Karsenti, 2011), which was almost inexistent in *The Algerians*, here becomes weighty, as it propose an "outline for a description of social classes" defined according to a series of pertinent criteria that enable recognizing four categories: sub-proletariats, proletariats, artisans and traders, and a modern bourgeoisie (Baranger, 2004: 114-115). The analysis of social classes is carried out by looking at the actual possibilities of a socialist revolutionary process, which goes beyond the proposal of Sartre/Fanon that Bourdieu opposes, as we previously pointed out. That is another story, nevertheless.

Conclusions. Bourdieu, social sciences and phenomenology

The discussion we have had on Bourdieu's debut in his passage from philosophy to socio-anthropology, shows that the thesis present in the section "understand" of *The weight of the world* —published in 1993— which states "against the old Diltheyian distinction, we have to state that understand and explain are one same thing" (Bourdieu, 1993: 910), far from being a last-minute positioning before the hermeneutical-interpretative and postmodern trends, it has been defended by Bourdieu since his first great empirical-research socio-anthropologic work, *Labor and laborers in Algeria* (1963).

It is here, in a context in which the performance of fieldwork, surveys and interviews poses great difficulty because of the context of war, force regroupings and military surveillance, in which Bourdieu sees the need to "understand" —against all the evils in this world— this is to say, the need to go beyond what methodological tools of empiricist sociology can provide, and from a subterranean dialogue with Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology put the statistical datum to work, in the framework of the imperative hypotheses of the meaning of social practices, with "reference to the existential situation of the colonized" (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1963: 258). How not to see there one possible way for the sociological transposition of the "existential analysis" proposed by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of perception*, when he points out "there are no explanations without understanding" and proposes to find "a phenomenological foundation for statistical thinking"? (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 134, 158, 505).

The introduction to the question on meaning, key meeting point between phenomenology and Weberian sociology (Schutz had it very clear) in Bourdieu is given by the central role held by Merleau-Ponty teaching (cf. Dukuen, 2010) and his imprint not only in the production of a *Theory of practice*, whose focus is (Leib), but also in the development of this methodological approach related to surpass

the opposition between explain and understand, which indubitably would be the strangest place to find the Merleau-Pontyian imprint, were it not for the positive openness—not leaving criticism aside—that Merleau-Ponty always showed for social sciences.

This way, his proposal of a dialogue between philosophy and sociology is understood; it implies to elucidate an “interworld” that in *Adventures of the dialectic* Merleau-Ponty (1955) calls “truth or history to be born”; this would allow surpassing the opposition between objective and subjective, passivity and activity, autonomy and independence. As we previously pointed out, Bourdieu reaches Weber through this notable Merleau-Ponty’s book, his perspectives intertwine in Bourdieu’s methodological approach related to surpassing the opposition between explanation and understanding that have described in this article, and which in later and broader terms will appear in the proposal to surpass objectivism and subjectivism (cf. Bourdieu, 1972, 1980).

This point takes us to the current debate on the relation of Bourdieu’s work with phenomenology, which has to do with whether he is a reader rather faithful to this tradition, in reassuming and re-elaborating concepts and problems. As we pointed out in the introduction, even if there is a series of works that show the anthropologization of phenomenological problems performed by the author (Martínez, 2007; Dukuen, 2012, 2013, among others) in recent years, Bourdieu has been the target of criticism from perspectives of phenomenological orientation because of “misinterpreting” Husserl, as he does not consider genetic phenomenology (cf. Throop and Murphy, 2002), proposing a concept of habitus incapable of giving an account of the substrate of social actions as he fell in the problem of substantiation (cf. Belvedere, 2011) and assess the work of Sartre and Schutz by means of partial readings, as subjectivist (cf. Throop and Murphy, 2002; Belvedere, 2012).

We believe these critiques are right as for the partiality of Bourdieu’s appreciations of Husserl and Schutz and in the problems of the habitus theory, issues we have approached and re-elaborated from Merleau-Ponty somewhere else (Dukuen, 2013). As for Sartre, Bourdieu (1972: 248-250; 1980, chap. 2) makes some philosophical objections, close to those by Merleau-Ponty (1945: 496 and ff.), related to liberty and opposition between the in-itself and the for-itself (cf. Sapiro, 2007 a and b).

This way, even if discussable, these objections do not lack support, which allows understanding that a notable specialist in the work of Merleau-Ponty, Etienne Bimbenet, locates Bourdieu’s proposal as a “faithful sociological exemplification of

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception" (Bimbenet, 2006: 58; 2011: 167); however, the critiques with phenomenological orientation do not take into account what the meaning of appropriation that Bourdieu makes of phenomenology is.

Because of this, we call to attention on Bourdieu's (2002) answer to the critical article by Throop and Murphy (2002) on his relation with phenomenology, in which he indicate that it is necessary to bear in mind that his retaking of phenomenological problems is not based upon a methodic transposition, but on a re-assumption in which the theoretical ideas "are designed to guide the empirical research and to solve specific problems of anthropology and sociology" (Bourdieu, 2002: 209). This is why in this work we have shown such re-assumption, especially focusing on the unknown substantiation that Bourdieu's methodological approach finds in Algeria, in the teachings of Merleau-Ponty. We expect to have contributed to a multidimensional approach to the work of Bourdieu that contributes to open new dialogues between social sciences and philosophy.

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