NEW TRENDS IN FRENCH SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The French social sciences have undergone a significant reorientation over the past ten years. I will concentrate on some developments (for a review, see Dodier 1993b, Wagner 1994; in French: Critique n°529-530, 1991; Espace-Temps, n°49-50, 1992; Réseaux, n°62, 1993) which are less familiar to American academic circles than the French production of the 60s and 70s which is nowadays in the course of absorption.

Cultural studies frequently claim a cognitive orientation. [Footnote 1: A large amount of French social research of the highest quality has been dedicated to culture as a specific research domain which covers education, arts or, more broadly, cultural practices. This is linked with the importance of the notion of cultivé in French society (Lamont 1992). Raymonde Moulin's influential works in the sociology of arts are already well known in the US, as well as Bourdieu's and Passeron's seminal pieces of research in the sociology of education and cultural practices, which offered a new theoretical framework extending beyond this domain. Younger researchers in this area are especially anxious to compare the usefulness of classical analytical tools, such as the ones forged by the sociology of professions or by symbolic interactionism, to new modes of analysis introduced from economics (Menger 1994), social studies of science and scientific controversies (Hennion 1993), or the sociology of disputes and judgement (Heinich 1991, 1993a).]

The French sociological approach to cognition has build deeply on Durkheim and Mauss's analyses of classification schemes. Bourdieu and Boltanski gave to the Durkheim-Mauss homology a marxist twist, considering "classification struggles" as an expression of class struggles (Bourdieu et Boltanski, 1974). [Footnote 2: This legacy from Durkheim and Mauss has been combined, in the social construction synthesis (Berger et Luckman), with the phenomenological orientation developed in the American ethnomethodological current. This can be characterized as a composition of Hegel's collectivist and Husserl's individualistic conceptions of phenomenology (Alexander 1988:226-245).] Later on, Boltanski adopted a different perspective and examined the various activities which construct a social category, les cadres (Boltanski 1987), and involve spokespersons as well as ordinary members of the group. In parallel, a research program at INSEE (French National Bureau of Statistics and Economics) was dedicated to a thorough examination of the whole process of social classification. This encompassed not only the historical genesis of classifications but also the cognitive operation of different agents who are involved in classifying, from the surveys' respondents to the professional representatives who intervene in the reform of classification, and to the routine work of coding agents (Desrosières et Thévenot 1988; Desrosières 1993). This research work was applied in the construction of the new French socio-economic classifications used in census and statistical enquiries (Desrosières & Thévenot 1983). [Footnote 3: These pieces of research were not only receptive to the previously mentioned tradition but also benefited from Foucault's insights. However the Foucault most influential in the US, the one who unveiled disciplinary processes was less significant in this process than the Foucault interested in episteme settings and cognitive operations such as 'making similar' (The Order of Things).]
Relating cognitive, objectal and moral issues

These studies were extended into a broader research program on the relation between cognitive forms and environment of objects that together support judgement and coordination. They departed from previous influences in three directions which specify three research orientations.

1) The first orientation focuses on investments of form which contribute to homogeneisation, across contexts, in the treatment of people and things. Statistical categories, job evaluation scales, occupational names build equivalences among human beings as well as norms of measurements, standards or properties make things similar. An investment in forms is a costly operation involving negotiation, but the cost of implementation can be related to "returns" gained from coordination, depending on the generality of the form (in terms of the domain of acceptance) (Thévenot 1984). We studied the processes through which such forms are established or renegotiated, considering the whole chain of articulations and the use of both cognitive procedures and material instrument in these processes, through case studies concerning the qualification of people (occupational or educational qualities) or things (related to security standards, for instance: Thevenot 1993).

2) The second orientation is related to the support of objects and the different ways they are engaged in the coordination of human activities. Objects and their arrangements prop up cognitive operations and facilitate coordination through conventional qualifications (that is providing information on quality in forms such as marketable goods, recognizable signs, efficient implements). But they are also engaged in more specific and personal relations. Once we see the involvement of things in the elementary forms of the social fabric it becomes necessary to upgrade their place in social sciences. This implies a strong move from the exclusive focus on meaning in comprehensive social sciences to the analysis of the different modes through which things are practically treated, either in private or in public settings. For instance we follow the same object (such as baby push chair or a piece of school furniture) from the situation of personal and familiar usage in a domestic arena to the most public and macro treatment such as the one we observe in European committees which are in charge of making of safety standards, through the methods and implements of the laboratories that certify their properties.

3) The third orientation concerns the articulation between cognition and evaluation. The making of equivalence (*1 above) operates through the intervention of objects (*2 above) and leads to ordering and evaluating. This last orientation was first elaborated in experimental studies concentrating on the way people select clues by means of which they build equivalences between individuals on the basis of their occupation. When they are asked to categorize, people shift from cognitive to moral and political issues and refer to hierarchies of worth (Boltanski et Thévenot 1983). Boltanski's analysis of the making of public cases and the process of denunciation through letters to newspapers editors (1984 republished in Boltanski 1990) greatly contributed to the characterisation of the generalisations which are judged as valid or invalid.

Orders of worth supporting criticism and justification

The next phase of this research program focuses on the requirements for legitimate forms of evaluation and breaks sharply with the prevailing suspicion, in the social sciences, regarding
legitimacy. While identifying a limited plurality of legitimate orders, Weber insisted upon the possibilities for domination offered by the claim to legitimacy. Although rooted in different debates, both the critique of values in Parsons' work and the critique of ideologies and false consciousness in French social research converge. Indeed, the question of legitimacy turned out to be illegitimate for most sociologists. While it is correct to identify the strategic and contingent uses to which orders of legitimacy might be put, this should not impede sociological inquiry on the requirements satisfied by these orders. They are most visible in justification and criticism when actors face the necessity of relating private to public cases and aim at third party evaluation (Meyers 1989, 1991).

The identification and analysis of the plurality of orders of worth which support justifications (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991, on translation à HUP) has been developed in parallel with empirical research on the dynamics of everyday disputes or deliberations within which one aim is to establish common grounds (Boltanski and Thévenot eds. 1989). Each order of evaluation follows a different dynamics based on a distinct kind of qualification test and piece of evidence, through: prices in market competition, technical efficiency, collective solidarity, reputational trustworthyness, fame in the opinion, inspiration. Each order offers the basis to criticize and reduce to contingency what is consider as general and worthy in the other. This analysis has been documented by studying various arenas of action and judgement such as: the "modernization" of public services and local administration which are torn between a civic public good grounded in the vote of citizens, the technical efficiency voiced by experts, or the market qualification focusing on customers (Corcuff and Lafaye 1989, Lafaye 1990); the confrontation of different types of arguments and evidence in bank committees which grant loans (Wissler 1989); professional fault on the workplace (Chateauraynaud 1991); the compromise between business orientation, solidarity and reputation in Rotary clubs (Camus 1991); the principles of evaluation used for ranking students and orienting decisions in schools (Derouet 1992); the tension raised by avant-garde artistic work and the forms of contestation of its value (Heinich 1993b); environmental disputes, the qualification of nature in terms of a public space, a site of ineffable beauty, a shared inheritance, a reserve of resources, etc. and efforts to elaborate a new order of ecological or "green" worth (Lafaye and Thévenot 1993). Each order of "worth" qualifies what is relevant for judging. However, all the orders satisfy certain requirements that crosscut the differences among them. In all, for instance, the evaluations of differential worth made within the particular order have to be reconciled with the equal dignity of human agents. The requirement is clearly visible on the negative side, when studying the two main sources of a sentiment of injustice: the stable attachment of a state of worth to individuals, which is considered as power abuse as long as it is not put to a test; the transfer of qualification from an order to another which leads to the criticism of domination or, on the opposite, of the accumulation of handicaps.

This research on the common exigencies satisfied by the different orders of justification has opened to debates with political and moral theory, from classical constructions of common good to contemporary theories of justice (especially Rawls' second principle: Thévenot 1992). There is a
parallel between the way in which each order uses specific criteria of justification and the different kind of standards found in distinctive social practices as described by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, or the different forms of the common good which are to be coped with in the complexity of modern politics (Bellah and alii, *Habits of the Heart*). A quite constructive comparison has been made with Walzer's pluralistic approach of a variety of social goods attached to different spheres of distribution (see Ricoeur's comparison between *Spheres of Justice* and *De la justification* hereafter called DJ: Ricoeur 1995). However, the communitarian emphasis on shared values or understandings in social groups and institutions, contrasts with the accent, in DJ, on the necessity for individuals to shift from one order of justification to the other, depending on their adjustment to the situational arrangement. Approaches of public debate should also be included in the comparison, whether they insist upon different types of rhetoric (Jasper 1992), look for a thorough identification of the underlying patterns of civil society and civility (Alexander and Smith 1993), or propose a complete analysis of the grounding of ideal communication (Habermas). One of the specificities of the DJ research program, which focuses on the conditions which are practically required to public justifications might reside in the close examination of the dynamics of criticism and of the involvement of qualified objects in the process of judgement making. A fruitful dialogue has also been opened with American cultural sociologists who study the symbolic repertoires that people make use of to draw lines along which moral codes are internally organised and "worthy" individuals distinguished from "less worthy" ones (DiMaggio 1987; Lamont 1992; Swidler 1986; for a review see Lamont and Wuthnow 1990). [Footnote 4: A research program on "Symbolic boundaries and modes of justification in comparative perspective" has been jointly proposed by Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot and funded by the NSF and the CNRS (France). It will develop for the next three years a collective agenda focusing on the forms of evaluation that are used in France and the US to evaluate people, events, and situations. This project brings together thirteen sociologists who examine the principles of evaluation mobilised in a wide range of spheres of activity: environmentalism, journalism, contemporary art, the publishing industry, culture-producing institutions, voluntary associations etc.]

**From argumentational to organisational arrangements**

American orientations to cultural research are more receptive to the dynamics of experience than to the structural constraints of fixed codes. The pragmatist legacy is shared by the new French approach sketched here which, in analysing the situated processes of justification, emphasises the reality test to which arguments are put. It urges an enlargement of the scope, from verbal communication to the pragmatic modes of involving objects in conflict and coordination. The sociology of scientific controversies initiated by Callon (1985) and Latour (1987) turned its attention to the network linkage between human beings and technical objects. The sociology of disputes and coordination presented here brings to the fore critical tensions between different ways of arranging things in relation to persons in accord to different qualifications (as efficient tools; pledges that anchor trust; inspired creation; commodities appropriate for marketing; public goods; signs supporting fame). The tests or trials cannot rely on a single equivalence medium such as force...
in "trials of force". Different qualifications, in different orders of worth, leads to different kinds of trials: a test of technical efficiency, of creativity, of reputation, of market competition, of democratic vote, of diffusion in public opinion. Tensions between qualifications are overcome through an intense effort of compromise which can be paralleled with the crafting of "boundary objects" (Bowker and Star 1994) but which is more stable when the justification orders have been themselves compromised to some extent.

This attention to proofs and arrangements of objects in disputes breaks a path from rhetorical to organisational settings (Dodier 1993a). A main purpose of organisations is to implement modes of coordination of activities which are compatible with general forms of judgement (whether they rest upon prices, efficiency, reputation, etc.) and foster compromise between them (Thévenot 1989). The study of these different modes of coordination which are supported by various conventions has been developed in a new French institutional current coined "Economics of conventions", in close relations with sociology (Salais and Thévenot eds. 1986; Thévenot ed. 1986; Dupuy Eymard-Duverney Favereau Orléan Salais and Thévenot in Revue économique 1989, n°2; Salais and Storper 1993, Orléan ed. 1994). These studies, although they step across the Iron Curtain raised between sociology and economics - which is even more sturdy in the US than in France - can be compared with the New Institutionalism and Organisational analysis (Powell and DiMaggio eds. 1991). Especially suggestive is the French context have been those works which highlight, in a comparative perspective, different types of orders of rationality or legitimacy governing industrial decisions (Dobbin 1994). The identification of different modes of coordination and of their respective efficiency may also converge with sophisticated rethinking of internal labor markets (Stark 1986).

Coordination, pragmatic regimes and objects in action

A common concern with the dynamics of coordination, the reconsideration of the different approaches to activity (intentional, habitual, ritual, situated, scriptual, etc.), the comparison with various philosophical traditions (pragmatism, hermeneutics, semantics of action, moral and political philosophy, etc.), brought together a network of social researchers around the new series Raisons pratiques (Pharo and Quéré eds. 1990, Petit ed. 1991, Cottereau and Ladière eds. 1992, Conein Dodier and Thévenot eds. 1993). The extent of the coordination through general evaluations is limited by divergent attitudes towards other people, like agapè which requires the suspension of the equivalence which is needed for justification (Boltanski 1990), or the diverse reactions to suffering of others (Boltanski 1993). The continuation of the research program procedes with the exploration of a variety of dynamics of adjustment with the environment. Instead of the a canonical opposition between the collective and the individual, or between macro and micro spheres, we need to account for a whole architecture of pragmatic regimes which human beings can use to cope with their human and non human environment and to monitor their own conduct: the justification regime which has been explored through the different orders of worth; the regime of intentional action which is used in the interpretative stance; or the familiarity regime which does not rely on general forms of evaluation, nor on the attribution of intention, but on specific clues distributed in a circle
of familiar human and non-human beings (Thévenot 1990, 1994). Studies of reaction to failures in
the workplace in different organisational setups illustrate the fact that a justification regime allows
for attributed competence and imputation of responsibility which fosters judicial litigation, whereas
a familiarity regime rests upon distributed competencies and permit a more flexible but local
accomodation. The analysis of different regimes demands that social researchers pay as much
attention to the distinct formats through which actors grasp their objectal environment (through
function, properties, clues, spatial setup, etc.) as to the ways actors deal with their human
environment. The analysis of objects in action (Conein Dodier and Thévenot eds. 1993) offer
bridges with cognitive anthropology and cultural studies that pay attention to the relations with
objects (Lave 1988, Zelizer 1994).

The new current presented here, which focuses on the study of disputes and modes of
coordination with the human and objectal environment, has recently contributed, among other
trends, to recasting the relationship between disciplines, and to building novel alliances between
sociology and philosophy (political, moral and theory of action), institutional economics, micro-
history and social cognition.

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